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Of "Vampires", "Sweet Promises", and Contested Developments: Frame-Analysis of Development Projects in the Omo Valley, Ethiopia

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Abstract:

Hydroelectric dams, often part of larger development programs in developing countries are characterized by conflicting interests of stakeholder groups, emblematic for the contested nature of development. Because of these different interests, stakeholders develop different evaluations of such projects, that can be understood as frames of events and projects. Frames are "the different ways of understanding or representing a system" (Leach et al. 2010 b). In this article, I analyze frames stakeholders use to convey a distinct perspective on problems, root causes, solutions, and benefits associated with the hydroelectric Gibe III dam and accompanying sugarcane plantations in the Omo Valley, Ethiopia. I found that stakeholders use contrasting frames and narratives to describe the projects, but partially also propose mutual solutions. Stakeholders incorporate modernist arguments to justify their actions. Supporters and opponents address different aspects of the livelihoods of Omo valley inhabitants. By analyzing different frames and narratives, this paper contributes to opening up and broadening the debate on the development activities in the Omo valley and shows alternative pathways for sustainable development projects in Ethiopia.

Inhaltsverzeichnis

1 Introduction

Almost 15 years after the World Commission on Dams reported numerous social and environmental downsides of large dam projects, Oliver-Smith (2014) wrote: "Dam projects, like vampires, are hard to kill permanently". He referred specifically to the attempts made by indigenous people to stop a dam project in Brazil, but the metaphor is emblematic for the history of large dams in general. The 1990s were marked by a period of "greater caution towards hydropower" due to negative social and environmental consequences of dams (Del Bene et al. 2018). In the last decade, there was an increase of hydroelectric dams. In fact, some scholars see a "revival of hydroelectric dams" in the past decade (Ansar et. al 2014; Del bene 2018). Large hydroelectric dams currently gain momentum in many developing countries due to an increase in dam financing by the World Bank, the New Development Bank, and Chinese investments (Atkins 2017; Del Bene 2018; Hausermann 2018).

With its high topographic potential for hydroelectricity, Ethiopia plans to become the "hydrotower of Africa" (Little Ethiopia 2016). In 2016, the *mega-dam* Gibe III started to operate in the Omo valley (ibid.). The Gibe III is the third dam on the banks of the Omo river and the government plans to build two more. Gibe III is closely linked to the development of irrigated sugarcane plantations downstream, which source water from the Omo river (Kamski 2016). The dam and agricultural development projects are highly contested. NGOs and several scientists claim that the resulting absence of floods and the decreased water flow would adversely impact the livelihoods of people living downstream on the banks of the Omo river and Lake Turkana in Kenya (e.g. Human Rights Watch 2012; International Rivers 2012; International Rivers 2013; Carr 2017). They argue the projects would lead to food insecurity, forced resettlement of indigenous people, and social conflict. Supporters of the projects argue the projects would result in economic development on a national scale and improve living conditions for people living in Ethiopia (e.g. Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation 2009; Mishra and Aklilu 2015). The conflict between supporters and opponents of the dam and large-scale sugarcane plantations is characterized by opposing views and opinions on how the development in the Omo valley should look like (Abbink 2012).

Leach et al. (2010 b) analyzed conflicts arising from water systems and found that the structure and boundaries of a system as well as its functions are open to multiple interpretations and representations. Different stakeholders perceive systems in different ways, therefore conveying a distinct perspective on benefits and disadvantages of a certain issue. For example, a water system can be bounded on a local scale that stresses the importance of water on livelihoods for local people. It can also be bounded on a national scale that highlights the availability of drinking-water in urban areas (Leach et al. 2010 b). System boundaries of a certain issue are not naturally clear but depend on how actors perceive a system. The way a system is bounded, and which system functions are prioritized are central dimensions of "framing" (ibid). Different frames highlight different aspects of an issue to make them more salient (Entman 1993). Frames are used strategically to influence decision-making processes: People with different interests, values, and goals use different frames to make them more memorable, intriguing, and convincing (Entman 1993; Hall and White 2008). Therefore, analyzing frames is a tool to identify how actors define and evaluate a system. "System-frames" are a part of larger narratives or "simple stories" that define a system in a particular way and propose how it should develop (Leach et al. 2010 b). This paper draws on the constructivist pathways approach by Leach et al. (2010 b) who argue that "particular narratives are produced by particular actors" and lead to "particular pathways of response". This means actors can use narratives to reduce complex information to

what they deem important, thereby shedding light on particular ways for the system to develop. If the narrative is frequently reproduced, the views expressed in it are reinforced. This hinders alternative trajectories to play a significant role in the discourse on a certain topic. This process is referred to as narrowing down; it impedes finding alternative solutions for sustainability challenges (ibid). The pathways approach suggests opening up and looking at diverse viewpoints and narratives to find solutions to complex and diverse sustainability problems.

There is a growing amount of literature on frames used to describe hydroelectric dams in sustainability science: Atkins (2016) analyzed how government and politicians used diverse frames to legitimize the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam in Brazil; Hausermann (2018) analyzed frames used in the discourse on the Bui-dam in Ghana and Risley (2014) explains why critical collective action frames of NGOs on a hydroelectric dam project on the Bio Bio River were not successful. Other literature goes a step further and explicitly aims at opening up a certain discourse in addition to analyzing frames like the examples above: Bausch et al (2015) analyze the discourse on the agriculture- urban interface in Arizona, USA; Leach et al. (2010a) analyze policy challenges of dealing with epidemics; and Wise et al. (2014) use the pathways approach to open up the discourse on climate change adaption. Hence, researchers have already identified frames used in the debate on large dams and stressed that these frames turn into narratives, which create pathways. While academia has contributed to opening up different discourses, there are currently no studies that combine a frame analysis of development projects with the explicit and promising aim to broaden the discourse to show diverse pathways to move forward.

