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# What restrains Ethiopian NGOs to participate in the development of policies for natural resource management?



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## ABSTRACT

By law, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Ethiopia are severely restricted in their activities towards policy development. In this study we explore to what extent these restrictions have affected NGOs in Natural Resource Management in the Oromia regional state of Ethiopia. We quantitatively analyzed 106 semi-structured questionnaires, in order to assess 1) the general characteristics of these NGO, 2) the role of NGOs in natural resource management, 3) the factors that constrain their activities, especially in relation to the proclamation, and 4) the cooperation between NGOs as well as other stakeholders. Results indicate that NGOs are mainly involved in policy implementation, including afforestation, forest management, and soil and water conservation. We find that a more active role in agenda setting and policy formulation is hampered by the 2009 proclamation, which explicitly restricts the role of Ethiopian Residence Charities/Societies (ERCS) and Foreign Charities (FC). Consistently, NGOs, as well as their donors, often avoid involvement in policy development, in fear of potential collusion with the government. In addition, NGOs listed legal and administrative barriers, poor networking and cooperation among NGOs, lack of capacity, lack of information, and a lack of clear role on policy issues as constraints for influencing policies for natural resource management. The extent to which these factors affect NGOs is dependent on their type and the source of their funding.

## 1. Introduction

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play an important role in natural resource management (NRM) in developing countries (Banks et al., 2015; Brass, 2012; Cook et al., 2017). Their involvement comes in a variety of forms, including policy advocacy, expert advice and analysis, mobilization of public opinions, representation of the voiceless, service provision, monitoring and assessment, consultation and policy dialogue with policymakers (Barnes and van Laerhoven, 2014; Brass, 2012; Gugerty, 2008; Jepson, 2005). Participation of NGOs in the public policy making for NRM could improve the implementation of policies on the ground (Mukamunnana and Brynard, 2005; Ohanyan, 2009). However, most developing countries only partially use this opportunity and NRM policies are developed with little or no participation of NGOs (Nichols, 2004). In those countries where NGOs are allowed to engage in the policy development process for NRM, their views are rarely accepted by governments (AUC-ECA-AfDB-Consortium, 2010). Governments of developing countries often assume that most of the NGOs are dependent on, controlled by, and accountable to donors rather than their members and objectives. They also assume that the plan

and objectives of NGOs directly reflect the plans and objectives of their donors (AUC-ECA-AfDB-Consortium, 2010; Dupuy et al., 2016; Hailegebriel, 2010). Yet, many NGOs aim for autonomy and their own identity in their activities, despite donors attempts to maintain control over NGO agendas (Brinkerhoff, 2003; Igoe, 2003; Makuwira, 2006).

While NGOs had some presence in Africa in the post second world war period, it was really only in the 1980s and 1990s that NGOs flourished. This flourishing followed the structural adjustment programmes which were imposed across Africa by the international financial institutions and development agencies (Bratton, 1989; Shivji, 2007). The lack of capacity to serve their people in the remote rural areas became a staging ground for the increase of NGOs in the newly independent African countries (Obiyan, 2005). Many of the NGOs in post-colonial African countries have been involved in environmental service delivery, largely as a result of the inability of governments to provide such services (Princen and Finger, 1994).

Conservation activity is arguably the first environmental policy area in which NGOs were actively involved (Burgess, 2017; Princen and Finger, 1994). For instance, the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA), traces its origins to the formation of the Natal

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Game Protection Association (NGPA) in 1883 (Burgess, 2017). In 1982 twenty-one African environmental NGOs formed the African NGOs Environment Network (ANEN), whose membership reached 530 in 45 countries by 1990 (Princen and Finger, 1994). Recently, NGOs have been playing different roles in the areas of NRM in Africa and other parts of the world. For example, in the conservation and management of natural resources in countries like South Africa, Guinea, Cameroon and Tanzania (Fischer, 2000; Fonjong, 2006; Levine, 2002; Musavengane and Simatele, 2016), in the formulation of bylaws for NRM in Tanzania and Uganda (Mowo et al., 2016), community based NRM and ecotourism in protected areas in Cameroon and Kenya (Sawhney et al., 2007; Tantoh and Simatele, 2017), and soil and water conservation in Burkina Faso (Atampugre, 1997). Despite the increase in number and influence of NGOs in Africa (Hearn, 2007), their role in land use governance is still restricted in most of the countries, and their views are either ignored or not fully considered by policy makers (AUC-ECA-AfDB-Consortium, 2010<sup>a</sup>; Hearn, 2007).

NGOs have been present in Ethiopia since the 1960s. However, they were slow to take root under the empire, and then severely restricted during the Derg period (1974–1991) until the famines of 1973–1974 and 1984–1985 pressed the government to open their door to international and local NGOs (Dupuy et al., 2013). Following a regime change in 1991, the government introduced a new guideline which provided guidance for NGOs to align their programmes and activities with government priorities. This was very much welcomed by NGOs as it supports collaboration with the state. Due to their relative freedom, NGOs grew in size and in number, which drew the attention of government officials like in other African countries (Bratton, 1989). As a consequence Ethiopia as well as several other sub-Saharan African countries have issued a restrictive policy to control the activities of NGOs (Dupuy et al., 2016).

