

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **An assessment of youths' perception and participation on environmental management undertakings: Empirical evidence from Youth Development and Change Package implementation in Southern Ethiopia (SNNPRS)**

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The participation of youths is important in the management of environmental problems. Environmental problems such as deforestation, overgrazing, soil erosion, and improper waste disposal are common in most parts of Ethiopia. Inappropriate environmental policies, population growth, climate change, and low level of awareness and less participation of the public are the major factors responsible for the problems. These environmental problems are affecting the overall agricultural productivity of the country necessitating corrective measures. The participation of youths in environmental management activities is important not only because they are the most productive group of society, but also because they constitute a significant number (30 and 28% of the Ethiopian and the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS) total population, respectively). This article, in line with the Ethiopian Youth Development and Change Package which is a program designed to materialize the Ethiopian Youth Policy (2004), discusses the success achieved and the challenges encountered in the implementation of the program in SNNPRS. The study is based on primary data collected by household survey from 7,630 youths all over the region. Other relevant secondary data were obtained from different sources. The findings have indicated that significant integrated watershed management activities have been undertaken in the region and as a result, some of the degraded lands rehabilitated, and urban greening and sanitation have improved. However, lack of autonomous organizational structure, weak coordination, lower youths' participation and perception regarding their responsibility in managing the environment, lack of follow up for environmental management activities, absence of civic societies working in environmental management in the region are found to be problems to be resolved. Deforestation is found now to be the major environmental problem in the region.

**Key words:** Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS), environmental degradation, youth participation, environmental management.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Ethiopia, the second most populous country in Africa next to Nigeria with a total population of 96 million, is a country endowed with enormous natural resources and biodiversity that are the results of its diverse agro ecology

(Asefa, 2003; Negash and Niehof, 2004). However, because of inappropriate policies, poor agricultural practices, and environmental and demographic changes, the country has been experiencing environment

degradation of different forms among which are deforestation, soil erosion, over grazing, improper waste disposal, and loss of biodiversity (Dejene, 1990; Tedla and Lemma, 1997, 1999; Taddese, 2001; Bewket, 2003b; Haile, 2004; Birhanu, 2014; Bekele and Hailemariam, 2010). The highlands of Ethiopia, constituting nearly 45% of the total area of the country and a place where 80% of the Ethiopian population resides, are becoming less productive because of overgrazing, deforestation, population growth, soil erosion and climate change (Keeley and Scoones, 2000; Zeleke, 2000; Holden and Shiferaw, 2004; Hurni et al., 2005; Ludi, 2004)

These environmental problems are not without consequences. They are affecting environmental productivity as well as the socioeconomic development of the country (Leach and Mearns, 1996; Devereux and Sussex, 2000; Berry, 2003; Birhanu, 2014; Amsalu and Gebremichael, 2010). Though the actual rates of soil erosion and deforestation are debatable, there is an agreement that both are happening on a large scale in most parts of the country. The former one is believed to have affected 82% of the country; and the forest cover of the country which was nearly 40% at the beginning of the 20th century has now declined to less than 3% (Tedla and Lemma, 1997; Bewket, 2002; Feoli et al., 2002; Hurni et al., 2005; Kristen, 2007; Gessesse, 2010).

The Ethiopian environmental concern came to government attention during the 1950s when the government responded by designing policies and establishing different institutions to deal with the mushrooming environmental problems (Hoben, 1996; Tedla and Lemma, 1997). A case in point was the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Organization (EWCO) which was established in 1965. Environmental management policy was also formulated though it did not acknowledge traditional land uses and had limited success in achieving the intended goals (Pausewang, 2002).

The socialist Derg (1976-1991) also attempted to introduce different programs to rehabilitate the environment through reforestation, terracing, and other methods mainly in the 1980s though the rehabilitation policies opted for were coercive, top-down, and hence detested by many. Despite the aforementioned limitations, the forest cover of the country was temporarily improved, but was not sustained after the downfall of the regime mainly because the policy was coercive (Leach and Mearns, 1996; Keeley and Scoones, 2000).

The incumbent regime, after coming to power in 1991, responded to the environmental problems of the country by launching a new National Environmental Policy (1997) which opts for enhancing the quality of life of its people by promoting sustainable development through environmental management and the wise use of its

natural resources. Though the policy has been criticized for its failure to be translated into practical measures, and for its non-participatory approach by many scholars (Keeley and Scoones, 2000; Rahmato, 2008), some of its goals include: preserving essential ecological processes, life support systems, and biological diversity; encouraging sustainable exploitation of nonrenewable resources; improving the environment of human settlements; and promoting understanding of the essential linkages between environment and development (EPA, 1997). Despite the critics, various programs have been implemented based on the policy including reforestation, construction of erosion control structures, integrated watershed management and the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) (Bewket, 2003a; Sharp et al., 2006; Damtie, 2010).

