


The challenge of matching biodiversity conservation and community's livelihoods: Historical trends and participatory interventions in the Kafa biosphere reserve, Ethiopia

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ENG Abstract: The aim of this paper is exploration of biodiversity conservation and community's livelihoods interactions plus the ensuing challenges at the Kafa biosphere reserve. The analysis was conducted by tracing the governance regimes' (or institutions') perspectives, interests and actions from the customary institutions through to the participatory interventions. A qualitative historical analysis method has been employed to acquire and interpret data alongside an analytical framework called the Policy Arrangement Approach. Generally speaking, Kafa's biodiversity conservation and community's livelihoods have been shaped by competing and contrasting structures, discourses and stakes over different governance periods where, more or less, all fall short of effective 'hands and feet on the ground'.

Keywords: Kafa-biosphere-reserve, biodiversity, conservation, community, livelihoods, participatory.

ES El reto de conciliar la conservación de la biodiversidad y los medios de vida de las comunidades: tendencias históricas e intervenciones participativas en la Reserva de Biosfera de Kafa (Etiopía)

ES Resumen: El objetivo de este artículo es explorar las interacciones entre la conservación de la biodiversidad y los medios de vida de las comunidades, así como los retos que se plantean en la Reserva de Biosfera de Kafa. El análisis se ha realizado siguiendo las perspectivas, intereses y acciones de los regímenes (o instituciones) de gobernanza, desde las instituciones consuetudinarias hasta las intervenciones participativas. Se ha empleado un método de análisis histórico cualitativo para adquirir e interpretar los datos, junto con un marco analítico denominado Enfoque de Acuerdos Políticos. En términos generales, la conservación de la biodiversidad de Kafa y los medios de subsistencia de la comunidad se han visto moldeados por estructuras, discursos e intereses contrapuestos a lo largo de distintos periodos de gobernanza en los que, en mayor o menor medida, no se ha contado con "manos y pies sobre el terreno".

Palabras clave: Reserva de la Biosfera de Kafa; biodiversidad; conservación; comunidad; medios de vida; participativo.

FR Le défi de concilier la conservation de la biodiversité et les moyens de subsistance des communautés : tendances historiques et interventions participatives dans la Réserve de la Biosphère de Kafa (Éthiopie)

FR Résumé: Cet article a pour objectif d'explorer les interactions entre la conservation de la biodiversité et les moyens de subsistance des communautés, ainsi que les défis rencontrés dans la Réserve de la Biosphère de Kafa.

L'analyse a été réalisée en tenant compte des perspectives, des intérêts et des actions des régimes (ou institutions) de gouvernance, depuis les institutions coutumières jusqu'aux interventions participatives. Une méthode d'analyse historique qualitative a été utilisée pour collecter et interpréter les données, en s'appuyant sur un cadre analytique appelé Approche des Accords Politiques.

De manière générale, la conservation de la biodiversité à Kafa et les moyens de subsistance de la communauté ont été façonnés par des structures, des discours et des intérêts divergents au cours de différentes périodes de gouvernance, au cours desquelles, dans une certaine mesure, il y a eu une absence de implication directe sur le terrain.

Mots-clés: Réserve de la Biosphère de Kafa; biodiversité; conservation; communauté; moyens de subsistance; participation.

Table of contents: 1. Introduction. 2. Background. 2.1. Claims for sustainability; the biosphere reserve and/or participatory approaches. 2.2. Study area; the Kafa biosphere reserve. 2.3. Methodology. 3. Results and Discussions. 3.1. Conservation and livelihoods in Kafa: historical perspectives before the 1990s. 3.1.1. Customary-indigenous practices, prior 1897. 3.1.2. The feudal era, 1897-1974. 3.1.3. The military regime, 1974-1991. 3.2. Participatory interventions in Kafa since the 1990s: gains and challenges. 3.2.1. The claims for success. 3.2.2. The challenges. 4. Conclusion. 5. References.

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1. Introduction

"We, the 'Kafecho', not only own but also live on trees. Forests are our home. We identify ourselves as people who love to live in the forest, and I know our forests identify themselves too as ... belongings to us, the Kafecho"

Quoted from a FGD, Gimbo district, Michity site; March 10, 2024.

Many of the protected areas and national parks in Ethiopia were formally demarcated (or established) in the 1960s and early 1970s. Thus, external involvements remained insignificant and very slow until about the final decades of the feudal era, i.e., 1960s, except during the short-term engagements and, of course, the impacts left behind by the Italians at the time of their occupation between 1936 and 1941. The lately introduced conservation schemes were expanded by raising concerns on population growth and increased demands for livelihoods, of the local community, as major threats to natural resources such as the forest ecosystems. The argument finally led to the promotion and application of exclusionary conservation approaches. However, it then became evident that the exclusionary management attempts fail to attain the required results as they could not stop resource degradation and loss (see Stellmacher & Mollinga, 2009; Poteete & Ostrom, 2002). Following the strong critics against fortress conservation approaches, participatory forest management (PFM) was introduced in Ethiopia in the early 1990s by None Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as Farm Africa, including at the Bonga forest in Kafa, which is one of the initial exemplary sites of the new intervention (Gobeze et al, 2009).

The Kafa forest landscape is not only an important home for the remnant moist evergreen montane forest of the country but also part of the region that is believed to be the birthplace of *Coffea arabica*'s plant genetic diversity, which still grows wild in the area. The landscape, however, had been undergoing different conservation histories, from the communal customary local practices before the last decade of the 19th century, to the feudal class (or landlords) ownership and control between the 1890s to early 1970s, to the fiercely top-down protectionist philosophy of the socialist Dergue that ruled the country from 1974 to 1991. When Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in 1991, it instituted a new policy discourse, i.e., constitution, where ethnic groups (or nationalities) have to realize self-determination in their own affairs (FDRE Proclamation No.1/1995). Potentially, the constitution had great implications for the peripheries which, of course, include ethnicities such as the Kafecho people. In any case, the 1990s marks the time when participatory management was first introduced in Kafa. Bonga forest, which is part of the Kafa biosphere reserve (KBR), was among the areas where participatory forest management, PFM, was first initiated and practiced in Ethiopia.