From 1993–2012 nearly a quarter of the world's low and middle income countries, including nearly one third of the African countries, adopted a laws to restrict foreign funding for to locally operating NGOs (Dupuy et al., 2016; Mukamunnana and Brynard, 2005). Ethiopia is among those countries which has issued a proclamation to limit the flow of foreign funding to local NGOs. Unlike other countries, the law puts restrictions on a specific types of NGOs from involving in advocacy activities (Dupuy et al., 2016). Proclamation No. 621/2009 divides Ethiopian NGOs into three types, based on their place of origin, source of income, members' citizenship, and control. Ethiopian Charities/Societies (ECS) refers those NGOs that are formed under the laws of Ethiopia, all of whose members are Ethiopians, generate more than 90% of their income from Ethiopia, and are wholly controlled by Ethiopians. Ethiopian Residence Charities/Societies (ERCS) are those NGOs that are formed under the laws of Ethiopia, consist of members who reside in Ethiopia, but who receive more than 10% of their fund from foreign sources. Foreign Charities (FC) refer to those NGOs that are formed under the laws of foreign countries, which consist of members who are foreign nationals, are controlled by foreign nationals, or receive funds from foreign sources. The proclamation, introduced in 2009, prohibited ERCS and FC from engaging in advocacy and governance activities. The law also restricted NGOs spending on administrative activities, which explicitly includes expenses related to policy advocacy, to a maximum of 30% of their total budget. Hence, in the current situation, NGOs are severely restricted in their contribution to developing policies for NRM in Ethiopia. Yet, it is unknown how this situation affects their activities.

The aim of this paper is to assess what determines the role of NGOs in NRM policies. Based on the 2009 proclamation, we expect that the involvement of NGOs to NRM policies differs according to their type, and that these types also affect constraints they are experiencing (Dupuy et al., 2016, 2013; Hailegebriel, 2010). Consistently, we expect that the way NGOs work and plan differs between these different NGO types, depending on their funding source (Ohanyan, 2009). Specifically, we expect that ERCS and FC have a smaller role in the development of

policies, as the law does not allow them to involve in policy advocacy. We also expect that ERCS and FC are more influenced by donors' interests than NGOs that receive national funding. We further hypothesize that there is a difference between the NGO types and the impacts of the new law as well as the coping strategies used by NGOs to overcome impacts (Dupuy et al., 2016).

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Study area

The Oromia regional state is the largest region in the federal state of Ethiopia, with a total area of 353,690 km<sup>2</sup>, and a high variety of landscapes. The region contains 75% of Ethiopia's highlands, large parts of Ethiopia's remaining forests, and various rivers which can be used for power generation and irrigation (OEB, 2005). Forests, bushes and croplands are the major land use types covering 9%, 60% and 28% percent respectively. Most forests, protected areas, lakes and parks are managed by government while other lands are managed by smallholder farmers.

Within the past two decades, the population in Oromia has increased from 25 million to 36 million (OEB, 2005; CSA, 2014). About 85% are from the Oromo ethnic group, while small minorities are from other ethnic groups. Because 90% of the population depends on agricultural activities for their livelihoods, this population growth has also increased the competition for land. As a result of this, local livelihoods have changed from pastoral livestock herding to sedentary mixed and cropland farming. These developments, together with urban expansion, have led to a marked decrease in forests and natural areas, and a degradation of the available natural resources, including freshwater sources (Ariti et al., 2015; Garedew et al., 2009).

Institutional responsibility for the management of natural resources is distributed over a number of regional and federal institutions. Specifically, the Oromia Bureau of Rural Land and Environmental Protection (BoRLEP), the Oromia Bureau of Water, Mines and Energy (BoWME) and the Oromia Forest and Wildlife Enterprise (OFWE) are the most important regional offices that are responsible for NRM, while national parks, lakes and protected areas are managed by federal institutions, such as Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority and Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy. Oromia regional state has passed a number of laws and regulations for NRM, such as for rural land use and administration (130/2007, 147/2009, 151/2012), water (162/2003), and irrigation (162/2009, 180/2013) under the framework of the federal laws and regulations. The rural land use and administration proclamations aim for the sustainable use of rural lands through tenure security, land use planning, conflict management, and conservation. The water and irrigation policies prescribe how to utilize, conserve, protect, and control water resources and irrigable lands.

