

## **STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS DONOR-FUNDED LAND RESTORATION PROJECTS IN LESOTHO: THE CASE OF QUTHING DISTRICT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Land degradation is a global challenge and Lesotho is not immune from this problem. This problem, directly and indirectly, impacts the three important pillars of sustainable development: environmental, social, and economic aspects. Earlier research has shown that human activities are the most important drivers of degradation in Lesotho. Furthermore, poor involvement of local people in land restoration projects has been identified as a weakness leading to the failure of many land restoration initiatives in the country since 1970, when various donor agencies started supporting projects to curb land degradation. This study focused on capturing the perceptions of stakeholders involved in land restoration projects supported by donor agencies in Lesotho. The aim was to enhance the success of land restoration initiatives in the country. Stakeholders in the Quthing district were interviewed to identify gaps in current stakeholder engagement and management processes in donor-funded land restoration projects (DFLRPs). The findings indicate that the five most serious gaps in the processes of stakeholder engagement and management are poor communication, centralised power at the national level, lack of transparency, high discrimination amongst stakeholders, and lack of capacity, especially at the community level. Development and adherence to the DFLRPs legal and guiding frameworks together with effective communication amongst stakeholders were found to be the most important strategies to enhance effectiveness and efficiency of stakeholder engagement and management processes.

**Keywords:** donor-funding, stakeholders, perceptions, land-restoration, Lesotho

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>CCS</b>	Community Council Secretary
<b>DFIT</b>	District Field Implementation Team
<b>DFLRP</b>	Donor-funded Land Restoration Projects
<b>DCS</b>	District Council Secretary
<b>DPCT</b>	District Project Coordination Team
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>IFAD</b>	International Fund for Agriculture Development
<b>IPBES</b>	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
<b>MFRSC</b>	Ministry of Forestry, Range and Soil Conservation
<b>PFO</b>	Project Field Officers
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Program
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Program

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

Land degradation in Lesotho has escalated since the early 1800s and is associated with human misuse of the land, leading to loss of biodiversity, vegetation cover, agricultural production, water sources and wetlands, and environmental integrity (Akerman 1989; Ndimba et al. 2014). Maile (2001) explained that over-exploitation of native tree patches in 1833 exposed land to various forms of erosion, but mostly to water erosion. The subsequent drivers of degradation since then have been prolonged drought followed by extensive floods, over-exploitation of natural resources, over-grazing, and clearing for cultivation on steep slopes (Ndimba et al. 2014). The ultimate effects are loss of biodiversity and land integrity, secondary species colonization and dominance on rangelands, degradation of water and water resources, and complete breakdown of ecosystem functions (IPBES [Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services] 2019). Between 1990 and 1999, the country lost approximately 0.25% of fertile soil, 15% of wetland vegetation cover, and 1.8% of vegetation on rangelands, leading to a decrease in productive land of about 9-13% (Majara 2005). Currently, only 9% of land suitable for agriculture remain in the country (MDP [Ministry of Development Planning] 2018).

Though the fight against land deterioration is as old as the inception of degradation, major interventions began in the early 1970s when most of the donor-funded agencies (IFAD, UNDP, FAO, WFP) began to support the then Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, the Department of Soil and Water Conservation, which was upgraded in 2003 to the Ministry of Forestry, Range and Soil Conservation (MFRSC) (Akerman 1989; Ndimba et al. 2014). This Ministry is mandated to increase tree cover, restore degraded lands, improve rangelands, and improve the livelihoods of the citizens (Department of Forestry 2008). The Ministry holds and governs the policies for land restoration; hence all donor-funded land restoration projects (DFLRPs) are guided by this Ministry. To understand the significant contribution of these DFLRPs in Lesotho, Appendix 1 gives the chronological history of donor-funded projects implemented in the country and the donor agencies responsible for the support of each project. To date, about 50 donor-funded projects have been implemented in Lesotho since 1970, with the focus on building resilience amongst communities through adaptive measures, such as halting degradation and restoring ecosystem functions and structures to enhance the sustainable provision of the ecosystem services nature provides to human beings (Renoka 2021).

Regardless of these joint interventions by the Ministry of Forestry and donor agencies, the rate of land degradation in Lesotho has increased with time (Mhlanga 2004). This is associated with human activities and behaviour towards misuse of land resources (Maro 2011). The IFAD evaluation report of 2019 demonstrates how inadequate involvement of people in the decision-making processes during land restoration failed many DFLRPs in Lesotho from 1970 onwards (Mbago-Bhunu 2020). This is because land restoration requires holistic, transparent, and flexibly agreed decisions, derived from a diversity of indigenous and scientific knowledge, due to the complexity and dynamic nature of this problem (Reed 2008; Jepsen & Eskerod 2009), hence the significance of stakeholder considerations in donor-funded land restoration projects.

Therefore, this study focused on identifying gaps in stakeholder engagement and management in DFLRPs with an emphasis on the current processes. The aim was to explore how

stakeholders in Quthing District perceive land restoration donor-funded projects and how the processes can be improved. This is because many donor-funded projects have failed to meet the expected outcomes due to poor stakeholder targeting, weak participation throughout the project's life cycle, and a need for behavioural change towards efficient use of natural resources (Mbago-Bhunu 2020). Understanding the gaps in the current stakeholder engagement processes in donor-funded land restoration projects would assist in developing improved and acceptable strategies.

The DFLRPs in Lesotho should involve all related stakeholders (National Action Plan 2015) because stakeholders affect and/or are affected directly or indirectly and have specific contributions, power, and expectations in relation to the projects (Freeman 1984). The understanding of stakeholders, their engagement, and management in donor-funded projects is crucial. Thus, the following sections are dedicated to understanding these concepts.

## **1.2 Stakeholder engagement process in donor-funded land restoration projects**

### *1.2.1 The stakeholder concept in DFLRPs*

Since 1963, researchers have adopted the concept of 'stakeholder' in the process of land restoration and management (Nguyen et al. 2018). The term stakeholder encompasses all different kinds of people either individually and/or in groups who affect or are affected positively or negatively by the processes and outcomes of the project (Mitchell et al. 1997; IPBES 2018). This is because stakeholders have interests, ownership, and legal or moral rights, and can contribute their knowledge and support to the project (Bourne 2010; Aaltonen & Kreutz 2009).

After reviewing different literature on stakeholder analyses in land restoration projects, Jepsen and Eskerod (2009) suggested that the process of engagement should be as follows: Stakeholder identification indicates "who"; stakeholder characterization is based on their influence/power, contributions, and expectation "what"; and appropriate strategies to manage each stakeholder group "how" in DFLRPs. This process emphasizes the importance of identifying the people who can contribute positively to the projects and involve them, but without over-looking the influence that can be brought by external forces. Hence, it is vital to classify stakeholders into relevant categories (supportive and non-supportive) based on their influence and contribution to the project.

### *1.2.2 Stakeholder identification in DFLRPs*

Stakeholder identification is key since stakeholders have interests, power, influence, and can contribute to the project (Reed et al. 2014). Different methods of identifying relevant stakeholders have been suggested by many scholars, but the most common include brainstorming, expert opinion, focus groups, use of previous lists from the same institution, snowballing, generic list, and/ or a combination of these methods (Aaltonen & Kreutz 2009; Reed 2008; Freeman 1984). Jepsen and Eskerod (2009) suggest two steps: (1) the project manager identifies key stakeholders relevant to the project, and (2) together with key stakeholders, additional stakeholders are identified to form a complete list of the project's stakeholders.

### *1.2.3 Stakeholder involvement/engagement*

The Project Management Institute (PMI) (2013) defines stakeholder engagement as the actual development of procedures, protocols, and approaches to involve stakeholders based on their specific interests, roles, and responsibilities, expected contribution or impacts, and expectations from the project. Outset engagement of stakeholders during project formulation or design, planning, and implementation, results in better project outcomes (Dyer et al. 2014). Aaltonen and Kreutz (2009) outlined the fundamentals of stakeholder involvement as being inclusive and encompassing; equal share; effective communication; dedication; responsibility; ownership; capacity building; accountability; and continuous collaboration amongst stakeholders. The ultimate outcome of the engagement process is the development of a stakeholder register (PMI 2013). This is a document that assists project owners in exactly knowing their stakeholders as well as when to engage each of them.

### **1.3 Stakeholder management in DFLRPs**

The word management in this study is used to imply administration, collaboration, communication, coordination, and general human regulation structures in the DFLRPs. Effective stakeholder management is ensured by clarifying the goals and objectives of the project through flexible and adaptable implementation approaches from the inception of the project (Dyer et al. 2014). Reed (2008) outlined management principles for project success as being: participants' capacity building, mutual trust, enhancing equity, and continuous learning throughout the project life cycle. These principles can be achieved through meta-communication, legitimate strategies to deal with issues, reducing misunderstandings, and focusing on things that all stakeholders in the project can agree upon (Berglund 2010). Communication should be done through agreed and acceptable channels, and in such a manner that each stakeholder can understand and reflect on the true picture of his/her point of view.

### **1.4 Stakeholder perceptions**

Stakeholders' perceptions in ecological restoration have received insignificant recognition globally, though it is a crucial factor that catalyses the success of restoration and conservation initiatives, thus reducing the rate of potential conflicts between land users, policymakers, and other interest groups (Castillo et al. 2021). Unlike the traditional practices, where projects were seen as successful when they met costs, schedule, resources and quality attributes, the satisfaction of stakeholders is presently found to be central in project management (PMI 2017). Stakeholder views should always be considered and incorporated into the administration and management of DFLRPs to avoid misuse of resources (funds, humans, and material) during the project's implementation and vandalism of restored areas after the project's closure.