This paper aims at closing the gap in literature on frames used to describe dam projects as parts of larger development projects and will use the pathways approach to open up discourse on the development projects in the Omo valley. Hence, I explore how stakeholders frame the hydroelectric Gibe III dam and the Kuraz Sugar Development Projects (KSDP) in the Omo valley, Ethiopia. The KSDP is 175,000 hectares in size and is by far the largest plantation developed by the Ethiopian Sugar Company (Kasmki 2016). Due to data availability, the KDSP will be analyzed representative for other, smaller plantations in the lower Omo valley in this study. I chose the case of Gibe III and KSDP, because large dam projects are a reoccurring theme in development policy and Ethiopia is planning further dams. Large dams are interesting to sustainability science, since they have environmental, societal, and economic impacts. The Gibe III and KSDP pose complex sustainability challenges, thus there is the need to look at frames used by stakeholders, which form narratives and lead to future pathways for development. To uncover diverse pathways of development, my first research question is: *How do stakeholders frame the construction of the Gibe III dam and the Kuraz Sugar Development Project and which narratives emerge?* The results will be discussed in the light of relevant theory.

To find diverse pathways for future development, this paper also analyzes the solutions proposed by different stakeholders. Thus, my second research question is: *Which pathways out of the conflict emerge from the frame analysis?* This question has the potential of showing commonalities between the conflicting stakeholders. Future development plans could lead to a window of opportunity for dialogue to find intervention points for sustainable development pathways. Since there might be more controversy around Gibe IV and Gibe V, finding commonalities between contrasting viewpoints might prove helpful for future decision-making processes (International Rivers 2013).

2 Theoretical Background: Frames, Narratives, and Pathways

The concept of framing describes the process of highlighting aspects of perceived reality to make them more memorable and to strategically influence decision-making processes (Entman 1993). Whereas framing usually refers to a conceptual level (Entman 1993; Scheufele 1999), the "frame" itself refers to a distinct formulation, that shows how an actor defines the boundaries and priorities of a certain system (Leach et al. 2010 b). Therefore, a system can be framed in different ways. Frames always convey a distinct, socially constructed perspective on a certain issue. They are described as a process that is active, dynamic and evolving, and can be used by social actors with agency (Benford and Snow 2000). Snow and Benford (1998) identify three main tasks of framing: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational framing. The diagnostic framing "identifies a problem and attributes responsibility" (White 2013), the prognostic framing shows potential solutions, and the motivational framing "calls to arms or rationale for engaging in ameliorative or corrective action" (Snow and Benford 1998).

Some peer-reviewed articles on framing also mention narratives, without clearly defining the boundaries between frames and narratives (for example Abbink et al. 2012; Atkins 2016; Risley et al. 2014). Narratives are a "cohesive story or account of events, experiences, or phenomena, which can be true or fictitious" (Teeter and Sandberg 2017). My paper goes beyond this and adapts the definition by Leach et al (2010 b), which argues that narratives are "simple stories" that emerge out of frames. Narratives often start with a problem frame, elaborate the consequences in the middle, and frame solutions in the end. Hence, in this paper narratives are understood as stories that contain different frames.

Narratives often describe how a system should develop and how the response to a specific issue should look like. These responses are pathways or "possible trajectories for knowledge, intervention, and change, which prioritize different goals, values, and functions" (Leach et al. 2010 b, Figure 1). There is the "pervasive tendency" for actors to close down around certain narratives that lead into specific pathways (ibid.). Focusing on only one possible pathway forward impedes the ability to solve complex sustainability problems because it hinders actors' capacity to recognize alternative solutions and pathways. Therefore, "paying serious attention to multiple, diverse framings and narratives […] brings vital opportunities to advance debates about sustainability […]" (ibid.).
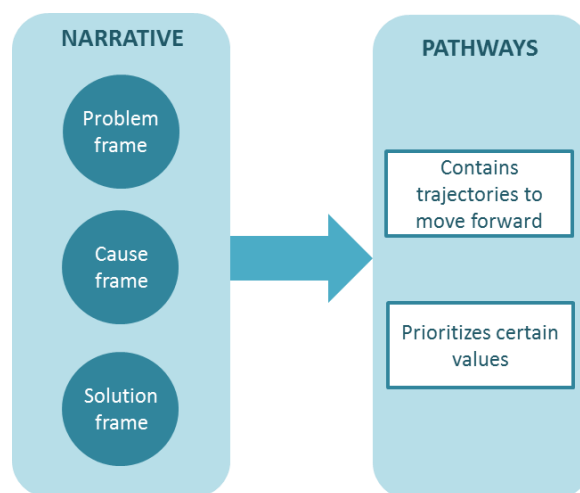

Figure 1: *Frames, narratives and pathways (own graphic, based on Entman 1993, Leach et al. 2010 b)*

3 Methods

The analysis is guided by two research questions: (1) How do stakeholders frame the construction of the Gibe III dam and the Kuraz Sugar Development Project and which narratives emerge? and (2) Which pathways out of the conflict emerge from the frame analysis? To answer these questions, a document analysis was performed.