Community based governance, decentralization, local empowerment and development were among the dominant discourses and provisions stated in the participatory management approaches. Thus, under the 1990s global and local policy frameworks, it seemed as if such traditions as the Kafecho indigenous practices, which had been in a dilemma of being lost during the imperial and Dergue regimes, granted a chance to revive themselves. By coincidence, the EPRDF's internal decentralization policy was launched during the time when the Rio Declaration on "Environment and Development" was also issued in 1992. Apart from other possible reasons, the overlap of the national and international, somehow well-suited policy provisions, are believed to have greatly invited and facilitated involvements of the several international organizations in the new natural resource conservation sphere of Ethiopia, including in the Kafa landscape, that have been in place since the 1990s. In essence, the coalescence of the national and international policy developments was remarkable since it triggered circulation of power amongst variable stakeholders thereby, of course, offered opportunities to some and exclusions to others.

Ideally, what makes PFM and similar new interventions different from earlier approaches in Ethiopia is the claim that they “solve the problem of open access to the forest resources and promote sustainable forest management in the country through community participation” (ibid). It can be drawn from the claim that; (1) though (natural) forests legally declared properties of the state, more often they were exposed to open access and exploitation, and (2) prior management interventions missed to incorporate communities’ interests in the management of forest resources. This claim, of course, is compatible with what has happened in Kafa during the feudal and Dergue regimes, as being elaborated by the respondents of this study in relation to their demands or in terms of what they expressed as their ‘inherent rights’. The concern for the importance of participatory intervention at the Kafa forest ecosystem was further strengthened by involvements of additional NGOs such as the Nature and Biodiversity Union (NABU) and multilateral organizations, like the man and biosphere (MAB) program of United Nations Environmental, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). However, whether the claim upon which PFM itself has been founded succeeds its envisaged targets or still remains to have exhibiting drawbacks as opposed to the widely held rhetoric and/or promise with regard to the approach is still a debatable conception. Hence, the objectives that are to be realized in this study are; (i) exploration of the historical perspectives that shaped Kafa’s forest landscape over different governance regimes, and (ii) investigation of the important challenges that the biodiversity conservation and community’s livelihoods endeavors (or participatory management approaches) have been undergoing.

2. Background

2.1. Claims for sustainability; the biosphere reserve and/or participatory approaches

The idea of biosphere reserve (BR) was initiated by UNESCO in the early 1970s and established and promoted since in the fields of conservation. In the first place UNESCO launched “Man and the Biosphere” (MAB) program in 1971, in order to promote knowledge and skills to support sustainable relationship between people and their environment (see Roychoudhury & Sharma, 2013). Then, the notion of the biosphere reserve came into view in reference to the MAB program and was coined to materialize the principles stated under the program. By providing a global network of sites designated under UNESCO’s MAB program, biosphere reserves serve as foundations to realize the program’s principles, i.e., “... they aim to demonstrate the sustainable use goals of the world conservation strategy” (Roychoudhury & Sharma, 2013). Implementation of the initiatives followed the consensus reached at the decision of the intergovernmental conference of experts that was held in Paris, France, in September 1968, regarding the scientific basis for rational use and conservation of the resources of the biosphere (UNESCO House-Paris, 1968).

Likewise, biosphere reserves are internationally significant natural and cultural landscapes that consist of areas of terrestrial or marine ecosystems, which are recognized under UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program for demonstrating a balanced relationship between people and nature (Ozyavuz et al, 2006). In short, biosphere reserves reconcile conservation of biodiversity and its use. Moreover, UNESCO promotes the coordinated network of world biosphere reserves as it encourages exchanges of information, experience and skills amongst the designated sites. According to UNESCO’s guidelines, each biosphere reserve is intended to fulfill three basic functions, i.e., (1) a conservation function: where the BR should contribute to maintenance of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation; (2) a development function: where the BR is expected to contribute to economic and human development that is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable; and (3) a logistic function: where the BR also needs to provide support for research, monitoring, education and information exchange about the local, national and global issues of conservation and development (see UNESCO-MAB technical guideline, 2022).

As it has been often remarked, “fortress conservation approach is based on the flawed idea that local people’s use of forests endangers biodiversity and therefore habitats should be protected by force if necessary” (Rai et al, 2021). It can be claimed that UNESCO had responded to this important gap created by the fortress conservation approach early in the 1970s with its MAB-biosphere reserve programs and/or initiatives. But the idea was further uplifted when another but alike initiative known as the “environment and development”, (see Agenda, 21, Rio de Janeiro, (1992), was launched and widely promoted. Before the emergence of the sustainability framework of the late 1980s and early 1990s, it can evidently be realized that designation of the biosphere reserves by UNESCO remained to be growing only steadily (see Barraclough et al, 2023). Thus, the biosphere reserve concept can be regarded as the first of its kind that foreshadowed changes in fortress conservation approach, realizing that people living in-and-around protected areas and their values/interests should be counted integral parts of the conservation interventions.

Connotations that support claims for the joint advantage of human and nature are often reiterated as sustainable development, local involvement, indigenous and scientific knowledge, empowerment of grassroots, local and global experiences, socio-ecological balance, fair and just share of benefits, ..., into their management account. Consequentially, the schemes came up with a significantly new idea that conservation concepts be revisited and/or revised. Accordingly, there comes an argument that areas of biological diversity should not be strictly protected from people who live within and around them, rather the people need to play participatory role in their management (see for example IUCN-WCPA, 2003). In its first international biosphere reserves congress that was held in Minsk-Belarus in 1983 UNESCO, for instance, announced “people should be considered part of a biosphere reserve” (Gregg, et al 1989; UNESCO-MAB, 1987).

