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Assessment of Stakeholders Engagement in Biodiversity Conservation Project: In the case of MELCA Ethiopia

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Declaration

I, Hadis Tadele, declare the Research Paper entitled: Assessment of Stakeholders Engagement in Biodiversity Conservation Project: In the case of MELCA Ethiopia, is my original work, prepared under the guidance of Dr. Dakito Alemu (PhD). All sources of materials used for the research paper have been duly acknowledged. I further confirm that the research paper has not been submitted either in part or in full to any other higher learning institution for the purpose of earning any degree.

_____ Signature and Date

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Abstract

Active engagement of stakeholders from the beginning and throughout the decision-making is an essential element of any successful community-based biodiversity conservation. The objective of this study was to assess the key stakeholders engaged in projects implemented by MELCA Ethiopia, assess the engagement practices being implemented by the organization as well as figure out the role of the key stakeholders in the community-based biodiversity conservation projects. A mixed research approach was used in which, data collected quantitatively through questionnaire from 28 from project personnel, community and others as well as qualitative data through semi-structured interview from four key personnel were organized and analyzed. The finding showed that the organization has at least 11 stakeholders which can considered as potential key stakeholders influencing decision making and project success ranging from local community to government authority. The organization uses snowballing (through peers) and from lessons learned from past projects, with a frequency of (28, 100%) and (24, 84.7%), for stakeholder identification. Furthermore, vision and mission based (24, 85.7%) followed by proximity to conservation area (18, 64.3%) were the bases for stakeholder identification. On the other hand, MELCA Ethiopia undertakes stakeholder's engagement throughout the project life cycle beginning from project initiation to completion. Key informants also raised conducting need assessment and prioritizing stakeholders' needs as an important idea for project identification. Indeed, this study recommends that, all stakeholders need to be provided a training on stakeholder engagement where they can develop an understanding on the usefulness of partnership (working together). As well, the organization should devise a mechanism to track progress through proper monitoring on the engagement process and make corrective actions easily.

Key Words: Biodiversity conservation, Key stakeholders, MELCA Ethiopia, snowballing, stakeholder engagement

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List of Acronyms/ Abbreviations

BMNP	Bale Mountains National Park
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSE	Conservation Strategy of Ethiopia
MELCA	Movement for Ecological Learning Community Action
PFM	Participatory Forest Management
PHE	Population, Health and Environment
PMI	Project Management Institute
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

Chapter One

1. Introduction

World wide a significant proportion of biodiversity loss has had far-reaching environmental and socio-economic consequences for food security, ecosystem/ecological services, human health, and the survival of other species (Butchart *et al.*, 2010). Consequently, biodiversity conservation is becoming more widely recognized as a crucial component of long-term sustainability and impact reduction (Jones and Solomon, 2013). But, its conservation is typically a complex, multi-scale approach which affects multiple actors and agencies, hence demands transparent decision-making that is flexible to changing circumstances, and embraces a diversity of knowledges and values. As a matter of fact, discussions pertaining about the need to combine biodiversity conservation with local development and participatory initiatives gained prominence in the mid-1980s (Sterling *et al.*, 2017). For this reason, stakeholder participation/engagement in environmental decision-making has been increasingly required and incorporated into national and international policy (Reed, 2008). Particularly, for the past decades "stakeholder engagement" has been a key component of conservation organizations' and governments' biodiversity protection initiatives (Malone *et al*. 2016).

Stakeholder engagement can be conceptualized in different ways, in which it can be seen from a strategic management perspective aimed at capturing knowledge, increasing ownership of the project by users, reducing conflict, encouraging innovation and facilitating spin-off partnerships (Mathur *et al.,* 2008). It is vital as a key facet of conservation management, particularly protected area management, and has an undisputed role to play in how these protected areas and the biodiversity within are conserved (Verwey 2019).

Stakeholder engagement is difficult in biodiversity conservation because the diversity of stakeholders, as well as their differing needs and perceptions of nature conservation, complicate implementation processes, resulting in disagreements about the objectives and zonation of biodiversity-rich areas (Sterling *et al.*, 2017). However, it offers a wide range of learning opportunities and management methods for long-term development, and it frequently leads to the establishment of new institutions and networks (Sterling *et al.*, 2017).

Active engagement from the beginning and throughout the decision-making process has been identified as one essential element of any successful participatory process (Gopnik *et al*. 2012). Similarly, in conservation, stakeholder engagement can improve the effectiveness of biodiversity management (Boiral and Heras-Saizarbitoria 2017).

From an ethical perspective, meaningful stakeholder engagement can be seen to enhance inclusive decision making, promote equity, enhance local decision making and build social capital (Mathur *et al.,* 2008). Furthermore, certain biodiversity initiatives (for example, the establishment of protected areas, site rehabilitation, verification and certification mechanisms, mutual agreements, and resolution of conflicts) necessitate the agreement of, or active collaboration with, a variety of stakeholders, including public authorities (Boiral and Heras-Saizarbitoria 2017).

On this respect, Ethiopia as home to rich biodiversity and endemicity, MELCA Ethiopia a non-profit organization works for healthy ecosystems and resilient communities through developing and institutionalizing innovative approaches and experiences (MELCA Ethiopia, 2020). The organization's establishment was due to current erosion and destruction of both biodiversity and culture in which adoption of western thinking and action is not a solution to Ethiopia.

Bale was chosen to be MELCA's project area firstly because of its rich biodiversity and indigenous culture as well as its high endemicity of both plants and animals. The area is not only rich in biodiversity, but is also known for its variety of representative ecosystems starting from grassland through alpine climate to cloud forest (BMNP, 2017). Hence MELCA was interested in opening its first branch office in Bale with the aim of contributing to the effort by different stakeholders to conserve the biodiversity and culture of the people from being eroded by the factors mentioned as threats.

To that end MELCA is currently undertaking different programs in the zone including Environmental Education (SEGNI), which mainly involves school children, Environmental Advocacy, which focuses on different stakeholders including government organs, soil and water conservation activities, and integration of Population, Health and Environment (PHE). Moreover, Participatory Forest Management (PFM) is also implemented around Bale project area (MElCA Ethiopia, 2020).

MELCA-Ethiopia has taken the initiative, by considering these problems to sponsor a research on environmental governance and institutional arrangement with the view to enhancing the coordination and partnership among various stakeholders, both state and non-state actors by proposing an alternative institutional arrangement for improved environmental governance.

However, there was no research available on measuring the effectiveness of stakeholder these engagement in Biodiversity conservation (with specific reference to Bale Mountains National Park), and is therefore highlighted as a potential research opportunity in the currently available literature. In addition, there was limited information on how much the stakeholder engagement initiative being implemented by the organization has improved the success in biodiversity conservation as well as community development.

Therefore, the aim of the research was to gain a deeper insight into effectiveness of stakeholder engagement in conservation of biodiversity and community development in the study area. Specifically, with the aim of gaining a better understanding of stakeholder engagement through performance measurement in the conservation of the study area's biodiversity as well as community development.

1.1. Statement of the problem

Effective stakeholder engagement in biodiversity conservation has become a focus in recent years (Reed, 2008). Stakeholders can play a vital role not only in business, but in nature conservation too (Reed, 2008). Due to the interests of stakeholders on any project, it is possible to exert influence on the project's goal and result. To ensure the success of a project, the project team must first identify and engage all stakeholders, then assess their requirements and expectations, and manage their influence in relation to those needs. Stakeholder engagement and management is now widely recognized as an important aspect of biodiversity protection, particularly in protected areas that are bordered by local communities, and it plays an uncontested role in how we manage resources sustainably (Sterling *et al.*, 2017). Despite the fact that stakeholder involvement and vulnerable species management go hand in hand, there is minimal evidence on stakeholder engagement and its success in biodiversity conservation due to the subjectivity and difficulty of assessment, necessitating more research.

The impact of stakeholders on biodiversity conservation results is a hot topic among conservationists around the world, which explains why so much effort and money is spent on it (Verwey, 2019). Engagements, on the other hand, frequently fail, having a negative influence on biodiversity conservation and community development in protected areas. In this setting, a greater understanding of stakeholder involvement is crucial for positive conservation outcomes and, as a result, for conservationists.

The assessment of stakeholder engagement in nature conservation has not been widely studied due to difficulties associated with assessment and the subjectivity surrounding assessment (Sterling *et al.*, 2017). On the other hand, limited research is available on measuring effective stakeholder engagement in biodiversity conservation (with specific reference to threatened species), and is therefore highlighted as a potential research opportunity in the currently available literature (Verwey, 2019).

Ethiopia has been issuing various policy and legal instruments as well as strategic documents for ensuring a better environmental governance system in its territory. One among them, the Conservation Strategy of Ethiopia (CSE) have been made in a comprehensive manner and provide for the need of participation of all stakeholders across the board (Mellese and

Solomon, 2012). However, unlike other developing countries, Ethiopia, despite its major position, confronts numerous problems in its implementation of biodiversity conservation. Furthermore, there are speculations that Ethiopian community-based conservation programs have not properly embraced the enormous necessity of stakeholder management. On top of that, MELCA Ethiopia which works for healthy and prosperous people that conserves their bio-cultural diversity involves multi stakeholders and applies unique approach in conserving biodiversity and culture. But, studying how such an approach is effective and efficient with regard to stakeholder engagement and its effectiveness in biodiversity conservation is quite imperative.

Therefore, this research aims to practically understand stakeholder engagements better in community-based biodiversity conservation projects being implemented in Bale eco-region being implemented by MELCA Ethiopia and their practice and challenges in achieving community development and the conservation of their rich resources around protected areas.

1.2. Objectives of the study

1.2.1. General objective

The overall objective of this study was to assess the stakeholders engagement in a Biodiversity Conservation Project: In the case of MELCA Ethiopia

1.2.2. Specific objectives

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- Assess the key stakeholders in conservation and development projects implemented by MELCA Ethiopia.
- Assess the stakeholder engagement practice implemented on projects being implemented by MELCA Ethiopia
- Assess the role of the key stakeholders in the community conservation projects.
- Assess the stakeholder engagement challenges in implementing the conservation projects of MELCA Ethiopia

1.3. Significance of the study

Given the large number of stakeholders involved in the conservation of biodiversity and community development in the world now days, appropriate stakeholder engagement and management is crucial to build stakeholders' confidence, ensure accountability and transparency, and protect stakeholders and their rights especially on projects being implemented in their areas. Therefore, at the end of the study among other benefits, it will help policymakers, regulatory bodies, conservation groups, consultancies, financial institutions, and other stakeholders better understand who the main stakeholders are and what role they play in the conservation sector.

Furthermore, the findings of the study will contribute considerably to a better understanding of the current degree of stakeholder participation and management practices, as well as the associated difficulties and challenges.

Indeed, readers in general as well MELCA Ethiopia in particular will have crucial information on how stakeholder's engagement practices can be planned and implemented within the organization in the future to have and achieve the desired objectives of any project.

1.4. Scope of the study

Compared to other sectors, conservation of biodiversity and development sector engages with a number of stakeholders which are either directly or indirectly affected by the intervention. As a result, the primary focus of this research will be on identifying key stakeholders, examining their roles in the project, and evaluating stakeholder management practices and issues. The concept of stakeholder's engagement and its management in the conservation of biodiversity is a broad and complex concept that covers a wide array of sectors, individuals, communities and institutions both governmental and nongovernmental organizations. Basically, this study will define the relationship of project stakeholder engagement which is the combination of the following components (stakeholder identification and analysis, information disclosure, stakeholder consultation, negotiation and stakeholder grievance management, stakeholder involvement in project monitoring, reporting to stakeholders and management function), in the project area.

On this regard, even if MELCA Ethiopia have been working on conservation projects in three regions (Oromia, Amhara and Gambella), this study is confined to assess the practices and challenges of stakeholder engagement and conservation project performance implemented only in Bale Ecoregion, Oromia and it does not assess the practice in other regions and projects.

