

The Community Conserved Landscape of the Borana Oromo, Ethiopia: Opportunities and Problems

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Abstract

Purpose – This article describes an attempt to assess at the local level the progress that has been internationally achieved in recognition of community and indigenous rights, and of Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas. An action-research exercise was implemented in Ethiopia with a mobile indigenous people to evaluate customary as well as government-led governance of the environment, with the objective to strengthen the capacity of the Borana-Oromo to conserve their landscape.

Design/methodology/approach – This article is based on collaborative research implemented by the authors in 2002 while SOS Sahel Ethiopia was introducing collaborative forest management, and on a 2007 action research project specifically designed to broaden the scope of the involvement of the customary leadership in sustainable landscape management.

Findings – This research demonstrated the high degree of articulation and efficacy of customary governance as opposed to the failure of State-centric attempts to protect specific areas within the broader landscape. Customary institutions, however, are increasingly delegitimized and incapable of coping with new challenges such as massive immigration, political marginalization and *de facto* land privatization.

Research limitations/implications: The action-research was insufficient to achieve the goal, due to limitations in the national legislation, inefficiency by the government in implementing the existing policies, and the persisting practice of imposing development with insufficient prior consultation.

Practical implications:– Based on an informed review of the international and national legislation and policies, the customary leaders of the Borana have released a public statement asking for support in addressing the gaps and problems they have identified, particularly achieving legal recognition of the customary institutions and customary laws in relation to biodiversity conservation. At national level it was recommended to organize a workshop on community conservation of biodiversity and community rights, with the objective of disseminating awareness about the latest instruments and Resolutions in the context of IUCN and the CBD.

Originality/value : The customary governance of the Borana is based on the *gadaa* generation class system, highly articulated in terms of norms and procedures. The territory is vast and it includes government protected areas due to the importance of the biodiversity. The case contributes to raising awareness about the relevance of legislation and enhancement of rights at national level.

Keywords: Community Conserved Areas; Landscape; Gadaa; Ethiopia; Borana Oromo; Governance

Paper type: Case study

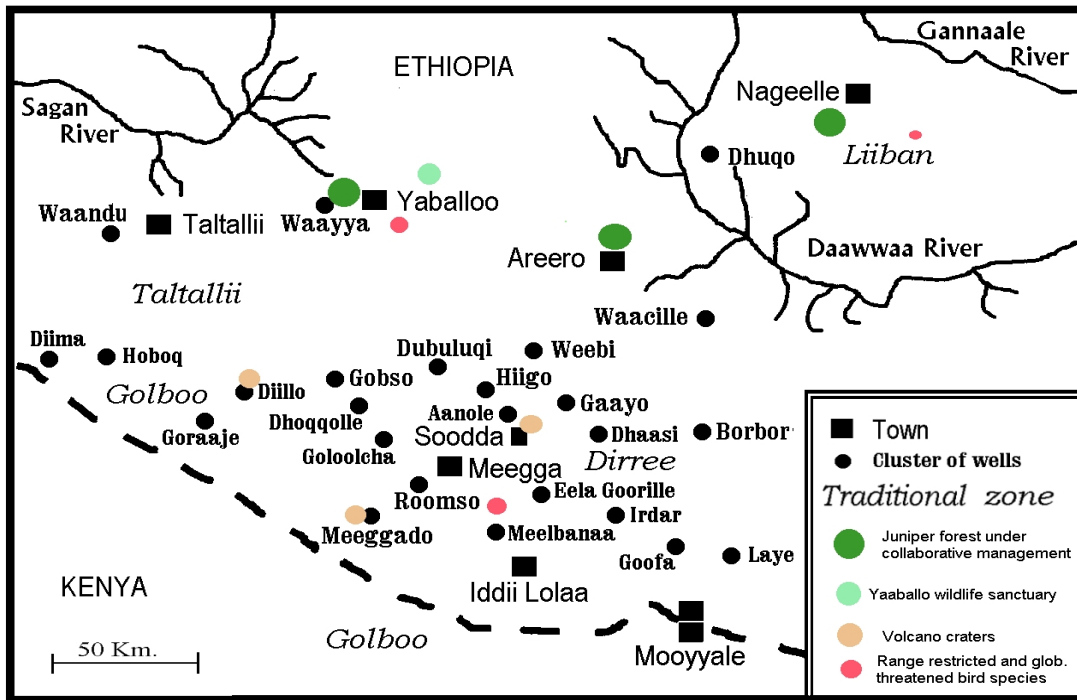
The Community Conserved Landscape of the Borana Oromo, Ethiopia: Opportunities and Problems

