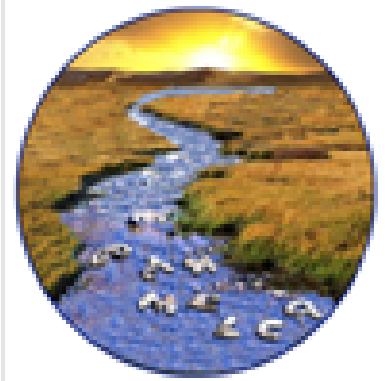


The Roles of Sacred Natural Sites for Conservation within the Context of Socio-Ecological Resilience

SUMMARY REPORT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Tesfaye Tolla & Cath Traynor



MELCA-Ethiopia

About MELCA

MELCA means 'ford' both in Amharic and Oromo language. *It means the crossing point of a river, that symbolizes building an understanding and appreciation of the traditional ecological knowledge of local peoples and culture.*

MELCA

Movement of Ecological Learning and Community Action.



HISTORY

- MELCA was registered in 2004 and accommodates a broad membership comprising foresters, lawyers, ecologists, sociologies, environmentalists, youth group , local communities and women's associations, and currently has 60 members
- MELCA Focus – Three forest areas of Ethiopia
 - Shekha Forest (SNNPR)
 - **The Bale Mountain (CRR sites)**
 - The Sebata Suba Forest (Oromiya Region)

VISION

- To see bio-cultural diversity conserved for healthy ecosystems and sustainable life

MISSION

- To work for healthy ecosystems, resilient communities and critical young generations through developing and institutionalizing innovative approaches and experiences
- Program areas
- Environmental Education/SEGNI
- Ecological Agriculture
- Biosphere reserve and Community Conserved Areas (CCAs)

INTRODUCTION CCRI SITES

Dinsho District
3 Kebeles



COMMUNITIES, LAND & LIVELIHOODS

Communities

- Communities of Abakera, Mio & Dinsho-02 Kebeles.
- Total population-25,000

Land

- Land owned by government
- Land Owner Certificate.

Livelihoods

- Agro-pastoralism
- Crops: barley, wheat, maize, lentils, beans
- Cattle & sheep husbandry



SACRED NATURAL SITES (SNS)

A community definition

“A Sacred Natural Site is;

A place of love,

A cultural place;

A home for wildlife;

A source for water;

A place where people gather together,
to help one another and people in need;

A place where we conduct worship;

In times of drought, a place where we pray to God for the rains to
come;

A place where conflicts between neighbours or religions can be
resolved;

A place where people of different religious faiths can come together
and pray for peace.”



Aman Tura, Abakera Kebele

CO-ORDINATION & PARTICIPATION

- **Co-ordination committees** established at Dinsho District & Bale Zone level: GO, NGO & Community representatives;
- Community consultation & FPIC;
- Joint methodological development;



Kebele	Elders	Women	Youth	Sub-total
Abakera	20	10	10	40
Dinsho-02	15	8	9	32
Mio	10	7	7	24
Total	45	25	26	96
Av. age	67	55	26	-