Mallak et al. (1991) indicated that positive perceptions of stakeholders can be achieved by addressing and meeting three success criteria (interests, influence, and power) plus a combination of communication and reliability of data or information to all stakeholders always. This is because, by its nature, land restoration is a complex, dynamic, sophisticated, and multidimensional process that requires transparent, flexible decisions made from a diverse pool of knowledge and skills (Reed 2008). Thus, good coordination, synergy, and relations between stakeholders can lead to the success of DFLRPs in Lesotho and elsewhere.



The identification of gaps in the engagement and management of different stakeholders in land restoration donor-funded projects and prescription of the strategies for improvement would benefit the Ministry of Forestry, donor agencies, policymakers, researchers, and the public at large in Lesotho.

Currently, land restoration projects in Lesotho are failing to achieve expected outcomes because of poor stakeholder engagement and management as indicated by the IFAD evaluation report of 2019. The Renoka 2021 report indicated that since 1970, when donor agencies started supporting restoration initiatives in Lesotho, the success rate of projects has been minimal because of weak coordination amongst stakeholders, especially key implementers/agencies. This study, therefore, strives to find the gaps in current stakeholder engagement and management processes in DFLRPs, and suggest improvement strategies for the country.

## **1.5 Main objective and research questions**

This study aimed to explore how stakeholder engagement and management in donor-funded land restoration projects can be improved in Lesotho.

The research questions were:

- a. How is the current process of engaging and managing stakeholders in donor-funded land restoration projects?
- b. How do different stakeholders in Quthing district perceive donor-funded land restoration projects?
- c. How can stakeholder engagement and management processes be improved?

## **2. METHODS**

### **2.1 Study area**

The study was conducted in Quthing District in Lesotho (Fig. 1). Lesotho has four agro-ecological zones (Senqu river valley, low-lands, foothills, and Mountains) and Quthing is within the Senqu river valley, which is in the Southern part of the country. This district is characterized by an area of 2,916 km<sup>2</sup>, a population of about 115,500, and a subtropical, cool, semi-arid zone with an average rainfall of 700 mm/year (BoS [Bureau of Statistics] 2020). This district has an elevation ranging from 1,600 to about 2,000 meters above sea level (Lamboll & Pound 2014).

The climatic conditions most associated with degradation in Quthing district include hail, prolonged drought, extreme heat, winds, snow, and floods compounded by steep slopes (Lamboll & Pound 2014). These unfavourable climatic conditions plus a high number of grazing animals, estimated in the 2016 animal census to be 36,600 cattle, 12,900 donkeys, 6,100 horses, 103,600 goats, and 244,700 sheep (BoS 2020), catalyse the rate of land deterioration. The main challenge is that more than 80% of the citizens in this district depend solely on land for crops (on plots of about 0.5 to 2 hectares per person) and animal production (IUCN [International Union for Conservation of Nature] 2016), hence they are negatively

affected by declines in production. Due to these extremities, Quthing district has called the attention of many donor-funded land restoration agencies to reduce land degradation and build resilience amongst citizens.

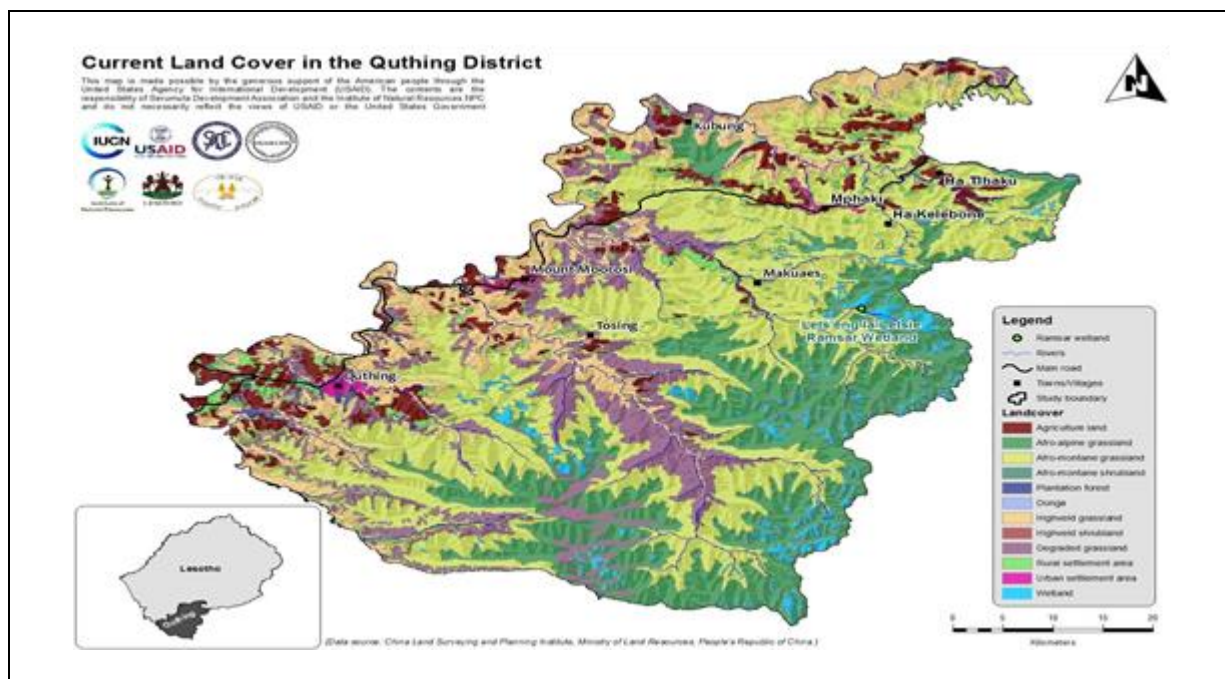


Figure 1. The study area. (Source: IUCN 2016).

## 2.2 Data collection

### 2.2.1 Stakeholders/respondents

Quthing district is divided into five administrative councils: Mphaki, Telle, Seapala, Moyeni, and Tele. For this study, the respondents/stakeholders were categorized into government ministries, local governance, donor agencies, land users (associations), and the public (media) (Mbago-Bhunu 2020; Mallak et al. 1991).

The study focused on gathering stakeholders' views about donor-funded land restoration projects based on their experience of working in such projects and by virtue of their respective designations. The study consisted of 15 respondents in Quthing District (Table 1).

Each district in Lesotho is governed through the office of the District Administrator, District Council Secretary, and the Principal Chief. All developments intended for the district enter from the national level to the district through these offices hence their significance in this study. Due to a lack of technical capacity, these offices execute activities through the line government ministries which ensure effective and efficient implementation of government policies and mandates. Donor agencies work with the line ministries under the office of the district administrator. At the district level, these donor agencies are represented by the project field officers (PFO) who ensure that each project is implemented according to the agreed standards and expectations.

**Table 1.** Categories of respondents and number of respondents per category.

Category	Stakeholders	Number of respondents
Public officers	Administration offices	2
	Government Ministries	2
Donor representatives	Project field officers	3
Community representatives	Chiefs	2
	Community Council secretaries	3
	Associations	2
	Media	1
Total		15

Community representatives encompass a diverse pool of offices as indicated in Table 1. Generally, these groups own the land, ensure effective implementation of planned activities, protect natural resources and human wellbeing, and are directly in contact with the land where the restoration work is done. They are the direct beneficiaries of natural resources.

### 2.2.2 Sampling methods

Qualitative data was gathered from the selected key informants in the Quthing district. This approach was selected for its relevance to acquiring information about peoples' understanding based on their experiences with a phenomenon (Nowell et al. 2017). Data was collected through semi-structured, open-ended interview questions (Appendix 2) where research assistants conducted face-to-face interviews in June 2022. This approach allowed for follow-up questions when more clarity was needed, and it was found convenient to conduct interviews during the respondents' preferred times (Corbin & Strauss 2008).

Non-probability purposive sampling was used, where individual respondents were deliberately selected based on their experiences and knowledge about donor-funded land restoration projects (Taherdoost 2018). Due to other commitments during working hours, some respondents were interviewed after working hours and others on weekends. One respondent preferred to take the interview questions and answer them during the weekend through a phone voice recording. Five respondents refused to be recorded and hence the research assistants took notes of what they said during the interviews. One of the donor representatives was not in the district during the interview period. This person got sent the questions and responded in writing with the agreement that, if something was not clear in the answers, the researcher could contact the respondent for clarification at any time.

The data collectors were officers in the Ministry of Forestry, Range, and Soil Conservation from the Department of Forestry, and Department of Conservation respectively. Both were very conversant and knowledgeable about conducting semi-structured interviews. These two officers head their sections at district level, which automatically makes them part of the donor-funded projects field implementation team at district level. They therefore interact with all other stakeholders in these projects on a day-to-day basis. The researcher conducted a preliminary session with them before the data collection in order to ensure a similar and common understanding of this project. The outcome of this orientation session was signing the ethical form attached in Appendix 3.

The interview questions covered the two main aspects of the study. The first part was intended to gather information about the stakeholder engagement process (identification, characterization, and management) in donor-funded land restoration projects. The second part focused on the stakeholders' general views about the donor-funded land restoration projects with an emphasis on their challenges, observed gaps, and recommendations. These two aspects were analysed against literature to suggest developments in stakeholder engagement and management processes in donor-funded land restoration projects in Lesotho.

### **2.3 Data analysis**

Data were analysed using thematic content analysis as it helps to analyse people's perceptions and experiences about an incidence (Corbin & Straus 2008). As the respondents used both English and Sesotho language, the first step was to transcribe the recorded data into English.