In the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia and Kenya) many pastoral and agro-pastoral groups have fully fledged and still operative systems of indigenous governance. These were described in classic anthropology, but having undergone radical change and adaptation in the different historical phases they need to be reconsidered. In this article the authors consider the indigenous governance based on *gadaa*, practised by the Borana Oromo. We particularly focus on its role in enhancing sustainable management of natural resources and on the effort made to have it recognised. The internationally developed concept of Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) opened up a space for considering the positive role of customary governance in conservation of biodiversity (Borrini-Feyerabend et al, 2004; Kothari, 2006; www.iccaforum.org). ICCAs have recently been defined as “natural and/or modified ecosystems containing significant biodiversity values, ecological services and cultural values, voluntarily conserved by Indigenous peoples and local communities, both sedentary and mobile, through customary laws or other effective means” (www.iccaforum.org). The differentiation between indigenous and local communities may not refer to a difference in the qualities of the groups involved in conservation, but simply to the different legal environment in which they are acting. Indeed in the Horn of Africa indigenous rights are not legally recognized, forcing the communities either to relegate their conservation action in the traditional domain, or to frame it within the existing but inadequate national legislations and policies. This situation is posing specific challenges to communities, affecting customary governance to the point that this extraordinary asset for conservation may entirely get lost (Bassi, 2006). These problems were addressed during a participatory workshop organised as part of action research implemented in Borana by the authors of this article (Bassi, Tache, and Liban, 2008).

1. The Borana Conserved Landscape

The Borana are part of the Oromo, the largest nation of the Horn of Africa. The Oromo were politically characterized by their *gadaa* system of generational classes and by the *qaalluu*, the high priests. Being scattered over a large and diverse territory, the Oromo have established various *gadaa* centres in Ethiopia, each providing the governance structure for a certain portion of the territory. The Borana are a pastoral sub-group of about 400,000 people with a distinctive territory in the semi-arid lands of Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya. In Ethiopia, their customary territory corresponds to the southern portion of the former Sidamo Region as was demarcated during the imperial and socialist times (until 1991), from the confluence of the Ganale and Dawa rivers in the East to Lake Chew Bahir in the West. Some portions of this land were jointly used with other pastoral and agropastoral groups. The area between the two rivers is *Libaan*, while the land to the west of the Dawa River is *Dirree*. In Kenya the Borana are nowadays concentrated in Moyyale, Marsabit and Isiolo districts. The Borana have a single encompassing *gadaa* system and five recognized *qaalluu*. They have managed to maintain their governance system, although the political influence of *gadaa* is now confined to Ethiopia.

MAP: The Borana Conserved Landscape



The whole of the large territory of the Borana, and particularly the Ethiopian homelands still under *gadaa* governance, can be considered a community conserved landscape, due to the variety of specific rules and practices that have historically assured its sustainable and eco-compatible use. In accordance with IUCN Protected Areas Management Category V, Protected Landscape/Seascape (Phillips, 2002), their territory includes diverse ecological zones and a variety of key natural and human-modified resources. As described below, within the broader landscape certain zones are customarily managed under more restrictive rules of access and use. Taking into consideration the emerging trends in interpreting the IUCN categories (Feyerabend et al., 2004; Dudley 2008), the ceremonial grounds are compatible with IUCN categories Ia, Strict Nature Reserve, the juniper forests with category Ib, Wilderness Area, the volcanic craters and the traditional wells with category III, Natural Monument. The landscape also includes three large juniper forests. They were gazetted as National Forest during the socialist period (1974-1991) and were accordingly formally protected by the government by adopting a top-down and exclusive management model. This approach, which ultimately proved unsuccessful, was later modified with the introduction of collaborative forest management (Tache and Irwin, 2003).