1.5. Limitation of the study

Time was the main limitation during this study. In addition, since this study was conducted with respect to the prime responses of project personnel as well as communities actively involved on the project, these respondents might be biased towards their projects.

1.6. Organization of the paper

This study is organized in to five chapters with the first chapter covering background of the study giving the background of the study and the study area, problem statement, problem statement, research questions, study objectives, significance and scope of the investigation, and study limitations. Chapter two deals with the literature review, discussing theoretical concepts and empirical findings from the literature. The third chapter covers research methodology of the study which elaborates the research design and approach of the research; data types, sources; the target population, and the data collection techniques and procedures employed including the data analysis applied. The fourth chapter present and elaborates the findings of the study, and discuss the findings more comparing with other studies of similar concept. The last or fifth chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations.

1.7. Definition of terms

- **Biological diversity (biodiversity)** - is the term given to the variety of life on Earth, including plants, animals and micro-organisms, as well as the ecosystems of which they are part. It includes genetic differences within species, the diversity of species and the variety of ecosystems (CBD, 2005).
- **Stakeholder** - according to (business dictionary), is a person, group or organization that has interest or concern in an organization, where they can affect or be affected by the organization's actions, objectives and policies. Not all stakeholders are equal. A

company's customers are entitled to fair trading practices but they are not entitled to the same consideration as the company's employees.

- **Stakeholder management** - is the process of forming, monitoring and maintaining constructive relationships with concerned stakeholders by influencing their expectations of gain resulting from their involvement appropriately. Stakeholder management also helps an organization move toward its stated goals by keeping existing stakeholders satisfied.
- **Project Stakeholder Management** - includes the processes required to identify the people, groups, or organizations that could impact or be impacted by the project, to analyze stakeholder expectations and their impact on the project, and to develop appropriate management strategies for effectively engaging stakeholders in project decisions and execution. Stakeholder management also focuses on continuous communication with stakeholders to understand their needs and expectations, addressing issues as they occur, managing conflicting interests and fostering appropriate stakeholder engagement in project decisions and activities. Stakeholder satisfaction should be managed as a key project objective (PMBOK, 2013).

Chapter Two

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. Theoretical Review

2.1.1. Project

A project is a short-term undertaking that aims to produce a one-of-a-kind product, service, or outcome. They also drive change and work with the goal of increasing corporate value (PMBOK, 2013). Although most projects are designed to make a profit through project deliverables, there is a potential that they can introduce unintended consequences as a result of the project's intervention, which are known as side effects. These side effects could be beneficial, harmful, or indifferent. The term "dis-benefits" is used to describe negative side effects.

Project outcomes are the benefits and side effects encountered by a project (Jepsen and Eskerod, 2016). Conservation projects, in particular, are efforts by conservation and environmental organizations to safeguard biodiversity, wildlife, wild spaces, or endangered species.

2.1.2. Stakeholders Definition

The concept of the stakeholder originates from the business science literature (Mainardes *el al.*, 2011) as well as has its roots in the field of corporate management (De Lopez, 2001) and the time may be traced back from the time of Adam Smith in his Theory of Moral Sentiments. However, its modern utilization in management or project management literature was started to used about by the Stanford Research Institute, which introduced the term in 1963 to generalize and expand the notion of the shareholders as the only group that management needed to be sensitive towards. But, as a theory, stakeholder draws on four of the social sciences: sociology, economics, politics and ethics, especially the literature on corporate planning, systems theory, corporate social responsibility and organizational studies (Mainardes *et al.*, 2012).

Stakeholder as a definition is subject to, multiple interpretations and applications from business ethics and corporate social responsibility to strategic management, corporate

governance and finance. Within, and between, these narratives, widely different conceptualizations of 'what is a stakeholder?' have emerged as different definitions are generated to serve different purposes (Freeman *el al.,* 2010), each focusing on attributes that are relevant to context (Miles, 2017). In addition, the concept of the 'stakeholder' has become central to business, yet there is no common consensus as to what the concept of a stakeholder means, with hundreds of different published definitions suggested (McGrath and Whitty, 2017).

Carroll (2006), described stakeholders as "individuals or organizations that are either affected by or affect the deliverables or outputs of a specific organization", other defined stakeholders as "those who can influence the project process and/or final results, whose living environments are positively or negatively affected by the project, and who receive associated direct and indirect benefits and/or losses.

However, regardless of having various definitions of stakeholders in the literature, perhaps the most often cited one is who, at that time, used it to mean: "an individual or group of individuals which can affect or be affected by the achievement of organizational objectives" (Freeman, 1984. Only those who cannot affect (due to an incapacity to do so) and those who are not affected by the actions of an organization (due to the absence of any form of relationship) are excluded from this definition.

The concept of stakeholder appears more recently in conservation literature (De Lopez, 2001). But, not very far in context from the above definitions, researchers have also been defining stakeholders from the perspective of either biodiversity conservation or environmental management. For instance, Mannetti *et al.,* (2019) has defined stakeholder, as an individual, group, or organization who possesses a direct, significant, and specific stake in the expansion, management, and development of the protected area network and its resources in the protected area. However, De Lopez (2001) have pointed out a clear distinction between the concept of stakeholders in conservation projects and the stakeholder theory of the firm where the emphasis in conservation is on the participation of all conservation stakeholders, rather than the administration of those stakeholders by an organization.

2.1.3. Project Stakeholders

According, to Winch (2007), projects have always had stakeholders, but they have usually been either the funders of the project as client or suppliers of the project as members of the project coalition. Inherently, these stakeholders have had an interest in the effective delivery of the project with the minimum capital investment for the functionality required by the business case, and the project management team could focus on this objective. However, long-run changes in the social, political, and economic environment of projects have meant that this is no longer necessarily the case. This indicates there is a diversity of parties that can be considered to be project stakeholders.

Therefore, Cleland (1998), has defined "Project Stakeholders" as individuals or groups who have or feel they have legitimate claims to the project's substantive features. A stake is an interest, share, or claim in a project, which can range from a casual interest in the undertaking to a legal claim of ownership on the other end of the spectrum. Clients, end users, contractors, consultants, labor unions, line organizations, public agencies, financial institutions, insurance companies, controlling organizations, media, third parties, and competitors are all examples of project stakeholders. In general, project stakeholders can be either primary or internal stakeholder group which have contractual relationship with the client or subcontract from another stakeholder. They usually enter willingly into the project coalition and are by definition positive about the project even if they negotiate toughly for their share of value added by the project. On the other hand, there are project stakeholders called as secondary or external stakeholders. They may have little choice about whether the project goes ahead and may be either positive or negative about the project. They almost never have a direct enforceable claim on the project and must rely on authorities to act on their behalf (Winch, 2007).

To have the right stakeholder for a project, the project team identifies internal and external, positive and negative, and performing and advising stakeholders in order to control the project requirements and the expectations of all parties involved. The project manager should manage the influences of these many stakeholders in relation to the project requirements to realize successful outcome (PMOBOK, 2013).

2.1.4. Stakeholder's Classification

Stakeholder classification is all about setting out criteria for prioritizing the respective relevance of each stakeholder towards the intervention or project (Mainardes *et al.*, 2012). According to Mitchell *el al.,* (1997) argument, managers who do not prioritize and classify stakeholders according to their interests do not realize the importance of stakeholders. More specifically, stakeholder classification deals with assigning stakeholders to different categories according to their common interests or influence (Buysse and Verbeke, 2003). Broadly speaking, there are two types of stakeholder classification schemes: generic and relative (Kumar *et al.*, 2016). Stakeholder classification schemes that are inspired by past studies and assume that the particular stakeholder classification is universally accepted in all areas are known as generic classifications. However, some researchers have introduced their own stakeholder classification schemes based on their specific study area; these are called relative stakeholder classification schemes. These classification schemes assume that stakeholders are not common in all study areas (Rivera-Camino, 2007).

Therefore, in the literature there are various types of classifying stakeholders based on different criteria's (Table 1). But, the most popular classification has proven to be the Mitchell *el al.,* (1997) model, which classifies stakeholders based on the power, legitimacy and urgency. According to this model, it considers stakeholder powers of negotiation, their relational legitimacy with the organization, and the urgency in attending to stakeholder requirements. According to Mitchell *el al.,* (1997), stakeholder salience is a dynamic model, based on a typology of identification that enables explicit recognition of the uniqueness of each situation and managerial perceptions to explain how managers should prioritize relationships with stakeholders.

Authors	Classification/criteria used
Goodpaster (1991)	The strategic and the moral stakeholder
Savage *el al.*, (1991)	Stakeholder's potential powers to threaten or cooperate with the organization
Clarkson (1995)	The primary (with formal relationships) and the secondary

	(without formal relationships)
Mitchell *el al.*, (1997)	Power, legitimacy and urgency
Rowley (1997)	Network density and the centrality of the organization focus
Scholes and Clutterbuck (1998)	Power of influence, impact on the organization and affinity with organizational objectives
Kamann (2007)	Power and the level of interest
Fassin (2009)	Classical stakeholders, stake watchers, stake keepers

Table 1. Stakeholder classification typologies Source (Mainardes *et al.*, 2012)

2.1.5. Stakeholder Identification

Project managers should always identify and interact with key stakeholders in the project system's environment carefully. A part of the management of the project system's environment is to organize the process in order to able to identify and to manage the probable stakeholders in that environment and determine how they will react to project decisions (Olander, 2006). Identification of stakeholders includes both stakeholders that are involved in the project and possible stakeholders who will also improve the support and ownership to the stakeholder management process (Karlsen, 2002). In light of this, Jepsen and Eskerod (2009) point out to the identification of the (important) stakeholders and their essential contributions, and expectations regarding rewards for contributions, as a precondition requirement for stakeholder analysis in projects for management the stakeholder in the construction project.

Perceive Stakeholders is the path toward recognizing the social requests, or affiliations that could influence or be influenced by a decision, development, or aftereffect of the endeavor, analyzing and recording critical information as to their interests, incorporation, interdependencies, effect, and potential impact on assignment accomplishment. The key preferred standpoint of this technique is that it allows the undertaking boss to recognize the fitting community for each accomplice or social occasion of partners (PMBOK, 2013).

In any project, the project management team may identify stakeholders either by the (external/internal) guideline, or by their functions such as clients, contractors, and consultants (Ye *et al.*, 2009).

The same is true that, planning and managing environmental and conservation projects frequently entails striking a balance between the protection and use of natural resources. Who makes the decisions on which natural resources should be conserved and which should be exploited? Who are the landowners? Is it better to have a federal or municipal government? Scientists? Or the general public? A varied group of people is more likely to bring to a project a wide range of viewpoints, motives, previous experiences, and interests (Madden and McQuinn, 2014).

2.1.6. Project Stakeholder Management and its Process

There are many persons and groups with competing interests in natural resource management when it comes to biodiversity protection. Consequently, conflicts are unavoidable and agreement may not be likely in situations characterized by multifaceted social interactions. In such instances, stakeholders may develop specialized methods to achieve their respective goals for natural resource usage. As a result, there is a case to be made for conservationists implementing management practices that are specific to each stakeholder group (De Lopez, 2001).

Hence, the stakeholder management theory provides a framework for managing pluralistic situations. Stakeholder management recognizes that a conservation project has a wide variety of stakeholders with differing objectives and values. The role of the managers of the project is to see that the objectives of the primary stakeholders are achieved and that other stakeholders, where possible, are also satisfied. Stakeholder management fundamentally consists of understanding and forecasting the behavior and actions of stakeholders and devising strategies to ethically and effectively deal with them. Thus, the questions that need to be answered are: (1) who are the stakeholders of the project? (2) what is the nature of their stakes in the project? (3) what type of behavior can be likely from stakeholders? and (4) what approaches should the project assume to achieve its goals and deal with stakeholders? (De Lopez, 2001).