From MS Word, data was transferred as it is to Microsoft Excel where the researcher put all responses for each question together. The initial codes were developed from the transcripts and grouped into themes. Further verification was conducted where similar codes were grouped to develop encompassing sub-themes and then final themes. The themes were interpreted using the thematic analysis methods to investigate respondents' perceptions and the underlying reasons for their responses (Maguire & Delahunt 2017). The final process was to interpret the final themes against literature related to this study.

## **3. RESULTS**

Quthing district has several donor-funded land restoration projects and different stakeholders who were involved in these projects gave their views on the processes of engagement and management in these projects. This section outlines their perceptions towards the current and previous DFLRPs in the district. To adhere to the agreed ethical agreements, the responses are presented without revealing the identity of those interviewed, but rather referring to their main groups (administration, government ministries, PFOs, chiefs, community council secretaries, community associations, and public representatives).

### **3.1 Current process of stakeholder engagement and management**

The process of engaging different stakeholders in Quthing's DFLRPs was categorised based on who were relevant stakeholders and their importance as well as the approaches used to engage them with reference to how they were identified, classified, and involved.

### 3.1.1 Who are the stakeholders?

All donor-funded projects in Lesotho, regardless of the area of interest, enter the country through the Ministry of Development Planning which oversees and regulates those projects. This Ministry, as stated by PFOs and administration offices, liaises with relevant ministries and donor agencies to implement the intended projects. Respondents attested to the fact that stakeholders in donor-funded projects are diverse and have different mandates, as indicated by one PFO:

*A number of them are implementers, beneficiaries, and policymakers. Implementers would be either state or private organizations which will help realise the set outcomes of the project. Beneficiaries are also key as they ensure that funds are spent on the execution of activities that are related to the beneficiary's needs. Donor-funded projects have agreements between the borrower, which is the government, and funders [UN agencies], so policymakers need to ensure that funds are spent as agreed.*

The respondents also pointed out that the decisions regarding who is to be involved as a stakeholder in each project are based on the main goals of the project and the relevance of each person to the project. Table 2 outlines all stakeholders whom the respondents found to be always involved in donor-funded land restoration projects.

The government ministries are mandated for public developments like land restoration by the provision of resources (financial, material, and technical expertise) as all respondents said. These ministries operate under the DA's office at the district level. This means that the DA is the overseer of government policies at the district level. The administration offices (DA, DCS, PC) facilitate linkages between the communities, ministries, and donor agencies. This is to ensure that public expectations and rights are considered in all developments in the district. All respondents indicated that donor agencies support the government ministries with resources, such as finances, materials, and capacity building for technical officers and communities.

Community representatives (chiefs, CCSs, associations, media) stated their roles in donor-funded projects were to ensure effective implementation of projects, protection of these developments, linking communities with different offices, and mobilization and sensitization of communities to support government initiatives like rehabilitation works. One chief clarified these roles:

*I play a very big role in these donors funded projects since I am responsible for sensitizing communities about these projects and implementation of the activities of the projects. My responsibility is to link the community I am ruling with such projects and give advice to the donors based on community needs.*

Academic institutions were mentioned by only one PFO who was first very hesitant to describe their roles in these donors-funded projects but eventually said that researchers and academicians conduct studies on the feasibility of the projects as well as being used by donor agencies as project consultants.

**Table 2.** Categories of stakeholders in DFLRPs.

Categories	Group	Stakeholders
Public officers	Administration	District administrator
		District Council secretary
	Government ministries	Forestry, Range, and Soil Conservation
		Agriculture and Food Security
		Environment
		Local Government and Chieftainship
		Environment
		Education and training
	Departments	Water Affairs
		Lesotho Meteorological Service
Disaster Management Authority		
Donor agencies	UN Agencies	FAO
		IFAD
		World Vision
		WFP
	NGOs	Serumula
		Red Cross
Academic institutions	Research and academic institutions	National University of Lesotho
		Agricultural research
Community representatives	Chiefs	Principal Chief
		Area Chief
	Community councils	Five councils: Mphaki, Telle, Seapala, Moyeni, and Tele
	Public representatives	Media
		Spiritual denominations
	Societal groups	Associations (e.g., Grazing associations); environmental protection communities

### 3.1.2 Approaches for stakeholder engagement and management

To understand the previous and current processes of stakeholder engagement and management, the public officers and community representatives were asked to clarify the prevailing processes within the projects they worked with. These processes were broken down into identification, classification, and involvement processes of stakeholders.

#### a. Identification processes

As indicated earlier, the Ministry of Development Planning links the different donor agencies with relevant key ministries based on each ministry's mandate. The public officers said that, from the national level, projects enter the district through the office of the DA consulted by the donor agencies (project field officers). However, before that, the district administrators from all districts are called for national meetings where they are briefed by key ministries about the projects in the pipeline. The only challenge is that some project field officers do not consult the office of the district administrator when such projects start, which results in the failure of this kind of projects:

*Donors come into the district with a clear plan and their mission in the district. They first approach the DA's office to introduce their mission. But unfortunately, sometimes they just go straight to the targeted project site and those projects are rejected by communities.*

The common methods of identification at the national and district level as indicated by PFOs, ministries, and administration officers, include using the ministerial database from previous similar projects; brainstorming by project managers, key ministries, and donor agencies; or consultation meetings and workshops where experts use existing platforms such as the District Planning Unit, National Planning Board, and community groups to seek relevant stakeholders through open discussions. These experts use institutional guidelines, such as policies, project memoranda of understanding, and reports.

At the district level specifically, through the administration offices (DA, DCS, and Principal Chief), the project's field officers and key ministries facilitate public gatherings where communities elect a suitable candidate for each project after being introduced to the project core mandates. One of the respondents attested that:

*Facilitators normally call public gatherings where they introduce and educate communities about the project. The societies that are within communities are strictly involved at the grassroots level. The importance of projects is specified, and weakness is also introduced as to enable individuals and society to know and examine all sides of the projects. Then community members elect people who would represent them.*

The public officers' respondents seem to be clear about the current identification processes, while the community representatives were not very certain about the processes from the district to the national level, except that, from time to time, they would be called for meetings when new projects are to start in their areas.

#### b. Classification methods

Classification at the district level includes individuals based on their designation, such as DA, chief, and councillor, and/or based on the roles and responsibilities each stakeholder is to play in the project. The knowledge and skills of an individual play a pivotal role in classifying them as key (primary) or supportive (secondary) stakeholders:

*Stakeholders can be classified by their titles in the district or community; that is, area chief, PC, and other people who can offer their services, skills, and knowledge. We can have the primary stakeholders like the community, farmers, youth, women, and Area chief who are directly affected by the project. We can again have secondary stakeholders whose involvement is temporary, like the policeman.*

On top of these criteria, similar responses were given by all stakeholders that, at the community level, stakeholders are classified based on their level of influence (high, low, passive) on the project, i.e., those with high influence are sometimes given the privilege to lead the restoration work by being project foreman. The two main factors considered are: the availability of an individual to do the job and that all social group dynamics (youth, women, disabled, and men) should be represented in the project implementation. It became clear from

the interviews that this latter information relates to the involvement of community members in the actual restoration work where they are engaged as labourers.

c. Involvement approaches

The involvement of stakeholders in these projects seems to be linked to the roles each group plays. Community representatives and communities are involved as project implementers, protectors of rehabilitated areas, and beneficiaries as they are hired and paid for doing rehabilitation work. One association representative stated their duty as being:

*Fully involved in day-to-day activities throughout the lifetime of the project.*

One of the community council secretaries emphasised the same point:

*...to justify that recruitment processes are done correctly and to ensure that the community is satisfied. To improve project understanding to the communities using local knowledge; increase project acceptability and promotion by local community.*

On the other hand, the government ministries and PFOs provide resources and technical expertise to the communities, while the administration offices link all the related stakeholders. The main challenge mentioned from time to time by community representatives is that they are not involved from the inception of the projects. For example, one of the chiefs said:

*I don't have much power I can say, it is medium because these donors came to us with what they want us to do and what they are going to fund. Meaning, once they realize that the area is around the needs that the project is to address, they just work, and the stakeholders[ministries] will arm-twist us to be in. So, engagement of all stakeholders does not happen according to my expectations. Often stakeholders are involved at a later stage, and this is very unsatisfactory.*

This seems to contradict what one of the councils' secretaries said based on their involvement:

*My community council began working hand in hand with donor-funded projects in 2016. ... being representatives of the community, we are normally engaged in these types of projects for coordinating communities and projects administrators, and I have high influence in that the working sites are being given by the community.*

It is worth mentioning in this context that there seems to be a common confusion in Lesotho that, since the introduction of the councils in 2009, the offices of chiefs are side-lined in community developments and, as a result, chiefs seem to be reluctant to protect the introduced developments.

### **3.2 Approaches to manage stakeholders' engagement in DFLRPs**

Once stakeholders are engaged in the projects, their engagement must be effectively and efficiently administered to ensure the best outcomes of the project. This section presents the strategies used to manage stakeholders in donor-funded projects with an emphasis on



administration and coordination structures that influence the level of participation of each stakeholder.