1.1. The management of rangeland

Liiban and *Dirree* are the two main macro-regions of the Borana in Ethiopia, including both wet and dry season pastures. *Golboo* is the dry lowlands in and around northern Kenya, along the Ethiopian border, a critical wet season pasture. The sound management of the rangeland is promoted through norms of inclusion/exclusion designed for pastoral activity and known as *seera marraa bisaanii* – ‘the law of grass and water’. The Borana ‘law of grass’ shares the basic principles of most East African pastoral groups. Although no family can be directly denied access to the rangeland, the law differentiates between dry season pastures (with permanent water points) and wet season pastures (with good grass but only accessible during and immediately after rains). It imposes the maximum use of wet-season pasture whenever possible, thus minimising pressure on the most intensely utilised rangelands served by permanent

water points. In practice, this is achieved by dividing lactating, thus less mobile, cattle from dry stock, and other stock species. There are also provisions for restricting access to certain areas (*kaloo*), kept as reserve for certain stock categories during the dry season. These norms and practises have a direct impact on the ecology of the rangeland, particularly on the composition of grass species. Additional practices contribute to the control of the composition of the bushes and trees, such as controlled fires, selective cutting of bushes for firewood and the periodical movement of villages to avoid depletion of trees.

The conservation ethos is not always expressed in explicit terms. Indigenous conservation is often indirectly achieved in accordance with culturally-specific values, beliefs and ritual practices. For instance, the Borana share with the other Oromos cultural beliefs associated with particular trees. The most important is the Sycomoro (*Ficus sycomorus*) (vernacular: *odaa*), symbolically associated with the *qaalluu*. Other trees are protected because their branches are used in rituals or to make ritual/cultural sticks and objects or in relation to livelihoods, for the production of edible fruits for humans and livestock (e.g. *Acacia tortilis* - vernacular: *dhaddacha*) or their positive ecological interaction with the growth of forage. Further, certain tree species are planted close to the burial place as part of the funerary rituals. These trees are carefully cared for later on. The overall result is a species-selective tree management at the country level. In the savannah areas poverty is forcing some families to engage in charcoal production (Tache, 2008). However, the burning of protected trees still raises strong social concern. The Borana also strongly complain about the destructive tree-cutting practices by groups of non-Borana resettled by the government in their land.

1.2. The management of water

The second set of customary law indirectly regulating the ecology of the rangeland is the 'law of water'. This law is highly articulated and peculiar to the Borana and their environment. The traditional wells (*eela*) are distributed in localities where the aquifer can be reached. Access to key dry-season rangeland is achieved by gaining access to these permanent water points. Nine of these well complexes - the *tulaa sallan* (the nine *tulaa* wells-complexes) - have a special ritual and symbolic relevance, for the particular qualities of the water and the surrounding environment. The *tulaa* wells can be as deep as 40 metres in the localities of Meelbanaa, Irdar, Goofa (El Gof), Laye (El Lae), Dhaas, Weebi, Waacille, Hiigo, and Gaayo. The wells have different sets of norms regulating digging and utilisation. They define the flow of investment required for digging and combine collective (clan based) and individual contributions. Investment implies ownership and rights of access, with priority granted to clans and families that have actually invested in well (re-) excavation and upkeep. But use regulations also provide for a limited quota to outsiders, including members of other ethnic groups and wildlife (Bassi, 2005; Oba, 1998). There are also special provisions to ban any permanent or temporary human settlement in the vicinity of the wells (Tache, 2000). The sites of the wells thus appear to be maintained in a fully natural state, except for the daily movements of thousands of livestock. The cattle dung is accumulated outside each well for decades or centuries, a reserve of manure in the long-term ecological cycle. In the normal cycle of well excavation and collapse, wells serving over-exploited rangelands are abandoned and new are developed elsewhere, given that ground water is available.

The particular distribution of the well clusters have encouraged the Borana to select, over the centuries, their particular breed of zebu cattle, internationally known as the 'Boran breed' after the attention received in several studies promoted by ILCA/ILRI. The Borana cattle are able to walk long distance in hot and sunny climates, normally drink every third day and are very efficient converters of pasture forage into body fat which is consumed during periods of drought¹. The three days watering interval allows access to rangelands located up to one and a half days walking distance from the

wells, assuring access to poorly served areas even during the dry season, with obvious implications in terms of reducing pressure on the rangeland and on long-term grass composition of the different zones. Socially this three days rotation also allows well access to a larger number of pastoral units and the allocation of each day to different clans, thus fostering inter-clan cooperation and reducing the potential of inter-clan competition and conflict. In economic terms, the Borana cattle have been the main beef export from Ethiopia to the Gulf States and a major source of foreign currency during the socialist period in Ethiopia (1974-1991).