Therefore, as a continuous improvement process, stakeholder management requires understanding and support, or awareness, from everyone in the organization ranging from the CEO to the short-term contractor (Bourne, 2009). Stakeholder management is one of the key elements in the project management process, and it is one of the key elements in the project management process, in order to ensure the project's success. Project Management Guidelines (2011) provide an overview of the essential components of project management methodology and identify eleven key elements that should be applied throughout the project Lifecycle. In the project systems context, project managers must identify and interact with relevant institutions and individuals. An organized procedure for identifying and managing the likely stakeholders in the project systems environment, as well as determining how they will respond to project decisions, is an important aspect of project management (Cleland, 2007). On the other hand, Jepsen and Eskerod (2009), clarified the premises underlying project stakeholder management, which include making deliberate efforts to exert influence on project stakeholders in order to gain their contributions to the project, allocating limited resources in such a way that they achieve the best possible results, and spreading efforts across a wide range of stakeholders rather than focusing on a few. Therefore, project stakeholder management is indispensable to control the negative impacts of stakeholders, maximize the perceived benefits, and achieves the preset mission (El-Gohary *et al*., 2006).

According to Bourne and Walker (2006), the benefit of project-stakeholder management is to encourage the use of proactive project management for limiting stakeholder activities that could negatively impact the project and to aid the project team's ability to take opportunities that encourage stakeholder support of project objectives.

But, in general a Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (2013), has outlined an overview of the Project Stakeholder Management processes that includes four of the following processes:

i. Identify stakeholders

Stakeholder identification is the process of repeatedly identifying project stakeholders and assessing and documenting relevant information about their interests, participation, interdependencies, and possible influence on project success (Pandi-Perumal *et al*., 2015). The most important advantage of this process is that it allows the project team to determine

the right focus for each stakeholder or set of stakeholders. This procedure is repeated as needed throughout the project.

According to Haddaway *et al.,* (2017), there are four strategies to identify stakeholders can be identified to engage; purposive selection, 'snowballing', open calls, or systematic selection. Purposive selection entails identifying and inviting key players, many of whom are well-known. This methodology could lead to a skewed sample of stakeholders and the exclusion of minorities (identification bias). This strategy is generally favored because reviewers are often familiar with the targeted stakeholders, meaning a higher possibility of positive responses and a smaller number of stakeholder groups to handle. The "snowballing" method refers to the process of starting with the identification of a small group of stakeholders and then asking them to suggest more, and so on. Snowballing can cause identification bias and exacerbate the risks of disregarding minorities by reiterating the same bias across different stakeholders (network bias). But, multiple cycles of snowballing with a variety of starting points (such as key stakeholder groups or well-known minority stakeholders) can help to eliminate reduce network bias.

The third way is by minimizing identification and network bias, open calls for stakeholder involvement might create substantially larger numbers of interested stakeholders, with potentially more diversity. Open calls, on the other hand, risk missing people who do not have access to the advertisement (awareness bias). If all parties are included but reviewers' resources are restricted, it may result in an unmanageable number of interested stakeholders, and minority opinions may be drowned out. Systematic identification of stakeholders involves the systematic approaches used to discover evidence within a review, and involves a search for possible stakeholders. Systematic approaches are inherently less likely to suffer from bias and they employ a verifiable, justified process.

ii. Plan stakeholder engagement

This is the process of defining an approach to managing stakeholders throughout the entire project life cycle as per their interest, importance, impact, and influence over the project (Pandi-Perumal *et al*., 2015). It's also a method of determining how to involve project stakeholders based on their requirements, expectations, and interests, as well as their potential impact on the project.

This section explains how to build strong relationships with stakeholders who can help the project while limiting the impact of those who can hurt it. As the project's required level of stakeholder engagement evolves, this is an iterative process that should be addressed on a frequent basis. The key advantage is that it offers an actionable plan to interact successfully with stakeholders. This process is performed periodically throughout the project as needed.

iii. Manage Stakeholder Engagement

By continuously communicating with stakeholders, clarifying and resolving their issues, addressing their concerns, and improving project performance by implementing their change requests, the Manage Stakeholder Engagement process aims to meet and exceed their expectations. According to PMI, the project manager is in charge of managing the expectations of the stakeholders. Meeting the stakeholders' expectations increases the probability of project success by enabling the stakeholders to be active supporters of the project, drastically reducing unresolved stakeholder issues, and limiting disruptions in the project (Pandi-Perumal *et al*., 2015). This strategy's main advantage is that it allows the task manager to create support while reducing resistance.

iv. Control Stakeholder Engagement

The control stakeholder engagement is the process of evaluating and monitoring overall stakeholder relationships and safeguarding stakeholders' appropriate involvement in the project by adjusting plans and strategies as needed. This method will maintain or improve the efficiency and effectiveness of stakeholder participation activities as the project improves and its environment changes (Pandi-Perumal *et al*., 2015). The primary benefit of this approach is that it maintains or increases the efficiency and efficacy of stakeholder engagement activities as the project and its surroundings evolve. Throughout the project, this procedure is followed.

Figure 1: Project stakeholder management overview (Source; PMBOK, 2013).

2.1.7. Stakeholder Engagement and Project Performance

By offering early feedback and garnering consensus before a new regulation, plan, or decision takes effect, including stakeholder input into an initiative's planning process can be so crucial (Vogler *et al.*, 2017). This may result in a more friendly approach and the avoidance of unneeded conflicts. Stakeholders frequently oppose a project if they were left

out of the decision-making process or were not told about the multiple aspects and compromises that had to be made prior to their participation (Peterson *et al.,* 2007). In addition, when stakeholders perceive (rightly or wrongly) that their opinions are not being heard or given unfair considerations, antagonism might arise, thereby sabotaging a project. (Madden and McQuinn, 2014). Therefore, fostering stakeholder involvement in the in a project implementation can result in increased project support, better execution and success. (Richards *et al.,* 2004).

In relation to biodiversity conservation and stakeholder involvement, so far there has been less research evaluating the links between process, social outcomes and environmental outcomes. In their study on environmental planning in the Great Lakes region, Beierle and Konisky (2001) found that although stakeholder involvement had helped improve the quality of decisions and improved the relationships amongst stakeholders, there was no obvious link between stakeholder involvement and improved environmental quality. While Sultana and Abeyasekera (2008) found that social cohesion was slightly stronger and that stakeholder involvement had led to a faster uptake of community actions for fisheries management, even if no direct links were made between stakeholder involvement and improved environmental conditions. Newig and Fritsch (2009), explored the ability of participatory decision-making to deliver environmental policy output, compliance and implementation. Whereas conflict will hamper efforts to develop collaborative management strategies, good social outcomes may perhaps be more likely to lead to a greater willingness and better knowledge on the part of land owners and managers to engage, to assimilate new knowledge and want to adapt their activities in order to conserve biodiversity.

Although few of the claims stated have been proven, there is evidence that stakeholder participation can improve the quality of environmental choices by considering more extensive data inputs. The quality of decisions made through stakeholder participation, on the other hand, is greatly influenced by the type of the process that led to them (Reed, 2008).

Stakeholder involvement is not just about a more democratically satisfying way of making public decisions about the environment. But, it has been demonstrated that it can produce tangible societal benefits in terms of: (1) making decisions that better reflect public values and incorporate public knowledge; (2) improving relationships by resolving conflict among

stakeholders and building trust in government agencies; and (3) building capacity among stakeholders and government to understand environmental problems, coordinate action to address them, and influence change (Beierle and Konisky, 2001). In addition, if stakeholder engagement is properly implemented it can provide the following benefits such as improving the evidence base, better public acceptance, higher possibility of intervention success, broader communication of findings, and improved likelihood of effect on decision-making (Haddaway *et al.*, 2017).

2.2. Empirical Review

2.2.1. Key Stakeholders in Biodiversity Conservation

De Lopez (2001), suggested a definition for stakeholder from the broader context of natural resources management projects as "any group or individual who can affect the achievement or is affected by the achievement of a conservation project's objectives." Therefore, it means that they are people and organizations who are involved in or affected by a policy or action, and who can be involved in the decision-making process either directly or indirectly. With this regard, stakeholders in environmental and biodiversity conservation planning often include government officials, corporations, scientists, landowners, and local natural resource users and etc (Vogler *et al.*, 2017). In Zambian National Parks where community-based conservation is being implemented they classified stakeholders as multiple users of the same resource of natural environment, that may have divergent or conflicting interests such as subsistence, production, or conservation which lies in the first understanding their different perspectives. Based on this, they have identified key stakeholders that include the government, as well as individuals and organizations ranging from international funders and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to private and communal farmers, communities, traditional authority, and hunting and tourism businesses (Mannetti *et al.*, 2019).

These groupings of stakeholders frequently possess opposing viewpoints and ideals that can be difficult to reconcile with one another and the project at hand.

2.2.2. Significance of Stakeholder Engagement

UNEP (2005) forwarded that effective and strategically aligned stakeholder engagement can bring the following benefits:

- Allow people who have a right to be heard to be considered in decision-making processes, resulting in more fair and sustainable social development;
- Enable improved risk and reputation management;
- Enable the pooling of resources (knowledge, people, money, and technology) to solve issues and achieve goals that single enterprises cannot achieve;
- • Facilitate comprehension of the complicated business environment, including market trends and new strategic prospects;
- Enable businesses to learn from their customers, resulting in better products and processes;
- To improve decision-making and actions that have an impact on the firm and society, inform, educate, and influence stakeholders and the business environment;
- Increase the level of trust between a company and its stakeholders.

An organization that actively engages with its stakeholders is more likely to succeed, according to a research finding based on various literature. Potential benefits include increased relational wealth and commitment of stakeholders; increased process and organizational efficiency; reduction in waste of effort, time, and materials; stronger market positioning; and reduced risk of conflicts and consequences.; In addition, improved identification of new business prospects; better end-user services; first-class public and local community image; stronger foresight on forthcoming difficulties; more motivation; easier access to financial backing; and stronger organizational learning are all benefits are the benefits in stakeholder engagement (Chinyio and Akintoye, 2008).

2.2.3. Biodiversity Conservation and Stakeholder Engagement

Biodiversity conservation and protecting the environment is becoming more widely recognized as a crucial component of long-term sustainability in the contemporary world of climate change and habitat loss (Jones and Solomon, 2013). More than simply ethical considerations are raised by the growing number of species that have become extinct or

endangered. The global loss of biodiversity is accelerating at an unprecedented rate, driven by habitat destruction, pollution, invasive species, overharvesting and human overpopulation, (all human-induced activities). The average abundance of native species in most major land-based habitats has fallen by at least 20%, mostly since 1900. More than 40% of amphibian species, almost 33% of reef-forming corals and more than a third of all marine mammals are threatened. The picture is less clear for insect species, but available evidence supports a tentative estimate of 10% being threatened. At least 680 vertebrate species had been driven to extinction since the 16th century and more than 9% of all domesticated breeds of mammals used for food and agriculture had become extinct by 2016, with at least 1,000 more breeds still threatened (UNSDG, 2021). This loss of biodiversity loss has far-reaching environmental and socio-economic consequences for food security, ecological services, human health, and the survival of other species, especially at the current rate (Butchart *et al.*, 2010). The seriousness of these consequences necessitates proactive biodiversity management, particularly by natural resource organizations, whose actions can have major and significant impacts on ecosystems inhabited by at-risk species. However, measures for biodiversity protection are rarely undertaken by conservation organizations alone due to the complexity, socially sensitive nature, and implications that extend beyond organizational boundaries, and frequently necessitate the involvement of different stakeholders such as local communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and government bodies (Boiral and Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2017).

