

# Appraisal of Community Awareness towards WAJIB Approach: the Case of Dodola District, West-Arsi, Ethiopia

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## Abstract

This study was intended at examining awareness of forest dwellers towards WAJIB approach and identifying problems hindering their participation in joint forest and wildlife resources management. Data were generated through PRA and household survey. The data obtained were analyzed using thematic narrative and descriptive statistics. The findings indicated that majority of forest dwellers (77%) have no adequate awareness about the objectives of WAJIB approach and the role of their participation in joint forest and wildlife management. The results also indicated that, currently, failure to enforce legal instruments, doubt about WAJIB continuity and human population increase within forest blocks are among the major problems hindering forest dwellers participation in co-management activities. Thus, improving their awareness by training and capacity building programs, supporting them with enabling legal and policy tools might advance sustainability of the scheme.

**Keywords:** Participation, Sustainability, WAJIB (forest dwellers association-in local language)

## 1. INTRODUCTION-Scenario of WAJIB Formation

Currently, participatory natural resources conservation approach is relatively a new concept in Ethiopia. However, there are some experiences particularly in collaborative forest and wildlife resources management (Terefe, 2003). Adaba-Dodola community managed ecotourism and hunting area in Oromia region is known for its joint forest and wildlife resources management. It is recognized as *WAJIB (Waldaa Jiraatotaa Bosonaa)* in local language substitute for Forest Dwellers Association. It was first established in Dodola district Barisa Kebele Sokora block.

The circumstance in and around the Dodola forest and wildlife area before the *WAJIB* establishment was diverse. It stayed for a long period of time without specified ownership since the coming of Derg regime to power in the name of all high forest and land must be controlled by the state. At that time, majority of the local community consider the forest and wildlife resources as the no ones' property. The approach followed by Derg regime resulted in severe destruction of forest and wildlife with illegal users. On the other hand, the existing government understood that exploitation of natural resources like forest and wildlife couldn't be reduced unless the local communities take part in the management process. As a result, the Integrated Forest Management Project (IFMP) in the Adaba-Dodola forest involved people in controlling and sharing benefit of the forest and wildlife in the co-management approach.

According to Girma (2006), the Integrated Forest Management Project called Adaba-Dodola IFMP has been operating since 1995. It was a bilateral technical cooperation project of the governments of Ethiopia and Germany with the objective of developing a feasible forest and wildlife conservation approach. The project put considerable efforts into different activities. These include awareness creation, mobilization, encouraging forest protection committees to conduct patrolling and subsidizing enrichment planting and area closure. Moreover, it also supported extensive village development activities, income generation, planting and fencing of regeneration areas to gain the confidence of the local community. But, the preliminary survey and document analysis revealed that, the project verified the impact of activities in relation to forest and wildlife conservation was insignificant, as they failed to create a sense of ownership amongst the local communities. On the other hand the absence of a clear mission that is agreed up on by all the stakeholders as the major cause for the failure. Consequently, the re-orientation of this new approach led to *WAJIB* establishment.

According to Tsegaye (2005), *WAJIB* helps to make certain that local people can share the responsibilities and the benefits of forest and wildlife conservation. Moreover, they can take decisions about issues that affect their lives. The objectives of the development and implementation of the *WAJIB* approach include empowering local people in forest management, improving livelihoods of the forest dwellers through sustainable forest utilization, increasing forest cover in *WAJIB* managed areas and ensures improved forest condition, and contributing to institutionalization of PFM as an alternative forest conservation approach.

The formation of *WAJIB* passed through different stages. These include, according to the same source, awareness creation, negotiation, and other technical supports to create harmony with local community particularly forest dwellers. First, different bodies including local communities, government representatives, elders, user groups, NGOs etc. were dealt about the necessary actions to be taken to start up *WAJIB*. These include identification of the forest and making necessary preparations. Identification of a possible situation at the beginning, meeting the local leaders and community members, identifying primary stakeholders and reaching at

common consensus with the village community on *WAJIB* implementation were the focus of this stage. Following this, information was gathered on the present state of the forest and wildlife resources, its impact on local community lives and new ways to transform the situation. Thirdly, a committee comprising of community representatives (both forest dwellers and non-forest dwellers) from different settlement areas was formed. This committee together with representatives of the District forest and wildlife service demarcated the peripheral forest boundary. Conducting settlement census, identifying preliminary forest management blocks, facilitating election of an initiation team, final adjustment of forest blocks boundaries etc. were the other emphasis of this stage. Finally, the system was institutionalized and implemented as participatory forest and wildlife management scheme.