ASSESSMENT: METHODOLOGY PER KEBELE



Participatory sketch mapping



Spatial data collection



Focal group discussions



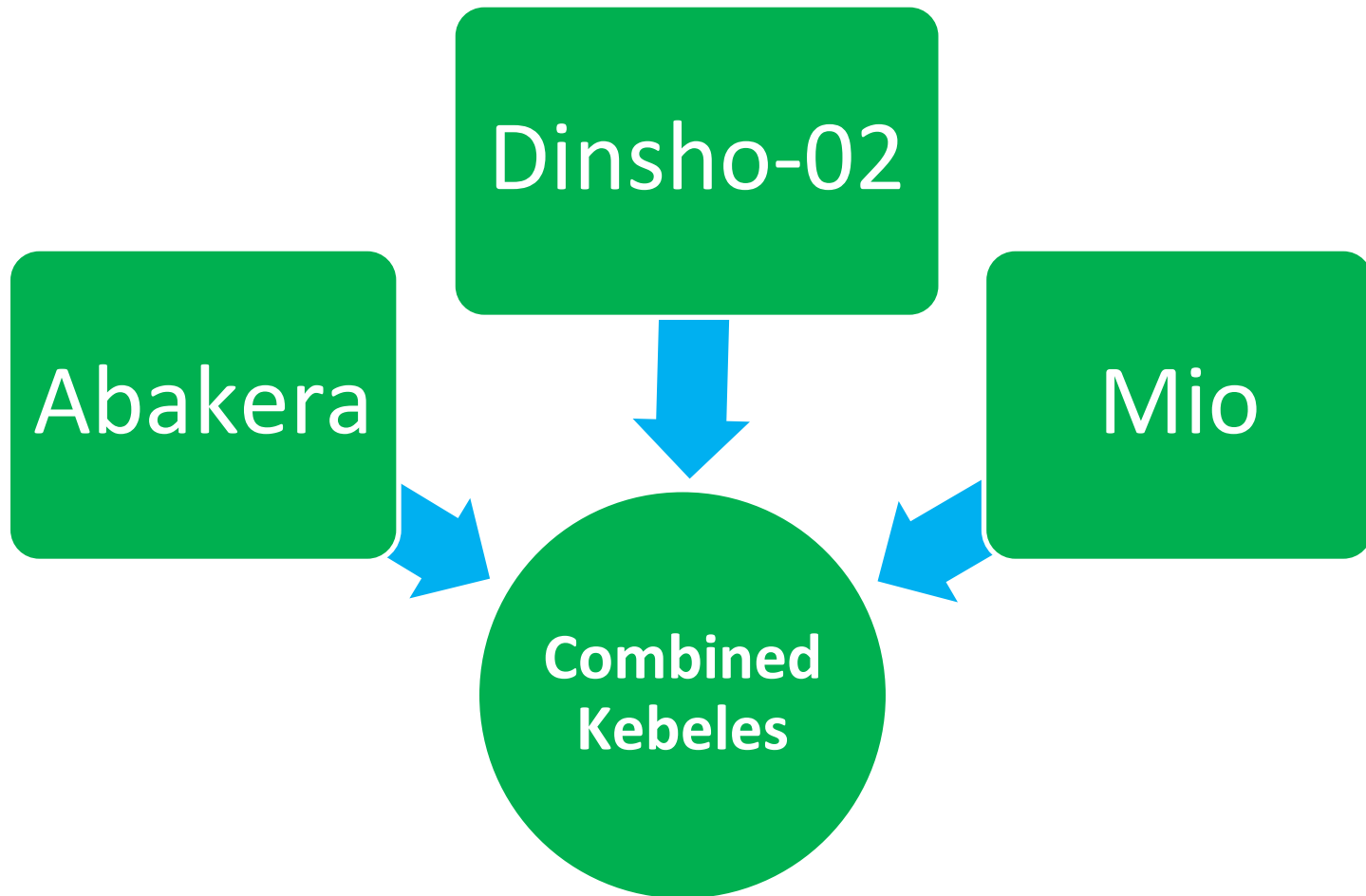
Semi-structured interviews



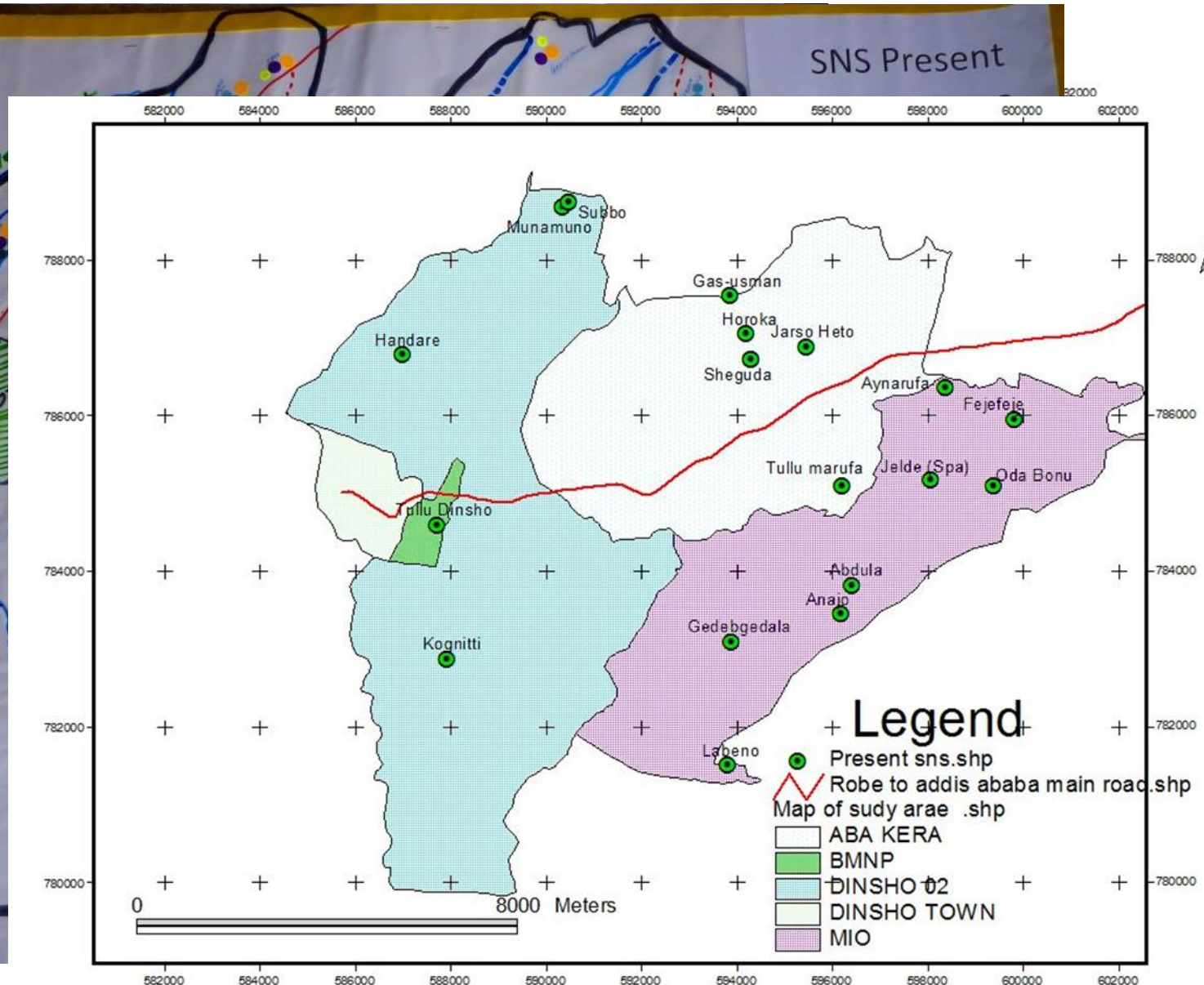
Community validation of data



RESULTS COMBINED



ASSESSMENT: COMBINED RESULTS



ASSESSMENT: RESULTS

Methodology