In light of this, over a long time, approaches to stakeholder engagement have progressed through a series of phases like from awareness creation in the late 1960s (the anti-modernization critique of the transfer of technology paradigm), to a post-participation consensus over best practice, learning from the mistakes and successes (Reed, 2008). In the context of natural resource management, stakeholder engagement refers to the participation of stakeholders in planning or decision-making processes in order to blend their expertise and values with the more specialist expertise and purpose of a project (Talley *et al.*, 2016). This time, community-based biodiversity management is amongst the contemporary popular approaches to participatory environmental management that have emerged in pursuit of these multiple economic, social and environmental goals emanated from people living especially in biodiversity rich areas (Dyer, 2014). In that respect, stakeholder participation and

collaboration is perceived as one of the two most important factors influencing biodiversity conservation and management (Van Cuong *et al.*, 2018). From this perspective it obvious that, any biodiversity of natural resource conservation activity has key stakeholders which, but how stakeholders are engaged is a trait that distinguishes one initiative from another (USAID, 2016). In Biodiversity conservation, engagement techniques may range from passive stakeholders receiving communication about the project initiative to full project collaborative partnerships. Looking at the above description, it is clear that successful implementation of the biodiversity conservation approach needs a strong public–private partnership and engagement from government and non-government stakeholders (Ishwaran *el al.,* 2008). In this regard, engaging local stakeholders is a central feature of many biodiversity conservation and natural resource management projects globally (Sterling *et al*., 2017). According Van Cuong *el al.,* (2018), improvement in stakeholder participation and engagement, particularly from local communities and non-government actors is essential for solutions of biodiversity conservation operations and sustainability. The same is true that, stakeholder participation and engagement can enhance the quality of environmental decisions by considering more comprehensive and realistic information inputs that can shape and influence the outcome of intervention at the end of the project (Reed, 200). In this regard, stakeholder engagement can be either motivated by players external to those stakeholders, or can be self-organized, when stakeholders have active control over resource management and function independently of external establishments other than for support (USAID, 2016).

Successful implementation of biodiversity conservation relies on having a compliant landscape designation of the protected area as well as commitment and support from central and state government that encourages setting up a reliable management system which encompasses a broad-ranging stakeholder participation and partnership (Coetzer *el al.,* 2014). Because, broad stakeholder involvement in the management of natural resources strengthens democratic cultures and processes, provides additional knowledge and values for decision-making, increases legitimacy and trust, and reduces conflicts (Young *el al.,* 2010).

Likewise, in today's conservation intervention projects additional challenges are being raised, including the need to negotiate with actors from the international to local scale, an emphasis on stakeholder participation, promoting sustainable livelihoods, and adaptive management (Mahanty and Russell, 2002). But, such a complex and dynamic nature of

environmental problems requires flexible and transparent decision-making that embraces a diversity of knowledges and values (Reed, 2008). For instance, uniting diverse stakeholders through communication, education or building a collaborative 'common vision' for biodiversity management is a recommended approach for enabling effective conservation in regions with multiple uses. In addition, Sutherland *el al.*, (2010), stated that inclusiveness and multi-stakeholder participation are important factors in the identification of conservation priorities since they can generate ownership of the issues and potential solutions whilst reducing bias from specific stakeholders.

According to young *el al.*, (2013), social outcomes of increased stakeholder involvement, such as increased trust, increases the perceived likelihood of positive future biodiversity outcomes. This can be done, by efforts aimed at increasing stakeholder involvement in the management of protected areas need to consider making processes more independent, and acknowledge and address underlying biodiversity conflicts. In addition, the understanding of the various objectives linked to use and management of resources and ecosystems by several stakeholders will facilitate the creation of social solidarity, sharing of resources, and maintenance of a peaceful atmosphere in a context of high pressure on resources and low ecosystem production (Amadou, 2006).

Young *el al.*, (2013) in their studies also showed that stakeholder involvement in the development and implementation of management plans could lead to good social outcomes, such as increased trust amongst stakeholders and improved learning. These social outcomes could, in turn, impact on biodiversity outcomes in the long-term, for example by leading to a greater willingness on the part of land owners and managers to want to conserve biodiversity. This may be sufficient reason to promote the expansion of well-designed stakeholder involvement.

There are now a growing number of examples of stakeholder participation in biodiversity related issues. In France after 1997, as a direct response to difficulties encountered in the Natura 2000 process, an approach was adopted based on consultation and stakeholder involvement, in which it was recognized that the facilitator or moderator of such a process was to play a key role in bringing the different interest groups together and to bridge the gaps in understanding (Deverre *el al.*, 2007). In addition, the European Commission has sponsored

a number of projects to look at stake- holder involvement in the designation of Natura 2000; these have included the collection of case studies and best practice. In addition, stakeholder participation already has a successful track record in assisting in the management of species protection issues; guidance now exists for the implementation of ecological networks through stakeholder participation and in relation to local biodiversity action planning (Jones-Walters *el al.,* 2009). On top of that, in Peninsular Malaysia stakeholder engagement in the identification of priority issues was an effective approach that enabled a wide range of stakeholders to participate in an open, transparent, inclusive and participatory manner to generate a list of 35 conservation priority issues (Nagulendran *et al.,* 2016).

2.2.4. Critical Success factors (CSFs) in Biodiversity Conservation

Critical Success Factors can be defined as "areas, in which results, if they are satisfactory, will ensure successful competitive performance for the organization" (Rockart 1979) or "those critical areas of managerial planning and action that must be practiced in order to achieve effectiveness". This method is used as a means to improve the performance of the management process and in the field of stakeholder management, it is important to know whether or not it is successfully "managing" the project stakeholders.

The engagement of stakeholders in environmental projects such as biodiversity conservation has been documented as important for ensuring their accomplishment and equally for the syntheses of evidence of what works, where, and for whom, providing key benefits and challenges (Haddaway *et al.,* 2017). In this case, effective stakeholder engagement promises to yield better decision-making, improved social learning, and effective communication between scientists, managers, and the public at large. The strengths of stakeholder engagement lie in its flexibility and compliance, yet this also presents complexity into engaging stakeholders, given conceptual, pragmatic, and institutional challenges (Talley *et al.,* 2016). Environmental management like biodiversity conservation is a multifaceted subject, influencing both humans and the environment alike in an intricate way. As a result, during this contemporary world, environmental decision- making also accounts for impacts on human wellbeing, for example through the instigation of the '*at least do no harm*' which is depicted as mandate in the Convention on Biological Diversity (Smith *et al.,* 2010). Looking at the inseparable interface on importance of the environment to human wellbeing

and the human wellbeing on biodiversity conservation, the engagement of stakeholders in conservation projects has been recognized as a critical step in ensuring their success (Haddaway *et al.,* 2017). Furthermore, relationships between diverse stakeholders, such as practitioners, policymakers, and local groups, are critical to the successful integration of protected areas and adjacent landscapes. Because, protected areas are influenced by and can influence such stakeholders, either directly or indirectly, through resource use and land use decisions (Lockwood, 2010). Therefore, for effective stakeholder engagement, a strategic view of the social and institutional setting, which consists the issues of stakeholders consider most outstanding and imperative to their well-being, is very much needed (Mannetti *et al.,* 2017).

For instance, Cox and Underwood (2011) pointed out that rather than Governments and conservation organizations should recognize the value of maintaining networks of interconnected sites as animal habitat in addition to safeguarding species and habitats on a site-by-site basis. But, for the success of such sustainably, stakeholders such as businesses, local landowners and community members must be successfully engaged and in support of the approach (Wiens, 2009), and the requirements of wildlife conservation must be balanced with the socioeconomic and other needs of the people who live and work within the biodiversity rich area (Henson et al., 2009).

Another crucial success factor that affects project success is effective communication, which could be only effective if it is designed and done with the uniqueness of each stakeholder or stakeholder group in mind. For instance, two-way communication is crucial at all stages of the community involvement process, and effective leadership based on mutual respect and clarity of roles and responsibilities is vital for participants to obtain an awareness of the project's goals and philosophy/thinking. This can lead to successful project outcomes through community ownership of the project goals and empowerment in project implementation (Dyer *et al.,* 2014). In addition, understanding the complexity produced by varied cultural backgrounds and distinct “realities” of each stakeholder is critical to effective communication. Hence, the communication plan must consider the culture and realities of each stakeholder (Bourne, 2015). Similar to this reality, Naqvi *et al.,* (2011) found out is study that there was a strong correlation and dependency of project outcome on stakeholder communication.

Indeed, it is recognized that collaboration with stakeholders can improve environmental results and support for decisions made provided true approaches are established and implemented in a way that actually empowers stakeholders throughout the decision-making process (Robinson and Berkes, 2011).

2.2.5. Challenges of Stakeholder Management in Biodiversity Conservation

Stakeholder engagement is not without its challenges. Stakeholder engagement, in general, is associated with a number of challenges that make implementation difficult, including increased demands on time and resources, the potential for marginalizing or favoring certain groups of stakeholders, and unbalanced representation of the appropriate stakeholder groups (Haddaway *et al.*, 2017).

As emphasized by Schlosberg (2013), environmental justice such as related to biodiversity conservation encompasses three interrelated dimensions: distribution of direct and indirect benefits from natural resources; methods and techniques relating to decision-making; and acknowledgement of culture, knowledge, and needs of different groups in those processes. Therefore, the establishment of protected areas for the sake of biodiversity conservation and the fear of loss of access to resources by local communities, and specifically the initial lack of dialogue and participation of stakeholders, as well as neglect of local knowledge and practices, boundaries, and spatial discontinuities have formed environmental prejudices and explain the complexities in shifting from a national park paradigm to a biosphere reserve paradigm (Bouamrane *el al.*, 2016). A great example of this is a community participation project in the Amazon, where indigenous peoples are frequently excluded from local, national, and international decision-making. Furthermore, the Amazon's ever-increasing development fuels environmental and social crimes in the region, such as road construction projects that may aid illegal natural resource trafficking, as well as increased deforestation and people trafficking routes. In addition, stakeholder engagement is also being hampered by the failure to address indigenous land tenure issues (for example, indigenous land ownership not being considered/recognized in the government systems) might result in extra development obstacles. As each party strives to preserve their needs, multi-stakeholder efforts have conflicting goals; establishing a balance between them frequently leaves native populations on the "short end of the stick" (Battiste and Rayes, 2020).

In addition, in biodiversity conservation the diversity of stakeholders and their different needs and perceptions about nature conservation makes it uneasy in the implementation processes, sometimes resulting in conflicts about the purposes and zonation as well as utilization or exploitation of biosphere reserves (Bouamrane *el al.*, 2016). On top of that, stakeholders from various backgrounds and agendas, including different subsets within broad stakeholder groups e.g. junior vs. senior government officers are likely to have contrasting perceptions about conservation priorities. Recognizing differences in perception and the ways in which perceptions are influenced can be helpful in the overall process of defining conservation priorities and providing potential solutions to facilitate policy response and decision-making (Nagulendran *et al.*, 2016). However, the above problems and challenges should not be used as an excuse to avoid stakeholder engagement; rather, they should serve as a reminder of the need of carefully planned, nonjudgmental, and well-adjusted involvement.

Creating and managing a biodiversity is to reconcile, in the same space, conservation and economic development objectives and foster the convergence of the long-term interests of the stakeholders involved. Among all the conservation strategies, there are some that support development, and there are those that prefer conservation among all the development methods. The path to take in a biosphere reserve is defined by the intersection of these two sets of tactics (Bouamrane *el al.*, 2016).

However, to avert the problems related to stakeholder engagement and management dialogue among the different stakeholders must be implemented from the early planning phase and be based on the principle of social and ecological solidarity. Then, both in terms of biosphere reserve administration and political backing, dialogue must be pursued, codified, ritualized, and translated (Bouamrane *el al.*, 2016).

Chapter Three

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research approach

To keeping the advantage of the result, a mixed research approach was used. According to Bazeley (2002) mixed approach helps to have a more in-depth information and knowledge of the problem and provide rich datasets which enable to answer research questions and achieve the desired objective. It also provides a strong assistance in increasing the findings reliability and credibility through the triangulation of the different evidence results. According to Creswell (2012), there are six mixed methods, design strategies which are being used by researchers for triangulation, cross-validation, or corroborate findings within a study and is used to overcome a weakness in using one method with the strengths of another. Mixed approach provides better thoughtful of a study problem than either quantitative or qualitative data by itself (Creswell, 2012). The reason for using mixed approach for this study is to take advantage of the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to escape from pitfalls of using a single research approach (Jennifer and Creswell, 2013).