Despite the implementation of a number of regional policies, degradation of natural resources, such as soil erosion and deforestation, remain a major problem in Oromia, due to unsustainable management and poor enforcement of existing laws (Garedew et al., 2009; Meshesha et al., 2012; Yeshaneh et al., 2013). Instead, some land policies have been named as causes of unsustainable land use changes (Ariti et al., 2015), while they have also been a source of political grievances (Deininger et al., 2008; Ariti et al., 2018) and sometimes civil unrest (Andargie, 2015). Since 2015, the study area has experienced repeated public protest and violence against the implementation of the Addis Ababa-Oromia special zones integrated master land use plan (Andargie, 2015; Challa, 2016). This is mainly because farmers in the study area have the perception that the expansion of the city to adjacent agricultural land would gradually evict them out of their land leaving them landless (Ariti et al., 2018).

## 2.2. Data acquisition and analysis

Using the register and documents obtained from Ethiopian Charities and Societies Agency (ECSA), we identified all NGOs that are both registered in Oromia and active in environmental management and NRM. NGOs were first contacted by e-mail with a request to fill our questionnaire. NGOs that did not respond were subsequently contacted by phone or visited in their offices.

We used semi-structured questionnaires to quantitatively and qualitatively assess their contribution to NRM, and their relation with governmental organizations. Specifically, the questionnaire addresses 1) general information of the NGOs, 2) their role in NRM, 3) factors constraining their role in NRM, and 4) the cooperation among themselves, with the government, and with other stakeholders. General information includes the type of charity, number of projects, types and associated sources of funding, and their activities related to NRM. Types of funding indicate potential restrictions on the use of funds by donors. For this study, funds are unrestricted (U) if more than 50% of the fund can be used without any restrictions by their donors, while they are indicated as restricted (R) otherwise.

The role of NGOs in policy making was evaluated using the policy cycle model. The policy cycle model is a relatively simple model of policy development that distinguishes four distinct phases in the policy cycle: agenda setting, policy formulation, policy implementation, and policy evaluation (Howlett et al., 2009). In the agenda setting phase, problems are placed on the political agenda, to ensure they receive attention. The policy formulation phase refers to the development, identification and adoption of potential policies to resolve the problem. Policy implementation relates to putting the selected policy into effect, while policy evaluation includes the assessment of the selected policies to assess whether they are successful (Howlett et al., 2009). We assess to what extent NGOs participate in each phase and the different factors affecting NGOs in discharging their policy roles. The questionnaires also address the implications of the new proclamation for the different types of NGOs that are active in the region. We further assess how NGOs perceive their internal governance with regard to how programmes are driven, their accountability, transparency, self-regulation, networking, and collaboration among themselves.

Results were first summarized in terms of descriptive statistics, and further analyzed statistically to test our hypotheses. To contextualize the results of the questionnaire we used both scientific and grey literature, including websites, newspapers, and legal documents. In addition, we conducted in-depth interviews with representatives of some NGOs working in the Central Rift Valley, including Sustainable Environmental and Development Action (SEDA), Arsi Nature Conservation and Environmental Development Action (ANCEDA), and Rift Valley Children and Women Development Association. We further interviewed members of the top management of ECSA and the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resource regarding their relationships with environmental NGOs and their activities.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. NGOs in NRM

There were 3115 NGOs registered in Ethiopia in 2016, 561 of which are involved in NRM. Of these NGOs, 1382 are active in Oromia regional state, 301 of which are active in NRM. We distributed our questionnaire to all 209 NGOs with whom we were able to get in contact. 106 NGOs returned a filled questionnaire (response rate 51%). The 106 responses came from 17 NGOs that are registered as ECS, 71 that are registered as ERCS, and 18 that are registered as FC. On average, NGO's that return the questionnaire had four projects in the field of NRM.

Of the NGOs in Oromia, 62% and 66% are engaged in afforestation/ reforestation and forest conservation, respectively, while 73% and 35%

**Table 1**

Activities of NGOs in NRM. Numbers do not add up to the total number of respondents, as each NGO can participate in multiple different activities.

Activities	Total (n = 106)	ECS (n = 17)	ERCS (n = 71)	FC (n = 18)
Afforestation/re-forestation	62	15	41	6
Forest conservation/management	66	11	43	12
Soil and water conservation	73	8	52	13
Area closures and conservation of protected area	35	3	28	4

of the NGOs are involved in soil/water conservation and area closure, and conservation of protected areas, respectively (Table 1). However, these activities are not distributed equally over the different types of NGOs, as ECS are more involved in afforestation and re-afforestation activities while ERCS and FC are more involved in soil and water conservation activities. None of the NGO types are strongly involved in area closure and conservation of protected areas.

### 3.2. Role of NGOs in land use policy

The main contribution of NGOs to NRM is related to the implementation of policies, while their roles in other phases of the policy cycle are limited (see Table 2). The new law allows only ECS to take part in policy advocacy and governance activities, while it restricts ERCS and FC from involving in such activities. Yet, the only NGO that indicated any agenda setting activities was a FC. Despite the legal differentiation, our analysis indicates that there is no difference between the NGO types and their contributions to different phases in the policy making process (Table 2). Hence we reject our hypotheses that there is a significant difference between the types of NGOs and their roles in the policy making process.