Despite the pressing nature of environmental problems to the overall socioeconomic development of the country and the vital roles that the youths can play in environmental management activities, little empirical research has been done in the domain of youths' participation in environmental management issues in the country and in the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR). Therefore, the overall objective of this study is to assess the perception and the roles of youths in environmental management activities since 2005 in Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS).

### **Overview of environmental management policy in Ethiopia**

The 1995 Ethiopian constitution in its article 44(1) stated that "all citizens have the right to a clean and healthy environment." Based on the constitutional provision, different national policies have been formulated and international conventions signed to manage the environment, and to use its resources for overall development.

In the last two decades, the Ethiopian Government has put in place a number of policies, strategies and laws that are designed to support sustainable development taking into consideration environmental management as one of its pillars (Lemenih and Woldemariam, 2010). Some of these policies and strategies include: The Conservation Strategy of Ethiopia (April 1997), The Environment Policy of Ethiopia (April 1997), The National Agricultural Research Policy and Strategy (October 1993), The National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Management (1997), The National Policy on Biodiversity Conservation and Research (1998), National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2005), Development, Conservation and

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Utilization of Wildlife Proclamation (No. 541/2007), Forest Development, Conservation and Utilization Policy (2007), Forest Development, Conservation and Utilization Proclamation No 542/2007, Environmental Impact Assessment Proclamation 299/2002, and Pollution Control Proclamation 300/2002.

Ethiopia is also a signatory to a number of international agreements that have implications on the sustainable development efforts of the country. The country has signed and/or ratified many of the international conventions and protocols. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC, 1994) was signed by Ethiopia during the 1992 Rio Conference in Brazil and was ratified in May 1994. So as to implement the convention and provide a legal basis for its implementation, the Framework Convention on Climate Change Proclamation 97/1994 was put in place.

The participation of all stakeholders, including the youths, is important for the successful implementation of policies and strategies including the environmental management policy and affiliated packages. Considering the significant role of youths in the overall development of the country, and recognizing their unbalanced representation in most sectors of development, the Ethiopian Government has designed the Ethiopian Youth Policy (2004). In order to materialize the policy, a Youth Development Package was also developed in 2005. The major goal of the policy and the package among others include: enabling the youths to play an active role in building a democratic society and good governance, enabling the youths to benefit from the overall development of the country as well as involving the youths in social, environmental and economic development of the country.

The Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) 2010/2011-2014/2015 has also revealed a policy direction for the youths by addressing their needs through boosting their participation to ensure that they benefit from the socio-economic development in the country. Though encouraging progress is made regarding the issuing of environmental laws, lack of commitment to implement some of the laws, the absence of a comprehensive land use plan, emphasis on the potential economic values of the environment at the expense of other aspects, and considering the land as an 'infinite resource' are the major constraints in the institutional and legal frameworks.

As one of the regional states of the FDRE, the SNNPRS has been implementing the Youth Development and Change Package since 2007. This study is, therefore, aimed at assessing the successes or otherwise of the package in this region.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Brief description of study area**

The SNNPRS, is one of the nine regional states that constitute the

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). The region is located in the southern part of the country with astronomical location of 4° 43' and 8° 58' North latitude and 34° 88' and 39° 14' East longitude with a total area of 113,539 square kilometers. The region shares the boundary with Oromia region in the north, east and southeast. SNNPRS also shares international boundaries with Kenya in the South, and with South Sudan in the southwest. Administratively, the region is divided into 14 zones, one city administration and 4 special woredas/districts. These include Sidama, Hadiya Gedio, Silte, Gurage, Kambata Tembaro, Gamo Goffa, South Omo, Bench Maji, Kafa, Sheka, Dawro, Wolyta and Segen people's zones and Basketo, Yem, Konta, and Halaba special woredas. Hawassa City, one of the fastest growing cities in Ethiopia, is the administrative seat of Sidama Zone, and the region (BoFED, 2006). The region is the mosaic of diverse ethnic groups with 56 nations and nationalities living together.