3.1 Data Collection

Data was collected in a process based on an example by Fischer et al. (2017). To find diverse publications on the development projects in the Omo valley, my analysis included scientific publications, NGO reports, and newspaper and blog articles. I specifically looked for documents published by decision-makers in Ethiopia to gain insights into the decisions that led to the development projects. Furthermore, I searched for documents by development agencies and Ethiopian as well as international media to display a wide variety of opinions.

As a starting point, I designed a search string[1] that covered the hydroelectric Gibe III and irrigated sugarcane agriculture in the Omo valley. Searches in two databases (Scopus and Google) were performed from April to June 2018. This initial search resulted in 17 articles from Scopus and 98,200 search results on google (Table 1). Additionally, further publications were identified through a backwards citation search and key informants (see text below for details) (Webster and Watson 2002). Initial results, which passed my inclusion/ exclusion criteria (Table 2 and 3), went into the final sample of documents.

Table 1: *Process of Data Collection (full list of documents in Appendix A)*

Source	Sample	
	Initial	Final
Scopus	17	6
Google	98,200	9
Backwards Citation Search		17
Key Informants	16	8
TOTAL	98233	40

I screened the title, abstract and full text of the scholarly articles found on Scopus for two formal and one content-related inclusion criteria (Table 1 and 2). Documents found with Google were screened for one formal and three content related criteria disclosed below (Table 1 and 2).

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[1] "Gibe III" OR "Gibe 3" OR "Kuraz Sugar Development Project" OR "Omo valley and dam" OR "Omo valley and sugar"

Table 2: Inclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Scopus	Google Searches
Formal	English or German Language	English or German Language
	Peer-reviewed	-
Content related	Explicitly deal with either Gibe III or irrigated sugarcane plantations (including KSDP) in the Omo valley	Explicitly deal with either Gibe III or irrigated sugarcane plantations (including KSDP) in the Omo valley
	Explicitly mentions socio-ecological impacts or justifications for the development projects	Explicitly mentions socio-ecological impacts or justifications for the development projects
	-	Explicitly expresses an opinion on the development projects OR produced empirical data

Table 3: Exclusion Criteria

Exclusion Criteria	Scopus	Google Searches
Formal	In languages other than English or German	In languages other than English or German
	Not peer-reviewed	-
Content related	E.g. describes Ethiopia's economic development in general without referencing the development projects in the Omo valley	E.g. describes Ethiopia's economic development in general without referencing the development projects in the Omo valley
	Only discusses technical details, such as size of the plantation, Gibe III, or produced energy	Only discusses technical details, such as size of the plantation, Gibe III, or produced energy
	-	The site/ report only summarizes other reports/ studies, without producing their own data or evaluating the developments themselves

Because of the great number of search results on Google (98,200), I started by applying the inclusion/ exclusion criteria on the first 10 search results. This process resulted in nine documents. I also checked relevant studies mentioned in the documents found on google and screened them against my criteria. In the process, I realized that I did not find new frames and stopped the search after the first ten search results on Google.

In the last step of data collection, I identified key informants in the field of study: one on the Gibe III and another on the KSDP. Through their research experience in the Omo valley, they were qualified to validate my sample of documents. I presented my documents to them, asking for additional relevant publications not yet included. They recommended 16 documents, which I checked against inclusion/ exclusion criteria. I added eight documents that passed the inclusion/ exclusion criteria and contained new frames to my selection of documents. Finally, my final sample consisted of 40 documents.

3.2 Data Analysis

I entered the documents into a database and analyzed them with the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA. I followed a procedure for qualitative content analysis by Mayring (2014) that aims to ensure a systematic approach for data analysis. Documents were analyzed completely, except for some that contained large amounts of purely technical information. In this case, only text passages that described the legitimization of the Gibe III dam were chosen as units of analysis.

As a first step, I used a semi-inductive coding approach (Ryan and Bernard 2000). Themes[2] such as "processes, actions, assumptions, and consequences" (ibid.) for coding were developed partly inductive from the texts themselves as well as deductively from the works of Entman (1993) and Leach et al. (2010 b). Both works on framing state that problems, their cause, and the solution are important parts of conveying meaning. Therefore *problem, causes,* and *solutions* were set themes. Leach et al. (2010 b) also stress that stakeholders with different interests also describe different benefits of solutions. Therefore, *associated benefits* served as a fourth theme. In an iterative process, after coding the four broad themes in the documents, I identified sub-codes inductively from the text. This step was part of the type-building process (Mayring 2014), that "classifies and describes a heterogeneous amount" of frames used by the stakeholders (ibid). This third round of coding lead to the final codebook (see Table 4 and Appendix B), which I applied to all documents. I then summarized homogenous groups of frames combined into narratives based on type-building content analysis (ibdi.). The reliability of the themes was checked by coding 10% of the documents a month after they were coded the first time. The test showed a high level of intercoder agreement.

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[2] Themes are also called "categories" or "codes" in literature (for example Kuckartz 2007), however, this paper will use the term "themes", that "are coded" based on Ryan and Bernard (2000).

Table 4: Example form Codebook (full codebook in Appendix B)

Thematic Category	Sub Category	Definition	Example	Rule
P: Indigenous Livelihood endangered		The indigenous people cannot continue their way of life due to development projects	"There is no doubt that due to the dam construction […] local peoples will have to […] change to the point of abandoning most of their way of life."	Code if it is described that/ how indigenous people have to change their traditional way of life because of the projects.
	P: Volation of Human Rights	Violation of human rights (mostly performed by state authorities on indigenous people) is a problem	"During 2011 Human Rights Watch found that local government and security forces had carried out arbitrary arrests and detentions, used physical violence, and seized or destroyed the property of indigenous communities."	Code if human rights violations are described as a problem.
...	…	…	…	…

For the second research question, I coded different solutions proposed in the documents. Using the two-cases model in MAXQDA, I identified individual and shared solutions used by opponents and proponents of the projects.