3.2.1 Stakeholder coordination and administration structures

Out of the 15 respondents, nine indicated that the administration of donor-funded projects at the district level starts from the office of the District Administrator down to the grassroots level, through relevant offices as shown in Figure 2. The same way these projects are administered, the same way they are coordinated as shown by the left linkage in Fig. 2. One of the project fields officers described the administration structure as follows:

*...DA is the governing body ... coordinating team made up of heads of units is responsible for coordination. The field implementing team is made up of line/host ministries and partners for implementing the project and provision of technical supervision, monitoring, and reporting to the coordinating team, and the community for participating and benefiting from the project.*

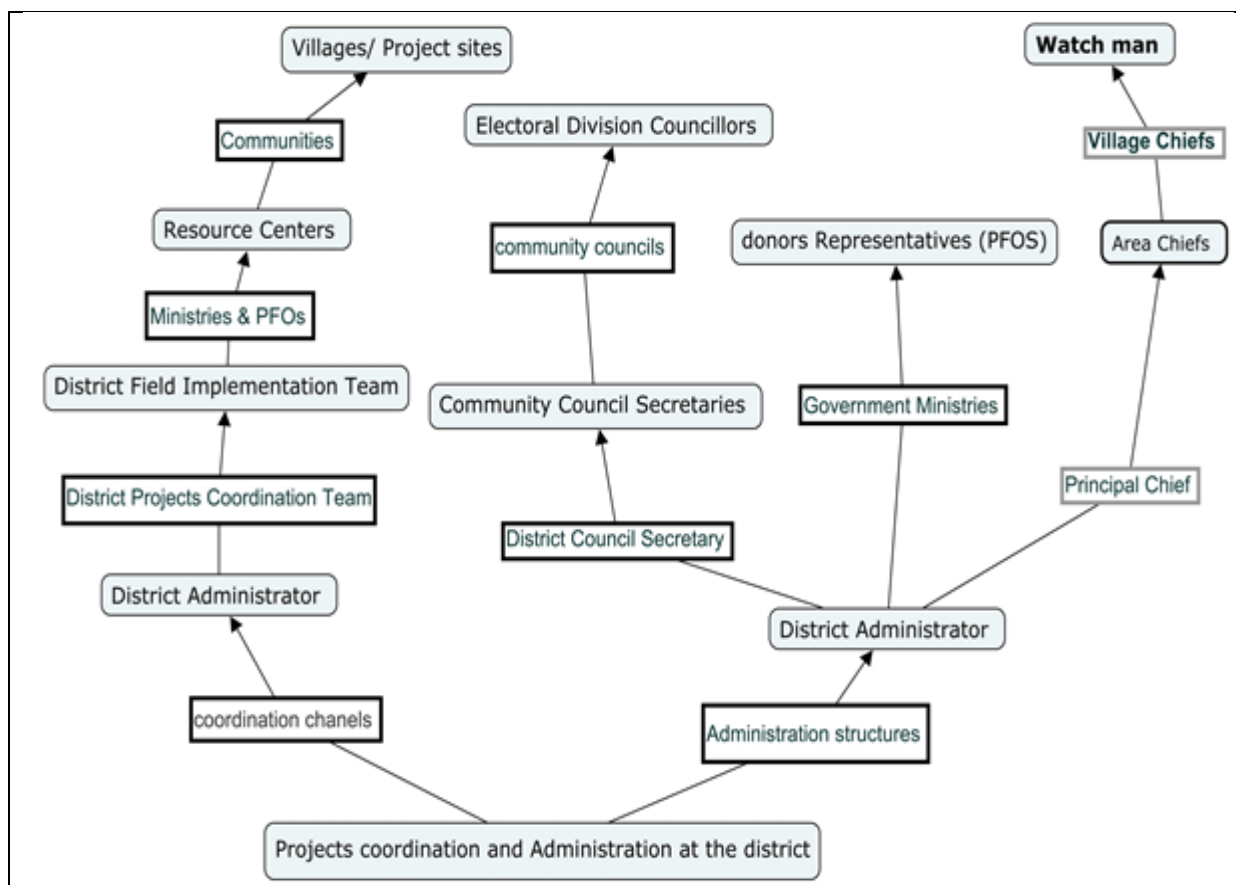


Figure 2. Coordination and administration of donor-funded projects in Quthing district.

The structure presented in Figure 2 encompasses all administration levels from DA down to village level. It was developed based on the data collected in this study. This structure also helps to harness and fairly distribute different donor-funded projects to support many people

in different areas in the district, rather than concentrating on one area. As noted by one of the ministries officers:

*These structures help to inform different departments about the existing projects in the district. They also help to reduce duplication of efforts in the same area.*

### 3.2.2 Stakeholder participation

Using the scale of “worst – moderate – best”, when respondents were asked to rate stakeholder participation in the donor-funded projects, they gave ranges from “moderate” to “best”. However, it became clear from the reasons they gave for their rating that this seemingly “good” participation was attached to the incentives derived from the projects. For example, communities are paid when doing restoration work and officers are given DSA to supervise the work. One of the PFOs attested that:

*For commitment: host ministries are committed, but also this is attached to incentive, lunch, or DSA. For equity: I can give three out of ten for inclusiveness; not the same for all at all levels. The participation is GOOD. Everyone plays their role well. All district public officers and community structures well represented.*

Two main challenges described by eight out of eleven public officers and donor representatives, are that key ministries participate more than the rest of the incorporated ministries and agencies, and this compromises their participation. Hence, some rated participation as “moderate”. One of the respondents said in an angry tone:

*Where there are good benefits, like DSA, we only see key ministries involved and where there are no funds, they want us to join them, so we are very reluctant to do that. We are not here for kidding.*

The other challenge affecting their participation and was raised by all respondents was the shortage and poor allocation of resources at the district level (transport, funds, materials) and at community level (tools).

### 3.2.3 Communication channels and platforms

Stakeholder participation was assumed to be effective based on the effectiveness of the communication between stakeholders. The public officers and district donor representatives listed the communication platforms used in Quthing district as: the District Administrator, the District Project Coordination Team, the District Field Implementation Team, community council meetings, monthly chief meetings, and community-specific group meetings. The last three were also mentioned by the community representatives.

Throughout these structures, the means of communication included phones (WhatsApp and calls), verbal communication during meetings, and letters (memos and savingrams). Only one respondent (PFO) mentioned the use of radio to pass messages. One of the administration officers summarises the communication platforms and channels thus:

*We use several channels like going through the DA’s office, who draft the memo, and savingram to the stakeholders. The sitting of the District Planning Unit,*

*District Project Coordination Team, and the District Field Implementing Team communicate or discuss some of the things like reporting and the plans either monthly or weekly. The use of ICT, like the WhatsApp groups, also adds to the mode of communication, and they can be rated 80% effective due to lack of connection in some areas.*

In terms of the effectiveness of all these platforms and channels, the respondents clearly stated that this is based on the participation of members in the groups to attend meetings and share information. One of the administration officers said that:

*Sometimes stakeholders don't attend the meetings and don't share information with others and that leads to poor communication among the members.*

On the same issue, the chiefs and council representatives described the problem of late message dissemination to them. As one chief said:

*The donors don't tell us plans in time and when we fail to show up, is like we disobey the district administrators' request, yet we need time to prepare ourselves, especially for the meetings down at the district and when we have to pass the message to the communities.*

Generally, the communication platforms and channels mentioned were preferred by the stakeholders except for these logistical challenges.

### **3.3 Stakeholder perceptions in relation to engagement and management**

To further understand the effectiveness of the current processes of stakeholder engagement and management in DFLRPs, the respondents were requested to give their critical and analytical views/perceptions based on their level of satisfaction, the gaps that they identified in the processes, as well as to recommend what they think can be the best processes with reference to their district.

#### *3.3.1 Level of satisfaction*

From the review of the results, the researcher decided to divide the presentation of community representatives' and the public officers' responses as they showed completely different trends.

##### *a. Public officers' views*

Although the existing processes and structures seemed preferred by the respondents, the actual implementation was strongly not preferred. Out of seven public officers, six rated their power and influence as very low/insignificant. Some of the reasons given were as follows:

A representative of the administration officers said:

*...because the DA's office is not allowed to decide on a suitable project site, so very often this is done at the national level without a thorough assessment of communities' needs.*

One of the Ministry officers said:

*I only have power and influence at the district level because I get instructions at the national level which I cannot dispute.*

While one of the donor representatives stated that their power and influence:

*... is limited because some of the resources, including the budget, are hosted at the national office, and approvals of plans or activities are also at the national level.*

On the other hand, one respondent who indicated his satisfaction, stated the importance of “open existing platforms” for everyone in these donor funded projects:

*There is an open floor for all, and ideas or suggestions are taken into consideration as more often what is implemented would be coming from the grassroots.*

When the respondents from the group of public officers were asked if stakeholders get similar opportunities that give them similar rights within the projects, they all stated that those opportunities (e.g., transport, DSA, tools, and materials) are more inclined to be given to the host key ministries. That compromises the rights of other stakeholders in these projects. As a consequence, they were all were very unsatisfied with how benefits and opportunities were distributed.