### **Data and methods**

The study used both primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected from youth (15-29 years of age based on the Ethiopian Youth Policy, 2004) by using household survey and focus group discussions. A total of randomly selected 7,630 youth from the 14 zones, 4 special woredas/ districts and one city administration were included in the survey from all over the region. A structured questionnaire was distributed to the youths and required data were collected. The secondary data are collected from reports, policy documents and other studies in the area. The present study adopted a mixed method approach. The primary data were thus generated using both qualitative and quantitative procedures while secondary data were gathered from official government statistical reports and administrative data. Interpretations and analyses of primary and secondary data were undertaken using qualitative and quantitative analyses.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This part of the study focuses on the background of the respondents, the perception of the youths concerning environmental management, the status of environmental management activities, youths' participation, and achievements and challenges in environmental management in the region with emphasis on the role of youths.

### **Respondents' background**

The respondents included in the study are in the age range (15-29) who are designated as youths by the Ethiopian Youth Policy (2004) (Table 1).

Of the total respondents, 45% were females and the remaining 56% were males. Regarding their academic background, 7% of the respondents were illiterate, and 64% of them were unmarried and nearly 82% of the respondents live in rural area.

### **Youths' perception about the responsibility of environmental management**

Youths constitute 30 and 28% of the Ethiopian and the

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic profiles of the study participants.

Socio-demographic variable	Categories	N (%)	Chi-square
Age	15-30	7633 (99.7)	15190.26 (2)
	31-45	17 (0.2)	
	46 >=	2 (0.001)	
Gender	Female	3503 (45.1)	74.38 (1)
	Male	4263 (54.9)	
Marital status	Never married	4982 (64.4)	8660.20 (3)
	Married	2596 (33.7)	
	Divorced	106 (1.4)	
	Widow/er	29 (0.4)	
Education	Illiterate	542 (7)	7997.94 (5)
	ANFE	184 (2.4)	
	Primary	3563 (46.1)	
	Secondary	2609 (33.8)	
	TVET Diploma	612 (7.9)	
	Degree & above	217 (2.8)	
Place of residence	Rural	5687 (81.9)	
	Urban	1258 (18.1)	
Employment status	Farmer	3835 (50.3)	5119.73 (5)
	Employed	3835 (5.83)	
	Merchant	3835 (11.25)	
	SMEs	3835 (3.14)	
	Unemployed	3835 (23.3)	
	Others	3835 (5.8)	

Source: Household Survey (2015).

SNNPRS population, respectively. It is strongly believed that youths play a significant role in the overall socio-economic development of the region and country. Thus, environmental management and other development endeavors need to encourage youths to participate. The participation of the youths in environmental management is partly a function of their perception on who is responsible for managing the environment. Hence, identifying their perception regarding the responsibility of managing the environment is important.

Regarding the primary responsibility of taking care of the surrounding environment, the youth have different perceptions. Of the 7,617 youth respondents included in the study, 55% (n=4174) believe that all stakeholders are responsible for managing the environment. Some 20% (n=1524) of the respondents perceive that parents are responsible, 19% (n=1462) believe that government bodies are responsible, 6% (n=457) of the respondents believe that conserving the environment is the responsibility of youths. From the responses, it is

possible to understand that most of the youths in the region do not consider themselves as the main caretaker of the environment (Table 2).

The perception of the youths on the main environmental problems in their surroundings is also different. Of 7,711 respondents involved regarding the major environmental problems in their surroundings, 39% (n=2977) of them believe that their environment has no major problem. Some 30% (n=2346) of the respondents believe that deforestation is the major environmental problem in their environment, whereas 13% (n=1007) and 18% (1381) respectively of the respondents believe that poor waste disposal and soil erosion are the major environmental problems, respectively.

### **Environmental management activities and youth participation**

Since the implementation of the youth's development

**Table 2.** Youths' perception on who is responsible for managing environment.

<b>Who is responsible for managing the environment?</b>	<b>Yes [N (%)]</b>	<b>No [N (%)]</b>
All stakeholders	4174 (55)	3443 (45)
Parents	1524 (20)	6093 (80)
Government	1462 (19)	6155 (81)
The youth	457 (6)	7160 (94)

Source: Household Survey (2015).

**Table 3.** The extent of youths' participation in managing environment activities.

<b>How often do you participate in environmental management activities?</b>	<b>Yes [N (%)]</b>	<b>No [N (%)]</b>
Occasionally	3252 (44)	4209 (56)
Always	2942 (39)	4519 (61)
Do not participate	1118 (15)	6343 (85)
No such activities	149 (2)	7312 (98)

Source: Household Survey (2015).

package in 2008, various environmental management activities are carried by the youths of the region. The major environmental management activities undertaken include: environmental sanitation, environmental greening, afforestation, integrated watershed management, and rehabilitation of mountain and degraded lands.