According to Tsegaye (2005), the main principle of the *WAJIB* approach is granting exclusive user rights to the recognized members of *WAJIB* in the state-owned forest. Each *WAJIB* association has a maximum of 30 recognized members and manages an average area of 360 ha. Currently, a total of 72 user groups have concluded contracts with the Dodola district forest and wildlife enterprise office; hence the co-management activities are ongoing in each forest block.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Study Area

The study area is in Oromia National Regional State (ONRS), West Arsi Zone, Dodola district. It is located at latitude and longitude of 06°59'N 39°11'E. The total population of the District is about 194,000 (CSA, 2008). The urban population of 35, 000 (18%) is one of the largest in the zone. An early estimate indicated that 95% percent of the total population belongs to the Oromo ethnic group and the remaining 5% constituted mainly of the Amhara and Guraghe ethnic groups (GFA, 1991). Document analysis indicated that, about 60% of the rainfall comes during the main rainy season from June to August while a small amount of rainfall occurs between January and March followed by a dry spell in May.

The main dry season is in November and December (IFMP, 2002). According to Agricultural & Rural development office of Dodola district (2010), the daily temperature varies between 14°C and 17°C at an altitude of 2500m. A daily temperature variation between 8°C and 27°C has been recorded for the years 1996 –2000.

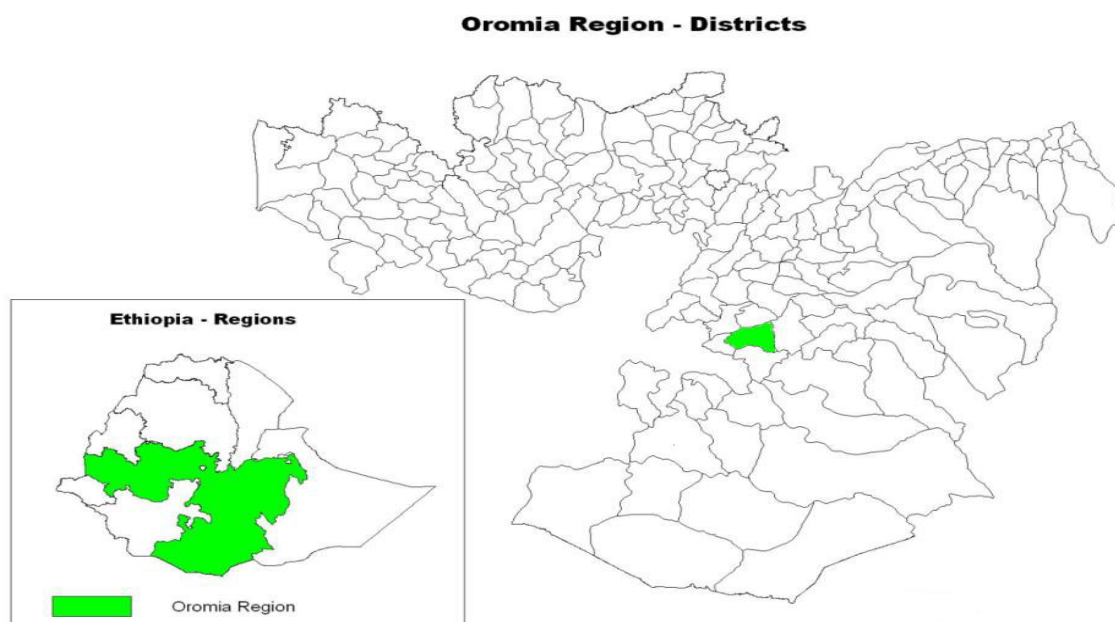


Figure 2 Geographical location of the study area

### 2.2 Data collection and analysis

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained via household survey, focus group discussion, key informants interviews and field observation. Checklists were prepared for gathering information from key informants and for the focus group discussion. Secondary information was obtained through an extensive literature review of various documents and an internet search. Three kebeles (*Barisa*, *Deneba*, and *Bura-Adele*) were purposively chosen for data collection. These Kebeles were selected because they are the first three Kebeles at which *WAJIB* as participatory forest and wildlife management approach was launched. Additionally, they are the main sites of wildlife movement.