4 Development Projects in the Omo Valley

The Omo river flows from the western highlands of Ethiopia through lowland plains to Lake Turkana in northern Kenya, the world's largest desert lake (Carr 2017; Hurd 2016). The lower Omo river basin and the Lake Turkana region are culturally diverse and inhabited by ten to twelve groups of people who practice diverse livelihood strategies including pastoralism, agro-pastoralism, and fishing (Carr 2017). These "groups" (Turton 2011) are referred to as "indigenous people" (Fratkin 2014) or "tribes" (Schilling et al. 2016) in some peer-reviewed articles. However, the Ethiopian state does not recognize these local people as indigenous (Abbink 2012). The United Nation's definition says that most indigenous people "have retained distinct characteristics which are clearly different from those of other segments of the national populations" (Masaquiza). Since the people living in the Omo valley and the Lake Turkana region correspond to this definition (Carr 2017), this paper will use the term indigenous people. The annual Omo floods transport necessary freshwater, sediment, and nutrients to Lake Turkana and act as a natural irrigation for flood-retreat cultivations performed in the lower Omo valley (ibid.).

The Ethiopian government plans to increase the national power production to meet domestic needs for the growing industrial sector, electrify rural regions, and export power to neighboring countries to increase foreign currency earnings (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2010). For these purposes, they plan to build a cascade of dams on the Omo river: Gibe I started operating in 2004, Gibe II in 2010, and Gibe III in 2016 (Abbink 2012; Rani et al. 2008). Gibe IV and V are in planning (International Rivers 2013). The dam projects are closely linked to irrigated agriculture. Increasing irrigated agriculture for economic development and increased food security is a development measure described in the Ethiopian Growth and Transformation Plan (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2010). The plan sets the overarching aim of becoming a middle-income country by 2025 and describes the goal to become a major exporter of sugarcane. Officials from the Ethiopian Sugar Corporation have called the plans to build irrigated sugarcane plantations a "sweet promise" that will bring employment opportunities in a "structurally weak" region and increase foreign currency earing through sugarcane exports (Kamski 2016). Large-scale irrigated sugarcane plantations have been created on the banks of the Omo river. Because Gibe III is preventing the natural Omo floods, it was possible to build and maintain irrigation infrastructure that leads water from the river to the plantations. With a projected size of 175,000 hectares of irrigated sugarcane, the KSDP is by far the largest plantation in the Omo valley (ibid.).

The development projects are highly controversial due to their high social-ecological impacts on people living in the Lower Omo valley and in the Lake Turkana region in Kenya. Numbers of people who need the water of the Omo river to support their livelihoods vary from 300,000 to 1,000,000 people in Ethiopia and northern Kenya (Carr 2012; Fratkin 2014). Due to the lack of floods resulting from Gibe III, the indigenous people in the lower Omo valley will not be able to continue traditional agro-pastoralism or flood-retreat agriculture (Carr 2017; Schilling 2016). The KSDP is also built on land that was previously used for grazing, which will affect pastoralists even further. Additionally, the groundwater is predicted to decrease along the Omo river and carry chemical pollutants from the irrigated plantations (Africa Resources Working Group 2009; Avery 2013). Large projects also bring about other changes like an increase of working migrants and the spread of sexual transmitted diseases (Gibe III Hydroelectric Project n.d.). Consequently, the livelihoods of local people who do not perform traditional ways of agriculture will also be affected by the development projects.

The effects of the development projects in the Omo valley are spreading across national borders: People living in the Lake Turkana region in Kenya are also adversely impacted, since scientists foresee that the development projects will decrease the water level in Lake Turkana. This will lead to a loss of fish species that they depend on for food. Additionally, shortages of already scarce resources are predicted to increase social conflicts between different groups living in the region. There was no environmental and social impact assessment performed for the "actual impact zone" of Gibe III, which also includes the irrigated plantations (Carr 2012). The plantations are built in areas that are typically inhabited by pastoral and agro-pastoral peoples. To make room for the development projects, populations are being resettled further inland and away from the Omo river without any or sufficient compensation and consultation (Carr 2017; Stevenson and Buffavand 2018). The resettlement practices, that are often forced and criticized by human rights organizations, threaten the survival and "way of life of small but distinct ethnic groups" (Carr 2017; Fratkin 2014; Human Rights Watch 2012).

5 Results

The type building content analysis after Mayring (2014) identified patterns of how stakeholders combined frames into larger narratives. This following chapter gives an overview about the different narratives and shared solutions proposed by the stakeholders.

5.1 Narratives based on frames used to descibe Gibe III dam KSDP

Destruction of land and livelihoods[3]

The most prominent narrative in the selected documents is the narrative I call *"destruction of land and livelihoods"*. The narrative is expressed in 27 documents in slightly different versions. It argues that Gibe III and/ or the irrigated sugarcane plantation will adversely affect the livelihoods of people in the Omo valley and around Lake Turkana. Within the narrative, the stakeholders frame the Gibe III as the problem, which causes a lack of natural floods and water volume. The narrative argues that water shortage diminishes crop production for the people who live on the banks of the Omo river. According to the stakeholders using the *destruction of land and livelihoods* narrative, the situation is exacerbated by the KSDP: To make room for the large irrigated plantation, people were forcibly resettled away from the Omo, without prior consultation or adequate compensation. Also, stakeholders criticize that the water used by the KSDP is not flowing into Lake Turkana, so the lake will suffer a drastic change in its hydrological cycle, which will lead to a loss of biodiversity and food insecurity for the people who depend on fishery. Another problem frame used in the narrative is forced resettlement of entire villages to make space for the transmission line build to export energy from Gibe III to Kenya. Stakeholders telling this narrative also describe the forceful resettlement practices that are employed to make room for both the KSDP and the transmission line as violations against human rights. Additionally, they claim that the diminishing resources due to lack of biodiversity and water scarcity will lead to social conflict between indigenous tribes.