3.1. Research design

Identifying key stakeholders in the organization, describing their role, identifying the level of stakeholder management practice and related challenges, as well as project performance in relation to implemented stakeholder engagement and management are all obvious research objectives and research questions in this study. Therefore, this study followed a descriptive study to analyze the stakeholder management practices and draws conclusions from the information gathered. According to Adams *et al*. (2007), descriptive research is aimed at describing phenomena and is not particularly concerned with understanding why behavior is the way it is. It doesn't involve changing or modifying the situation under investigation, nor does it intend to detect cause-and-effect relationships. This type of research is very useful for setting out baselines or 'templates' of how we think the world is.

3.2. Data type and source

According to William *et al*., (2010), there are two types of data, primary and secondary. The primary data are those which are gathered for the first time and a fresh and thus collected for the case at hand (Kothari, 2004). In order to get relevant information for this study, both primary and secondary data was collected and used. The primary data was gathered from various stakeholders, line managers, governmental and non-governmental organizations and local communities who are involved in the organization and biodiversity conservation. Those are whom are affected either directly or indirectly as well as positively or negatively by the community-based conservation in the study area. And the primary sources of data was collected through questionnaires administered to randomly selected study respondents and structured personal in-depths interview with project managers in-charge, community elders, religious leaders and other relevant bodies in the organization and the specific project. Secondary data is defined as data that has been previously collected for some purpose other than the one at hand and this will help to triangulate and gather relevant information related the project and the organization.

3.3. Study population

Since the aim the study was to gain a deeper understanding of stakeholder engagement through performance measurement in the conservation of the study area's biodiversity as well as community development. The total population of the research was all the employees working on the organization, local communities who either positively or negatively affected by the project, other governmental and non-governmental organizations who support either financially or technically to MELCA Ethiopia, Bale Mountains National Park employee and etc. But, because of the economical and time constraint as well as operational difficulty in contacting all employees and others stakeholders in the organization, I took a sample of the population for this particular study. Therefore, the target population consists of experts, general manager of MELCA Ethiopia, project managers and experts in Bale ecoregion, with experience and with direct contacts in their jobs in the stakeholder engagement and management.

In addition to this, the population of the study was all the completed and active projects being implemented and all active workers starting from the top-level management to lower level

employees in the organizations as well as all other stakeholders who have hand and influence on the community-based conservation projects.

3.4. Sample design

According to Saunders *et al*. (2007), there are two major types of sampling designs: probability and non-probability sampling, in probability sampling, elements of the population have some known chance or probability of being selected as sample subjects, and in nonprobability sampling, the elements do not have a known or predetermined chance of being selected as subjects which fit into the board categories of convenience and purposive sampling.

Convenience sampling (also called haphazard or accidental sampling) refers to sampling by obtaining units or people who are most conveniently available (D'agostino 1995). where information or data for the research are gathered from members of the population who are conveniently accessible to the researcher. But simply convenience sampling has no place in credible research (MacCallum *et al*., 2019). And purposive sampling also called judgmental or expert opinion sample, where the required information is gathered from special or specific targets or groups of people on some rational bases (Brewerton and Millward 2012). Therefore, for this particular study non-probability sampling (purposive sampling) was employed since the target population was quite small. In addition, the criteria for sample selection was from the sense that those who have abundant experiences in stakeholder engagement and stakeholder management in the project of the conservation of biodiversity and community development were involved. Therefore, seven (4) experts including the country director in the head office in Addis Ababa, six (9) experts from project area of Goba, Dinsho and Adaba towns, 10 from community and religious leader which were involved sufficiently in community-based biodiversity conservation projects and Five (5) other experts from other NGO's who had sufficient involvement in the community engagement consultations were the sample targets for this particular research.

3.5. Data collection instrument and methods

3.5.1. Questionnaire survey

For quantitative data, a structured standard questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection. Respondents were issued questionnaires to fill on the information required. The questionnaire consists combined questions of a more quantitative, closed-ended nature with less qualitatively oriented, open-ended questions aiming at collecting both factual and attitudinal data (McNeill and Chapman, 1985). Closed-ended questions provide a greater uniformity of responses, which are more amenable for quantitative analysis, whereas the open-ended questions allowed to get access to certain issues in more depth (Kelley *et al.*, 2003).

3.5.2. Key informant Interview (KII)

Interviewing is one of the most common sources for collecting qualitative data (Yin, 2009). Therefore, to further collect data, semi- structured interviews was used in order to obtain accurate answers based on the interviewee's opinion and experience, and to facilitate further analysis. By making the questions open-ended (Creswell, 2014; Saunders *et al*., 2019) participants were given sufficient time and opportunity to provide their professional insight into the topics covered. Interview guidelines and voice recorder was used as a data collection instruments in order to collect information more accurately and for further uses. The whole interview was recorded so that the correct information will be available for use in the study, as well it provides the possibility to go back to analyze in detail what the respondent have said.

3.6. Data analysis

For quantitative data which was collected during the study, data was analyzed using the Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS) latest version. In addition to this, data was analyzed using a descriptive statistical technique where it has presented in tabulation and graph forms.

For the qualitative data which was collected through KII, data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) which allows for 'identifying, analyzing and reporting' patterns that can be found in the primary data. For the sake of convenience, the

following process model indicated in (Figure 2) was used as the stages of qualitative analysis.

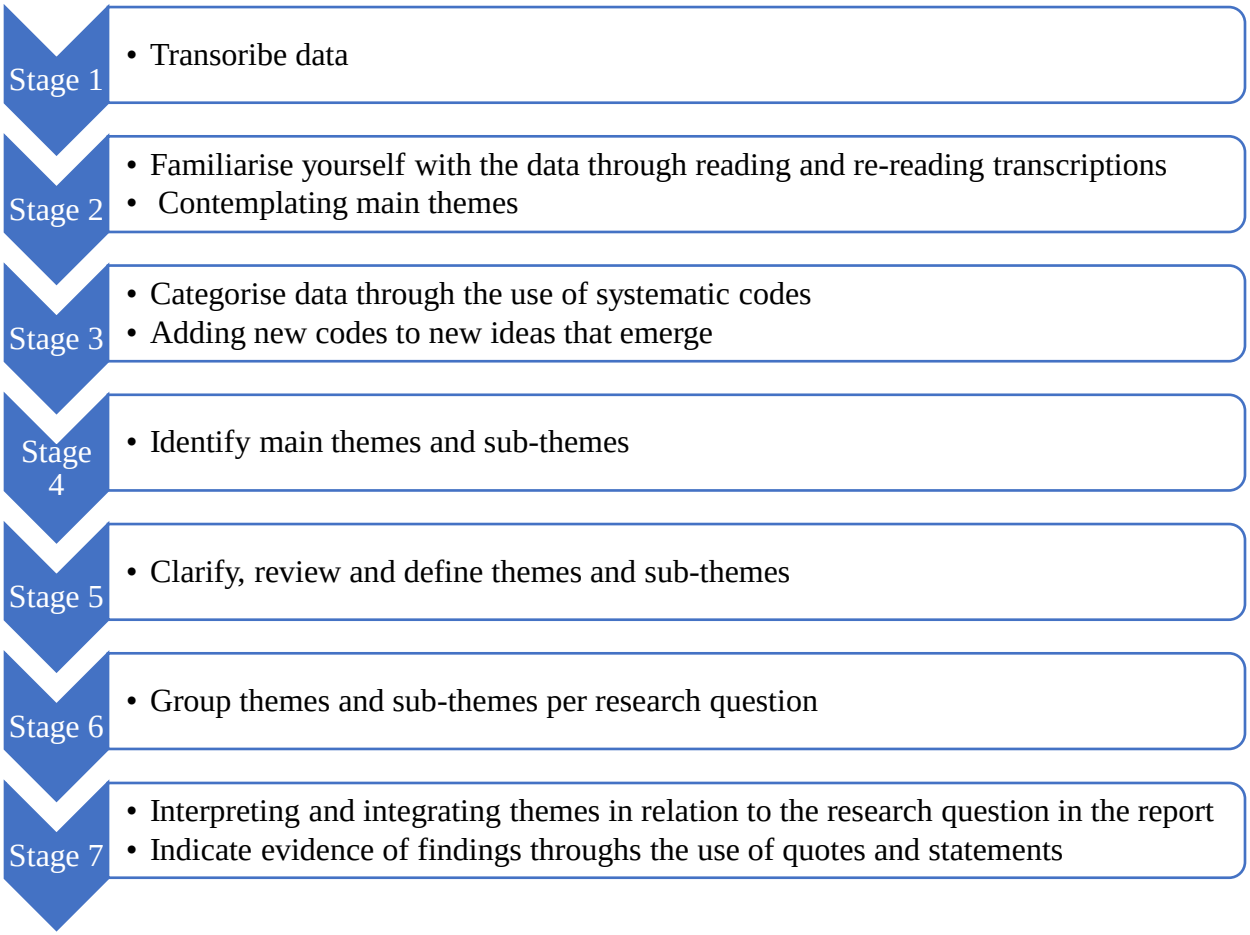

Figure 2:Qualitative analysis process (Thematic Analysis) adopted from (Verway, 2019).

3.7. Ethical consideration

During the study period, all appropriate aspects of ethics were properly considered. This particular study have used proper citation procedures to acknowledge the copy right holders and wasn't plagiarized ideas and concepts of researchers and authors without proper citation and acknowledgement. Any confidential information of the respondents was not disclosed as the main purpose is to gather data for the research purposes and their personal information would not be compromised. Therefore, in order to safeguard the participation of the respondents to give their responses genuinely, respondents were informed both verbally and in written descriptions of the study aims and objectives then they became eager to contribute in the study and all participants. This research was conducted on the agreement and interest

of MELCA Ethiopia and with the proper arrangement of Addis Ababa University, School of Commerce by providing an authorized legal letter to the researcher.

Chapter Four

4. Data Analysis, Presentation and Discussion

This section of the thesis focuses on presenting the results of the data collected and the appropriate discussions to answer the research objectives and research questions raised up as outlined in the first chapter of this thesis. This study aimed at to assessing the stakeholder's engagement in a Biodiversity Conservation Project: In the case of MELCA Ethiopia by raising a set of questions to the front faces of the project, that is the project professionals and communities either directly or indirectly involved in the project.

Before the questionnaire was distributed, pilot testing (pretest) was made with two randomly selected respondents in Dinsho and minor changes were made to improve clarity. Out of the 28 questionnaires distributed/delivered, all respondents were willing to be part of the research in which 28 of them filled and returned. The response rate to distributed questionnaire was 100% (28/28*100).

Therefore, the finding of this study was based on these responses, qualitative interview including to secondary document review. These are presented by objective answering the research questions using a combination of the statements from different sections that have a relation with the research questions. In general, this section is divided into three subsections: first, general profile of the respondents. Second, the stakeholder identification, mapping and analysis. Third, stakeholder engagement, communication and its challenges.

4.1. General Characteristics of Respondents

In the study area, majority of the respondents were male with a number of (26, 92.9%) and two (7.1%) were females. From this result one can easily understand that, majority of the respondents were male. Most respondents, (10, 35.7%) and (8, 28.6%) were in the age of 31-40 and 20-30, respectively, but (5, 17.9%) were within the age range of > 50. If you look at this result, one can easily conclude that most of the respondents included in this study are matured enough to understand on the primary concept of project and its importance. In

addition, majority of the respondents participated in this study were from the Bale eco-region project of Adaba and Goba with (9, 32.1%) and Goba (8, 28.8%), respectively and the least were from the Dinsho (7, 25.0%) and the Headquarter Addis Ababa office (4, 14.3%). Looking at the educational status of the respondents, about (14, 50.0%) of the respondents were university graduates, (5, 17.9%) had just primary education and (4, 14.3) were respondents who were MSc holders. This result shows that, the number of respondents who hold Bachelor degree were greater than that of the other educational levels. As the data shown in the central statistics agency of Ethiopia, less than half (42.7%) of the population in Ethiopia was literate in 2007. Compared to the data from central statistics agency, the average literacy level obtained from this particular study was very much higher. This might be due to the fact the target population for this study were purposively selected from the employee of the organization as well as few from the community. On top of the above information, results of this study showed that, significant number of respondents (20, 71.4%) had work experience of less than three years in the organization or projects implemented by the organization, whereas (8, 28.6%) had work experiences of 3-9 years. This indicates that, most of the respondents have enough experience to know and understand on the stakeholder engagement and its importance for project success. Similar to this context Bourne and Walker (2006) have found out that, experienced and effective project managers decisively deal with stakeholder issues and helps some project managers appear to be successful lobbyists and/or being more sensitized to key stakeholder issues that can define a project's perceived success.