1.3. The juniper forests and the volcanic craters

The *baddaa sadeen* are the three largest juniper (*Juniperus procera*) forests in the landscape conserved by the Borana. *Baddaa* means “forest with tall trees” and “a dark green forest”. As in several other forests in the Horn of Africa, they are too humid for permanent pastoral settlement. However, some open patches contain excellent pasture and provide permanent springs. They were therefore used as dry-season pastures. The forests have an important function as last refuge for grazing in case of drought, and are a reserve for medical and ritual plants. They were not subjected to special management provisions, apart from the very strict prohibition against starting fires in the forest.

The forests have a high symbolic value; they are conceived as something belonging to the “outside” - the realm of nature, being close to God, the *aloola* (Kassam and Megerssa, 1994). They are also a metaphor for human society, hence highly valued in social terms. Gurracha Duuba, a Borana elder living outside the Manquubsa forest near Nagelle town, during an interview conducted in September 2002, clearly articulated these values. The Manquubsa forest was nearly destroyed by a fire in 1999 and the remaining area was seriously affected by illegal and selective cutting of juniper trees for house construction in the town:

The juniper trees are like the Borana elders (*jaarsa*): they stand taller than the others and have a long white beard (whitish lichen *-arrii-* is often hanging on the juniper’s branches). Just as there cannot be Borana society without elders, the *baddaa* (forest) will fall into chaos when all the junipers are cut or destroyed. I was told long ago [referring to an oral prophetic text] that one day we would have seen a big light from very far and the *baddaa* would disappear...[it is a reference to the great 1999 fire]

The juniper trees are equated to the elders and the forest to the Borana society, since there is a dynamic link between the two. This link is reflected in prophecy. The prophetic text the elder was referring to is well known by the community and provides a list of events representing the reverse of orderly social life. These events announce a cosmological crisis, an apocalypse (Bassi and Tache, 2005). The ‘light’ (i.e. the fire) destroying the forest is thus equated to the disappearance of orderly human society and is conceived as a step towards, when translated in western scientific language, an ecological disaster at a global level. The symbolic interdependence between the forest and human activity is further qualified in the rest of the interview:

The forest attracts the clouds. It makes them stop and rain. It also produces rain: in the forest there is always humidity and mist. It produces rain. We can see it by the fact that it has springs and produces all-year-round high quality pasture. Due to the forest destruction now, the nearby plains (*Diida Liiban*) and other places do not receive enough rain anymore, and many of the permanent springs in the forest have dried up. But rain is still good in my place, *Xuxxuffe*, due to the remaining patch of forest nearby.

The *booqee sadeen* are the three volcanic craters found in Borana territory, providing different salt varieties and high quality mineral water for both human and livestock consumption. They are kept open and can be used by wildlife, but access by the community is regulated in accordance with a balance between customary and statutory laws, the latter

imposing a tax on salt extracted by the local community. In the early 1990s when the government announced in national newspapers a public bid for industrial mining in the craters, the entire community mobilised and managed to conserve the customary use of the *booqee*.

1.4. Borana governance

The different resources discussed above together ensure the maintenance of a viable pastoral system. They are common resources, in the sense that all pastoral units have the potential to use the territory and gain direct or indirect rights of access in response to unpredictable climatic patterns. However, both management and access are strictly regulated through practice, customary norms, belief systems and laws of inclusion/exclusion, which protect the resources from outsiders and regulate the internal allocation between groups, sub-groups, individuals and families.

This is achieved through indigenous governance built on the highly complex *gadaa* system of generation classes. Every eight years a new generation class, represented by elected leaders from the major clan divisions, takes the leadership of the *yaa'a*, the mobile ritual villages of the Borana (Legesse, 1973). Ceremonies in different sacred sites scattered over the landscape are performed, mostly in the shade of a Sycomoro tree. The tree and the surrounding area, known as *ardaa jilaa*, are fully protected and should be maintained in a natural state (Tadesse, 1995). The representatives of the *gadaa* generational class are also responsible for the organisation of the Gumi Gayoo, the general assembly of the Borana held once in every eight years. The event lasts over a month and involves thousands of people in democratic debates. The general assembly also serves as Supreme Court of the Borana and their legislative body. Formal customary laws (*seera*) are orally announced on these occasions. Law-enforcement is assured through a highly articulated and diffused assembly structure. Assemblies are led by different type of titled leaders. The *abbaa gadaa*, the *qaalluu* and the *hayyuu* are the most authoritative, having served for not less than 16 years in one of the Borana *yaa'a*. All titled leaders and influential men are called *jaarsa*-elders, a term implying political prestige (Bassi, 2005).