The documents using the *destruction of land and livelihoods* narrative mostly frame a shift in development policy as a solution to protect the livelihoods in the region: Eight documents call for a stop of the development projects, four documents appeal to the donors to stop funding the project, and nine documents propose a radical change in management practices of the development projects. Other proposed solutions are compensation for adversely affected locals, benefit sharing, help from international actors, a proper impact assessment, and dialogue and cooperation between the government and local communities.

Much needed energy

Twenty-one documents described the Gibe III dam as the solution to the pressing demand for energy in Ethiopia and the wider east African region. Some of the documents in this group stated that the lack of electricity is a problem to both Ethiopians in their everyday lives and to the developing economy. Stakeholders describe that as a reaction to this lack of energy, the government of Ethiopia formulated energy production as one of their core development goals. The *much needed energy* narrative frames large hydropower projects like the Gibe III as the solution to the increased demand for energy in Ethiopia. However, stakeholders name different beneficiaries of the produced energy: Some stakeholders claim that the increase of energy production will lead to benefits on the national scale

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[3] The names of the narratives resulted from the analyzed texts.

and rural electrification on the local scale. Other stakeholders argue that the energy production will benefit the industry and national economy, but electrification will still be out of reach for the poor in the country. Frequently mentioned benefits of the hydroelectric dams are that they emit significantly less CO_2 than conventional energy plants and can deliver water for irrigated agriculture nearby.

The narrative is employed in several texts. Even stakeholders who mainly criticize the development projects argue that the dam would produce "much needed energy" (Human Rights Watch 2012). However, they criticize that not everybody will benefit from the energy production.

Escape Poverty

This narrative stresses the potential of the development projects to *"escape the poverty"* (Hornaffairs 2015) and is used in ten documents. The narrative frames the problem as "underdevelopment" (Gibe III Hydroelectric Project n.d.) and describes the standards of living as very low. Indigenous local populations are depicted as plagued by food insecurity, and "wandering around searching for grazing land" (Ethiopian Sugar Corporation 2017). In this narrative, Gibe III is framed as the solution that enables irrigated sugarcane agriculture, which in turn will bring economic benefits on a local and national level. Some of the examples mentioned are that the plantations will bring employment opportunities, better infrastructure, and regulate previously harmful floods. On a national level, exported energy and sugarcane will increase foreign currency earning, increase food security, and help Ethiopia reach the goal of becoming a middle-income country by 2025. The stakeholders argue in the logic of the "trickle-down effect", which claims that wealth accumulated on a national scale will "trickle-down" (Aghion and Bolton 1997) and eventually lead to higher income and more wealth for everybody.

Five stakeholders combine this narrative with the problem frame that international actors "do not want to see a developed Africa" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ethiopia 2016). These stakeholders claim that reports of NGOs, which argue along the lines of the *destruction of land and livelihoods* narrative, are biased and the NGOs falsely accuse the Ethiopian government. Instead, they claim that the benefits of the development projects are plenty and outweigh the socio-economic costs.

The three narratives outlined above are fundamentally different in what they frame as problems, causes, solutions and associated benefits. Table 5 gives an overview about often used frames in the different narratives.

Table 5: Summary: Typical frames used in narratives

	Destruction of land and livelihoods narrative	Much needed energy narrative	Escape poverty narrative
Problem frame	Lack of floods	Lack of energy & economic development in Ethiopia, low standards of living	Poverty, low standards of living (especially in the Omo valley)
Cause frame	Gibe III & KSDP	Lack of energy production	No economic development
Solution frame	Stop of projects, stop of project funding, respect human rights,…	Gibe III &KSDP	Development projects like Gibe III & KSDP
Associated benefit frame		Low CO_2 emissions of hydroelectricity	Energy, jobs, Health centers, education,…

Several stakeholders employ more than one narrative. The most prominent narrative used in the analyzed documents is the *"destruction of land and livelihoods"* narrative, followed by "*much needed energy*" and "*escape poverty*". The intention of this paper is not to claim that one narrative is the most dominant or most used in the discourse on the development projects in the Omo valley, since this depends on the selection of analyzed documents. However, the count of narratives and the frequency of narratives by stakeholder group gives a broad overview about which narratives are typically used by whom (Table 6).

Table 6: Frequency of narratives by stakeholder group

	Destruction of land and livelihoods	Much needed energy	Escape Poverty
Academia (9)	8 (29,6%)	6 (28,6%)	1 (10%)
Development Agencies (2)	2 (7,4%)		
Ethiopian media (7)	4 (14,8%)	4 (19%)	2 (20%)
Government and state-owned enterprises (8)		5 (23,8%)	7 (70%)
International media (5)	4 (14,8%)	4 (19%)	
NGOs (9)	9 (33,3%)	2 (9,5%)	
Total (40)	27 (100%)	21 (100%)	10[4] (100%)

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[4] The sum of the narratives used exceeds 40, because several documents use more than one narrative.