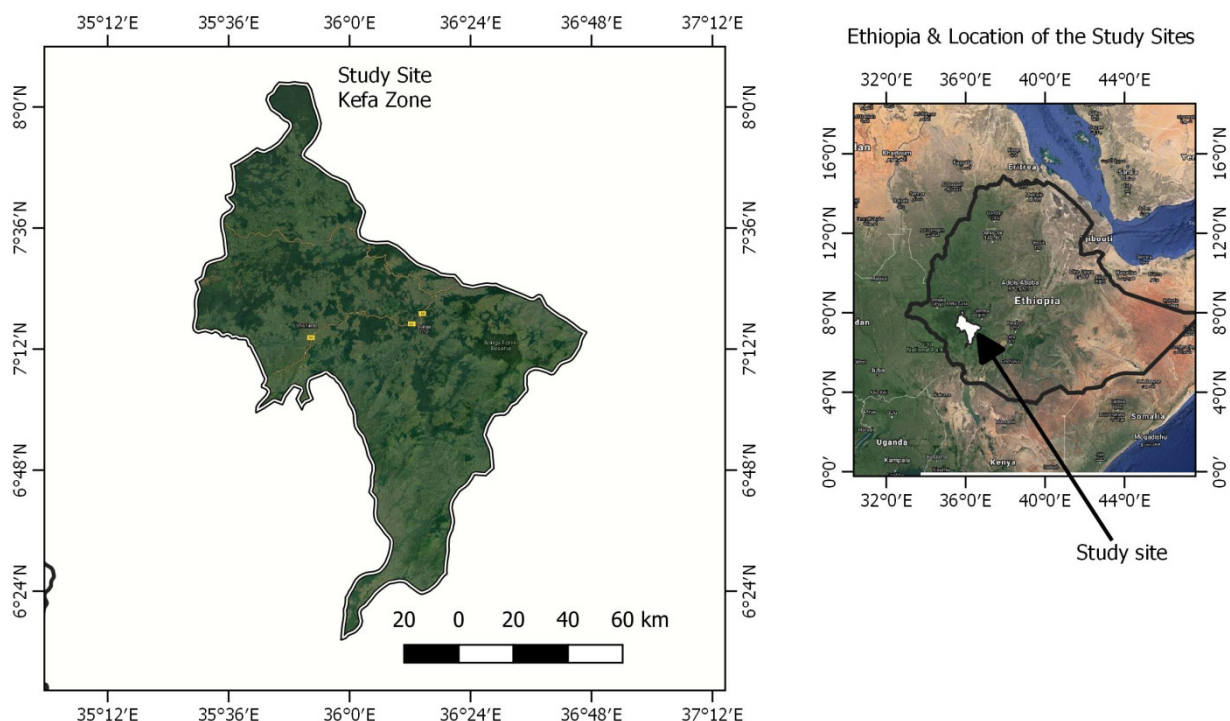
In conformity to the global shift towards conservation approaches, the concept of sustainable livelihoods was also further articulated and promoted during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The terms were initially

promoted by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) via, for instance, Brundtland's report, "our common future" (WCED, 1987). However, detail explanations on the concepts of the terminologies were provided afterwards by the works of, for instance, Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway, entitled "sustainable rural livelihoods: practical concepts for the 21st century" (Chambers & Conway, 1992). The authors view and conceptualize sustainable livelihoods in terms of capability, equity and sustainability, as well as the combinations of these. They further argue that all capability, equity and sustainability serve as 'end', also 'means', of livelihoods. Following such claims, biosphere reserves have become amongst the key areas of interest where nowadays participatory management interventions are notably initiated, or are under implementation by conservation agencies.

2.2. Study area; the Kafa biosphere reserve

The Kafa biosphere reserve is located in the south-west region of Ethiopia, about 460 km south-west of the capital, Addis Ababa. Being an important part of the home of the remnant evergreen montane forest region in the country, Kafa is regarded as part of the Eastern Afromontane Biodiversity Hotspot. The landscape was admitted by UNESCO into the world network of biosphere reserves in June 2010. Nowadays the Kafa biosphere reserve covers a total area of about 760,000 hectares categorized into core, buffer and transition zones. Of this total area, about 360,000 hectares (or 47%) is area covered by forests (NABU, 2017). Kafa boasts a rich variety of ecosystems and provides a unique habitat for around 250 plant species, 48 recorded mammal species, and 100 recorded bird species, some of which are endemic to the area (ibid).

Figure 1. Location of the Kafa Biosphere Reserve



Map by Kefyalew Sahle, Wondo Genet College of Forestry & Natural Resources

Kafa also shares the catchment area of the three well-known watercourses in the region, the Gojeb, Dincha and Woshi rivers, which are important sources of water of the biosphere reserve and water supply for surrounding areas. Kafa's cloud forest ecosystem is also known for its rich understory cover constituting the indigenous wild *Coffea arabica*, and important spices such as false cardamom. Kafa has an altitudinal range between 500 and 3,350 m above sea level, where coffee growth in the site is predominantly encountered in the altitudinal ranges between 1,300 and 2,200 masl. To date, more than one million people live within the boundaries of the biosphere reserve. The average population density of the biosphere reserve is 130 inhabitants per km², which ranges from 52 inhabitants per km² in the least densely populated district (or woreda), Decha to 210 inhabitants per km² in the most densely populated one, Chena (NABU, 2017).