The limited participation in Agenda setting, Policy formulation, and Policy evaluation is primarily attributed to the proclamation (621/2009), which explicitly restricts such activities for nearly 85% of the NGOs. As a consequence, most NGOs, particularly ERCS and FC, indicate that they are not interested in these activities in fear of collusion with government and they preferred to focus on the provision of services. In addition, some of the NGOs also indicated that their participation at the implementation stage was to fulfill a legal requirement rather than a voluntary participation. Most NGOs are not interested to engage in those activities which they think to be politically sensitive, such as demanding new policies, improving the structure and functioning of the state (Barnes and van Laerhoven, 2014; Zhan and Tang, 2013).

A number of factors were identified that constrain the participation of NGOs in different phases of the policy cycle. Almost all NGOs (99%) indicated they experienced legal and administrative barriers. Other frequently mentioned constraints include a lack of information on policy issues, a lack of cooperation with governmental institutions, and limited funding (see Table 3). Many NGOs have indicated that the 2009 law forced them to change their mission and vision, which subsequently affected their participation in the policy cycle. In addition, they indicated that subsequent regulations to limit the maximum amount of administrative expenses have affected them.

Although their participation in different phases of the policy cycle did not differ among the different types of NGOs, we found several differences in the extent to which they were constrained in their activities (Table 3). These effects were hypothesized because the 2009 law gives different mandates to different types of NGOs. The results show that ECS experienced more challenges than ERCS and FC in terms of networking, environmental mistrust, lack of capacity, and lack of



**Table 2**

NGO contributions to different stages of the policy cycle. The sum of all contributions exceeds the total number of respondents, as each NGO can participate in multiple different stages.

Question	Total (n = 106)	ECS (n = 17)	ERCS (n = 71)	FC (n = 18)	P-value of Chi Square test	Evaluation
NGO contributes to the agenda setting phase	1	0	0	1	0.0848	No significant difference between NGO types
NGO contribution to the policy formulation phase	4	2	2	0	0.1441	No significant difference between NGO types
NGO contribution to the policy implementation phase	85	14	60	11	0.0818	No significant difference between NGO types
NGO contribution to the policy evaluation phase	1	0	0	1	0.0848	No significant difference between NGO types

funding for policy advocacy. On the other hand, factors such as legal and administrative barriers, lack of cooperation, lack of information and lack of clarity on policy roles are found to be not dependent on the types of NGOs (Table 3).

Our analysis confirmed that there is a significant difference between NGO types concerning the impacts of the new law. ECS experienced more challenges than ERCS and FC as most of the challenges were predominantly related to the difficulty of local fund raising while ERCS and FC can still access foreign funds. As a result several ECS had to decrease their number of beneficiaries, employees, and branch offices. There is also a significant difference between NGO types and their coping strategies. Because ECS are highly dependent on local sources for their funds, they applied more and more different coping mechanisms, including the mobilization of the local community to create public awareness and thereby generate more income, the reduction of programs and projects, and a decrease in employees. Following the 2009 law several local NGOs were registered as ERCS in order to get access to foreign funding (Table 4).

### 3.3. Cooperation between NGOs and the government

As the legal conditions for NGO's changed considerably in recent history, we first assessed the relation between governmental institutions and NGOs in different time periods. In general, the relationship between governmental institutions and NGOs was poor before 1991, showed a large improvement until 2009, and started to decline again following the 2009 proclamation (Fig. 1). In 1999, the government issued a code of conduct for NGOs with the intention of promoting transparency, accountability and self-regulation. Although the code of conduct is widely accepted, there were some NGOs who believed that the code limited their freedom and autonomy, as it required each NGO to conduct an annual registration. However, most NGOs agree that the relative freedom of association since 1991 has contributed to the increase in the number of NGOs across the country as well as their engagement in policy affairs. The 2005 election has worsened the relationship between the government and NGOs, particularly the international NGOs. Following the election, the government started to accuse NGOs of providing funds to opposition parties, encouraging violence, corruption, being unaccountable and being more loyal to their donors than their community (Dupuy et al., 2013; Hailegebriel, 2010).

As a result of the new law, the annual registration of new NGOs has been declining consistently since 2009. That is, 1046 new NGOs were registered in 2009, 678 in 2010, 379 in 2011, 320 in 2012, 237 in 2013, 180 in 2014, 177 in 2015 and only 90 in 2016. Moreover, following the proclamation, many NGOs were forced to shut-down or to make a re-registration by changing their missions and objectives. According to ECSA, 552 NGOs were shut-down between 2009 and 2016, out of which 308 were shut-down because they failed to fulfill the requirements of the new law. Others are closed due to a lack of funds, as a result of a change in their objectives, and due to a gradual decline of donors' interest to provide funds.