#### b. Community representatives' views

The community representatives seemed to be fully satisfied with the current processes while public officers were only satisfied to some degree. Out of eight community representatives, six showed their satisfaction while only one was dissatisfied with a few projects. Only one from the chiefs' side indicated a clear dissatisfaction due to the limited information (reports and plans) he got from the project field officers. It was observed that the councils were always informed about the projects, and they are the ones who link the donors and others within the communities, giving them power and influence within projects at the community level as stated by one CCS:

*The way they [donors] enter our councils is very satisfying, and in terms of identifying the places of work, we are the ones who do so, basing ourselves on the guidelines the project has set. In the community, we first look at the vulnerable individuals, they are the first group that is going to work on this kind of project so that we can close the gap between the rich and the poor.*

#### 3.3.2 Identified gaps

Out of the 15 respondents, 11 mentioned that most of the stakeholders, especially community representatives, were excluded during the initial phases (initiation and planning) of the donor-funded projects, and this led to poor site targeting. One of the chiefs said:

*There are huge gaps since these donor-funded projects are not planned in collaboration with local communities which will be affected by the project. And*

*there is no time for discussing the terms and conditions of implementing the objectives of the project.*

Some of the issues which were raised by more than half of the respondents included lack of training for stakeholders, discrimination from the key ministries, and lack of transparency from the national level to the district level, from the district to communities' level as well as within stakeholder groups. The other most important points which were raised by community representatives, donor representatives, and administration officers alike were the lack of legal guiding documents for stakeholder involvement in these donor-funded projects, lack of standardization of donor-funded project guidelines (e.g., some have more benefits than others), and poor monitoring and evaluation of the projects. One of the PFOs said:

*The project should be transparent about the resources. On implementation, projects should not forget about community action plans. Projects should look at substance rather than running against time.*

This person clarified that donor projects always tend to delay starting by one or two years and, as a result, always run against time. Furthermore, none of the projects consider the existing community action plans which are built on the desires of the communities. The same PFO further stated that:

*...communities always feel left out because their needs are not addressed, but they take part in these projects because they are paid for it. Again, as donors, we are assisting the government ministries which we expect to take control of projects after we leave, but they are also very reluctant, hence the sustainability of implemented projects after donors phaseout is very questionable.*

The other challenges which were specifically raised by donor representatives and ministries officers include: lack of resources (transport), centralization of activities, generalization during stakeholder engagement, e.g., the identified ministry is asked to nominate persons to engage in a certain project, but some of the nominated persons are not knowledgeable about the project or the role they are expected to play. As one donor representative said:

*The main one could be the fact that some stakeholders are identified and incorporated as entities, not individuals, and group dynamics at times do not give the best implementation and responsibilities as opposed to dealing with individuals.*

### 3.3.3 Suggested improvements

Most of the recommendations suggested by the respondents were intended to counteract the gaps mentioned in the interviews but several additional suggestions were also mentioned. For example, the need to consider public cultures and norms during project implementation. As one association representative said:

*Also, consider the cultural norms and beliefs of the people at the project sites as failures to do that cause conflicts in the communities.*

The issue of considering the community action plans raised by the donor representatives was also indicated by a chief who said:

*The donors should not restrict us when working on such projects. They should let us shift over to things we see are going to work for us, not as they want.*

This suggests a need for joint planning by all stakeholders (policymakers, donor agencies, Ministries, district administration, and community representatives) from the inception of the projects as stated by the respondents.

Another exceptional point, stated by the association and media representatives, was the involvement of parliamentarians in the administrative structures of these donor-funded projects, so that they can have first-hand information about what is happening from time to time.

### **3.4 The impact of donor-funded projects**

The community representatives were asked to give their views on the impact of these donor-funded projects in relation to environmental improvement and the building of resilience within the communities. They all indicated that the socio-economic impacts of these projects have been both positive and negative. For example, one chief said:

*To the community, they bring togetherness to those whose needs the donor is addressing, but division to those who are left behind.*

People find these projects to be a source of income, but they are not all engaged in the restoration work, hence the division. Six out of eight community representatives indicated, however, that in general these projects have a positive impact. One of the association members said:

*The benefits are that our livestock now has access to what was not there at first, like water and forage. We even have rehabilitation equipment, and we are far better off when compared with the past years.*

Another important point was raised by one of the community council secretaries:

*On top of fruit trees that we get for our orchards, these projects help in educational purposes, as previously our kids thought fruits like apples and pears are only bought from the shops but now, they see them growing here.*

The environmental impacts outlined by these respondents included improved rangelands, reduced run-off, and the aesthetic beauty of the rehabilitated sites.

Generally, the findings indicated that different groups of people are represented in the donor-funded projects but that some are not involved at the inception of the projects and that causes discrepancies in site identifications. The stakeholders were mainly satisfied with the processes of engagement and management, except for some logistical gaps in the actual implementation of the work. According to one administration officer:

*There is a great improvement in the work done towards stakeholder involvement in these projects. But re-fresher training can be quite significant. People with disability also need to be engaged and understood since they also need the opportunities in the projects.*

## **4. DISCUSSION**

Stakeholder involvement in donor-funded land restoration projects in Lesotho is very crucial and significant for the success of this kind of projects, as revealed by the study results. The respondents seemed to be quite conversant about the existing engagement and management processes at the national, district, and community levels. The respondents' views made it clear that the processes are seen as quite good and accommodative for everyone, though some actual implementation practicalities need to be taken better care of. Some examples were harmonising the implementation logistics for all projects, breaking the ministerial "silom mentality", and ensuring that all stakeholders, especially community representatives, are incorporated already at the inception phase of the projects. This section discusses the results in relation to the research questions and literature on stakeholder engagement and management in donor-funded land restoration projects.

### **4.1 Stakeholders in donor-funded land restoration projects**

The results revealed that stakeholders in these projects are either individuals, selected based on their designation and specialised skills and knowledge, like district administrators and researchers, or can be a group represented by an organisation, such as the government ministries, and or/councils' representatives. The bottom line for stating who are relevant stakeholders is based on the roles and responsibility of each stakeholder in the project, as the results revealed that all these stakeholders have specialised roles to play in the projects. For example, the chief protects the restoration sites and donor agencies provide financial support to the government ministries, who give technical support towards the implementation of the projects. In other words, all people, either individuals or groups, who affect the project, like donors, or are affected by the project, like communities, are considered stakeholders in these projects (Mitchell et al. 1997; IPBES 2018). Some of the public officers categorised stakeholders into implementers (state or private organizations), beneficiaries (communities), and donor funders (commonly UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, and parastatals).

The results indicated that the stakeholders in donor-funded projects constitute government ministries, administration offices, community representatives, donor agencies and non-governmental organizations, academics, and researchers, as well as public representatives. This is associated with the fact that land restoration is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that impacts both socio-economic and environmental aspects of life (Reed 2008; Jepsen & Eskerod 2009). Failure to involve some of these relevant stakeholders might cause curiosity, delay the work, or raise conflicts among the citizens especially those who feel left out. Laurent et al. (2015) attested that sharing knowledge and skills from a holistically diverse group of stakeholders is significant in influencing decisions and positive behaviour towards achieving the project goals.

### **4.2 Stakeholder engagement processes**

The word engagement was preferred by the respondents in this study to refer to the initial process which encompasses the identification, classification, and involvement of stakeholders in the systems of administration of donor-funded projects. The results indicated that donor-funded projects enter the country through the Ministry of Development Planning, and this means it is the first ministry to identify relevant stakeholders, especially from the government ministries and non-governmental organizations. The key ministries together with donor

agencies identify the sites where the projects would be implemented together with responsible key stakeholders at district level. The district administration offices play a pivotal role in stakeholder identification at district level using existing platforms, like DPCT and DFIT, where most of the stakeholders mentioned in section 4.1 above are represented.

Engagement is considered as a process from the national level down to district grassroots communities, and this process involves different key responsible persons (individuals or groups) who need to be properly categorised. Mitchell et al. (1997) emphasized the significance of engaging stakeholders based on their power, legitimacy, and urgency. Based on these three attributes and the results of this study, the Andersen and Grude (2009) model of stakeholder engagement can be adopted as shown in Table 3 below. In this model, all stakeholders engaged in donor-funded projects can be listed, together with their area of interest, contribution, expectations, power, strategies that can be used to influence them, and an individual tasked/assigned to ensure efficient implementation of the strategy.

**Table 3.** Stakeholder engagement matrix. (Source: Adopted from Andersen and Grude 2009).

Stakeholder	Area of interest	Contribution	Expectations	Power	Strategy	Responsibility

Though this model is preferred by many scholars because of its simplicity, convenience, and comprehensiveness (Jepsen & Eskerod 2009), it does not indicate how and where the information necessary to fill the outline should be/is acquired, but the results of this study provide some insights into stakeholder identification, classification, and involvement processes to acquire such information and clearly understand the engagement processes in donor-funded projects in Lesotho.

a. Identification

Reed et al. (2014) stated that stakeholders can be identified based on their interest, influence, power, and their expected contributions to the project. Similarly, the findings of the study indicated a lot of commonalities with the current processes used in Lesotho as stakeholder identification is based, among others, on skills and knowledge, the proximity of people to the project site, the roles each stakeholder is going to play, and the power each stakeholder has to retard or accelerate the implementation processes. Existing structures and platforms like national structures (government ministries, policymakers) and district structures, as indicated in Figure 2, are commonly used during the identification of stakeholders for new projects.

The methods used for stakeholder identification in the Lesotho projects, as indicated by respondents, are exactly like those stated by some scholars (Aaltonen & Kreutz 2009; Reed 2008; Freeman 1984) and include: brainstorming, expert judgments, public gatherings, institutional database review, generic lists, and a combination of these methods where possible. The snowballing method described by Jepsen and Eskerod (2009), where the project manager together with key ministries identify key stakeholders at the district level, and those key stakeholders identify other relevant stakeholders down to the community level, was also found practical in this study.

Identification according to individual designation seemed to be unique and not common in most of the donor-funded land restoration projects. This is the situation where an individual



qualifies to be a stakeholder by virtue of the position he/she holds in existing project structures, regardless of the skills, knowledge, interests, and influence an individual can have on the project. However, this method was criticized by the respondents as it compromises the outcomes of projects due to the incompetence of some stakeholders co-opted through this approach into donor-funded projects.

#### b. Classification

The results indicate that stakeholders in donor-funded projects are mostly classified into primary or secondary stakeholders based on three aspects: the roles and responsibilities each has to play based on their skills and knowledge; the level of influence and power each stakeholder has to ensure success or failure of the project; and the proximity to the project site, especially for communities. Though Freeman (1984) stated that government ministries should be classified under secondary stakeholders, the results of this study revealed the opposite scenario. Due to their high continuous technical support, ministries are seen as primary stakeholders in these donor-funded projects.