Borana governance illustrates the mechanisms of indigenous governance, based on the political philosophy specific to each group, and manifesting itself through a number of correlated visible elements, including:

- norms (customary law and practice) and procedures regulating the decisional processes, including law making, conflict management and dispute settlement,
- the settings where binding decisions are made, normally in various councils and meetings,
- customary institutions, defining political and ritual roles and political and juridical personnel, and
- ritual practices.

Symbolic constructs of social and economic groupings, norms, juridical and judicial procedures, culturally specific sanctions, political and juridical personnel and local or indigenous knowledge are all inter-connected elements taking shape in relation to the specific territorial assets.

2. **Biodiversity and the State-induced decline of the conserved landscape**

This environmentally sound management of natural resources assured the development and conservation of a unique biodiversity heritage in Borana territory. To date, ecological studies have focused on the direct inter-relation of stock

with wild species, hence primarily on vegetation dynamics and their response to grazing (Oba et al., 2000; Coppock, 1994), from the point of view of both indigenous and scientific knowledge (Oba and Kotile, 2001). Very little is known about the relation between the pastoral-modified environment and other wild biodiversity, although it is well documented that the landscape managed by the Borana provides the habitat for a variety of important, globally threatened, range-restricted and biome-specific wild species (EWNHS, 1996), in addition to the domesticated Borana breed.

The Acacia-commiphora open woodlands and bush lands of the area support 43 species of mammals, including the endemic Swayne's Hartebeest (*Alcelaphus buselaphus swayeni*), and 283 species of birds, including the endemic Abyssinian Bush Crow (*Zavattariornis stresemanni*), the White-tailed Swallow (*Hirundo megaensis*) and the Sidamo Lark (*Heteromirafra sidamoensis*) (EWNHS, 1996). It is possible that the Abyssinian Bush Crow, found only in the land of the Borana, is actually dependent on a pastoral-modified ecology. This species, whose classification has been difficult, is in fact only found in a restricted range, in the middle of the *tulaa* wells area, that is locally known for having been intensively used by cattle pastoralists for centuries. This exclusive association cannot be hypothesised for the globally-threatened and little-known Sidamo Lark, found in a small area southeast of Nagelle Borana (Robertson, 1995).

The dry evergreen forests and patches of forests with *Juniper procera* are important because they occur in low rainfall habitat (below 1,000 mm). They host the restricted-range Prince Ruspoli's Turaco (*Tauraco ruspolii*) (Borghesio, 1997). Plants of wild coffee and *chat* (an evergreen shrub widely grown for its mild narcotic effect) are also found in the forests scattered through the territory of the Borana.

From the 1970s onwards, the Borana environment has been experiencing major land use changes. The socialist government limited mobility within the ethnic territory and promoted agriculture. The situation degenerated further after the change of government in 1991. UN-backed programmes designed to assist the repatriation of refugees and other development initiatives supported by international funds meant that entire portions of Borana territory, including two *tulaa* localities, were entrusted to neighbouring groups. More land resources were lost by the Borana in the process of economic liberalisation and globalisation. Large ranches were acquired by international investors and extensive portions of land around the towns, located in critical dry-season pastures, were assigned to town dwellers and to non-Borana immigrants for small holding cultivation. Since common property and indigenous land rights are not recognised in Ethiopia, the Borana's territory has been treated as if their common property land were 'no-man's land', to be assigned to whoever claimed it, as it is currently the case with the Liiban plains where private investors are acquiring ritual sites for farmlands. The Borana have been squeezed into the driest pockets where their grazing land was bound to deteriorate, and deprived of their drought grazing reserves (Oba, 1998). The only possible survival strategy for the Borana has been to engage in farming in the remaining least suitable places, both to obtain some food during years of good rain and to secure some land rights to the community in the long run.

The Borana institutions and norms appear increasingly unable to cope with the development and resettlement policies, and relevant decisions on land allocation and land use are simply imposed upon them by the State administration. In addition, massive immigration of people who do not share the values attached to Borana governance made the latter ineffective at the landscape level, with a strong de-legitimizing effect. The impact on biodiversity conservation is also tremendous, despite the establishment of some formal Protected Areas within the Borana territory by the socialist government. The open woodlands, especially in the wetter zone providing the habitat of the Abyssinian Bush Crow, are

becoming smaller and fragmented. Unregulated overgrazing is turning these woodland areas into dense bushes. Agricultural encroachment and overgrazing are taking place even within the Yaballo sanctuary, established to protect this outstanding biodiversity complex. A recent road-side count of the Abyssinian Bush Crow by Borghesio and Giannetti (2005) indicates a population decline of 80 per cent since 1989.