Furthermore, majority of respondents (19, 67.9%) who participated in this study were also those involved in less than three projects and the rest (9, 32.1%) of the respondents were involved in more than five projects. This clearly shows that, most of the respondents are aware of what the organization has been and is doing in its projects and concepts related to stakeholder engagement and management (Table 1).

Table 1: Sex, Age, Educational status of Respondents and Work experience as well as Past experience involved in the organization

Sex of Respondents		
Sex	Frequency	Percent (%)
Male	26	92.9
Female	2	7.1
Total	28	100
Age of Respondents		
Age category	Frequency	Percent (%)
20-30	8	28.6
31-40	10	35.7
41-50	5	17.9
>50	5	17.9
Total	28	100.0
Education Status of Respondents		
Education Level	Frequency	Percent (%)
Primary Level	5	17.9
Secondary Level	3	10.7
College	2	7.1
University	14	50.0
Postgraduate	4	14.3
Total	28	100.0
Project area		
Project area	Frequency	Percent (%)
Headquarter	4	14.3
Dinsho	7	25.0
Adaba	9	32.1
Goba	8	28.6
Total	28	100
Work Experience in the Organization		

Years	Frequency	Percent (%)
<3 years	20	71.4
3-9 years	8	28.6
Total	28	100.0
Number of Projects Involved		
No of Projects	Frequency	Percent (%)
<3 Projects	19	67.9
5 Projects	9	32.1
Total	28	100.0

Source: Computed from own survey data, 2021

4.2. Stakeholder Identification, Mapping and Analysis

4.2.1. Key Stakeholders of the Organization/Community-based Biodiversity Conservation Sector

Individuals, groups, communities, organizations, societies, and the natural environment, according to Mitchell et al. (1997), are all considered as real or potential stakeholders in biodiversity protection. It is also clearly understandable that for the organization or MELCA Ethiopia, the key stakeholders influencing the organization its decision making either directly or indirectly as well as positively or negatively are Community leaders, Religious leaders, General Public, Government Authorities, Government Authorities as well as Women and NGOs (Table 2). In general, eleven main stakeholder groups were identified on their roles and influence in the system under study. This wide array of stakeholder number indicates that, biodiversity conservation is typically complex, needs multi-stakeholders and affect multiple actors and agencies. The reasons mentioned by respondents to be a key stakeholder was their pivotal role in project implementation and mobilization which is critical for creation of ownership results. In addition, some stakeholders like religious leaders have instrumental role in conflict management which is quite critical in community-based biodiversity conservation. Similarly, Bhagwat *et al.,* (2011) have indicated that working with faith-based organizations is beneficial because they can increase public support for conservation and development. On top of that, while secular organizations must collaborate with faith groups on the basis of shared ethical or moral ideals, it is also vital to find effective

ways to build the bonds between secular and faith organizations. In addition, according to Rolston (2010), religion can make a significant contribution to environmental policy. He claims that while scientific logic can only provide limited and value-free advice, religious faith and communities may and have already begun to provide what science lacks: "a value-laden, unified understanding of creation, humanity, and our responsibility as stewards of the world."

Over all, being a source of finance, partnership creation for sharing knowledge and experience, for awareness creation and public mobilization were among the reasons raised why the above-mentioned organizations are key stakeholders. Similarly, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) calls on parties to integrate the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity into relevant sectoral or cross-sectoral plans, programs and policies. The Convention also advocates Parties to adopt the "Ecosystem Approach" which requires the participation of all sectors of society in the conservation and management of biodiversity. To implement such a conservation project, it needs the cooperation of other stakeholders in government (e.g. other ministries and departments) and other segments of society (e.g. land owners, hoteliers' associations, communities, NGOs, media, etc.) (Annan, 2008). Having such a wide array of stakeholders might have helped on the success of MELCA Ethiopia in biodiversity conservation in Ethiopia. At the same time, Reed (2008), signify that local and scientific knowledges from different stakeholders can be integrated to provide a more in-depth knowledge of complex and dynamic socio-ecological systems and processes.

But, comparatively Land owners, Consultants (15, 53.6%), Donor Organizations (15, 53.6%) were considered as not key stakeholder for the organization. The reasons, mentioned why they are not considered as a key stakeholder for the organizations was due the fact that even if they have a positive impact their influence is not significant. Similar to stakeholders identified by MELCA Ethiopia, UN Environment Program has also identified key stakeholders such as farmers, women, the scientific and technological community, indigenous peoples and their communities, children and youth, workers and trade unions, business and industry, non-governmental organizations, and local governments for sustainable development projects under their supervision. (UNEP 2015). This indicates that MELCA Ethiopia has a comprehensive list of stakeholders which are important for their project success. Similarly, according to Gete *et al.,* (2006), the stakeholders that play an

active role in the promotion of sustainable land management practices in Ethiopia were categorized into six groups, i.e., government development agencies, research institutes, agricultural/environmental education institutes, farmers, regulatory agencies, donors and NGOs. These are the major groups that play their own role, either in groups or individually, and have significantly influenced promotion of sustainable practices and approaches in the country.

Table 2: Key Stakeholders of the Organization/Community-based Biodiversity Conservation Sector

Key Stakeholders	Frequency	Percent %
Community leaders	28	100
Religious leaders	28	100
General Public	28	100
Government Authorities	28	100
Universities	25	89.5
Women	23	82.1
NGO	23	82.1
Land owners	19	67.9
Consultant	13	46.4
Donor Organizations	13	46.4
If others (Youth and Land administration office)	2	7.14

Source: Computed from own survey data, 2021

Considering or following the respondent's response to the questionnaire and key informant interview the following stakeholder typology is developed by the researcher from the above Table 2. Stakeholder typology of MELCA Ethiopia shows the relationships the stakeholders with each other as well as to/from MELCA Ethiopia Projects. Therefore, Figure 3 shows the major stakeholders impacting an MELCA Ethiopia conservation Projects and some of the key interrelationships. In this representation, the community and religious leaders significantly influences government authorities either directly or through local community in the community-based conservations projects of the organization.

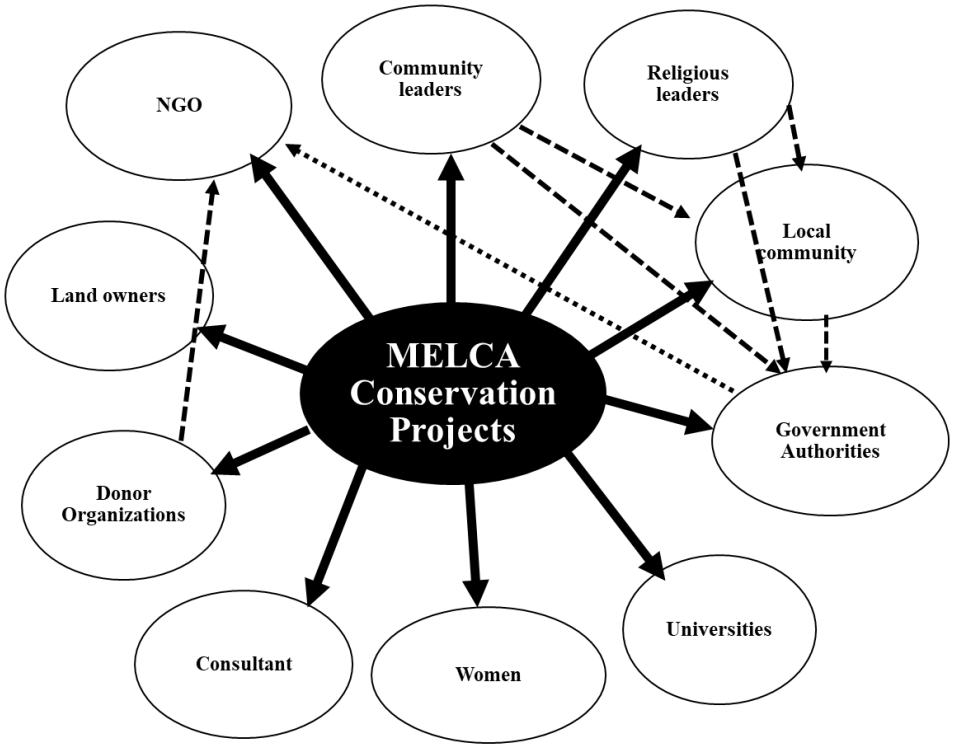

Figure 3: Stakeholder Typology for MELCA Ethiopia

4.2.2. Stakeholders Identification

The interaction and dependency of people to their natural resources around their area lies at the core of conservation planning in heterogeneous landscapes like Bale-ecoregion which is known as a biodiversity hotspot in the world. Therefore, understanding stakeholder perspectives towards their biodiversity or projects implemented to conserve it a key endeavor which begins with the correct and comprehensive approaches of stakeholder identification.

As indicated in the Table 3 below, to identify stakeholders to their projects, MELCA Ethiopia uses four forms of stakeholder identification. Amon them snowballing (through peers) and lessons learned from past projects, with a frequency of (28, 100%) and (24, 84.7%), respectively are being used. Similarly, Haddaway *et al.* (2017), have identified four ways in which stakeholders can be invited to participate such as purposive selection, 'snowballing', open calls, or systematic selection which seem a bit different except 'snowballing'. But, contextually they are not different. Furthermore, regarding to the criteria or bases used by MELCA Ethiopia for stakeholder identification, respondents believe that identified vision and mission based (24, 85.7%) followed by proximity to conservation area

(18, 64.3%). But to the least, the organization uses political and economic influence on the organization as a bases for stakeholder organization.

Table 3: Forms and Bases of Stakeholder Identification

	N	Frequency	Percent (%)
Forms/ types used to identify Stakeholders			
Snowballing (through peers)	28	28	100
Past project lesson learned	28	24	85.7
Project team brainstorming	28	14	50
Stakeholder forums	28	14	50
Criteria or bases for stakeholder identification			
Vision and mission based	28	24	85.7
Proximity to conservation area	28	18	64.3
Interest based (Political, economic, social, religious etc	28	9	32.1
Influence based (Political, economic etc)	28	4	14.3

Source: Computed from own survey data, 2021

Descriptive Analysis

A Likert Scale is a type of rating scale used to measure attitudes or opinions by asking the extent to which they agree or disagree with a particular question or statement. With this scale, target respondents were asked to rate items on a level of agreement. In this description analysis measuring instrument used to calculate stakeholder management practice and critical success factors. The level of respondent's engagement are scaled 1 to 5 scale. 1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree. Accordingly, a factor takes its average for the questions under it with no decimal point. Despite the fact that to summarize the narrative out comes, the researcher used criterion-referenced definitions for rating scales to describe the collected data.