SNS data collected: PSM v Spatial Data Collection: 99% same (past 73 v 72 SNS identified).

Bio-physical features of SNS

72 past SNS: 96% consisted of natural features:

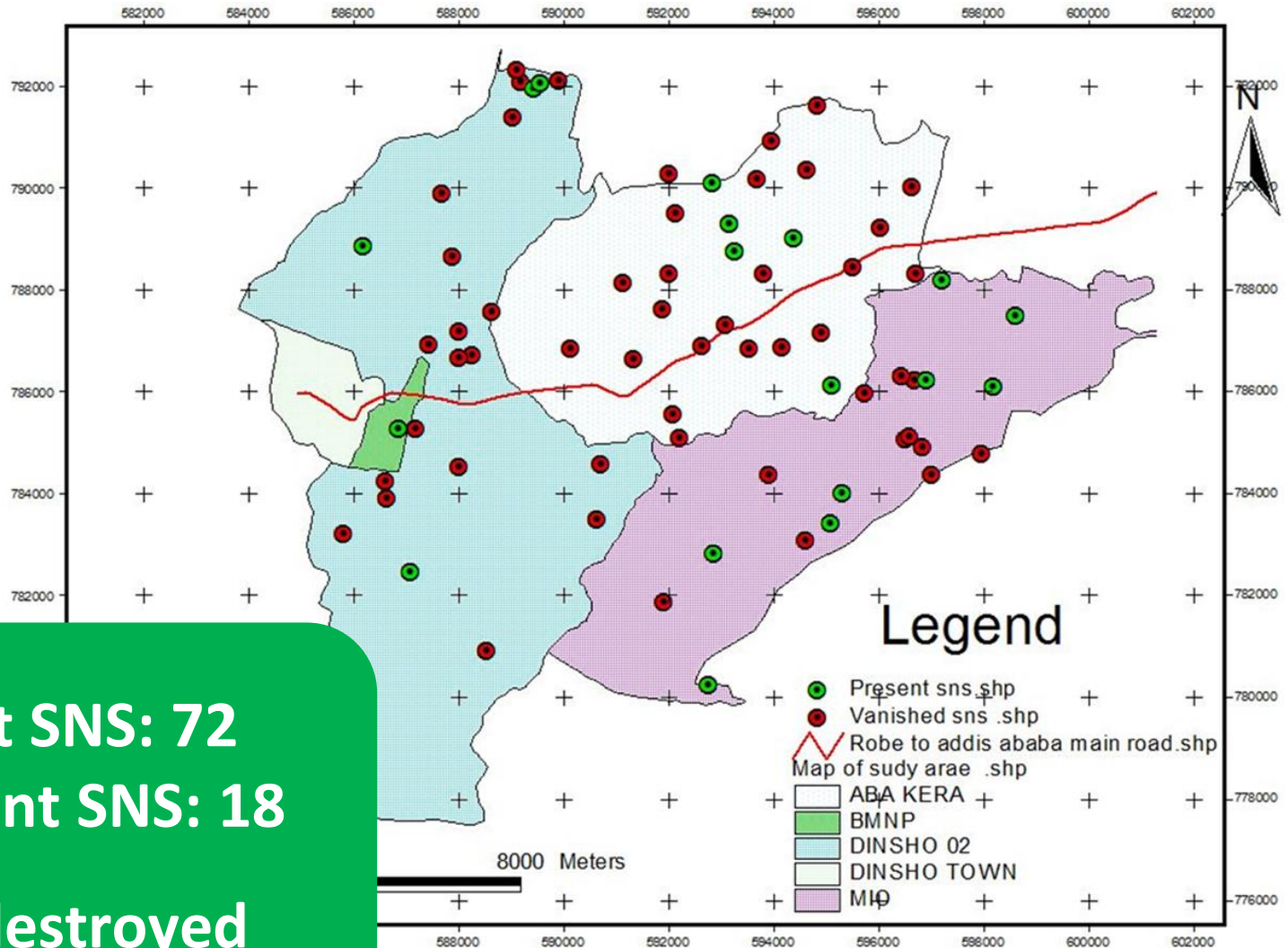
- Hills, knolls or mountain;
 - Important water sources (springs, streams & wetlands);
- & covered by indigenous trees/natural forests.