Currently there are 53 NGO networks working in Ethiopia, including the Ethiopian Consortium of Health and Environment, the Sustainable Land Use Forum, the Consortium of Climate Change in Ethiopia, the Forum for Environment, the Network for Integrated Development, the Youth Network for Sustainable Development, and the Consortium of Christian Relief Development Association, all of which are operating in Oromia regional state. In addition, the Central Rift Valley Working Group (CRVWG) and the Horn of Africa Regional Environment Centre and Network (HoAREC/N), which comprises environmental NGOs of the study area such as SEDA and ANCEDA as partners, are also active in NRM, although they are not officially registered at the ECSA. The vast majority (86%) of the participating NGOs are a member of one or more of these networks. However, most networks can be characterized as weak, due to a lack of participation by member NGOs, a lack of coordination and lack of capacity. This was confirmed by 63% of the respondents, as they indicated that the relationship between network members was poor and there was little or no participation in network activities. In addition, 81% indicated that there was role overlap between network members, for example by focusing on a certain community segment for the same purpose. Most of the participating NGOs also believe that the new proclamation significantly restricted the participation and cooperation of NGOs in networking, as it prohibits formation of networks between ECS, and ERCS and FC, in order to control the potential flow of funds from ERCS and FC to ECS. Based on the data obtained from ECSA, 91% of the established networks consist of ERCS and FC with little or no role to influence NRM policies.

While a lack of cooperation with the state was experienced as a constraint by 61% of the NGOs, 83% indicated that they had an official bilateral relationship with a governmental institution, known as a "GO-NGO forum". These forums are also a consequence of the new proclamation, as according to one respondent:

*"One of the very positive impacts of the new proclamation is that it enforces respective government sector organizations to coordinate and facilitate the activities of NGOs which fall under their respective jurisdiction. Accordingly we have a GO-NGO forum through which we can raise our concerns though the focus is very much limited to implementation problems."*

Although these forums are generally welcomed by NGOs, they mostly work at the local level, with little or no opportunity to interact with higher level institutions. According to some NGOs, a tripartite forum, encompassing federal institutions, donors, and NGOs needs to be strengthened. So while the GO-NGO forums have improved mutual relations, NGOs are still afraid to express their opinions on policy issues freely, especially since the new law gives a mandate to ECSA to shut-down NGOs for any reasons it deems necessary.

### 3.4. The internal organization of NGOs

Our finding indicate that the types of NGOs and their funding

**Table 3**  
Factors constraining the participation of NGOs in the development of land policies.

Factors	Number of NGOs that agree		P-value of Chi-square test	Evaluation	Trends of the result
	ECS (n = 17)	FC (n = 18)			
Legal and administrative barriers	17	17	0.0848	No significant difference between NGO types	All NGOs, irrespective of their types, are affected by legal and administrative barriers
Lack of networking among NGOs	14	1	0.0000***	Significant difference between NGO types	ECS have fewer networks compared to ERCS and FC.
Lack of cooperation with the state	12	11	0.6851	No significant difference between NGO types	All NGOs, irrespective of their types, have encountered lack of cooperation from the state.
Lack of information on policies	14	13	0.7735	No significant difference between NGO types	Lack of information is a common problem for all NGOs irrespective of their types
Lack of trust by the local community	13	3	0.0003**	Significant difference between NGO types	ECS are highly affected by lack of trust by the local community compared to ERCS and FC
Lack of capacity	13	1	0.0001**	Significant difference between NGO types	ECS are highly affected by a lack of capacity as they have to generate their income from local sources.
Lack of clear role on policy matters	12	11	0.4173	No significant difference between NGO types	Lack of clarity on policy role is a common problem shared by NGOs irrespective of their types.
Limited funding for policy advocacy	15	5	0.0015*	Significant difference between NGO types	ECS are highly constrained by funds to advance their policy roles.

\* P < 0.05.  
 \*\* P < 0.01.  
 \*\*\* P < 0.001.

significant affect the way NGOs plan and execute their activities (Table 5). ECS, NGOs with unrestricted fund type are found to rely more on their own strategies and the needs of the local community while ERCS, FC, NGOs with restricted fund type are found to rely more on the needs of their donors and project agreements (Table 5).

Since the majority of NGOs in the study area are ERCS and FC for which their spending for advocacy is restricted by government, they are less likely to pursue their own policy preferences, as they lack funding from their donors for advocacy. On the other hand, irrespective of the NGO types and fund types, NGOs could not pursue their own objectives without the influence of governments, as they have to follow the priorities of the government. Previous research indicated that NGOs with multiple funding sources experience some bargaining power over their donors in advancing their own policy preferences (Ohanyan, 2009).

Most of the NGOs, irrespective of their funding types, agreed that they are focused on and committed to their objectives, while 65% and 61% of ERCS and FC, respectively, agreed that their programmes/projects were fund-driven (See Table S1). Irrespective of their types, few NGOs agreed with the statements that they themselves are accountable, transparent, self-regulated, networked and collaborative (Table S1).