The analysis shows that some narratives exclude each other. Most notably, if the *destruction of land and livelihood* narrative is predominantly used in a text, the *escape poverty* narrative is absent and vice versa. Even though documents from the government and state corporations mention potential adverse impacts like food insecurity and absence of floods, they stress that there are plans to address these impacts. They also emphasize the benefits like economic growth and local job opportunities far more than the projects' cost.

Overall, there are three main groups among the documents I looked at. The first group is mostly made up out of academia, NGOs, and international media. These stakeholders mostly use the *destruction of land and livelihoods* narrative and argue for a halt of development projects. This group is highly critical of or against the development projects. This critical group conflicts with a group mostly made up of Ethiopian media and the Ethiopian government, which argues that the development projects are necessary. Both sides widely recognize the need for energy production and see the benefits and costs of the projects. However, they assign different weights on the benefits. A third group does not express a clear opinion of the projects.

5.2 Which pathways out of the conflict emerge from the frame analysis?

At the first glimpse, the analysis shows that stakeholders use different narratives, which partly contradict each other. Narratives usually suggest a certain way the system or issue they are referring to should develop. To see how the stakeholders want the development projects in the Omo valley to move forward, I focused on what they framed as solutions. With the help of the two-cases model in MAXQDA, I created a figure that shows the proposed solutions of dam opponents and proponents (Figure 2). The group of stakeholders that does not explicitly express an own opinion on the projects is not represented in the figure.
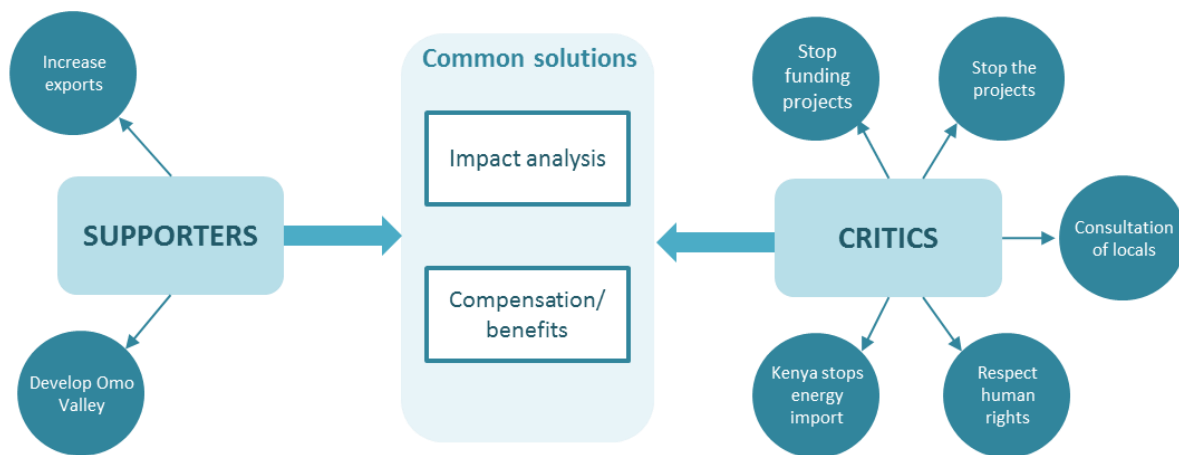

Figure 2: Solutions proposed by supporting and critical stakeholders

The analysis of the solution frames shows that opponents of the dams propose solutions to stop or relieve the negative impacts they see on the livelihoods of people dependent on the Omo river. For example, they request a stop in funding for the projects or a change in management practices to ensure human rights. Proponents of the projects on the other hand see the dam in itself as part of the solution that will increase exported goods and "develop" the Omo valley.

To link the conflicting groups together, I also searched for solutions that both opponents and proponents of the projects agree on. For example, conducting and releasing a proper social and environmental impact analysis not only for the Gibe III, but also of the KSDP, is framed as a solution by both critics and supporters of the projects. This is especially important for future development projects, like Gibe IV and V, since their impact analyses can still be carried out. Conducting an impact analysis years after the dam and sugarcane plantations started to operate might not solve the conflict between the proponents and opponents of the development projects. Hence, practical solutions for the "no-going back scenario" in the Omo valley are needed (Kamski 2016). One constructive solution mentioned by supporters as well as critics of Gibe III and the KSDP is that there should be compensation for affected households and/ or a system for benefit sharing between the local population and the sugar plantation. However, there seems to be a lack of implementation of the government's plan to compensate adversely affected people. Several sources mention that there was little to no compensation so far (Abbink 2012; Oakland Institute 2013).

Improving the living conditions of the people in the Omo valley was also an often-used motivation in the documents. It is a common goal, not a solution, yet it is important to stress that there are, in fact, shared underlying motives and goals described in the analyzed documents.

6 Discussion

My analysis demonstrates that stakeholders have different priorities that become visible in their contrasting frames used in different narratives. The following sections put my results in context with the literature on framing and development projects and aim to shed light on underlying world views and objectives as drivers for the different frames and narratives.

6.1 A modernist project?

Recent publications by Atkins (2017) and Ahlers (2014) show that parts of the discourse on modernity are employed today to argue in favor of large dams. Based on Hall et al. (1992), Ahlers identified five central discursive categories that turn dam projects into modernist projects: (1) the conquering of nature; (2) technological fix for socio-political problems; (3) the 'civilizing' mission of western powers; (4) nation-building and the unification of a fragmented society; and (5) notions of economic progress (Ahlers 2014). Atkins et al. (2017) added the categories; (6) demonization of opposition networks and (7) the sustainability of Belo Monte (a dam in Brazil). I found that frames and narratives used by the proponents of the development projects in the Omo valley touched upon all these discursive elements.