A total of 133 households were involved in survey. Six focus group discussion and six key informants were used as source of qualitative source of data. The households were selected using simple random sampling techniques from randomly selected forest blocks.

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 16 and Microsoft excel. The quantitative data were mainly expressed by descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentages chi square, and graphs. Qualitative data were analyzed by using thematic narrative.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1 Awareness of Forest Dwellers about WAJIB Approach

Households were asked as who took the initiating role of *WAJIB* formation. From the total respondents 85% said that, GTZ played the initiative; while the rest (15%) mentioned that the credit goes to Oromia Regional Bureau of Agriculture. Statistically, there is no significant difference between forest blocks ( $X^2=1.017$ ,  $df=10$ ,  $p=0.548$ ). Even though, there were government representatives working in collaboration with project owner NGO(s), few people considered them as the *WAJIB* formation initiators. Rather, the FGDs pointed out that, forest dwellers had been in the fear of being displaced from the forest by the government following the phase-out of the project. Forest dwellers lack trust in the government because of past conventional policing approach employed by the state at Adaba-Dodola forest and wildlife area.

The forest dwellers were also inquired what factors initiated them to become *WAJIB* members. Out of all respondents, 37% noted that understanding its usefulness is the major factor that encouraged them to become *WAJIB* members. The rest (16% and 47%) became *WAJIB* members' due to fear of punishment, and because their neighbors became members, respectively. This indicates that, although, there was a series of consultation between forest dwellers and representatives of government including other stakeholders before joining in partnership, the consultation was not adequate enough to have brought about behavioral change of forest dwellers. Statistically no significant difference prevailed between forest blocks ( $X^2=1.037$ ,  $df=10$ ,  $P=0.578$ ).

As it has been shown in Table 1 below, considerable number (26%) of the respondents opposed the formation of *WAJIB* at the beginning. However, 40% of household respondents indicated that they accepted it with full willingness; while the rest 34% of them kept neutral. Statistically, there is no significant difference between forest blocks ( $X^2=0.978$ ,  $df=10$ ,  $p=0.468$ ). On the other hand, all the surveyed households described forest block, cooperative, and union as organizational structure of *WAJIB* at village, peasant association, and district level respectively. The following table depicts the summary of respondents' response.

Table 1 Forest dwellers awareness towards WAJIB approach

Concerns (questions) for assessment	Frequency	Percent
<b>Who initiated WAJIB formation?</b>		
Oromia regional bureau of agriculture	20	15
NGOs(GTZ)	113	85
Total	133	100
<b>Why did you become a member of WAJIB?</b>		
Fear of punishment	21	16
Understanding its usefulness	49	37
Following others	63	47
Total	133	100
<b>In what way did you react on the establishment of WAJIB?</b>		
Opposed it	35	26
Accepted it with full willingness	53	40
Kept neutral	45	34
Total	133	100
<b>Do you know the organizational structure of WAJIB?</b>		
Yes	133	100
No	0	0
Total	133	100

On the other hand, respondents were asked about their awareness of the objectives of *WAJIB* approach and about the source of their information. Information was sought to know how much they were aware about objectives of the joint forest and wildlife management in Dodola community managed ecotourism and hunting area twelve years after establishment. Almost all respondents answered that they knew the objectives of joint forest and wildlife management as a *WAJIB* approach. When asked to list the objectives, all respondents started with protection of forest in general, followed by sheltering of wildlife. However, majority (77%) of household respondents had less awareness on the objectives of *WAJIB* approach: empowering forest dwellers, improving their livelihood and institutionalization of *WAJIB* as an alternative forest and wildlife conservation approach.

Statistically there is no significant difference between forest blocks ( $X^2 = 1.337$ ,  $df = 10$ ,  $p = 0.738$ ). Fifty three percent of respondents indicated interaction with experts as their primary source of information about the objectives of *WAJIB* approach; while 47% village meetings as their source of information.