According to ECSA, lack of accountability and transparency as well as absence of self-regulation among NGOs are the major justifications used by the government for issuing the 2009 law. ECSA also indicated that more than 60% of the NGOs were briefcase NGOs before the issuance of the law, as there was no controlling mechanism on their accountability. Similar observations were also made in other countries such as Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda (Dupuy et al., 2013; Harsh et al., 2010; Mukamunnana and Brynard, 2005).

In theory, NGOs are expected to be exemplary for the government in the way they collect, disseminate, and analyze information. They are also expected to provide timely information and thereby create awareness among the public and policy makers through training and technical support (Barnes and van Laerhoven, 2014; Harsh et al., 2010; Turner, 2011). However, in practice, NGOs are not playing their informational role as expected, due to lack of capacity, lack of communication, legal restrictions, and the type of communication media used (Kirchhoff et al., 2012). For example, the most widely used media for collecting policy related information is printed materials, while workshops/meetings are most widely used to disseminate information. The use of social media for exchanging information is very low (Fig. S1). On the other hand, radio and televisions are controlled by the government, and NGOs found it very expensive to promote their objectives due to the legal limitation on administrative expenses.

#### 4. Discussion

##### 4.1. Reflection on the current role of NGOs in policy development

Our results show that NGOs in Ethiopia are hardly participating in the development of policies for NRM. According to our interviewees, this situation is largely a result of the 2009 law, which limits the role of ERCS and FC on policy issues. Similar restrictive measures have also been taken by a number of other countries, arguing that NGOs are corrupt, unaccountable, and loyal to their donors' interest and that they interfere in the local political affairs (Dupuy et al., 2016). Between 1955 and 2012, 44% of the world countries (86/195) have adopted legislation that specifically restricts the activities of foreign NGOs (Dupuy et al., 2013). Besides Ethiopia, 16 other African countries, including Egypt, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea and Zimbabwe, have adopted restrictive legislation only in the past two decades (Dupuy et al., 2016; Mukamunnana and Brynard, 2005).

There is a lack of clarity among NGOs and governmental institutions regarding the role of NGOs in the policy process. Most ERCS and FC indicate that the new law does not provide room for their involvement

**Table 4**

Effects of the 2009 law and coping strategies used by different types of NGOs P = values < 0.05 indicate a significant difference between the impacts of the 2009 law for different types of NGOs.

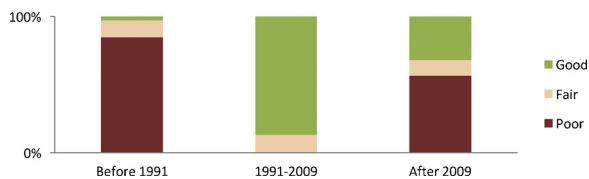
	Total (n = 106)	ECS (n = 17)	ERCS (n = 71)	FC (n = 18)	P-value of Chi-square test
<b>Impacts of the new law</b>					
Decrease in programs/projects	63	14	39	10	0.3424
Decrease in beneficiaries	49	14	30	5	0.0197*
Decrease in employees	64	16	42	6	0.0098**
Decrease branch offices	64	16	40	8	0.0408†
Reduced source of income	60	14	39	7	0.1707
<b>Coping Strategies</b>					
Revision of objectives	93	17	60	16	0.2137
Mobilizing local community & institutions	25	11	14	0	0.0000***
Income generating activities	5	5	0	0	0.0000***
Change of entity type <sup>a</sup>	48	0	48	0	0.0000***
Reducing programs/projects	17	39	10	17	0.0022**
Reducing staffs or employees	17	42	11	17	0.0054**

\* P < 0.05.

\*\* P < 0.01.

\*\*\* P < 0.001.

<sup>a</sup> NGOs are characterized according to their current type, hence a confirmation indicates a change into that type (in most cases, these NGOs used to be local NGOs).



**Fig. 1.** Historical relationship of NGOs with the government, according to NGOs.

**Table 5**

Factors affecting the way NGOs plan and work, differentiated by NGO type and type of funding (R = Restricted, U = Unrestricted).

Variables affecting the way NGO works	Types of NGO			Types of funding <sup>a</sup>	
	ECS (n = 17)	ERCS (n = 71)	FC (n = 18)	R(n = 84)	U(n = 16)
Donors interest	0	21	11	31	1
Project agreement	1	21	3	25	0
Community interest	13	14	1	18	7
Own strategy	2	10	1	2	8
Government policy	1	5	2	8	0
Evaluation of hypothesis	Difference confirmed (X <sup>2</sup> = 0.00014)			Difference confirmed (X <sup>2</sup> = 0.00000)	

<sup>a</sup> 6 NGOs did not indicate clearly the level of restrictions on their funding.

in policy advocacy. On the other hand, ECSA claims that these NGOs can still use other ways to engage in policy development, such as through conducting research, and organizing. They can also participate in implementing environmental protection programs, such as afforestation, terracing, soil and water conservation, as most of them already do. However, due to the prevailing interpretation of the law, most NGOs prefer to focus on the delivery of services, which they consider as a safe zone. Most local private businesses are not willing to support ECS for advocacy services in fear of collusion with government. Hence most of the NGOs are focused on the service delivery in fear of collusion such as happened in other developing countries, like Brazil, Egypt and Ghana (Brass, 2012).