The results match the stakeholder salience model used by Mitchell et al. (1997) which states that for convenience, efficiency, and effectiveness in land restoration projects, stakeholders should be classified based on their power, legitimacy, and urgency in the project. With reference to these results and the supporting literature on classification, the researcher used the Aaltonen and Kreutz (2009) power/interest grid to classify stakeholders in the donor-funded projects in Lesotho figuring in this study, as indicated in Figure 3 below.

The respondents indicated that donors and key ministries are very important as they provide the financial and technical human resources required to execute the projects. Similarly, councils are mandated to allocate and develop project sites. They are therefore considered important because project work cannot start without them. The results further suggest that, except for researchers, academicians, and communities around restoration sites, all other stakeholders were classified as “primary” due to their continuous commitment to the projects.

#### a. Involvement

Berglund et al. (2013) advocated involvement of stakeholders from the project outset and said that participation of different stakeholders is key during project formulation or design, planning, and implementation was important for better project outcomes. In addition, stakeholder involvement should be undertaken based on the existing procedures, protocols, and approaches which satisfy the needs and expectations of all stakeholders (PMI 2013). Most of the respondents identified delayed involvement of district stakeholders as a major challenge in the current process. Except for this challenge, the results indicated a clear criterion for stakeholder engagement from the national level down to the grassroots. The roles and responsibilities of everyone determine when and how he/she will be involved. For example, national offices (donors, researchers, ministries) conceptualise and initiate the projects and so are involved from the beginning, while the district and community representatives are involved during the implementation phases of the project. Land users (chiefs, associations, and public) are normally not involved as stakeholders, as the chiefs indicated, but rather as beneficiaries, i.e., those who work and get paid. It also became clear that often community councils are involved and favoured over the chief offices, though these councils were introduced as the local governance to work closely with chiefs in different areas (Matlanyane 2013). Councils are mandated to facilitate development while chiefs protect the

introduced developments, so when these two structures are not equally involved, the rehabilitated areas are not protected, as the chiefs indicated.

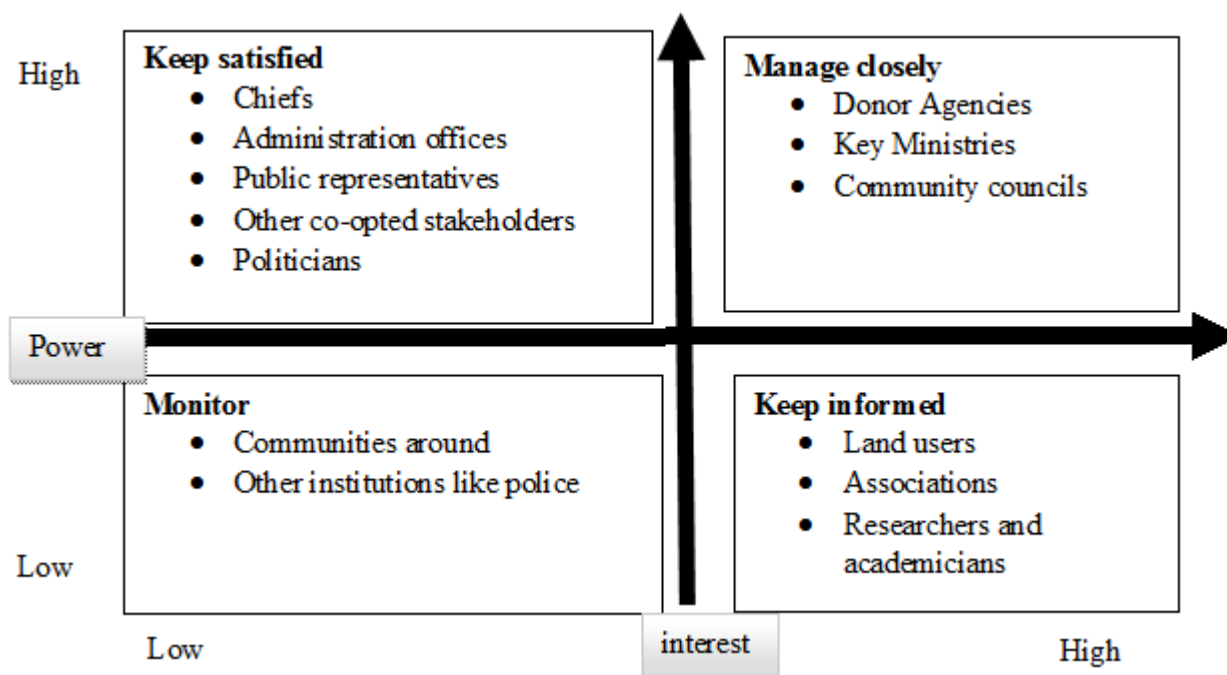


Figure 3. Power/interest matrix for stakeholder classification in DFLRPs in Lesotho.

The processes of stakeholder engagement are centred mostly around the contribution each stakeholder has to the project. Understanding the following commonly used attributes is necessary throughout the processes of stakeholder engagement in donor-funded land restoration projects: “influence (low, medium, or high): impact (negative, neutral, or positive); contribution (low or high); interest or willingness (low or high); and attitude (obstructive or supportive)” (Aaltonen & Kreutz 2009). The respondents in this study revealed that these attributes are associated with the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder in the project. For example, donors provide funds, ministries give technical know-how, chiefs protect, and community councils and communities implement the projects as laborers. Therefore, it is important to engage each stakeholder with a clear understanding of his/her contribution to the project.

### 4.3 Stakeholder management processes

The results revealed that stakeholder management processes in the donor-funded project are the function of administration, participation, and communication. Stakeholders are very clear about the administration structures governing these donor-funded projects in the district, as well as how they are supposed to participate and communicate within their structural platforms. On the other hand, though the management processes are very clear to each stakeholder, the actual implementation practices need consideration as there are many gaps identified.

a. Administration

The administration was understood by the respondent as the governing body for the implementation of projects at the district level and involves the hierarchical levels from the district down to the community level. The main tasks of this body include setting up goals and objectives for the projects based on government policies, procedures, and protocols. The administration also ensures the enforcement of rules and regulations to protect the restoration work. Administration is the process of governing the organization, programme, or project by a group of people with similar goals, or working towards similar goals, by developing, directing, and controlling the processes of making decisions in the project through effective strategies. Three mutually working together structures are the councils, chiefs, and government ministries which are all rooted in the district administration office as shown in Figure 2 above.

b. Communication

The results of this study attest that a variety of communication mechanisms, including phone calls, messages, social media platforms, letters, and verbal communication are used in DFLRPs. The platforms used include the district project coordination team and implementation team meetings/platforms at the district level, with public gatherings used at the community level. A combination of these strategies is preferred because some people do not have phones, hence the use of letters. Similarly, the mobile phone signal is a problem in most areas in the districts, hence letters are used. Public gatherings have been used for decades in Lesotho and this method seemed to be the most effective means of communicating with the communities, even with the younger generation. The merits of the method are rooted in the fact that many people get the same information at the same time, and they can give their views directly at the gatherings.

The differences between public officers and community representatives' views, where the latter are satisfied by the way they get information while the former claim that only key ministries and officers seem to get all the information, also indicates the significance of considering the most appropriate communication methods when engaging and managing stakeholders in donor-funded projects.

The information shared amongst stakeholders in these donors funded projects as described by the respondents includes project guiding documents, plans, budgets, and reports from time to time, so that all stakeholders can monitor the progress of the projects. Effective communication is understood as the process of sending and receiving messages by exchanging ideas and imparting knowledge and information through agreed channels to develop mutual understanding between sender and receiver (Jacobson 2007). Figure 4 shows a simplified model of communication between senders and receivers. The figure procedurally manifests that from the source the message is organised (encode) and shared i.e., transmitted through the appropriate channel to the receiver who digests to understand (decode) and send back the feedback. This model indicates how stakeholders in Donor-funded projects communicate where the source is; donors and public officers prepare plans and disseminate them through public gatherings or district platforms (DPCT and DFIT) to the communities (destinations). When the work is implemented, feedback in the form of reports (channels) is sent back to the higher administrative structures. Jacobson (2007) indicated that these elements of communication (source, encoding, the message, the medium/channel, decoding, the receiver, and feedback) are very important to consider when developing and designing

environmental conservation projects or programmes as they can help design step-by-step communication structures specifically tailored for each group of stakeholders.

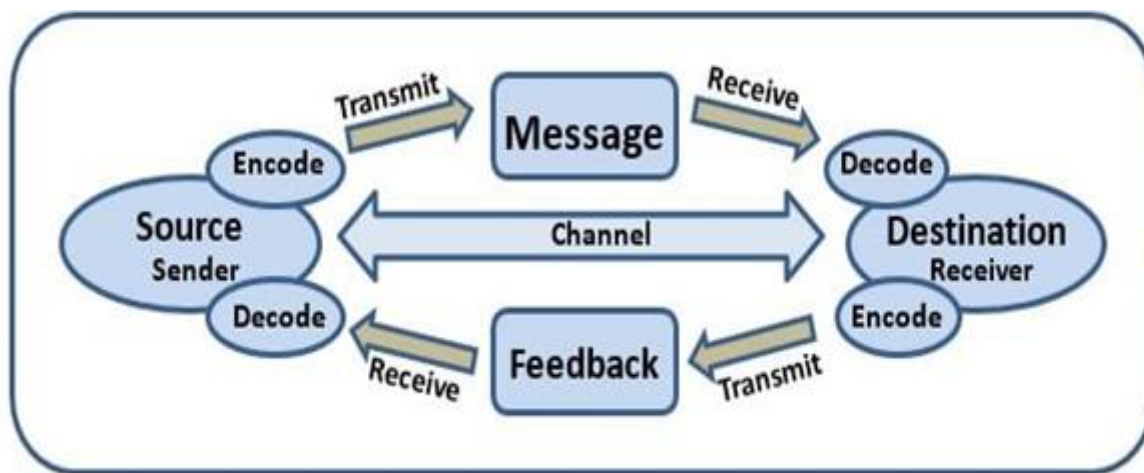


Figure 4. Two-way communication model. (Source: Furst 2014).