The 'civilizing' mission of western powers

The development projects in the Omo valley are depicted as a mission to civilize people in an "underdeveloped and backwards" region, especially in the *escape poverty* narrative (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ethiopia 2016). Whereas Ahlers (2014) describes western powers as the agents that drive the "civilization", the *escape poverty* narrative sees the Ethiopian state as the actor that develops the Omo valley. This might be due to Ethiopia's unique colonial past: In 1896 the Ethiopian Emperor Melenik seized control over Southwest Ethiopia (including the Omo valley) to keep the region from being colonized by European powers. The region formerly consisted of independent states and small

groups (Hurd 2016). Except for a short Italian occupation in 1939, Ethiopia was never colonized (Yates 2013). However, colonial forces still impacted the livelihoods in the Omo valley. For example when the Italians unintentionally imported rinderpest that resulted in the Mursi being depended on agriculture instead of cattle herding (Hurd 2016). The colonial history might lie in the past; however, it cannot be completely separated from the current thinking. In fact, Ethiopians are proud of never having been colonized. This becomes clear regarding the current development projects, where some stakeholders stress that the development projects were possible due to the growing capacity of Ethiopians to design and carry out large scale technical projects (Mishra and Aklilu 2015).

The conquering of nature

Atkins (2017) finds that the conquering of nature is not an argument used in the conflict on the Belo Monte dam in Brazil. In contrast to these findings, proponents of the development projects in the Omo valley frequently mention how the projects will conquer nature. Especially in the *escape poverty* narrative, stakeholders want to regulate the natural floods of the Omo river to protect the people from devastating floods. One stakeholder mentions that it is better to "tame" the river than to "live at its mercy" (Tigrai Online 2010). The strong focus on conquering nature might be due to historical reasons. When the highlanders under the control of Emperor Melenik took control over Southwestern Ethiopia in 1896, the Omo valley was described as an untamed "wilderness" without a "recognizable imprint of civilization" by the local inhabitants (Turton 2011). The need to conquer nature in the current conflict seems to be the continuation of these descriptions. How nature is seen is emblematic for the different perspectives of stakeholders on the Omo valley. Opponents of the development projects for example see nature as providing the basis for the livelihoods instead of endangering them. They argue that floods are crucial to the survival of the indigenous people because they bring necessary water and nutrients (Carr 2017; Fratkin 2014).

Demonization of opposition

According to Atkins (2017), the opposition of the Belo Monte dam in Brazil is "demonized". Similar to Atkins' findings, the government of Ethiopia portrays opposing forces as evil and characterized by ill intentions towards the Ethiopian state and its people. The *escape poverty* narrative claims that whoever does not support the development projects, does not want the people in Ethiopia to have higher living standards. This argument portrays the Ethiopian development policy as the only possible way to move forward. Hence, it is contributing to closing down the discourse on the development projects and disregarding other, alternative pathways.

The sustainability of the projects

The "sustainability aspect" (Atkins 2017) of the projects is also prominent in many of the documents analyzed. Fifteen stakeholders see the need for clean energy as a driver of the hydroelectric developments in Ethiopia. To stress the benefits of the renewable energy sources, most pro dam stakeholders compare the CO_2 emissions of hydroelectricity with conventional energy production. However, most stakeholders do not consider the social dimension of sustainability. The use of sustainability as a justification is also a less typical modernist argument than a feature of many other theories as well, like the sustainable livelihoods framework discussed in the following section.

6.2 Sustainable livelihoods - Same framework, different arguments?

The influence of the sustainable livelihood framework on the discourse on large dams is barely discussed in academic literature. The sustainable livelihood framework is a concept that aims to improve the understanding of the livelihood of the poor. Among other things, it puts the people in the center of analysis and argues that people need a wide range of assets to achieve a sustainable livelihood outcome (Department for International Development 2001). My findings suggest that opponents and proponents of the Gibe III and KSDP use parts of the framework, namely the vulnerability context, transforming structures and processes, and livelihood assets to justify different courses of action.

Vulnerability Context

According to the sustainable livelihood framework, people operate within a context of vulnerability (Department for International Development 2001). The vulnerability of the local people living downstream of the Omo river is a reoccurring theme in the *destruction of land and livelihood* narrative. In this narrative, the lack of floods functions as the shock that disturbs the current livelihood strategies along the Omo river. Proponents of the projects recognize the vulnerability of locals as well. However, they highlight that the people are vulnerable because of the long periods of drought, the low flow volume of the Omo river in these periods and the lack of electricity in rural areas. In the *much needed energy* as well as the *escape poverty* narrative, they argue that the development projects will make the livelihoods more stable, since Gibe III will allow a controlled and constant flow. Additionally, the KSDP is supposed to create employment opportunities and thereby increase the financial assets of the local population. The government also argues that Gibe III will lead to rural electrification. However, there is a lack of detail in government documents that provides information on how the rural population will be supplied with energy (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2010, Gibe III Hydroelectric Project n.d.).

Transforming structures and processes

The vulnerability context of the sustainable livelihood framework mostly lies outside of people's control. Transforming structures and processes, like policy reforms however, can alter the vulnerability contexts of people, for example by helping them become more resilient (Department for International Development 2001). The opponents and proponents of the development projects in the Omo valley also have different understandings of transforming structures and processes. The *escape poverty* narrative argues that technical solutions like new irrigation techniques for the plantations and hydroelectricity will lead to trickle down effects that will help the local people gain wealth. Critics of the projects have a fundamentally different understanding of how the market works. They believe that the profits from the development projects will stay in the hands of a few and will not trickle down to the poor.