Lack of funding for policy advocacy is a common problem for many NGOs. Several ERCS and FC NGOs also claimed that their effort to

allocate budget for research and development on policy impacts was rejected by their donors in fear of potential collusion with the government. This problem is also common for ECS, which are even further constrained by financial resources. The major factors contributing to the lack of funding is a lack of tradition of communities to support NGOs financially, for a number of reasons. First, most local people are very poor themselves. Second, even if they have the money, they are afraid that local authorities might do something against them. Third, there is a misunderstanding that NGOs do not need money from the local people as they are mostly perceived to get their funds from foreign sources. Finally, there is lack of trust in the local community that the money will be spend properly, which is related to a lack of trust in their roles. According to one NGO, the existence of some NGOs with corrupt and unaccountable practices created an environment of mistrust, where the local community and government see NGOs as corrupt and unaccountable institutions that share funds among family members, relatives, and nearby friends instead of the intended target group. Such mistrust could arise from a lack of accountability and corrupt practices of NGOs (Barr and Fafchamps, 2005; Chahim and Prakash, 2012; Hearn, 2007), which in turn could affect the abilities of NGOs to raise funds. This scenario has for example been reported for in Rwanda (Dupuy et al., 2013; Mukamunnana and Brynard, 2005).

While the current situation is mostly attributed to the 2009 law, ECSA and some NGOs indicate that their small role on policy matters originates long before the issuance of the 2009 proclamation, which suggests that this role is inherent. This was further confirmed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resource, which indicated that none of these NGOs had participated in the policy development process thus far. Instead, these roles are normally taken by international development partners, such as USAID, GIZ, DFID, and the World Bank. For example, USAID has been actively participating in the revision process of the Rural Land Administration and Land Use Proclamation (number 456/2005) by facilitating exposure visits, provision of technical and financial support and mobilizing other stakeholders.

Despite legal restrictions, it is worth mentioning that the new legislation has brought some opportunities that can benefit the further development of NGOs (Berhanu, 2015). First, it has brought a standalone and full-fledged law by replacing laws which were fragmented and unresponsive to new developments. Second, it led to the establishment of the ECSA as a regulatory body, where NGOs are represented in the Board. Third, the classification of NGOs created a choice for citizens to organize themselves in line with their preferences and interests. Fourth, it allows the formation of networks that support capacity building, income generation, and knowledge and experience sharing.

#### 4.2. Towards improved participation of NGOs in policy development

NGOs in many countries, including sub-Saharan Africa, play an active role in NRM through their networks (Fischer, 2000; Fonjong, 2006; Levine, 2002; Musavengane and Simatele, 2016). The relationships between NGOs can help developing self-regulation mechanisms to shape or constrain the behavior of other member NGOs to provide a quality of services to their stakeholders (Chaney, 2016; Gugerty, 2008). However, the sheer number of NGOs ready to provide services has offset their organizational autonomy, as NGOs often play donors off one another and advance their own goals in this process, weakening the overall effectiveness of the NGOs and their network in a given policy issue (Ohanyan, 2009).

Many states have recognized the need to involve NGOs in government policies (Brass, 2012; Gómez-Jauregui, 2004). A state-NGO relation affects the role of NGOs, as the former usually possesses power that is superior to NGOs. A state, with its policies, laws, regulations and links to the media, generally has far more control over other entities and may at any time shift the political opportunity structures that constitute the practical basis of NGO activities (Gordon, 2006; Matei and Apostu, 2014; Tang and Gavin, 2015). In most parts of Africa, including Ethiopia, the government plays dominant role in driving and shaping land policies. In addition, inputs from NGOs to land policy development have all too frequently been ignored or at least not been taken fully (AUC-ECA-AfDB-Consortium, 2010).

Despite the poor relationships between NGOs, as well as between NGOs and the government, their role in NRM in the study area is increasing through the introduction of some innovative ideas. For example, participatory forest management was first introduced by NGOs like Farm Africa and SoS Sahel, with a fund secured from GIZ. NGOs mostly participate in NRM through the provision of financial, technical, and logistical services to the local government as well as to the local community. SEDA has made remarkable achievements, in collaboration with the local governments, in giving training and convincing the local community to make them part of the efforts in the restoration of degraded lands through area closures in two kebeles, namely Gallo Hirrapi and QamoGerbi, covering a total area of more than 400 ha. As a result, degraded lands have recovered and indigenous trees which disappeared long before have started to regenerate. Similarly ANCEDA played a leading role in initiating the local communities and local governments to rehabilitate degraded areas with forests by conducting afforestation and re-afforestation activities. ANCEDA also introduced alternative sources of livelihood, such as bee keeping, to the rural community to reduce the pressure on forests. According to the information obtained from SEDA and ANCEDA they are currently collaborating with HoAREC/N in an EU project to improve which aims to provide of alternative sources of energy to the rural community. Such initiatives show the potential role of NGOs in NRM, including related policies.