### c. Participation

The respondents indicated that their participation in these donor funded projects is not satisfactory due to some faults in the processes, such as discrimination, poor resource allocation, and centralisation of key project resources (funds, procurement, etc) during implementation. Other challenges hindering effective participation in donor-funded projects include “silo mentally” during implementation, time constraints leading to working under pressure, poor distribution of resources, and poor communication (Waylen et al. 2012). Reed (2008) emphasised a strategy for effective stakeholder participation which encompasses three important aspects: skills and knowledge, trust, and equity amongst all stakeholders throughout the project life cycle.

The fact that stakeholder participation in donor-funded projects at Quthing district was rated by the respondents to be in the ranges from moderate to high, and generally unsatisfactory, indicates that the stated drawbacks might result in considerable failure of these donor-funded projects. Stakeholder satisfaction in donor-funded projects is amongst the key considerations that can lead to highly effective participation according to Mallak et al. (1991). Stakeholder satisfaction can be achieved by knowing who the stakeholders are, their interests in connection to the project, properly categorising them based on their powers, and considering their involvement as a continuous process rather than a one-off activity (Reed 2008). The community representatives said that some projects are working harmoniously with them and their participation in such projects is high during and beyond the closure of the projects as they feel a sense of ownership. The fact that each stakeholder seems to be involved based on his/her skills and knowledge, interests, and expected tasks, emphasizes the risk of undermining the satisfaction of stakeholders in the projects.

## 4.4 Gaps and challenges in the existing processes

Critical gaps which undermine the effective engagement and management of stakeholders at Quthing district centred around: delayed incorporation from the national level, centralised

control of resources and site selection decisions, and discrimination amongst stakeholders. For example, key ministries have more power, influence, and opportunities like DSA, resources, and information, while, on the other hand, chief structures sabotaged the community council structures. These discrepancies lead to conflicts, poor communication, and dissatisfaction as revealed by many respondents in this study.

Environmental protection is a complex and dynamic challenge that can be addressed by satisfied stakeholders who are thoroughly empowered, trusted, equitable, and receive continuous learning throughout the project life cycle (Reed 2008; Mallak et al. 1991). The findings revealed that some projects are started without due concern of the district administration and those projects fail because stakeholders are not properly mobilised throughout all levels of administration in the district.

Poor engagement and management processes were also related to a lack of communication between stakeholders from the national to district and down to the community level. There seems to be a lack of meta-communication (communication about how best to communicate), legitimate strategies on how to deal with issues and reduce misunderstandings, by focusing on things that all stakeholders in the project can agree upon to avoid compromising the outcomes of the projects (Berglund 2010).

## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The processes of stakeholder engagement and management in donor-funded projects in Lesotho seemed to be acceptable to stakeholders except for the fact that there are some drawbacks in the implementation of these projects, which create negative perceptions amongst stakeholders. Positive perceptions of stakeholders can be achieved by addressing three success criteria (interests, influence, and power) plus a combination of appropriate communication and reliability of data or information to all stakeholders.

Based on the findings of these studies it can be concluded that more than three-quarters of those interviewed are satisfied with the current processes of engagement and management of stakeholders in donor-funded land restoration projects in the Quthing district. Nevertheless, all respondents attested that the drawbacks (discussed in section 4.4) require immediate attention.

With reference to the results of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- ❖ All stakeholders, especially those at the district and community level where projects are to be implemented, should be engaged and involved at the inception stage of the project when each project's idea is conceptualised. As all respondents indicated, this could increase the sense of project ownership for the district and that would lead to sustainability of the projects even beyond the closure of the donor funds. Districts and communities can continue to manage such projects through volunteer programs as is the case in some of the projects in which they felt fully involved.
- ❖ Decentralization of power and resources to the district level to avoid delay in the project implementation processes, e.g., each project should hire procurement and finance officers at the district level or use the ministerial procurement and finance officers as they are authorised for government procurement and finance duties. The authorization of logistical day-to-day activities, like resource allocation and

procurement of small items, should be done at the district level through a key ministry and administration officer guided by the project field officers.

- ❖ Serious attention should be taken toward project transparency to stop the discrimination by leading ministries having more power, influence, benefits, and information than other stakeholders, as this causes a lot of distrust amongst stakeholders and sabotage by those who feel left out. All stakeholders should have equal opportunities, information, influences in the decisions made, and general administration of the projects.
- ❖ Continuous capacity building of stakeholders should be amongst the top priorities of each donor-funded project. Stakeholder engagement is a continuous process from which sometimes stakeholders change during the life cycle of projects, so new members should always be trained and given insights into the project so that they can contribute significantly from where the previous representative left off.
- ❖ Lastly, development of project guiding documents is needed, e.g., communication strategies, stakeholder engagement and management strategies, project guiding policies, and legal frameworks governing and protecting the restored areas. Currently, though donor-funded projects contribute to livelihoods and environmental protection, no national policies and legal documents are guiding and protecting these projects. The impact of this lack is visible at the community or project site where some of the sites are vandalised even before the projects come to an end.

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## APPENDICES

**Appendix I: Donor funded projects in Lesotho 1970 to date. (Source: Renoka 2021).**

Year	Project name	Funding agency	Implementing agency
1970	Phuthiatsana Upper Catchment Irrigation (1971 -1977)	Unknown	Ministry of Agriculture Conservation and Forestry Division
	Development of a Pilot Agricultural Scheme in Leribe Area. (1970 – 1975)	FAO/ UNDP	Ministry of Agriculture
1972	Lesotho Woodlot Program (1972-1985)	UK/Anglo American Corporation/ De Beers Consolidated Mines/Go	Ministry of Agriculture
1974	Senqu River Agricultural Extension Project Lesotho (1974-1977)	UNDP	Ministry of Agriculture
1975	Khomokhoana Rural Development Project (1975 – 1977)	FAO	Ministry of Agriculture
	Land and Water Resources Development Project LWRDP (1975-1983)	USAID	Ministry of Agriculture
	Thaba Tseka Mountain Development Project (1975-1978)	CIDA	Ministry of Agriculture/ Ministry of works
1976	Thaba Bosiu Rural Development Project (1973- 1977)	USAID/IDA/UNCDF/UNDP	Soil Conservation Division of the Ministry of Agriculture and Roads Division of the Ministry of Works.
1978	Basic Agricultural Services Project (1978- 1987)	Britain, Ireland & West Germany	Ministry of Agriculture
1980	Agriculture Marketing and Credit Project (1980-1988)	IFAD	MACM
1981	Land Conservation and Range Development Project (1981-1992)	USAID	MACM MICARD
1982	Phuthiatsana Integrated Rural Development Project	ADF	Phuthuatsana Irrigation Authority; and MOW
1985	Farm Improvement with Soil Conservation (FISC) Project in Maphutseng, Mohale's Hoek District (1985-1990)	SIDA	MACM
	Lesotho Agricultural Production and Institutional Support (LAPIS) programme (1985-1992)	USAID	MACM
1986	Matelile Rural Development Project (Orientation phase) (1986-1990)	GTZ	MACM
1978	Labour Construction Unit (LCU) (1978 -1985)	SIDA	Ministry of works
1987	Land Management and Conservation Project (1987-1992)	World Bank / SIDA	MICARD MACM
1988	Soil and Water Conservation and Agroforestry Programme	IFAD	MACM
1989	Soil and Water Conservation and Land Utilisation (SWCLU) Programme	SADC	MACM

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1990	Soil and Water Conservation Project	FAO	Ministry of Agriculture
	Matelile Rural Development Project (Implementation phases I and II) (1990 -1996)	GIZ	Ministry of Agriculture
1992	Community Natural Resources Management Project (1992-1995)	USAID	Ministry of Agriculture, Cooperatives and Marketing
1993	Production Through Conservation	SIDA	Ministry of Agriculture through Lesotho Agricultural College
	Local Initiative Support Project (LISP)	IFAD	Ministry of Agriculture
	Rural Finance and Enterprise Support Programme (1993-2002)	IFAD / Regional	
	Mafeteng Development Project	GTZ	
1995	Conserving Mountain Biodiversity in Southern Lesotho	UNDP/GEF	DoE/NES
1997	Environment and Land Management Sector, SADC ELMS (Phase II of SWCLUP)	Multi-lateral	SADC ELMS Lesotho
1998	Maloti-Drakensberg Conservation and Development Project	Multi-lateral	South Africa/Lesotho
2000	Sustainable Agricultural Development Programme for the Mountain Areas (SADPMA) (2000-2005)	IFAD	Ministry of Agriculture
	MAFS/LHDA Agricultural Projects Coordination Unit.	Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA)	LHDA/ Ministry of Agriculture
2004	LHDA Contract 1044 Integrated Catchment Management Project in Phase I areas of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (2004-2010)	World Bank/GoL	LHDA
2005	Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resource Management Programme (2005-2011)	IFAD	Ministry of Agriculture
	CARE's Livelihoods Recovery Through Agriculture Programme (LRAP) (2002-2006)	CARE	MAFS Local NGOs
	Crop Production: Small-Scale Irrigation Development Project (SSIDP)	IFAD	Ministry of Agriculture
2008	Lesotho Wetlands Restoration and Conservation Project (2008–2013)	Mellenium Challenge Account (MCA)	Department of Water Affairs (DWA)
	The Rural Finance Intermediation Programme (2008–2015)	IFAD	MFDP/CBL/MTICM
	Protection of Orange-Senqu River Water Sources 'SPONGES' Project	ORASECOM	ORASECOM
2009	Capacity Building and Knowledge Management for Sustainable Land Management (2009–2016)	UNDP/ GEF	Ministry of Forestry