Respondents (85 and 80%) agree that afforestation and watershed management, respectively, are carried out in their environment. Some 76 and 71% of the respondents also responded positively respectively on the activities of environmental greening and environmental sanitation. Regarding rehabilitating mountains and degraded lands, relatively fewer positive responses are reported. Some 65% of the respondents agree that activities of rehabilitating degraded land was carried out in their surrounding and the remaining 35% of the respondents responded negatively.

The participation of the youths on environmental management activities on a regular basis is very much limited. When we see the participation of the youths in environmental management activities of the region, of 7455 youths asked about their habit of participation in environmental management activities, only 39% (n=2942) reported regular participation. Some 44 (n=3252) reported that they participate occasionally. The remaining 15% (n=1139) responded that they did not participate in any environmental management activities (Table 3).

The reasons for less participation in environmental management activities, based on focus group discussion with the youths, are mainly associated with their perception on the responsibility of protecting the environment, lack of training and the support given to the youth by different stakeholders. Of the 7464 youths asked whether they had received training in environmental management or not, only 45% (n=3375)

reported that they were trained regarding environmental management activities. The remaining 55% (n= 4089) reported that they were never trained about environmental management.

Absence of civic societies and NGOs working on environmental management in the region also constrained the participation of the youths in environmental management undertakings. Civil societies and environmental activists play a significant role in environmental management activities. However, of the 7431 youths asked about the presence of environmental activists and civil societies working on environmental management activities in their area, only 36% (n= 2685) of them reported the presence of such groups in their environment. The remaining 64% (n= 4746) reported that there are no civil society groups working on environmental issues.

### **Achievements and challenges in environmental management activities**

Since the implementation of the Youth Development Package in the region, many environmental management activities have been carried out. The major ones include: environmental sanitation, environmental greening, afforestation, integrated watershed management; and mountain and degraded lands rehabilitation. Because of the aforementioned activities, the youths responding to this study reported that improvements are noticed on some of the environmental issues. Of 6,728 respondents asked about improvements in environmental greening and hygiene, 74% (n=4956) agreed that environmental aesthetic value has improved. The remaining 26%(n=1772) responded negatively.

**Table 4.** Distribution of the youth by their response on achievements because of environmental management.

Major achievements of environmental management	Yes [N (%)]	No [N (%)]	Total
Change in ecosystem	4788 (71)	1912 (29)	6700 (100)
Environmental beauty and aesthetic value increased	4956 (74)	1772 (26)	6728 (100)
Agricultural Productivity increased	4894 (73)	1777 (27)	6671 (100)

Source: Household Survey (2015).

Regarding improvements in agricultural productivity because of environmental management activities, 73% (n=4894) agree that there has been improvement in agricultural productivity because of environmental management activities carried out. Some 71% (n=4788) respondents believe that there has been improvement in the overall ecosystem of their surroundings due to the management activities.

There have been several challenges in practicing environmental management activities in the region. The major ones identified by this study include: lack of coordination, shortage of resources to do the activities, and lack of continuity of the work (Table 4).

A total of 7,594 youths responded to the major challenges of environmental management activities. Out of this number, 34% (n=2603) reported that they faced no problem in protecting their environment. This indicated that some activities had been done in supporting and encouraging the youths of the region to engage themselves in environmental management activities. The remaining 66% of the respondents reported problems in conducting management activities.

Of the total respondents, 32% (n=2395) reported that lack of continuity is a major problem in environmental management activities. This indicates that most of the time environmental management activities are being done in the form of a campaign. However, there is a need to ensure sustainability of the activities because activities like planting trees, cleaning wastes, watershed management and rehabilitation of degraded land require continuous follow ups to be more effective. The other important problem identified in relation to Afforestation and watershed management is lack of follow ups for the seedlings planted. The FGD participants in different zones informed the survey that only half of what is planted usually grows up. This is more serious for seedlings planted in communal lands.

Lack of coordination is also reported as a major challenge in performing environmental management activities in the region. Of the 7,594 youths responded to the major challenges in performing environmental management activities, 21% (n= 1627) reported that lack of coordination is a major problem in doing environmental management activities. Some 13% (n=969) reported lack of resources as a major problem in doing the management activities.

Despite encouraging progress of environmental

management activities in the region in the areas of afforestation, watershed management, and environmental sanitation and greening, there are some gaps and challenges identified by this study. There is no autonomous environmental management institution in the region that coordinates environmental management activities like other regional states of the country. The environmental department that is accountable to the Bureau of agriculture is not capable of leading environmental management undertaking because of its structural and resources capacity.