2.3. Methodology

Qualitative historical analysis has been employed to understand and interpret Kafa's biodiversity conservation and community's livelihoods over different governance periods, starting from customary institutions that took place before 1897 through to the participatory intervention, which is operating in the site since the 1990s and up to present days. Field assessments for this particular study were conducted in two rounds, i.e., first round in April 17-30, 2022 and a follow up one in March 05-17, 2024. The assessment has taken four important points into account: (i) understanding Kafa's historical human-nature interactions, perspectives and/or conservation

narratives, (ii) exploring the biosphere reserve's potential for the balance of ecosystem conservation and human's livelihoods, (iii) studying the community's and particularly women's familiarity with participatory interventions, and (iv) identifying the opportunities and challenges encountering participatory interventions. Likewise, data was uncovered through field visits (direct observations), semi-structured interviews and group discussions conducted with households (smallholder farmers); professionals and experts representing NGOs, government sectors; coffee, honey and spices collectors; PFM, coffee and honey cooperatives and/or unions; coffee, honey and spices traders and/or whole sellers; and other stakeholders who closely work with these ones in the biosphere reserve.

According to the 2023 population projection conducted by Central Statistical Agency (CSA), Kafa has a total population of 1,253,689 of whom 638,429 are women and 615,260 are men. The largest ethnic group in the zone is the indigenous Kafecho, which comprises 82.72% of the population (CSA, 2023). Of the 12 administrative Woredas (or Districts) four of them, i.e. Gimbo, Decha, Gewata and Shisho-Ende, were selected for the assessment. In each of the selected woreds or districts, 12 (twelve) to 16 (sixteen) households were interviewed and information on their participation in the participatory management schemes (like in PFM and Coffee or Honey Cooperatives/Unions) was gathered both through semi-structured interviews and observations of their activities. Thus, a total of 56 (fifty-six) households, of which 13 (thirteen) are female headed and 43 (forty-three) are male headed, were contacted and interviewed (see table below). Each interview lasted from 45 minutes to 2 hours, depending on the background/experience of participant personnel and number of individuals involved in each interview or group discussion.

Table 1. Districts (administrative woredas) in the Kafa biosphere reserve where the study has been principally conducted

Sample Woreda (District)	No. of households interviewed		
	Male headed	Female headed	Total
<i>Gimbo</i>	13	2	15
<i>Decha</i>	11	5	16
<i>Gewata</i>	9	3	12
<i>Shish-Awunde</i>	10	3	13
Total	43	13	56

Furthermore, stakeholders who closely work on biophysical resources and community's livelihoods at the KBR have been interviewed. Among these interviewees are the Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU's) site coordinator plus an expert working in the office, Climate Resilient Forest and Livelihood (CRFL's) site coordinator plus an expert, Head of the Kafa Zone Administration 'Livestock and Fishery Resources', and Coordinator of the Forest Sector under the office of the Kafa Zone 'Environmental Protection, Forest and Climate Change Mitigation' plus an expert working in the office. Furthermore, information was also collected from site experts working in such sectors as forestry (PFM), agriculture and bee keeping. Moreover, cooperatives and unions such as the participatory forest management cooperatives, the Kafa Coffee union, 'Kafa Forest Bee Products Development and Marketing Cooperative Union', and the 'Bonga Apneic Agro-Industry Plc', were contacted from whom important information was gathered from too. In this regard, information was captured from 16 (sixteen) personnel composed of professionals, experts, administrators and union organizers or coordinators who were very active in the site during the assessment.

Besides, one focus group discussion in each woreda was conducted, where a minimum of five participants (in Gewata woreda) and maximum of nine participants (in Gimbo woreda) were included. Efforts were in place to have different community structures such as age compositions, i.e., different age groups including youths and elderlies, and sex (both men and women) in each of the focus group discussion. Additionally, a review of literature on the historical conservation and livelihoods discourses and experiences in Ethiopia in general and at the Kafa ecosystem in particular have been explored, analyzed and presented.

Since the aim of this paper is to analyze the historical perspectives and/or governance narratives and the challenges being encountered alongside participatory interventions with regards to biodiversity conservation and community's livelihoods at the Kafa BR, an analytical framework known as Policy Arrangement Approach (PAA) is employed so as to analyze the acquired data. Doing so, the study traces different governance regimes from customary institutions through to the recently introduced participatory intervention. Among other reasons, PAA is built on discourse analysis, i.e., it addresses agency, structure, interests and ideas; and also connects policy processes in which actors interact with structural forces of social and political change (Ayana, et al, 2013; Van der Zouwen, 2006). Thus, in the case of this study, PAA enables us to understand, but also explain, the extent to which different institutions and governance regimes (customary, feudal, military, and participatory) have shaped human-biodiversity interactions and, also the impacts in the Kafa landscape. Accordingly, ideas (or data sets) enquired from interviews, focus group discussions and field observations have been transcribed and interpreted alongside PAA analytical concepts, then the findings constructed/ presented.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Conservation and livelihoods in Kafa: historical perspectives before the 1990s

3.1.1. Customary-indigenous practices, prior 1897

The Kafa forest ecosystem had been governed under customary arrangements that had basis in the local community's worldviews, until about the last decade of the nineteenth century. With still a strongly contestable input of civilization and development, if any, emperor Menelik's expansion to the south is rather criticized by many of the indigenous peoples, whose perception stand contrary to the ruler's and his affiliates' claim of modern state formation. Nonetheless, the expansion acted against local-traditional and indigenous institutions, denounced and replaced them with those given approval to representing the center, the King's own narration of the state. Among the indigenous people, whose narratives and worldviews plus land and forest resources ownership rights had been dispossessed, are the Kafecho people. Before 1897, Kafa's indigenous community, the Kafecho people, had their own King and local institutions guided by customary arrangements to manage and guide shared ownership of their environmental resources such as the forest ecosystem, among others. Forest and the forest ecosystem remained an indispensable resource, i.e., communal property for the Kafecho people, under the traditional administration of their own local King for the time period immemorial. When Menelik expanded to the site towards the end of the 19th century, the Kafecho people tell they had a local King named Gaki Sharicho, their last local King whose power was denounced by emperor Menelik.