Table 4: Criterion Referenced Scale Definitions

Mean rating	Respondents level of agreement	Description of respond agreement level
1.00 - 1.49	Strongly disagree	Very low
1.50 - 2.49	Disagree	Low

2.50 - 3.49	Neutral	Medium
3.50 - 4.49	Agree	High
4.50 - 5.00	Strongly agree	Very high

Source: Kaleab Buzuneh (2019)

From the above table, the value noted as "3" indicate “neither agree nor disagree, while value “4” indicates “agree”. Hence, if the value 3 is recorded as any of the subsequent measurement, it means that level is neither high nor low, or in other words it is in “average or medium level”. If a value of (4) is obtained, it means that a “high” level agreement is recorded. Similarly value one (1) and five (5) indicate “very low” level and “very high” level of agreement, respectively while value two (2) mean “low” level of agreement. Based on the above table I have discussed on the findings of the descriptive statistics of determinants of study respondent’s engagement by providing criterion-referenced definitions of each Criterion – referenced scale.

4.2.3. Stakeholders Mapping

Whatever philosophy one holds regarding stakeholder theory, legitimate and valid stakeholders need to be identified and their power and influence mapped so that their potential impact on projects can be better understood. Appropriate strategies can then be formulated and enacted to maximize a stakeholder’s positive influence and minimize any negative influence (Reed, 2008). In this particular study, the respondents agreed to the statement that, stakeholder mapping helps to understand what the key stakeholders are looking for as an outcome of the project with a mean value of 4.00. Furthermore, with a mean score of 3.89, they agreed that stakeholder mapping aids in the discovery and figuring out of stakeholder relationships. Further, the respondents also agreed with statement which states stakeholder mapping helps to find out the stakeholder’s relationship with the project activities with a mean value of 3.61. But, participants of this study were neutral to the explanation Stakeholder mapping is a simple technique to make sure anyone important in the project planning process is not missed out with a mean value of 2.93.

Table 5: Stakeholder Mapping

	N	**Mean**	**SD.**	**Mean Score**

Stakeholder mapping crucial to understand what the key stakeholders are looking for as an outcome of the project	28	4.00	1.33	1
Stakeholder mapping important to find out the relationship between the stakeholders	28	3.89	1.29	2
Stakeholder mapping helps to find out the stakeholder's relationship with the project activities	28	3.61	1.45	3
Stakeholder mapping is a simple technique to make sure anyone important in the project planning process is not missed out	28	2.93	1.36	4

Source: Computed from own survey data, 2021

4.2.4. Stakeholder Analysis

It is obvious that, stakeholder analysis is the second process required in preparation for stakeholder engagement. Stakeholder analysis is a technique for gathering information and knowledge on stakeholders for the sake of improving understanding of their motivations and actions, with the goal of determining stakeholder value in decision-making (Varvasovszky and Brugha 2000). The Table 6 below also depicts the stakeholder analysis practice being implemented in community-based conservation project in the organization. Looking at the responses of the project respondents almost all (100%) respondents indicated that doing stakeholder analysis is useful for realizing a quality decision making. This indicates that, stakeholder analysis is considered as a preliminary preparation factor for stakeholder engagement and it is included in their practice for quality assurance in project implementation. Similarly, according to Haddaway *et al.* (2017) stakeholder analysis is carried out for a variety of reasons, including: (i) ensuring stakeholder balance; (ii) prioritizing certain groups of stakeholders over others when resources are limited; (iii) identifying and examining possible stakeholder disagreements; (iv) tailoring contact to specific types of stakeholders; and (v) phasing contact with stakeholders through a project according to their relevant utility to and benefit from the research. On top of that, key informants have also raised the importance of stakeholder analysis as a means to identify and categorize stakeholder groups in the Bale Eco-region and those potentially involved in the

conservation of biodiversity in the area. Similarly, Vogler *et al.*, (2017) have also briefly described stakeholder analysis as a means in identifying significant and valuable stakeholders and evaluating their perspectives and interests on a proposed project.

Table 6: Stakeholder Analysis

	N	**Mean**	**SD.**	**Mean Score**
Prioritizing stakeholders according to how urgent they see the project interest in is useful	28	3.96	0.99	1
Stakeholder identification helps to find out who has unique knowledge related to any aspect of the project	28	3.79	1.03	2
In order to ensure the quality of the decision-making processes, stakeholder analysis is useful	28	3.71	1.33	3
Prioritizing stakeholders according to their responsibilities to the project is crucial	28	3.61	1.06	4
Prioritizing stakeholders according to their power to influence the project outcome is necessary	28	3.36	1.34	5
The project manager and the sponsor are the people who do the stakeholder analysis	28	3.57	0.96	6
Stakeholder analysis helps to evaluate different stakeholders' power	28	3.43	1.45	7
In my project I am involved in stakeholder identification and analysis	28	3.25	1.27	8
Internal Stakeholders are prioritized above external stakeholders	28	3.00	1.28	9

4.3. Stakeholder engagement and Communication

4.3.1. Stakeholder engagement

Engagement approaches range from communication strategies where stakeholders passively receive important information (e.g. public information campaigns), to fully collaborative partnerships between different groups where knowledge is co-created (e.g., participatory action research projects) (Sterling *et al.*, 2017). According to the finding of this study, majority of respondents agreed that, the main operational definition for stakeholder engagement in MELCA Ethiopia was a "process of working with stakeholders" with frequency of (28, 100%), followed by other respondents (8, 28.6%) who consider stakeholder engagement as "an event to let stakeholders know what is/should be expected from and by them". However, very few respondents (4, 14.3%) consider a "two-way dialogue process between project management and stakeholders" as an operational definition for stakeholder definition.

In addition to the operational definition, respondents were inquired the stages in which stakeholder engagement undertaken in projects implemented by MELCA Ethiopia. As can be seen in Table 7 below, most of the respondents (18, 64.3) believe that MELCA Ethiopia undertakes stakeholder's engagement throughout the project life cycle beginning from project initiation to completion, followed by those believing that the organization undertakes at the prefeasibility stage with frequency of (9, 32.1). But, few respondents (2, 7.1%) believe that the organization implements stakeholder's engagement during the initiation stage. In addition, some key informants also raised conducting need assessment and prioritizing stakeholders' needs is important. Looking at the respondents reactions to the definitions and stages of stakeholder engagement, MELCA Ethiopia clearly is following the right technique in involving its stakeholders in the conservation of biodiversity in the study area, which make successful in working with local communities around protected areas in Ethiopia. Similarly, in Southern Africa, successful stakeholder participation in environmental management focusing on the collective management of nature by management authorities and neighboring communities (Perrotton *et al.,* 2017), has resulted in a wide range of livelihood and conservation consequences, including the large-scale increase of wildlife-based land uses and

a significant increase in locally collected natural resource benefits in some cases (Roe *et al.*, 2009).

Table 7: Operational Definition and Stages of Stakeholder Engagement

	N	Frequency	Percent %
Operational Definition Stakeholder engagement			
Process of working with stakeholders	28	28	100
An event to let Stakeholders know what is/should be expected from and by them	28	8	28.6
A two-way dialogue process between project management and stakeholders	28	4	14.3
Stage of Stakeholder engagement			
Throughout the project life	28	18	64.3
Prefeasibility stage	28	9	32.1
Completion stage	28	5	17.9
Implementation stage	28	5	17.9
Initiation stage	28	2	7.1

Source: Computed from own survey data, 2021

4.3.2. Stakeholder Communications

Delivering value, whether strategic or tactical, needs strong processes and practices to succeed relationships with stakeholders through targeted communication in the form of regular reports, meetings, and presentations (Bourne, 2009). In relation to this, this study further has inquired on the extent to which respondents understand the means of stakeholder's communication, its significance for successful stakeholder engagement as well as the way in which stakeholder communications is being managed in the community-based conservations implemented by MELCA Ethiopia in Bale eco-region. According to Bourne (2009), the final part of the process of building robust relationships with the stakeholder community is the development and implementation of targeted communication strategies which are essential for excellent engagement of stakeholders to meet their expectations and for the benefit of the activity. According to the respondents, to maintain sympathetic relationships and to ease the consequences of uncooperative stakeholders for the benefit of

the organization and its projects the organization creates effective communication through many communications tools. Table 7 below shows, the statistical analysis results for stakeholder communication. According to the results of the questionnaire, regarding to the approaches of stakeholder communication, MELCA Ethiopia uses formal meeting which ranked (1^{st}) with a mean value of 4.11 followed by face to face meeting ranked (2^{nd}) with mean value of 4.00 and through information technology (3^{rd}) with mean value of 3.5. This indicates that, MELCA Ethiopia looks to have a very good communication approach. This might have helped the organization to have a good reputation in the case of community-based conservation in Ethiopia. Similarly, according to Vogler *et al.,* (2017), bringing stakeholders to the table for close communication is an significant step of the engagement process. Because, successful management of relationships needs planning and applying communication that embraces on the groups or individuals that are important at each phase in the lifecycle of the work and understanding their requirements from the outcomes of the work (Bourne, 2009). In addition, if effective and efficient communication occurs, communities or other stakeholders involved in any project are aware, at every stage, of what is happening and of their role within the project (Dyer *et al.,* 2014). But, as drawback MELCA Ethiopia does not use facilitated dialogue among stakeholders, which has been found to inspire collaboration and willingness to participate (Danielsen *et al.,* 2005). This entails having a trained, non-stakeholder facilitator (outsider facilitator) who can assist in encouraging efficient communication among the various parties, as well as setting common goals and reducing conflict.

Moreover, with regard to significance of stakeholder communication, respondents raised that exposure to different thoughts and knowledge of stakeholders as well as for the sake of helping stakeholders to prioritize their needs with mean value of 4.32 each, was the main importance of stakeholder's communication. This might help MELCA Ethiopia to have a successful community-based conservation in Bale Eco-region.

On top of that, respondents reacted on the ways of managing stakeholder's communication in MELCA Ethiopia. Accordingly, keeping stakeholders informed as project progresses by sending updated information as an important approach of engaging was ranked 1^{st} with the mean value of 4.29. In addition, communicating with stakeholders early at the project initiation stages for ensuring clear understanding is used as a successful means of

communication management ranking 2nd with mean value of 3.89. Considering the above result, Mitchell (2020) argued that stakeholder involvement, can be seen as a way of minimizing five types of knowledge problems such risk, ambiguity, complexity, equivocality, and a priori irreducible uncertainty which can support managers in resolving such challenges which looks alike with what respondents have reflected. Similarly, Hurlbert and Gupta's (2015) argue that, trust building among stakeholders results from early communication of uncertainties, joint knowledge production and shared responsibilities, and transparency in information sources and decision-making. Lastly, having a medium to provide feedback to projects being implemented in the community-based projects by MELCA was also raised as a means of stakeholder communication management ranking 3rd with a mean value of 3.61. This indicates that, for quality decision and to improve the success of project outcome the organization should get feedback from its key stakeholders regularly. This is similar with the philosophy of stakeholder participation that emphasizes empowerment, equity, trust and learning for success of any community based natural resource management (Reed, 2008).

In addition, with the help of elders and environmental experts, MELCA Ethiopia, a country winner in the Educating Africa Pan-African Awards for Entrepreneurship in Education, has made significant progress in the transfer of indigenous ecological knowledge from the older generation to the productive and energetic youth groups through active engagement and communication (Alelign, 2016).

Table 8: Stakeholder Communication

	N	Mean	SD.	Mean Score
Means of Stakeholder Communication				
MELCA Ethiopia communicates with stakeholders through formal meeting	28	4.11	0.69	1
MELCA Ethiopia undertakes face-to-face meetings with the particular stakeholders	28	4	1.16	2
MELCA Ethiopia undertakes communication with stakeholders through IT Systems	28	3.5	0.755	3
Significance of Stakeholder communication				
Communicating with different stakeholder helps to expose different thoughts and knowledge	28	4.32	0.55	1
Communication with different stakeholders helps to prioritize their needs	28	4.32	0.77	1
Stakeholder Communication Management				
Keep stakeholders informed as the project progresses by sending updated information is an important approach of engaging with them	28	4.29	0.6	1
Communicating with stakeholders early at the project initiation stages ensures clear understanding	28	3.89	1.26	2
Our all Stakeholders have a medium to provide feedback to the project	28	3.61	0.57	3

Source: Computed from own survey data, 2021

4.4. Challenges of Stakeholders Engagement

In this study, respondents were inquired to identify the main factors hindering project stakeholder's engagement in MELCA's projects that operate in a multi-stakeholder environment in Bale Eco-region. Accordingly, among the options provided as challenges, they indicated that almost all 10 challenges were listed as main barriers to stakeholder's engagement and management. Among them Communication gaps (including language differences, preference in utilization of communication tools) was raised as the biggest

challenge covering 67.9%, followed by Procedure (related to legal and administration laws), Gaps in knowledge about a specific issue and the Gaps in knowledge about a specific issue with a value of (14, 50%), (14, 50%) and (13, 46.4%), respectively. Naqvi *et al.,* (2011) indicated that, stakeholder communication is one of the significant determinants of project success which should not be considered secondary in routine project management practices. Looking at this justification, MELCA Ethiopia should work more on implementing effective communication to efficiently implement their conservation works in the study area.