*GRÓ Land Restoration Training Programme*

	Priority Support Programme, Lesotho (2006–2009)	DFID	MAFS
2011	Lesotho Adaptation of Small-Scale Agricultural Production (LASAP) (2011-2015)	IFAD/GEF funded	Ministry of Agriculture
	Smallholder Agriculture Development Project I and II (2011-to date)	World Bank	Ministry of Agriculture
	Demonstration Project on Community Based Rangeland Management in Lesotho (2011	UNDP/GEF	ORASECOM
2012	CRS. Lesotho Food Security Relief and Resilience Project. (2012-2014		
	Smallholder Agriculture Development Project (2012-2018	World Bank	Ministry of agriculture
2013	Khubelu SPONGES pilot project (2013-2015	GIZ	DWA DRRM SWC Letseng-Diamond
	Climate Change Adaptation for Sustainable Rural Water Supply in Lowlands Lesotho (2013-2015)	World Bank / GEF	Water Affairs
2014	Wool and Mohair Promotion Project (2014-to date)	IFAD	Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security/ Ministry of Forestry and Land Reclamation/ Ministry of Trade, Cooperatives and Marketing/ Ministry of Energy, Meteorology and Water Affairs Lesotho National Wool and Mohair Growers Association
	Biological Resources Monitoring within Phase I of the LHWP Catchments. LHDA	LHDA	AfriDev & partners
2015	Strengthening Capacity for Climate Change Adaptation through Support to Integrated Watershed Management Programme in Lesotho (2015-2019	FAO/ GEF	Ministry of Forestry

## Appendix II: Interviews questions

Interview Questions for Public officers' stakeholders' representatives on donor funded land restoration projects.

Name of Interviewer 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Name/ group \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Sebaka \_\_\_\_\_

Legend: ( I – DA; ii- DCS; iii- DAO; iv- Water; v- AICOV; vi- World vision)

- a. What approaches were/ are used in identifying and involving stakeholders in the donor-funded land restoration projects at Lesotho?
  - ❖ Ke mekhoha e feng e sebelisoang Lesotho ho kenya batho mererong e ea bafani
- b. Which stakeholders are important in donor-funded land restoration projects and why?
  - ❖ Ke mekhahlelo e feng ea batho e bohlokoa tsamaisong ea Merero e ea bafani. Hobaneng
- c. What are the current processes of stakeholder engagement in donor-funded land restoration projects in Lesotho & Quthing?
  - ❖ Ke mekhoha e feng e sebelisoang ho kenyeletsa batho mererong e ea bafani seterekeng sa Quthing?
1. How are they identified (Ba khethoa joang)
2. How are they classified (Ba khetholloa joang)
3. How are they involved in the processes? (ba Nka karolo joang)
- d. How are stakeholders managed within the processes of donor-funded land restoration projects?
  - ❖ Batho ba nkang karolo ba tsamaisoa le ho Loaloe joang?
1. Please explain the administration structure of donor-funded projects at the district level. (Methati ea Tsamaiso)
2. How can we rate the participation of stakeholders (you & others) in terms of commitment, equity, and inclusiveness? Please explain (ba ke ngoa joang **Palo, mekhahlelo, boitelo**)
3. What communication channels, platforms, and mediums are used? Are they effective? Please elaborate (Mekhoa ea Puisano ka meralo, mosebetsi le Litlaleho) etc
- e. How do you rate your power, influence, and contribution in the decision-making process of the donor-funded projects from above to grassroots (small, medium, high)? Please explain.
  - ❖ Matla a hau a makae liqetong tsa tsamaiso ea Merero ee, ho tloha Ntlo-khoho hoesa fats'e sechabeng). Hlalosa
- f. Do you think all stakeholders have equal?
  - ❖ Na batho bankang karolo mererong e bana le menyetla e lekanang tabeng ea? **hlalosa**
1. Opportunities, (melemo ea Merero)
2. information, (Litaba tse amang merero)
3. power, (Matla a bona tsamaisong)
4. influence, (ts'usumetsong ea liqeto)

5. and rights in the implementation of donor-funded projects? Please explain how each can be improved (Litokelo)
- g. Based on your experience, what can you say about current processes of stakeholder identification, involvement, and management (good or poor)?  
Elaborate
- ❖ Ho latela litsebo tsa hau mererong e ea bafani, o kare mokho oo batho (stakeholders) ba kengoang ka ona o joang. Hlalosa
- h. How satisfied are you on the current processes of stakeholder engagement, involvement, and management? Explain.
- ❖ Mokhoa o sebelisoang ha joale o khotsofatsa ha kae tabeng ea ho kenyeletsa batho ka hara merero
- i. What gaps do you see in the current process of stakeholder engagement in donor-funded land restoration projects in the country (both national and at the district).
- ❖ Mefokolo ke e feng eo o e bonang mokhoeng oa khetho ea batho ba nkang Karole mererong e ea bafani
- j. What recommendations can you give based on stakeholder engagement and management?
- ❖ O ka khothaletsa mekhoha efeng e ka ntlafatsang le ho matlafatsa merero ea bafani litabeng tsa ntlafatso ea batho le toantso ea tse'enyeho ea naha
- k. !!!!Any other information you would like to add on donor funded lands restoration projects!!!!**
- Na o kaba le taba eo o ka lakatsang ho e hlahisa malebana le merero ea ea Bafani**

Interview Questions for Quthing Community representatives' stakeholders on donor funded land restoration projects.

Name of Interviewer 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Name/ group \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Sebaka \_\_\_\_\_

[Location of interviewees removed for their protection]

Community councils and chiefs; Media; Community representatives (RMAs)

- a. When did you start working with the donor-funded land restoration projects? How were you engaged?
- ❖ O qalile ho sebetsa le merero ea bafani neng? O no kene joang
- b. Which donor-funded land restoration projects have you and/or are you working with as a stakeholder?
- ❖ O Sebelitse le merero e feng e fetileng le entseng e le teng?
- c. What Roles do you play as the stakeholders and at what degree (fully, partially, none). Please elaborate.
- ❖ O nka karolo efeng mererong e ea bafani?
- d. How do you rate your power and influence in the decision-making process of the donor-funded projects (small, medium, high)? Why?



- ❖ Matla a hau a ho susumetsa liqeto tsamaisong ea merero ea Bafani a makae. Hlalosa
- e. As a stakeholder, do you get all information about the projects (plans, implementation, reports)
  - ❖ Na o fumana litaba tsohle tse amanang le tsamaiso ea Merero e.g. (meralo, ts'ebetso, le litlaleho)?
- f. How satisfied are you on the current processes of stakeholder engagement, involvement, and management? Please explain?
  - ❖ O kare mokhoa oa ho khetha le ho sebetsa ha mahlakore ohle a batho mererong ee ea bafani e khotsofatsa ha hae? hlalosa
- g. What gaps do you see in the current process of stakeholder engagement in donor-funded land restoration projects in the district.
  - ❖ Mefokolo ke e feng eo o e bonang mokhoeng oa khetho ea batho ba nkang Karole mererong e ea bafani
- h. How satisfied do you think people at quthing are for these donors funded projects? Please give examples
  - ❖ Oena o le motho, o kare o khotsofetse ha kae, le batho bohle ba Quthing Mo ke merero e ea bafani. Hlalosa
- i. How can you rate the impact of the donor-funded land restoration projects on building societal resilience (**socio-economic**) and on land restoration?
  - ❖ Melemo kapa mathata a tlišoang ke merero e ea bafani sechabeng le tikolohong e kaba e feng
- j. What recommendations can you give based on stakeholder identification, involvement, and administration?
  - ❖ Ke likhothaletso lifeng tseo o ka fanang ka tsona hore tsamaiso ea merero e ea bafani e ntlafale?
- 1. **!!!!Any other information you would like to add on Donor funded lands restoration projects!!!**
  - ❖ Na o kaba le taba eo o ka lakatsang ho e hlahisa malebana le merero ea Bafani

### Appendix III: Ethical agreement with data collectors

This agreement form outlines the ethical issues for data collection from Quthing District on the topic "Stakeholder **perceptions** towards donor-funded land restoration projects in Lesotho; The Case of Quthing District. The Research Assistance agrees to comply with the following ethical considerations

1. To **conduct** semi-structured interviews for the project stated above.
2. To **adhere** to the protocols and guidelines of semi-structured interviews such as ensuring **confidentiality**, respect, active listening, permission for recording interviewees, time **management**, quality data collection, and prescription, and complete the work entrusted to
3. To **allocate** time for the data collection; arrive early or on time for data collection
4. Set **appointment** dates and times for interviews and agenda
5. Give a **positive** impression to the respondents
6. Ensure that the collected data is stored saved with the backup; and prescribed well before being **submitted** to the researcher
7. That all the receipts on funds used are compiled and submitted on time

Research Assistants

*[Personal signatures removed from document]*