At least since the last couple of centuries, forests have served the Kafecho people not only as a biophysical space to make livelihoods out of, but also as a setting where they narrated and shaped their entire social and political constructs. The people make an important part of their livelihoods from the forest ecosystem, i.e., in addition to the timber and firewood they use both for household consumption and sale; they collect coffee and spices which grow under the shade of the forests and are also accustomed to conducting traditional beekeeping which is very common and spread in tree branches in the site. Moreover, the Kafecho people use forests as spaces to undertake traditional mystical practices, i.e., they have several sacred forest patches that they spiritually associate themselves to. An elderly in Shisho-Ende district, Dukura-Woshi site, discussed about this in April 2022 as;

"... our people believed in 'Yero', the creator of man, land and forests. We used to gather together and connect to him, the 'Yero', worship in a special place designated for this. One of these sites is named 'Wareta-Gudo'. The place is a wholly forest identified by Allamo, a man who connects the people with Yero. In addition to the Allamo/s, the place is accessed by the people who get permits from the Allamo/s. There, we practice 'Dejjo', a prayer and sacrifice for the good time to come and for the sufficient harvest to happen to support us ..."

Hence, the Kafa forests are also regarded by the people as having to hold spirits that connect them to their 'Yero', literally translated a spirit or power that they believe controls their whole life and surrounding, thus worshiped for doing so. Likewise, sacred forest patches such as the 'Wareta-Gudo' and many others designated for similar purposes are traditionally respected and protected. Nonetheless, despite their considerable contributions to forest protection, traditional rituals such as the 'Dejjo' had been formally denounced and abandoned during emperor Menelik's rule through to the Military Derg governance system. Though they are somehow trying to revive since the 1990s, following the downfall of the Derg, they are still facing strong criticisms from the formally established religious institutions such as the Orthodox and Protestant Christians, thus are undergoing more or less similar threats as used to be under the feudal and socialist governments of the past.

Consequently, the continued critiques against the informal local institutions have limited the roles of the Kafecho people's traditional contribution to the sustainable management of forest ecosystem in the site. It has been identified during this study that though there is willingness by many of the respondents from the Kafecho community to revive and practice the traditional rituals that they relate to their ancestral rights, it appeared they are quite hesitant as they have been observed feeling anxious about the condemnations they expect to face from the formal religious institutions. Even if the current government policy seem not to completely stand against such traditional institutions, at least in terms of the state's policy provision, the long-established notions from the past and their extended effects are being observed to have firmly influencing and/or shaping the social-cultural and religious environment of the people, thus are restricting the traditional institutions from properly functioning in their own wisdom.

Likewise, whether traditional institutions and indigenous knowledge of the Kafecho people are going to be sufficiently and effectively be integrated and used in the sustainable management efforts of the site's forest ecosystem is not just a panacea as it can easily be talked, but also a dilemma from what practically been observed. In other words, integrating such indigenous knowledge that has gone through several, but also prolonged denunciations, into the modern conservation agenda, is not just a readymade opportunity that can easily be picked and applied. Rather it is also a challenge that requires a thorough understanding of the situation under which the knowledge has been operating, both in the past and present days.

3.1.2. The feudal era, 1897-1974

With Menelik's takeover of the ownership and management of the forest ecosystem from the traditional customary arrangement at the end of the 19th century, majority of the Kafecho people became 'gabbar', i.e., serfs of the emperor's warlords and affiliate settlers, similar to other traditional communities and farmers to which the feudal system expanded. Land and forests were allocated to few local notables, who were selected to support and facilitate the incoming feudal rule, and to warlords and feudal nobilities, whose prime interests were extracting forest products such as valuable timber and coffee (see Zewdie, 2001; Clapham, 2002). Apart from breaking the customary institutions of the Kafecho people, dispossessing them of ownership rights, and allocating land and forest ownership to the feudal settlers, Menelik's regime had no established formal institution to replace and/or properly guide the forest management of the area.

Similar ownership arrangements and 'balabat' (feudal)-gabbar (serf) relationships, which deprived the indigenous Kafecho people of control and access to the natural resources, continued during emperor Hailesillassie, who replaced Menelik. Rather, the respondents recall that there were intensification of extraction of timber and other forest products such as coffee, honey and spices. Tarmac-road that was constructed between Addis Ababa and the nearby Jimma town during the Italian occupation, i.e., 1936-1941, was another opportunity for the feudal nobilities to have had better road access. The opening up of the road had also contributed to the increased extraction of the resources, thereby supply to the central as well as overseas markets. Nevertheless, there is no much story told about any specific formal institution/s established in the region to ensure management of the forest ecosystem during emperor Hailesillassie's rule as well. Though the regime had issued forest proclamation only towards the end of its century long stay in power, i.e., in 1965, no one elderly or interviewee included in this study has told (or recalled) about the law and its impacts in the site. If at all, what they repeatedly inform is about the feudal landlords whose prime interests were maximization of exploitation and utilization than facilitation of any new forest establishment and/or management.