The perception of the youths on the responsibility of conserving the environment is found to be less than expected. Nearly 40% of the youths involved in this study believe that the primary responsibility of protecting their environment is a mandate of their parents and the government. Thus, extensive environmental management awareness creation needs to be done to boost the perception of the youth in managing their environment. Despite the environmental management activities carried out in the region, deforestation is reported to be the major environmental management problem followed by soil erosion, and poor waste disposal. Besides, compared with other environmental management activities (afforestation, watershed management, environmental sanitation, and greening) relatively less work was done in rehabilitating degraded lands in the mountains.

The participation of the youths in environmental management activities is found to be lower. Only 39% of the respondents participated regularly in environmental management activities. The remaining 44 and 15% of the respondents reported that they participated occasionally and never participated at all respectively. Lack of training on the issues of environmental management activities are reported as another gap in environmental management in the region. Only 45% of the youths reported that they got training on the issues; the remaining 55% of the respondents did not get any training. Training all the concerned stakeholders in general and the youths in particular in the area of environmental management will be pivotal for environmental management undertakings in the study area.

Absence of civil societies and environmental activists is identified as another gap in engaging the youth in environmental management activities. Civil society groups and environmental activists working on environmental management activities need to be

supported because they can easily mobilize the youth in environmental management activities. Compared with youth associations and government bodies, the parents, religious and community leaders are reported to be relatively less aware of environmental management activities. Lack of continuity of environmental management activities is reported as the main challenge in environmental management activities followed by weak coordination and lack of resources to do the activities. Moreover, there is little follow up for the trees planted. Environmental management activities should be carried out continuously and there should be a separate structure that coordinates the management activities and sufficient resources need to be allocated for environmental management activities.

## Conclusion

Ethiopia is a country endowed with rich and diverse natural resources because of its diverse agroecology. These resources have been underutilized and subjected to mismanagement because of the lack of appropriate policy, low awareness concerning its management, and also because of various environmental problems. The common environmental problems in the country and in the region include: deforestation, soil erosion, improper waste disposal, population growth, and climate change. These environmental problems are affecting the overall agricultural productivity of most of the rural area and thereby deteriorating the food insecurity issue in rural areas.

The incumbent Ethiopian Government, so as to manage the existing environmental problems and minimize their impact on the overall growth of the nation, has been working on various policy and institutional issues in the last two decades. Environmental management activities need to involve the youth of the nation and the SNNPR state because they constitute nearly one third of the total population and they are also the most productive group of society. Taking into consideration the role of youth in the overall development of the country and recognizing their unbalanced representation in most sectors of the development, the national government has designed the National Youth Policy (2004). To activate the policy, the Youth Development and Change Package was designed and is being implemented since 2005. Some of the major goals stipulated in the policy and the package include: enabling the youth to play an active role in building a democratic society and good governance, benefiting the youth from the overall development of the country as well as involving the youth in social, environmental and economic development of the country.

In the SNNPRS region, the implementation of the package has resulted in some achievements and has had this study, integrated watershed management activities

have been undertaken in different parts of the region with the participation of the community, including the youths and as a result some of the degraded lands have been rehabilitated and their productivity has increased. Significant work has been done in the areas of urban greening and sanitation which enabled some of the towns to be greener and relatively clean. However, there is weak coordination among the stakeholders both vertically and horizontally in carrying out the management activities. There is no autonomous organizational structure at regional and lower levels that can lead to the management activities. The existing office of environmental management is weak in capacity and accountable to the regional bureau of Agriculture. Thus, the government needs to establish an autonomous institution that coordinates environmental management activities. Most of the youths are not participating in environmental management undertakings regularly. Only 39% of the respondents participated regularly in environmental management activities. Lower youths' participation and perception regarding their responsibility in managing the environment is mainly attributed to lack of training on environmental management activities, and absence of civic societies working in the area. The government should work on improving the perception of the youths on environmental management undertaking and need to work with civic societies on the area of environmental management. Most environmental management activities are carried out in the form of campaigns and they lack follow up and hence their sustainability is in doubt. The government and all concerned stakeholders should monitor and support environmental management activities in a continuous manner to ensure sustainability of the outcomes. Despite the environmental management activities in the region, deforestation is found to be the major environmental problem in the region followed by soil erosion and improper waste disposal. Besides, compared with other environmental management activities (afforestation, watershed management, environmental sanitation, and greening) relatively less work was done in rehabilitating degraded lands in the mountains.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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