But, to the least incompatible interests of partners and conflicting requirements of stakeholders were raised as challenges to be a least concern in projects in MELCA Ethiopia. Apart from this some key informants have raised stakeholder's expectation with regard to having higher per diem is also becoming a challenge, where stakeholders financial interest becomes higher than the actual work needed. In addition, some have raised the limitation in financial capacity of the organization as challenge for not successfully engaging stakeholders from the beginning to the end as much as needed.

Table 9: Major Challenges or Barriers to Successful Stakeholder Management in MELCA Ethiopia Projects

Challenges or Barriers	**Frequency**	**Percent (%)**
Gaps in communication (including language differences, preference in utilization of communication tools)	19	67.9
Procedure (related to legal and administration laws)	14	50
Knowledge gaps about a specific issue	14	50
Failure to identify all important stakeholders and provide them the attention they require	13	46.4
Poor engagement of stakeholders	13	46.4
Project managers unfamiliarity with stakeholder management process	10	35.7
Late identification of stakeholders' interest	10	35.7
Challenges due to cultural difference	10	35.7
Conflicting requirements of stakeholders	9	32.1
Incompatible interests of partners	9	32.1

Source: Computed from own survey data, 2021

Indeed, respondents were inquired to reflect or recommend a better-ways enhancing stakeholder engagement and management for successful project management in their organization. Accordingly, respondents said that for successful project implementation engaging the stakeholders at the earliest stage of project development and continue to engage them throughout the project cycle should be enhanced in MELCA Ethiopia. In addition, some respondents emphasized that for sake of sustainability project personnel in MELCA Ethiopia should not forget to hand over the project to key stakeholders at the end of the project as exit and sustainability strategy. But, they raised frustration related to not devising efficient mechanism to effectively engage stakeholders, adopting public accountability system and allocating sufficient time and resources

Furthermore, people have raised an important issue regarding engaging stakeholders according to their gender, sensitivity, culture, language and timing preference and role and expectation which quite critical for successful stakeholder engagement. In addition, one respondent has also made a critical suggestion that during stakeholder engagement using local facilitator and key institutions and personalities are critical for successful stakeholder engagement and ensuring success of project implementation.

Chapter Five

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

Environmental protection especially biodiversity conservation issues as a leading global agenda these days require a rigorous effort by all state and non-state actors for their conservation and associated development. In light of this, this study has attempted to investigate into stakeholder engagement efforts are being exerted by MELCA Ethiopia in relation to biodiversity conservation. In this particular study, it was recorded that there are about 11 groups and institutions which were recognized as key stakeholders for the conservation organization of MELCA Ethiopia. But, their influence and interest on the projects was not the same among the key stakeholders. Some stakeholders' interests specified by the respondents are their pivotal role in project implementation and mobilization which is critical for creation ownership of results. The main stakeholder identification criteria used by MELCA Ethiopia was vision and mission as well as proximity to conservation area. Also, according to respondents, the main stakeholder engagement approaches being used by the project personnel are face to face communication, use of IT system and a formal meeting, as well as an informal meeting.

With regard to the challenges of the of stakeholder engagement, respondent's communication gaps (including language differences, preference in utilization of communication tools), Procedural requirements (related to legal and administration laws), Gaps in knowledge about a specific issue and the Gaps in knowledge about. But also, to the least incompatible interests of partners and conflicting requirements of stakeholders were raised as challenges to be a least concern in projects in MELCA Ethiopia. In addition, some have raised the limitation in financial capacity of the organization as a challenge for not successfully engaging stakeholders from the beginning to the end as much as needed.

5.2. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this particular study in order to assist the relation of stakeholder's engagement with biodiversity conservation projects particularly in MELCA Ethiopia's organization as well as other conservation organizations in Ethiopia. Therefore, for successful stakeholder's engagement which in turn result to effective project performance, all the components of stakeholder engagement should be attentive but the more focus should be given on the practices that are not well implemented in this paper based on the aggregate mean in variables with the lowest mean.

- It is obvious that, identifying key stakeholders in biodiversity conservation which affect a larger group is not easy. For example, selecting members to represent "the local community" can be challenging because who will be affected by the conservation project/intervention and who has a stake in the project is not easy to identify. Furthermore, each individual stakeholder may have views that differ from others in their constituency. Therefore, MELCA Ethiopia should have to define and share a selection process for identifying key stakeholders which is quite important, rather than haphazardly including those listed by the respondents in this study.
- Even if, MELCA Ethiopia has a very good reputation in communication system in its projects implemented Bale eco-region, it has to bring more concepts such as "Trust, Reciprocity, Exchange, and Respect" as a critical variable in its projects, which highly dependent upon effective communication, transparency, outreach, explicit links between participation and benefits, and co-learning throughout project implementation.
- It is clearly known that during this time of digital and information age, media plays a significant role in developing contacts with stakeholders and providing stories, especially joint ones about cooperation between stakeholders which can enhance the image of the project and others involved and about actions for biodiversity. But, MELCA Ethiopia doesn't consider media as a key stakeholder. Therefore, the organization should give due emphasize in using this timely tool to advocate and create an awareness on its projects to stakeholders.

- In any intervention projects such as biodiversity conservation the impact of the stakeholder engagement should have to be tracked well with a mechanism such as proper monitoring on the engagement process and make corrective actions easily.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Questionnaire

Dear Respondent,

As part of the requirement for the award of the master's program in Project Management at Addis Ababa University, School of Commerce I am expected to undertake a research study on "**Assessment of Stakeholders Engagement in Biodiversity Conservation Project: In the case of MELCA Ethiopia"** in projects implemented at Bale eco-region. I am therefore seeking your assistance to fill the questionnaire attached. The research is solely for academic purpose and your honest input will educate the researcher on the day to day practice of Stakeholder engagement in a real project scenario. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of these statements using the given scale by placing [x] in the provided space. Please answer all the questions to enhance the objectivity of the research.

Thank for taking your valuable time to complete this questionnaire. If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Part I. General Profile of Respondent

- Gender Female [ ] Male [ ]
- Age 20-30 yrs [ ] 31-40 yrs [ ] 41-50 yrs [ ] > 51 [ ]
- Kindly indicate the highest level of education attained Primary

  Primary level [ ] Secondary level [ ] College [ ]

  University [ ] Postgraduate [ ]
- Working area or Organization

  Headquarter [ ] Dinsho [ ] Adaba [ ] Goba [ ] Other Specify [ ]
- For how long have you been involved in projects implemented by MELCA?

  <3 yrs [ ] 3-9 yrs [ ] 9-12 yrs [ ] >12 yrs [ ]
- In how many projects have you been involved so far in MELCA?

  <3 projects [ ] 5 projects [ ] 7 projects [ ] >7 projects [ ]

Part II. Stakeholder identification, analysis and mapping

- How do you identify your Stakeholders?

  a) Project team brainstorming [ ]

  b) Stakeholder forums [ ]

c) Snowballing (through peers) [ ]
d) Past project lesson learned [ ]
e) Others, please specify……

- What is/are the bases for your stakeholder identification in your conservation organization?
    a) Vision and mission based [ ]
    b) Influence based (Political, economic etc) [ ]
    c) Interest based (Political, economic, social, religious etc [ ]
    d) Proximity to conservation area [ ]
    e) Others, please specify [ ]
- At what point in the project's life cycle do you identify stakeholders?
    a) Prefeasibility stage [ ]
    b) Initiation stage [ ]
    c) Implementation stage [ ]
    d) Throughout Project life [ ]
- Which of the following would you consider a potential/possible stakeholder in a typical project of your organization and why?

Typical stakeholders	Is the typical stakeholder in the conservation a stakeholder in your organization/project (**yes or no)**	Why is it or is not your stake-holder
Community leaders		
Religious leaders		
Women		
General Public		
Consultant		
Donor Organizations		
Universities		
Land owners		
NGO		
Government Authorities		

If others (mention)		

- Please rate how much you agree with the following statements about how you interact with stakeholders in your projects?

Stakeholder mapping					
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Stakeholder mapping is a simple technique to make sure anyone important in the project planning process is not missed out					
Stakeholder mapping helps to find out the relationship between the stakeholders					
Stakeholder mapping helps to find out the stakeholder's relationship with the project activities					
Stakeholder mapping helps to understand what the key stakeholders are looking for as an outcome of the project					
Stakeholder analysis					
Stakeholder identification helps to find out who has unique knowledge related to any aspect of the project					
I prioritize stakeholders according to their responsibilities to the project					
I prioritize stakeholders according to how urgent they see the project interest in					
I prioritize stakeholders according to their power to influence the project outcome					
Internal Stakeholders are prioritized above external stakeholders					
Stakeholder analysis helps to evaluate					

different stakeholders' power					
In order to ensure the quality of the decision- making processes, stakeholder analysis is suitable					
In my project I am involved in stakeholder identification and analysis					
The project manager and the sponsor are the people who do the stakeholder analysis					

Part III. Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

1. What is the operational meaning of the term stakeholder engagement in the context of MELCA Ethiopia?
   a) Process of working with stakeholders [ ]
   b) A two-way dialogue process between project management and stakeholders [ ]
   c) An event to let Stakeholders know what is/should be expected from and by them [ ]
   d) Others (specify) …… …… [ ]
2. At which stage of your Project life cycle do you carry out Stakeholder engagement?
   a) Prefeasibility stage [ ]
   b) Initiation stage [ ]
   c) Implementation stage [ ]
   d) Completion stage [ ]
   e) Throughout the project life [ ]
3. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements which relate to how you communicate with stakeholders in MELCA Ethiopia Projects?

Stakeholder communication					
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
MELCA Ethiopia conducts face-to-face meetings with the particular stakeholders					
MELCA Ethiopia undertakes communication					

with stakeholders through IT Systems					
MELCA Ethiopia communicates with stakeholders through formal meeting					
Our all Stakeholders have a medium to deliver feedback to the project					
Communicating with different stakeholder helps to expose different thoughts and knowledge					
Communicating with stakeholders early at the project initiation stages ensures clear understanding					
Keep stakeholders informed as the project improves by sending updated information is an important approach of involving with them					
Communication with various stakeholders helps to prioritize their needs					

Part III. Stakeholders Engagement and challenges

- From your experience, what are the challenges or barriers to effective stakeholder management in MELCA Ethiopia Projects?
  a) Project managers unfamiliarity with stakeholder management process [ ]
  b) Failure to identify all relevant stakeholders and offering them the level of attention they deserve [ ]
  c) Late identification of stakeholders' interest [ ]
  d) Conflicting requirements of stakeholders [ ]
  e) Poor engagement of stakeholders [ ]
  f) Incompatible interests of partners [ ]
  g) Challenges due to cultural difference [ ]
  h) Procedure (related to legal and administration laws) [ ]
  i) Communication gaps (including language differences, preference in utilization of communication tools) [ ]
  j) Gaps in knowledge about a specific issue [ ]
  k) Others please specify [ ]
  - What would you recommend, based on your experience, to improve stakeholder involvement and management, as well as successful project management? Make a

mention……
……
……
……
……
……..