3.1.3. The military regime, 1974-1991

When Hailesillassie was replaced by the Dergue in 1974, a new land reform was instituted i.e., all rural lands were declared to be nationalized. The feudal system was denounced and rural agricultural land was redistributed to the tillers. The land reform is widely appreciated by the citizens, as it was recalled a revolution that liberated majority of the peasants in the center and southern parts of the country from the oppressive imperial rule. However, since proclamation on the land reform was about the agricultural land, which didn't include the forest land, the first instant was a mixed emotion or confusion for communities like Kafecho, whose substantial part of livelihoods is dependent on the forest ecosystem. Later, proclamation on forest and wildlife resources was issued in the 1980, which was about six years after the onset of the revolution. With the delayed proclamation, hence lack of immediate clear directives specifically on the forest resources at the beginning, there was a perception and move by part of the Kafecho people, and even by some peasant association (PA) heads of the area, towards reinstituting their customary way of forest management and use arrangements. But this was not supported by either of the Dergue's proclamations, i.e., either by the public ownership of rural lands proclamation of the 1975 or the forest and wildlife proclamation of the 1980.

Even though not in an officially recognized way, the Dergue's land reform somehow encouraged the Kafecho people to recall their ancestral way of lifestyle alongside, of course, the rule's established local level PA administration structures, whose initial decisions and arrangements were influenced by the grassroots. As soon as the land and forests were confiscated from the feudal landlords, the indigenous community members started to access the forest resources, of course, under the PA regulated structures and consents. Later on, however, their access and use rights were gradually got limited as soon as the Dergue government introduced forest and wildlife proclamation and further policies such as the rural villagization program in the 1980s. Similar collectivization and villagization programs took place, for instance, in the then Soviet Union and in Tanzania during those days (see James C. Scott, 1998: 193-261). Insights from four respondents, who participated in a group discussion, held in Gimbo district, Tulla site in April 2022, are narrated as follows;

"... Compared to the Hailesillassie's regime the Dergue was good at the beginning. It freed us from the cruel 'balabat's. It was the Dergue who gave us back our land, that land we were given by our families, ... but later looted away from us by the cruel. But we did not feel happy with what the Dergue did afterwards. They told us forests are for the government, not for us-the Kafecho, and started to limit our rights again. Worst of all, they dislocated us from our homes, where our families, grand families, ... lived for generations and put us all in a small piece of land. We all were being detached from our ancestors' homes, from where we had to recall the senses and spirits of our fathers and mothers. ...".

In essence, the interviewees were honest in balancing and discussing the good as well as bad impacts they felt during the Dergue's regime, and also in relation to the impacts they had undergone during the imperial period. Their discussion precisely tells about the Dergue's policies on forests, plus the regime's villagization and resettlement program that took place about the 1986 to 1988 following the devastating famine that occurred in the country. Moreover, though it was championed in redistributing the agricultural lands to peasants, the Dergue's land reform had these sorts of critics and confusions, as discussed by the respondents, thus had limitations in resolving disputes with regard to property rights on forests and/or forest ecosystems. Furthermore, the respondents made it clear that the villagization and resettlement program of the Dergue was implemented contrary to the interests of the people. Consequently and in conformity to other rural communities nationwide,

it has been learned that villagization in the Kafa area was also overturned, and people went back to their original residences soon after the downfall of the Dergue regime, which took place in 1991.

3.2. Participatory interventions in Kafa since the 1990s: gains and challenges

3.2.1. The claims for success

Kafa represents the initial areas where participatory management was first introduced in Ethiopia. Bonga PFM was introduced and implemented by Farm Africa, in partnership with SOS Sahel in 1995 (Farm Africa, 2007). The initiative later attracted more conservation organizations such as the German Development Agency (GIZ) and the Nature and Biodiversity Union (NABU), whose involvement and contributions laid foundation for the Kafa landscape to be recognized and designated by UNESCO as a biosphere reserve in 2010. Participatory management and biosphere reserve approaches fundamentally take more or less common notions, i.e., the people and nature, human and ecology, man and biosphere, social and ecological, or rather livelihoods and conservation.

Vis-à-vis participatory management of the man and the biosphere, several livelihoods pilot projects have been reported to be taking place in Kafa so as to foster the promised solutions along with the newly introduced conservation scheme/s. The pilot interventions by NGOs in the site such as NABU and transnational organizations such as UNESCO claim offers such as knowledge transfer and the technical and material supports. The involving agencies, for example, claim their attainments in realizing forest-user-groups or cooperatives, coffee unions or cooperatives, beekeeper groups or cooperatives and ecotourism initiatives since the time of their initial engagements. By its very nature the Kafa landscape is a rich ecosystem endowed with variety of forest-based livelihoods options that have been practiced by the communities for generations.

The commonly utilized non-timber forest products, for instance, include: forest coffee (the famous *Coffea arabica*), forest spices (such as, Ethiopian Kororima or black cardamom & “Timiz” or the wild long pepper), honey, traditionally used medicinal plants, foods (e.g., from buds, nuts & fruit berries), and foliage for animal feeds. A number of the interventions in Kafa dictate their contributions are focusing on the improvement of these already accustomed local practices while a few of them also claim their due aim to introduce new alternatives such as ecotourism. Alongside other conservation interventions NABU, for example, states its technical and material support in the construction or renovation of a model guesthouse (or tourist lodge) plus establishment of the Kafa coffee museum in Bonga town. Moreover, the union communicates its contributions to the identification and mapping of ecotourism potential sites in the reserve, development of the destination's tourist guide template, and the delivery of trainings for local tour guides.

Likewise, echoing the idea of transforming traditional beekeeping, there are some involvements in the sector via what is notably promoted by the new interventions as transitional beekeeping. Inquiries about beekeeping in Kafa and the responses in this regard demonstrate that transitional beekeeping, i.e., literally taken to mean transforming or modernizing the traditional beekeeping, has been introduced to the site by and alongside participatory interventions since the 1990s. The introduction and timing, of course, is also acknowledged by many of the beekeepers when dictating their involvements in (or use of transitional beehives) dates back to only a few decades ago. Meanwhile the beekeepers tell their experiences in the traditional beekeeping rather counts back to generations of their ancestors. Nonetheless, nowadays transitional beekeeping has become one of the pilot projects of participatory interventions promoted, supported and implemented by NGOs such as NABU and Climate Resilient Forest and Livelihood (CRFL) and multilateral organizations such as UNESCO in collaboration with government agencies such as the Livestock and Fishery Resources sector. Vis-à-vis the preceding claims the fact that Kafa gained recognition by UNECO as a biosphere reserve is one of the successes triggered and materialized following the interventions by NGOs such as Farm Africa, SOS Sahel, GIZ and particularly NABU, hence the site's promotions made therein.