Initiatives from NGOs to be involved in NRM policy making have also been reported in other developing countries, for example related to the restoration of desert areas and degraded forest ecosystems through tree planting, reforestation, forest management and conservation, and soil and water conservation (de Graaff et al., 2013; Moon and Park, 2004). NGOs in these initiatives have legal constraints and a limited capacity to directly influence policy making, but they are often effective in influencing policies indirectly. For example, there are several recently issued NRM policies that have been developed using a participatory approach. According to Bratton (1990), NGOs which maintain the proper accountability relationships with formal and informal authorities in developing countries are more likely to be effective in influencing government decision making.

#### 4.3. Implications of the findings

The limited capacity of ECS and the legal restrictions imposed on

ERCS and FC have constrained the role of NGOs in NRM in the study area. We expect a similar situation in other parts of Ethiopia as the 2009 law applies across the country. Other studies have found challenges similar to those observed in this study in other developing countries, in Africa, Asia, Central America and Latin America (Cook et al., 2017; Dupuy et al., 2016; Mukamunnana and Brynard, 2005; Zhan and Tang, 2013). In these countries, NGOs that are involved in NRM are also constrained by their limited capacity, control on foreign funding, weak internal governance, and poor relation with government. On the other hand, NGOs working in China, South Africa, Thailand and Bolivia have better opportunities either to participate or to influence the policy making process (Burgess, 2017; Cook et al., 2017; Kabiri, 2016), and this participation has improved their effectiveness in the context of environmental and natural resource governance (Brass, 2012; Burgess, 2017; Fonjong, 2006; Musavengane and Simatele, 2016).

Despite all the challenges NGOs are facing, we still argue that NGOs are the right institutions to contribute to an effective NRM, at least for three major reasons: First, experiences show that governments of developing countries are not in a strong position to design and implement NRM policies without the support of non-state actors like NGOs (Sawhney et al., 2007). Second, NGOs have the ability to coordinate and mobilize public support and large amount of funds for NRM through their advocacy services (Moon and Park, 2004; Paloniemi et al., 2015; Sawhney et al., 2007). Third, NGOs, being the main provider of environmental education and public awareness raising, can easily mobilize the knowledge, finance and labor of the local community. In the Oromia regional state this has been demonstrated by the rehabilitation of degraded lands. NGOs can also provide policy makers a range of information, perceptions and solutions since they work more closely with the local community (Sawhney et al., 2007). Examples from developed countries show that such success is not limited to developing nations only. For example, in Finland, the government launched a national forest biodiversity program in response to the initiative of NGOs while in Greece and the UK environmental NGOs were the major actors in the coordination and leadership of protected and conservation areas (Paloniemi et al., 2015).

## 5. Conclusions

Although NGOs in the study area contribute to NRM, their participation in the development of policies is very limited. This is due to a number of factors, including legal and administrative barriers, lack of cooperation, lack of capacity and lack of a clear role in the policy process. Our result suggest that ECS are more affected by the new law compared to ERCS and FC, mainly due to the environmental mistrust and the tradition of the local community and institutions to support NGOs. Moreover, the cooperation or networking among the different NGOs is generally weak, partially due to the legal restrictions and a lack of networking experience. While donors are not interested to allocate funds for policy advocacy, ERCS and FC are also hesitant to work with ECS on policy issues in fear of potential collusion with government, which in turn affects their contribution to the NRM. However, on the positive side, the 2009 law paved the way in improving state-NGO relationship through the formation of GO-NGO forum.

Given that NGOs have successfully contributed to NRM and NRM policies in several cases, our results provide some recommendations for Ethiopia as well as other countries where NGOs are similarly restricted. First, as NGOs in general and ECS in particular face challenges as a result of the 2009 law, the government could provide support to adapt to this, so that they can contribute to sustainable NRM. At the same time, ECS could also strengthen their capacity to mobilize local source for the sustainability of their projects. Second, in order to win the trust of not only government but also the local community, NGOs and their networks could strengthen their cooperation and develop a code of conduct to improve their transparency and accountability. Third, there is a need to strengthen the relationship between government and NGOs,



as NRM cannot be performed successfully in isolation. Given the limited capacity of the government and given NGOs vast experience in research and development compared to government, NGOs are in a better position to identify possible improvements for policy makers. Existing GO-NGO forums can be used as an opportunity to improve the bilateral relationship into a partnership for sustainable NRM. While this research focused on the role of environmental NGOs in NRM and their participation in the land use policies in Oromia region, we expect that these suggestions are also applicable to other fields of NGO activities and in other regions in Ethiopia.

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### Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary material related to this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2018.08.008>.

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