Table 2 Forest dwellers awareness towards objectives of *WAJIB* approach

Objectives of the <i>WAJIB</i> Approach	Able to list the objective		Unable to list the objective	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Empowering forest dwellers	39	29	94	71
Improving forest dwellers livelihood	52	39	81	61
Increasing forest cover	133	100	0	0
Contributing for Institutionalization of PFM	0	0	133	100

### 3.2 Problems Hindering Participation in Co-management Activities

Results of data collected via PRA identified a number of problems that limit the participation of the forest dwellers in the joint forest and wildlife management. The major ones are: Failure to enforce legal instruments stated in the model bylaw, human population increase (particularly within forest blocks), forest dwellers doubt about *WAJIB* continuity and forest use rent payment.

#### 3.2.1 Failure to enforce legal instruments

Forests and wildlife are expected to be conserved for the benefit of present and future generations. To realize this forest dwellers of each forest block have agreed to implement a new forest and wildlife conservation approach the '*WAJIB*'. Bylaw is produced to help them adhere to the terms of agreement they signed with the government. It (bylaw) is made in accordance with articles 7 and 9(d) of the Forest Block Allocation Agreement (FBAA) that was approved by the Oromia Regional Government in April 2000 (Model *WAJIB* Bylaw, 2000). According to the model bylaw, the bylaw prohibits illegal activities: farm plots expansion, allowing domestic animals to graze in restricted areas, increasing homestead per *WAJIB* member, unauthorized hunting and cutting trees. However, according to key informants, except the unauthorized hunting, others are becoming common in some forest blocks. As one key informant noted, the forest block committees referred considerably serious problems to the PAs administrators, police and courts to take action on individuals to be accused to the damage over forest and wildlife. According to the same source, the law and regulation that enforce to take an action on illegal users and traders are very weak. For example, the punishment taken on illegal users by the court is very insignificant. Moreover, the FGD participant forest dwellers complained that the courts of law failed to take proper legal actions against the offenders who were engaged in illegal actions like forest destruction. Generally, according to experts, there is less cooperative effort by police and court in taking appropriate action on exploiters of the forest treasure.

#### 3.2.2 Human population increase

Another obstructing problem that was raised by key informants and experts was the human population increase of the forest dwellers. Currently an average carrying capacity of forest is 30 households per forest block. However, as noted by key informants, majority of the people particularly the females are uneducated. There is no effective family planning program developed. Many people are happy to have many children. Consequently, at present the number of dependents reached a minimum of one hundred and fifty per forest block. On the other hand, according to experts, majority of the youth from forest dwellers family are not completing even primary education; and have least opportunity of employment. Thus, as noted by the same source, parents to support the increasing family size, and the youth group to fulfill their own need, might be forced to over exploit the forest and wildlife resources. On the other side, the FGD participant youngsters reach for owning their own families are complaining for the lack of space to construct their own homestead. Subsequently, what could be the fate of the members in the block, and what could be the fate of the forest and wildlife itself are some of the great questions raised by almost all FGDs that are not answered yet. The Dodola district OFWE management perceived this problem as very difficult to manage and it is becoming serious from time to time.

#### 3.2.3 Forest dwellers doubt about *WAJIB* continuity

Even though some experts tried to forward as no more doubt about continuity of *WAJIB* and its objectives realization, the focused group discussants and some key informants noted that there is hesitation. Such suspicion could arise due to the statement stated in the contract, the contract is cancelled and all FODWA members will be expelled from the forest area if the forest cover is reduced. If the government for some reason needs the forest block in the future, then the FODWA is entitled to get an increment compensation including coverage of expenses for resettlement (Contract Document 2000). *WAJIB* member key informants said that we are not guaranteed of the ownership right at policy level. Thus, according to the same source, is also difficult to maintain the current success if government might fall, so that there could be a great damage during transition period.

#### 3.2.4 Forest use rent payment

According to experts, the *WAJIB* pays an annual rent that is collected by the district OFWE and the village administration in exchange for the exclusive use rights it was granted. As noted by the same source, the rationale

behind forest rent payment is the equity consideration. The description of this rationale is that, forests were the public properties, which were administered by the PAs or communities in the PAs. But now the use rights are handed-over to only *WAJIB* members except the PAs administration do cooperatively in controlling and take action on request. To compensate such inequality, the users should pay the rent so that the rent will be shared to the PAs. Although this is the basis of paying rent, and the contract agreed up on is there, FGD participant forest dwellers complain paying the rent. They raise an argument that they were obliged to double rent payments (land use rent and forest use rent). They suggest that the use right they were provided should be considered as an incentive to compensate the cost of their guarding for public forest.