Territory size: 0.14-146 ha

95% Respondents agree SNS play a vital role for conservation & biocultural diversity.



SNS destroyed in past 50 years



Past SNS: 72
Present SNS: 18
54 destroyed

“A wake-up call”



“After the assessment which showed the loss of SNSs in the area, the community was pained to see what they have lost, and now we have to consider how to conserve and ensure the sustainability of the remaining SNS for the future. The assessment reminds us of the legacy of the past 12 generations, and now we are starting to revive the conservation activities that were conducted by them. The assessment was a wake-up-call, and each of us saw what we had lost.”

Adam Haji-jarso, Dinsho-02 Kebele

Roles of the Community for Conservation

Community

- SNS transferred for more than 10 generations;
- Those worshiping at SNS morally obliged to conserve habitat and wildlife;
- Hunting & tree cutting prohibited inside SNS;
- Sites spiritually important;

Governance

- Custodians & elders;
- Responsible for mobilizing community to conserve SNS;
- Customary norms;
- Customary laws produced, ratified & announced.

SNS: Sources of human and societal capital

Adapting to Climate Change

“A Sacred Natural Site is not just important to the community regarding culture, it is also important to minimize the impacts of climate change.

Now we are experiencing a change in rainfall patterns, and even though we have planted maize there is a shortage of rain, and insufficient fresh water. SNSs provide essential sources of water for our crops and animals, and our communities.

Destroying SNSs, doesn't just harm the forests, it also destroys our water sources, and with it our ability to cope with changing weather conditions. Thus, we are interested to conserve and manage our SNSs not just for culture but also because they can help us to adapt to climate change.”

Aman Tura, Abakerlae Kebele

Women's Rights

“Women have clear rights regarding Sacred Natural Sites.”

- Women who carry a “Sinqe” stick especially respected;
- Wronged women gather in an “illite” ceremony, and husbands publicly shamed;
- There is no violence towards women within SNS.



“Ceremonies without women are considered incomplete.”



Kebabush Senbeta, Abakera Kebele

*Hadjo Hussein &
Saeda Inbrahim, Dinsho-02 Kebele*

INTERNAL THREATS

Community perceptions & attitudes

- Failure to understand true meaning of SNS & importance for nature conservation;
- Undermining & marginalisation of SNS custodians;

Land allocation system & land use

- Land allocated for agriculture & grazing;
- Use of SNS as burial grounds.



EXTERNAL THREATS

Lack of formal recognition for SNS in Ethiopian laws and policies

Globalisation, modernisation & acculturation

- Traditional knowledge & culture viewed as “backward”



SOLUTION-ORIENTED APPROACHES

Community-initiated

- Awareness raising within the community;
- Successful examples of conserved SNS used as models for SNS at risk, peer-to-peer learning exchanges;
- Enhance capacity of custodians of SNS;
- Elders group convened, to revive customary laws and norms and develop new by-law for conservation of SNS so they are legally protected.



SOLUTION-ORIENTED APPROACHES

National laws, policies and guidelines

- Enforce existing environmental, cultural, heritage laws & articles within the Constitution supportive of SNS;
- Develop national level policy that specifically addresses needs of SNS;
- Harness international human rights and environmental laws that recognize value of SNS.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create a network between the SNS custodians within different communities, hosting regular quarterly meetings of the network, to plan community-led strategies and activities for the conservation of SNS;
- Financial and technical support to assist communities to manage SNS, e.g. fencing initiatives, and reforestation of indigenous tree seedlings around water sources.
- Scale-up the assessment to other Kebeles in Dinsho District, and to neighbouring Districts in Bale Zone.
- Advocacy at all levels with key government actors within the Cultural and Tourism Office and Rural Land Administrative and Environmental Protection Office.

Thank you