The juniper forests (*baddaa*) of the Borana conserved landscape have been devastated. The smaller patches scattered over the landscape are almost completely destroyed. The three largest forests (*baddaa sadeen*), were classified as National Forest and accordingly protected and managed by the government. All were seriously affected by the fires in 1999 and seriously endangered by commercial timber extraction and agricultural encroachment by non-Borana newcomers. Of the three, the Manquubsaa Forest (Nagelle Borana) has nearly entirely disappeared. The Arero forest remains dense only in some blocks, having completely disappeared in the remaining parts, while the Yaaballo Forest is highly exploited with some remaining dense patches (SOS Sahel - Ethiopia assessment, 2002; Borghesio et al., 2004).

During field-surveys conducted by the authors in 2002 with SOS Sahel-Ethiopia, it appeared that nearly all the ceremonial grounds previously held in a natural state by the Borana were affected by the development of new settlements and extensive farming, mostly practiced by non-Borana newcomers, or were incorporated into private ranches managed by external investors (Tache, 2000; Bassi 2003). The customary leaders have been forced to negotiate access to their holy grounds at the time of the ceremonies.

The government and the international community are supporting the development of new boreholes and introducing modern water systems. The Borana still manage to self-maintain those traditional wells they can still access, but the system of norms and the enforcing mechanisms that were preventing settlement close to wells are losing efficacy. While most pastoralists still keep their mobile villages far from the *tulaa* wells, some wealthier Borana have started to construct permanent houses and shops in vicinity of the wells, a change that can fast develop into the formation of a new town, being close to the water source.

Unfortunately this changing pattern of land use that is destroying the sustainable pastoral management and the dependent biodiversity is not producing any relevant economic gain. The territory of the Borana is not suitable for agriculture due to low and irregular rainfall. Both the pastoralists and the immigrating farmers only manage to survive on food donations from abroad.

3. Revitalizing Borana governance

We have shown a fundamental convergence of interests and a comparable conservation ethos between the Borana community and global conservationists, despite indigenous conservation being primarily motivated by sustainable livelihoods and rituals. We have also described how customary governance is under heavy external pressure and currently incapable of dealing with the new challenges. These set of problems were addressed during an action research implemented in 2007 with the objective to bridging global biodiversity goals with the values and practices of the local and indigenous communities, respecting the basic principles of equity and building upon local cultural notions and models². The research built upon previous experience of one of the authors (BT) for SOS Sahel-Ethiopia during a project designed to introduce collaborative management of the three largest juniper forest of Borana Zone³. The project worked in cooperation with the customary leadership to rebuild recognition and respect for the *gadaa* institution as a legitimate governance structure (Tache and Irwin, 2003). The 2007 action research was specifically designed to broaden the scope of the involvement of the customary leadership in conservation from collaborative forestry to

sustainable landscape management, taking into account the latest international developments in the field of indigenous and community conservation. Accordingly, the relevant international and Ethiopian legislation and policies were carefully reviewed. The results of this preliminary research were communicated to the customary leaders and other community members by adopting particular care in translating concepts having no equivalent in the indigenous language or culture. During a participatory workshop held in Yaaballo in July 2007, *gadaa* leaders belonging to three generation classes, a *qaalluu*, women and other community members engaged in self-reflection about their experience with *gadaa* governance and the new opportunities and challenges⁴. The indigenous community announced their intention to conserve biodiversity along with normal pastoral sustainable livelihoods in the territory they inhabit, asking for the necessary support to achieve this goal. They have chosen the format of a public statement in English for the international public and in the Oromo national language, for dissemination in Ethiopia. In addition, the workshop also produced specific recommendations to the community, NGOs, the Government and the international organizations. (Bassi, Tache and Liban, 2008)