Forest dwellers might be in need of double advantage (the forest use right and farmland). However, some of them have no farmland outside the forest block. On the other hand, it is possible to understand that the people are not ensured or guaranteed the property right on forest. Their question is related to the concept that forest is a public property so that the use right currently given to them has no longer life in the future. Thus, the need for institutional strength is the important determining factor that develops the confidence of community. The following table shows summary of HHs response concerning problems hindering their participation.

Table 3 Summary of HHs response concerning problems hindering their participation

List of Problems	Level of impact on the participation (%)				Total
	High	Medium	Low	No impact	
Failure to enforce legal instruments	27	54	19	-	100
Human population increase	41	38	12	9	100
Doubt about <i>WAJIB</i> continuity	17	33	31	19	100
Forest use rent payment	23	19	45	13	100

#### 4. DISCUSSION

##### 4.1 Awareness of Forest Dwellers towards *WAJIB* Approach

The response of surveyed households for the inquiry as who took the lion's share in initiating *WAJIB* formation was different. From the total respondents 85% said that, GTZ played the initiative role. Whereas the rest mentioned (15%) goes to Oromia Regional Bureau of Agriculture. Similarly Alemtsehay (2010) noted that in Ethiopia, particularly in Bale region, joint forest and wildlife management is recommended by NGOs to conserve the unique biodiversity and ecological functions of the Greater Bale Mountains Eco region. Actually, it is obvious that any project could not be successful without political will and support of government. Document analysis indicates that there were government representatives working together in the *WAJIB* formation process in collaboration with project owner NGO(s).

At the beginning, the attitude of forest dwellers towards *WAJIB* establishment was diverse. As a result, they were motivated by different factors to become *WAJIB* members. Majority of respondents (63%) become *WAJIB* members without understanding its importance (anticipation of punishment 16% and following others 47%). However the rest 37% noted that understanding its usefulness as the major motivating factor that encouraged them to become *WAJIB* members. This indicates that, though, there was a series of consultation between forest dwellers and representatives of government including other stakeholders before joining in partnership, it was not adequate enough to brought about behavioral change of forest dwellers. As argued by Heck (2003) it is possible to say that, there was rush of initiating authorities and implementing agencies to produce visible results rather than investing on residents awareness creation. It is further suggested that the attitude of the local community towards common resources like forest and wildlife can be changed by educating them about joint management by emphasizing on the role of their participation for sustainable use (Kugonza *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, lack of adequate awareness further led the forest dwellers to disagreement with the formation of *WAJIB* at the beginning. Considerable number (26%) of the respondents opposed the formation of *WAJIB* at the launch and 34% kept neutral. Rushing to implementation of community based natural resources management without careful consideration of the level of residents' understanding about the approach, may face challenges including complete refusal (Alemtsehay, 2010).

Another inquiry forwarded for forest dwellers was about their awareness towards objectives of *WAJIB* approach. Although a series of introductory meetings were scheduled and conducted, forest dwellers were not well aware of the objectives of *WAJIB* approach. On average, 77% of respondents have less awareness towards 75% of *WAJIB* approach objectives. It is inharmonious with an argument (Terefe, 2003), in participatory natural resources management, the local community should gain insight into the objectives of development and implementation of approach. Furthermore, there was no uniform flow of information from the source (experts and local community leaders) towards forest dwellers concerning the development and implementation of *WAJIB* approach. Fifty three percent of respondents indicated interaction with experts as their primary source of information about objectives of *WAJIB* approach, whereas 47% village meetings as their source of information. Ineffective communication and insufficient trust among stakeholders can be barriers to effective and efficient participatory natural resources management (Tang and Zhao, 2011). On the other hand, there are different tools

which could play a significant role in creating better understanding in the local community about the importance of sustainable use of natural resources like forest and wildlife. These include regular communication, education and public awareness raising. However, it is possible to say that, both government representatives and partner NGOs were little committed to use these tools adequately during *WAJIB* establishment. Generally, this result is in line with that of comparative study Alemtsehay (2010) at Goba and Dello PFM.