Livelihood assets

The sustainable livelihood framework also stresses that different assets, like natural and financial capital are needed to achieve a sustainable livelihood outcome. In the narratives that describe the development projects in the Omo valley, the different stakeholders focus on different assets. In the *escape poverty* narrative, the government and state corporations focus on increasing physical and financial assets. The opponents of the projects on the other hand stress the destruction of natural assets by the development projects. Additionally to the different content of the narratives, the arguments brought forward have different functions. The *much needed energy* and *escape poverty* narrative usually

propose solutions to existing problems and highlight the need for Ethiopians to support the projects. The *destruction of land and livelihood* narrative on the other hand mostly identifies problems and their causes. Risley (2014) found that NGOs were unsuccessful in stopping a dam project in Chile, partly because they were on "collision course" with the government instead of proposing "current policy-friendly" and constructive solutions to the governments. A direct comparison between Chile and Ethiopia is fruitless, due to Ethiopia's autocratic regime being fundamentally different from the democracy in Chile. However, my findings support Risley's statement that most NGOs assign blame to powerful stakeholders like the Ethiopian state and offer few constructive solutions. In this context, Abbink (2012) speaks about a "clash of narratives" between stakeholders in the Omo valley.

6.3 Pathway or Pathways?

My results support that the different frames, woven together in different narratives by different stakeholders also point towards "a clash" based on contrasting worldviews (Abbink 2012). Each stakeholder is focused on their own interpretation of the development projects and therefore only sees one single pathway how the Omo valley should develop. This is where it becomes important to apply the pathways approach (Leach et al. 2010 b) and stress that diverse frames and narratives exist. By looking at the various kinds of narratives told by the stakeholders and the pathways that emerge from them, ways out of the conflict appear. For example, my findings reveal that the conflicting stakeholders have the common goal of improving living conditions. There is a difference in whose living conditions should be improved, though. The Ethiopian government is mainly concerned with Ethiopians living in the Omo valley and in other parts of the country. NGOs, scientists, and the government of Kenya also include people living in northern Kenya. Just like the livelihood framework, this puts the people in the center of attention. Hence, even though there is a clash in narratives, there are starting points for a development pathway that takes into account a wider range of stakeholder interests. One way to target improved living conditions could be to inquire what changes are needed the most in the Omo valley and northern Kenya. As a next step, the recommendations could be incorporated into management plans of the Gibe III and the KSDP.

6.4 Critical Reflection

Most studies on framing use interviews to deduct different frames. Due to better data availability, this study analyzes documents published by different stakeholders. This might be seen as a limitation to the validity of this study. However, I argue that more viewpoints in additional documents or interviews might diversify the identified frames but would not change the patterns that emerged through this analysis. Additionally, several of the documents analyzed contain interviews from indigenous people from the Omo valley and Lake Turkana.

7 Conclusion

This study seeks to contribute to the "fundamental need to open up" and describes a great diversity of narratives touching on different problem, cause, solution, and associated benefit frames (Leach et al. 2010 b). This rich picture of different perspectives provides a deeper understanding of the specific situation of different stakeholders and reveals points of common interests that can bring the stakeholders closer together.

I found three narratives which are used frequently within the debate on the development projects in the Omo valley: *destruction of land and livelihoods, much needed energy*, and *escape poverty*. The research also finds that the *destruction of land and livelihoods* narrative is prominently used by opponents of the projects, namely NGOs, academia as well as international newspaper articles. Ethiopian government, state-owned companies, and several of the Ethiopian media sources on the other hand support the projects and mostly employ the *escape poverty* narrative. The narrative that highlights the need for low-carbon energy production in East Africa and the high potential of Gibe III to supply this, is used frequently among all the stakeholder groups. My research also reveals arguments of the 20th century modernist discourse provided by Ahlers et al. (2014) are used today to argue for the development projects in the Omo valley. The stakeholders also have a fundamentally different opinion on how to evaluate parts of the sustainable livelihood framework, like the livelihood assets, transforming structures and processes, and the vulnerability context.

Hence, this paper depicts many contrasting viewpoints on the development projects, but also shows that the conflicting parties propose common solutions, and both recognize the importance of energy production and the need to improve living conditions of the people in the region. These points create a common ground and can be valuable for decisionmakers of current and future projects in the Omo valley. However, more research is needed on the potential barriers that prevent the implementation of the shared solutions like the compensation for adversely affected people. Following the pathways approach, this paper shows diversity of narratives and contributes to opening up concrete possibilities for ways forward (Leach et al. 2010 b). A promising next step is an interventionist approach on the ground that actively provides stakeholders the opportunity to reflect on the different narratives, for example in a stakeholder workshop. Such an opportunity could foster a debate on existing policy strategies and might lead to a more diverse development policy. Building on the results of this paper, the workshop could also further assess possibilities of benefit sharing mechanisms. For this, local people and the government could work on a shared vision that includes such a system. This would give the local people in the Omo valley and Lake Turkana region the space to express what kind of benefits, like land or money, they would like to receive. The shared vision could serve as a base for a follow-up workshop that employs backward planning to sketch out concrete steps to reach the constructed vision (Holmberg 1998).

Rethinking ideas and practices is not only a task for decisionmakers and opponents on the development projects in the Omo valley, but for research itself. Most of the peer-reviewed articles I analyzed were themselves narrowed down on one or a few narratives. In this context, it is important to go beyond often told narratives and engage in a knowledge production process that is transdisciplinary and participatory.

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