3.2.2. The challenges

As has been illuminated earlier participatory management has been brought into the scene of conservation in response to the limitations of fortress management. Fortress conservation approach has undergone a strong criticism of being a top-down approach, thus characterized to be exclusionary particularly when the needs, aspirations and interests of local communities are taken into account. Thus, at least theoretically, participatory management is initiated and designed to overcome the limitations realized under the implementation of conservation scheme directed by few people in authority while disregarding the wider public. Likewise, the balance between ecological conservation and local (community) development, of course, is what participatory approach often claims to achieve. However, whether participatory management approaches themselves have sufficiently achieved the sought goals or not, particularly in conservation areas of developing countries such as the Kafa biosphere reserve, should be examined deeply and cautiously than only superficially.

Apart from the success stories that are often told by the claimants like NGOs working in the site, challenges, whether induced internally, externally or triggered by the interventions themselves in the case of the Kafa biosphere reserve, have been explored and/or analyzed in this study. Part of the internally induced challenges, in fact, relate to the historical backgrounds and experiences that the site's conservation and livelihoods had gone through, while others emanate from the contexts under which the ecosystem is currently operating. Moreover, there are challenges that have been created or introduced via the processes of participatory intervention/management. Thus, in this regard and apart from the excellent rhetorical underpinnings often

promoted about the participatory interventions, it is also wise to equally and carefully examine the limitations and/or challenges that can practically be encountered during on-to-the-site application process.

Historically, almost a century long time period, i.e., 1897 to 1991, marks an era where the local people had been bureaucratically dispossessed the forest resources ownership rights (see portions under section 3 above). After such a prolonged incidence that jeopardized indigenous community's ownership rights, it must be obvious that communicating and convincing local communities about the new arrangement/s appear to be a difficult task if not entirely impossible. In other words, building trust with the people, who felt excluded at least for two generations in this case, is not so easy. Likewise, it has been learned through this study that people in Kafa, particularly the indigenous Kafecho, has been found too hesitant, suspicious or distrustful about the participatory intervention into their destiny. Moreover, we should also bear in mind that under such social-ecological context any small failure or missing to deliver the promised benefits can easily and rapidly escalate such skepticism that is already embedded within the feelings of the community, thus lead to rejection of the intervention, where this could be either implicitly or explicitly.

Other internal challenges that are currently operating include population growth, which is related both to the birth, plus immigration into the site. More or less similar to Ethiopia's national population growth, annual population growth in the Kafa area shows 2.9% (CSA, 2023). Moreover, the respondents to this study witness that there are constantly recognized immigrations into the area, both to towns and rural areas, from other parts of the country. Thus, demands for forest resources (e.g., timber, firewood, coffee, etc.) and smallholder farm lands in the area are increasing from time to time. Moreover, agro-investments such as coffee and tea commercial farms are expanding. The Kafa site is attracting agro-investors, thus commercial farms are growing in numbers and sizes since the 1990s, almost about the same time period since when participatory management was introduced. Evidently, therefore, deforestation in the Kafa biosphere reserve has since been continued rather than getting reduced.

Similarly, there are recognizable challenges that, one way or another, relate to the participatory management interventions. Some of these challenges seem to solely be associated with the participatory management process itself, while others appear to be interconnected with and operate hand in hand with the challenges presented earlier. Under the contexts of the Kafa biosphere reserve, these challenges can be regarded in terms of, (i) the nature of conservation/development projects involved, (ii) cynical arrangements of user-rights, and (iii) new stratifications or layers or groups created within the local community.

By its very nature conservation/development project's involvement is more often only a short-term stay plan, while rather promising and/or introducing extended activities that indeed demand long-term management and actions. This, in fact, is where many of the conservation/development projects operating in developing countries begin to stumble right from their very onset. Likewise, it has been learned that NGOs like Farm Africa, SOS Sahel, and GIZ that had been participating in the Participatory Forest Management (PFM) at the Kafa ecosystem had terminated their involvements either in five years or ten years maximum. For instance, Farm Africa, which first introduced and implemented the PFM in Kafa in partnership with SOS Sahel, stayed active in the site only for about 10 years (1995-2004/5). Arguably, it is not only the short lifetime of the NGOs that matters but also quite a considerable part of this available time itself is often spent in preparatory activities such as the reviews of proposal/project, workshops/meetings, planning, and writings and/or reporting, than the hand-on-ground practices.

Likewise, the time that would be leftover for actual implementation of the project on-ground is often pushed out towards the last-end year/s or 'rush-hours' of the project period. Even when new projects come in following the termination of the other/s, for example, as it happened in Kafa with the involvement of GIZ following the withdrawal of Farm Africa, they follow similar trends and processes. In addition to Kafa area's complex historical and social-ecological interactions, forest conservation and development itself is taking quite a long period of time as compared to the projects' lifetime. On top of these the NGOs' process oriented nature than to be able to maximize implementation or actual on-the-ground practice is not only a huge challenge but also one of the primary reasons that contribute to the shortcomings of development projects in developing countries like the ones in the Kafa biosphere reserve.