#### 4.2 Problems Hindering Participation in Co-management Activities

Many factors could possibly affect local community's participation in natural resource management. Failure to enforce legal instruments stated in the bylaw is one of the problems hindering forest dwellers participation in joint forest and wildlife management. According to Sunderlin *et al.* (2008) forest peoples lack the political power necessary to counteract the forcible appropriation of forest and wildlife resources. Moreover, according to the same author, they lack policies that would protect and enhance their rights. The bylaw prohibits illegal activities like farm plots expansion, increasing homestead per member, cutting trees and unauthorized hunting. However, except unauthorized hunting, others are becoming common in some forest blocks. The forest dwellers are complaining the court for its setting free the illegal group who engaged on forest destruction. According to USAID (2012) the enforcement situation towards users' right as well as legal instruments is less clear in Joint Forest Management (JFM). Generally, in the study area, the law and regulation that enforce to take an action on illegal users and traders are very weak.

Another obstructing problem that raised by key informants, focus group discussants, and experts is human population increase of the forest dwellers. At present, the number of dependents exceeds one hundred and fifty per forest block. As a result there might be over exploitation of forest and wildlife resources. Particularly the youngsters reach for owning their own families within the forest area are highly opposing the prohibition of having their own homestead. In fact, the nexus between population size and natural resources degradation is ambiguous. Recently conducted assessments revealed that population density might not be links with success or failure of participatory natural resources management (USAID, 2013). According to the same literature, Namibia a large country with a small population as well as Nepal a small country with a relatively large population experienced successful participatory natural resources management. Conversely, Botswana has low population density but does not have effective participatory natural resources management experience. Some reviewers see high population pressure as a constraint to management (Banana, 1999). In contrast, there is a growing literature showing that environmental recovery can happen in situations of population growth (Mortimore, 1998). According to USAID (2013) it appears that population density and growth rates have little impact on success of participatory natural resources management. As a whole, however, the effects of population could be mediated by institutions and organizations whose impact is much greater.

The third problem claimed for local community participation deterioration in collaborative forest and wildlife management was forest dwellers doubt about *WAJIB* continuity. The main source of this hesitation is the statement in the contract document. It states that the contract is cancelled and all FODWA members will be expelled from the forest area if the forest cover reduced. If the government for some reason needs the forest block in the future, then the FODWA is entitled to get an increment compensation including coverage of expenses for resettlement (Contract Document 2000). Moreover, the problem somehow lies on the past history of nationalization of the properties. According to Tamrat (2010) forest rights are generally considered to be very insecure in Ethiopia. Furthermore, according to the same author, the security of tenure for PFM forest allocations is also tenuous as their continued existence is contingent on an annual assessment as to whether the user groups are meeting their management obligations. It is further claimed USAID (2012) that communities will continue to be at a legal and managerial disadvantage in managing forests effectively as long as their rights to forest use are restricted to use rights only. Generally, local communities have strong commitment to their own places. Thus, the need for institutional strength is the important determining factor that develops their confidence.

According to PRA results, the fourth and the last problem believed to be hinder forest dwellers participation in co-management of forest and wildlife resources is forest rent payment. The use rights are handed-over to only *WAJIB* members. As a result, they obliged to pay the rent to compensate such inequality. However, some user groups claim as they are asked to pay double rent. Their claim might be related to the concept of property right on forest. According to Mahanty *et al.* (2007) local communities would reject gradually conservation programs whose costs of managing and monitoring were unthinkingly decided and exceed perceived or realized benefits. Although, it is their independent right to prompt what they fill, it is hard to say this (paying use rent) is the serious problem. The problematic is lack of mechanisms in place to establish legal recognition of communal holdings like forest and wildlife. Likewise, Tamrat (2010) noted that, in Ethiopia, the rights of local communities with respect to communal holdings are unclear. Generally, the gap in Federal and regional laws might be the source of ambiguity. According to Nelson (2012) successful participatory natural resources management initiatives require clear institutions and good governance.

## 5. Conclusion

A study was designed to assess the awareness of forest dwellers towards WAJIB approach and identifying problems hindering their participation in the co-management activities. This study has shown that majority of forest dwellers have no adequate awareness about the objectives of WAJIB approach and the role of their participation in joint forest and wildlife management activities. In general, the time needed to facilitate WAJIB approach as collaborative forest and wildlife management scheme was underestimated and Oromia forest and wildlife enterprise officials of dodola district have done little to upgrade awareness of forest dwellers. Generally, in participatory natural resources management institutions like forest and wildlife enterprise, the local community should gain insight into the objectives of development and implementation of approach.

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