3.1. The Yaaballo Statement on the Borana Conserved Landscape

The Yaaballo Statement on the Borana Conserved Landscape was conceived, discussed, drafted and reviewed on July 22nd, 2007, during the Yaaballo workshop. It recalls Borana indigenous governance and its effectiveness for the sustainable use of the natural resources mentioned in this article, referring to the relevant international legislation in the context of CBD and IUCN. Concerning the national legal environment, reference is made to some provisions for collective rights implicitly considered or recognised as a secondary claim in some sectoral law or policy document - usually under the heading of 'community' or 'local community'. The Statement also points to the lack of clear provisions for the recognition of collective rights and indigenous governance as a major problem. This gap between international and national legislation on indigenous rights clearly limits the available options, forcing the last part of the Statement into the form of an appeal to the concerned governmental and international actors, demanding support for:

- promoting development that is compatible with community-based conservation and sustainable pastoral livelihoods,
- establishing a mechanism whereby development agencies are accountable to the Borana customary institutions,
- enhancing the capacity of the indigenous community to independently assess the cultural and environmental impact of all private and public initiatives that may affect their landscape,
- advocacy efforts for the development of policies and legislation that are appropriate for pastoral development, including respect of communal land rights and mobility, and
- achieving legal recognition of customary institutions and customary laws in relation to biodiversity conservation.

4. **Conclusions and recommendations**

The case here presented shows the high potential of customary governance for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. Customary governance needs to be re-contextualised in the current global and national settings. Action-research is a crucial method to communicate relevant international achievements to local communities and to promote their own self-analysis and the elaboration of appropriate responses. The case also shows that action-

research alone cannot lead to an actual improvement of environmental governance, since it cannot solve legal and policy shortcomings at national level. The Yaaballo Statement basically remained in a vacuum, both because of some inefficiency by the government in implementing the existing policies at national level, such as in the case of the Environmental Impact Assessment, and because of the continuing practice of planning development without prior and informed consultation. Since the 2007 a new Proclamation (541/2007) and a Regulation (163/2008) on conservation and utilisation of wildlife have been approved in Ethiopia, but they still appear inadequate. They introduce a new type of protected area, the ‘Wildlife Conservation Areas to be Administered by Local Communities’, but they fail to define the rights and prerogatives of the local communities, if one excludes a generic reference to participating in ecotourism activities and in determining preferences in the utilization of wildlife. The new legislation rather defines what the prerogatives of the government are, relegating the community to a supportive implementing role. As such, the new legislation seems to be designed for small-scale community conservancies entirely dedicated to wildlife management, rather than for landscape scale community initiatives, whereas conservation of biodiversity needs to be compatible with livelihoods and development activities.

The international organizations offer the potential to help create a conducive legal and policy environment at national level . In order to give value to customary governance in the Horn of Africa there are two possible routes, either to recognize indigenous rights in national legislations, enabling indigenous communities to articulate their environmental objectives within the general entitlements to their natural resources, or, in absence of the former, to promote *ad hoc* rights-based legislation in the sector of biodiversity conservation, as suggested in the Yaaballo Statement. In order to achieve this goal, the Yaaballo workshop recommended holding a workshop at federal level on community conservation of biodiversity and community rights, with the objective of creating and disseminating awareness about the latest instruments and Resolutions in the context of IUCN and the CBD, while simultaneously building on the experience of the Borana and several other Ethiopian communities and initiatives. Given the current federal structure of Ethiopia, the workshop could have a follow up at level of each regional state. This initiative should be promoted and supported by organizations such the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), United Nation Environmental Programme (UNEP) and the CBD Secretariat, and could be organized in Ethiopia in the framework of the existing GEF-funded initiatives.

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¹ They have the capacity to carry weight easily after the dry season and provide an optimal balance of meat and milk production for market and household consumption. Because of their outstanding performance in hot and dry climates the Boran breed has from the 1920s onwards been introduced in commercial schemes and cross bred in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Australia, the United States, Brazil and Mexico (Animal Genetics Training Resource). Recently, a proposal has been formulated to preserve the 'pureness' of the breed in Boranaland (Zander and Mburu 2005)

² The action research methodology was developed for the Third Country Case Studies of the 'Governance and Ecosystems Management for the Conservation of Biodiversity' (GEMConBio), co-funded by the European Commission. The 'Borana-Oromo Community Conserved Landscapes of Southern Ethiopia' case study was entrusted by CENESTA to the authors of this article.

³ The Borana Collaborative Forest Management Project was established in 1999 with funds from the EU to stop the process of serious degradation.

⁴ The workshop was organised and facilitated by Gayo Pastoral Development Initiative (GPDI), an indigenous NGO, and SOS Sahel Ethiopia.