Another challenge that relates to participatory interventions in the Kafa biosphere reserve can be realized from the arrangements of 'user-rights'. In the first place 'user-rights' arrangements look like to be a volunteer gift, which purely based on the sole willingness of those who can decide, than anything that has formal policy backup. Hence, the forest 'user-rights' is more informal arrangement than strict, law-bounded, forest resource possession offer (or transfer) to the community members. Likewise, it appears to be a 'cynical arrangement', which has been dictated more towards legitimizing the actions of the project/s involved. Practically speaking, it though lacks to offer formidable guarantee to the users as it has been manifested in the case of the Kafa biosphere reserve.

Moreover, participatory intervention in Kafa has created new stratifications within the local community. In its broader sense this stratification has created forest 'user-groups' and 'non-user-groups'. It has been identified through this study that there is an ongoing argument, both implicit and explicit, about the arrangement and also between the members of the two groups. While the 'non-user-group' members appear to expressing their upset feelings about being excluded, those who are members of the 'user-groups' were found condemning members of the 'non-user-groups' as illegally entering into their corridors and violating their rights. In this regard the 'user-rights' arrangement has already been criticized of creating new types of exclusions and discriminations between the local community members, which indeed is becoming a potential source of (new form) of conflicts by itself.

A furthermore challenge that has been realized from the stratifications or layers created within the local community is growing classifications within the 'user-groups' themselves. In this case some 'user-groups' are found more influential than others, indeed because of the social status of their members, and particularly of the coordinators, in the community (or the area). Likewise, some 'user-groups' have been found to have better status to defend, execute and even further capitalize on their interests and demands while others are indeed could not. Furthermore, despite the claims that women members are empowered through the interventions, it though has been realized in this study that 'user-groups' that have exhibited better executive power are those who have been dominated and/or coordinated by masculine, more vocal or outspoken members in the community.

Within a single 'user-group' itself, there appears a critique that some members are becoming dominant, thus running after own-individual egos than fulfilling the common interests of the 'user-group/s'. Similar to the explanations presented in the preceding paragraph, these individuals again are those who are masculine, more-vocal members, thus are getting more and more grasp of the system, and meanwhile, prioritizing attainment of self-interests than the common benefits of the group. This kind of individually oriented, own or self-benefit maximization notion is a new introduction that indeed is incompatible with, or even contradict, the local-traditional values that have long been embedded in and/or founded on attaining communal interests, benefits or advantages. In this case, participatory interventions in the Kafa biosphere reserve have exhibited the tendency of creating new power structures and competitions than balanced conservation and livelihoods benefits within the local community. Obviously, this can also create (or has already exhibited the tendency to create) new form of local exploitations.

4. Conclusion

In the Kafa ecosystem conservation of the natural resources, particularly the forests; and the livelihoods of communities, more importantly the indigenous Kafecho people; are inevitably interconnected. This has been exhibited throughout different governance arrangements irrespective of the facts even where some of these governance systems have fallen short of either reliable policy guides, for instance, the feudal regime, or 'hands and feet on the ground', i.e., when the participatory approach is taken into account. In this study, it has been identified and/or argued that Kafa's biodiversity conservation and local community's livelihoods endeavors have undergone at least more than a century long interactions and governance interventions. The interactions and interventions have also endured several competing, but also contradictory stakes, motivations and/or interests. The interplays further have created and/or continue to create discourses, some of which are interpretable within the delineation of the very local contexts, while others can take on the broader (global) environmental situations.

Likewise, the Kafa forest landscape and the people have been going through different state derived and internationally, for instance, NGOs oriented management initiatives or interventions. Initially, the forest ecosystem had been governed under customary arrangements that had basis in the local community's worldviews and own way of perceptions, until about the last decade of the nineteenth century. But, in 1897 Menelik's expansion to the south denounced the local community's resource ownership rights and acted against local-traditional and indigenous institutions, thereby replaced them with the emperor's own narration of the state. Similar ownership arrangements and relationships continued during emperor Hailesillassie, who replaced Menelik in the early 1920s. The Dergue, who overthrown emperor Hailesillassie in 1974, instituted a new land reform and declared all rural lands to be nationalized. However, the Dergue's land reform itself had never escaped critics; first because of its fierce top-down (or exclusionary) nature and, second since it had limitations in resolving disputes particularly with regard to property rights with regard to forests and/or forest ecosystems.

Following the downfall of the Dergue, the 1990s mark the time when participatory management was first introduced in Kafa. While successes are often claimed and promoted by the claimants, for instance, by the NGOs who are engaging in the participatory management, important challenges which relate to either internal or external factors have been identified and documented during this study. Apart from the debatable success stories that are often claimed, for example, with regards to 'forest-user-groups', the fact that Kafa forest ecosystem values have been explored, documented, promoted and finally got a remarkable attention to the extent where the ecosystem has been inscribed by UNESCO and enlisted in the world network of biosphere reserves is one of the inevitable successes achieved by the participating NGOs, principally by the NABU, which is still active in the site. Since interventions by NGOs, which completely depend on donor funding, are often short-term engagements, the opportunity that the ecosystem is being recognized by a multilateral-international organization, i.e., UNESCO, is a great opportunity for it can have influence in attracting continued attentions for conservation and sustainable development, both at the national and international levels.

Nevertheless, there are recognizable challenges that, one way or another, relate to the participatory management interventions. Under the contexts of the Kafa biosphere reserve, the challenges can be categorized and/or be explained in terms of, (i) the nature of conservation/development projects involved, (ii) cynical arrangements of user-rights, and (iii) new stratifications or layers or groups created within the local community. Likewise, participatory interventions in the Kafa biosphere have created (or at least exhibited the tendency to create) new promises than deliverable benefits; discourses than practices; stratifications within the local community such as 'forest-user-groups' and 'non-user-groups'; power structures that have led to new form of local discriminations or exploitations; among others.

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