

## Research Article

# Assessing Organizational Effectiveness, Engagement and Partnerships in Biodiversity Policy Advocacy in Tanzania

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## Abstract

Civil society organizations and community-based organizations play an increasingly important role globally in shaping natural resource governance and influencing biodiversity conservation policies. Through advocacy, policy dialogue, and partnerships with governments and development partners, these organizations help improve natural resources governance and ensure that community voices are represented in decision-making processes. Within this context, this study examines the strengths, weaknesses, and levels of engagement among organizations involved in biodiversity policy advocacy in Tanzania to identify areas for more effective future support and partnerships. The study employed 30 key informant interviews and three focus group discussions with stakeholders involved in biodiversity conservation. Findings show that ten organizations have a defined policy advocacy agenda. Key strengths include strong advocacy capacity demonstrated by organizations such as Tanzania Forest Conservation Group, Tanzania Natural Resource Forum, the national network of community forest groups, and Marine Conservation and Development Initiative, which have successfully influenced policy and legal reforms. Additional strengths include strong national and international networks, credibility with government authorities and partners, effective use of media, and the ability to communicate policy recommendations to decision-makers. However, common weaknesses include limited funding for policy advocacy activities and a shortage of skilled policy advocates. Engagement in monitoring, evaluation, learning, and financial sustainability planning remains limited. Nonetheless, engagement in financial planning and sustainability remains weak, highlighting a key area for future capacity building and partnership strengthening. In conclusion, Tanzanian biodiversity advocacy organizations show strong policy influence but require greater financial and technical support to maximize their impact.

## Keywords

Biodiversity Policy Advocacy, Stakeholder Engagement, Policy Influence, Advocacy Effectiveness, Natural Resource Governance

## 1. Introduction

Biodiversity conservation in Tanzania is shaped by a complex interplay of ecological priorities, policy frameworks, and

the diverse stakeholders engaged in natural resource governance [13, 19, 47]. As one of the most biodiverse countries in

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sub-Saharan Africa, Tanzania faces persistent threats including deforestation, habitat loss, unsustainable resource use, climate change, and weak coordination across sectors [11, 15, 31, 33, 46]. These challenges have intensified the need for effective policy advocacy, especially among civil society organizations (CSOs), Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), and networks that influence decision-making at local, national, and regional levels. Policy advocacy is widely recognized as critical for strengthening conservation outcomes, as it helps shape regulatory frameworks, mobilize evidence, amplify community voices, and ensure accountability among governance institutions [34, 36].

In Tanzania, natural resource governance operates within multiple policy arenas including forestry, wildlife, fisheries, land, energy, and climate and these arenas are often characterized by institutional fragmentation and overlapping mandates [18, 27]. Such complexities reinforce the importance of strong advocacy coalitions capable of bridging sectoral divides and ensuring coherent policies that cut across biodiversity. Recent studies highlight that CSOs and networks such as the Tanzania Natural Resource Forum (TNRf), the Tanzania Forest Conservation Group (TFCG), MJUMITA, and the Mpingo Conservation and Development Initiative (MCDI) have gained influence by engaging policymakers, convening multi-stakeholder dialogues, and participating in policy formulation processes [20, 43]. Their contributions align with global evidence indicating that organizations with strong networks, financial resilience, strategic clarity, and technical expertise are more successful at influencing policy and legislative reforms [35, 50].

Despite these achievements, policy advocacy in biodiversity conservation remains constrained by limited institutional capacity, inadequate funding, and shortages of skilled policy analysts and lobbyists challenges that mirror broader patterns in environmental governance across the Global South [14, 44, 45]. Many organizations in Tanzania continue to rely on short-term project grants rather than long-term core funding, undermining sustainability and the ability to maintain evidence-

based advocacy efforts. Furthermore, although partnerships with international actors such as the European Union (EU), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the United Nations (UN) have strengthened visibility and technical capacity, engagement in financial planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning remains weak across the sector [18, 30, 45].

Understanding the strengths, weaknesses, and levels of engagement of key policy advocacy actors is therefore essential for enhancing Tanzania's biodiversity governance landscape. Such assessments guide strategic investments, improve coordination among actors, and ensure that organizations are better positioned to influence policy reforms that promote conservation and sustainable development. This study contributes to the growing literature on policy advocacy by providing an empirical assessment of 30 organizations engaged in biodiversity policy advocacy in Tanzania. It identifies their areas of strengths and weaknesses and determine their level of engagement and commitment with Government and or other key partners in biodiversity conservation. Ultimately, the study aims to inform future support, investment, and partnership strategies necessary to strengthen evidence-based advocacy for improved biodiversity outcomes in Tanzania.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Study Area

The study was carried out to a total of 30 organizations working in the Ruvuma Landscape, Rufiji-Mafia-Kilwa (RUMAKI) Seascape, Southern Kenya Northern Tanzania (SOKNOT) ecosystems landscape and Water Tower Landscapes (Table 1). These landscapes are categorised as per WWF Strategic Plan. The study was carried out from 2021-2024.

*Table 1. Location of consulted organizations.*

| SN | Organization   | Location      |
|----|--|---------------|
| 1  | CBFM Lionja) and Ndonga WMA  | Nachingwea    |
| 2  | Nalika and Chingoli WMAs, PAM Foundation, and SUA – Tunduru Campus | Tunduru       |
| 3  | RWBO, BMU – NAMELA, and MASHA                                      | Mtwara        |
| 4  | CBFM Mchakama, MCDI, BMU – Somanga                                 | Kilwa         |
| 5  | Juhiwangumwa WMA   | Rufiji        |
| 6  | BMU - POMBWE   | Kibiti        |
| 7  | TFS, TAREA, CWMAC, TuNA Alliance, MJUMITA, TFCG and TaTEDO         | Dar es Salaam |
| 8  | TNRf and TAWIRI  | Arusha        |

| SN | Organization  | Location |
|----|---|----------|
| 9  | Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, MNRT (FBD and WD) and Ministry of Land, Settlement Development and Housing | Dodoma   |
| 10 | TAWA, TAFORI, SUA and SUHODE  | Morogoro |

### 2.1.1. Ruvuma Landscape

The Ruvuma landscape includes Southern Tanzania and Northern Mozambique. It extends from Lake Nyasa in the West, along the Ruvuma River basin, to the Indian Ocean in the East. This area includes a number of globally important eco-regions - Miombo Woodlands, Eastern African Coastal Forests, Lake Nyasa and Eastern African Marine and marks the interface between the Eastern and Southern Africa bio-geographical regions. The Ruvuma landscape is dominated by miombo woodlands which serve as important biological links for wildlife to migrate from one place to another, from Selous Game Reserve/Nyerere National Park to Niasa Game Reserve. Despite its ecological importance, the Landscape face a number of challenges that include encroachment, shifting cultivation, illegal logging, illegal fishing, poaching and gem stone mining challenges. This assignment was carried out in the Ruvuma land scape involving public institutions, NGOs and CBOs.

### 2.1.2. Rumaki Seascape

RUMAKI Seascape is the most important coastlines and adjacent marine territorial waters of three administrative districts on the central-southern Tanzanian coast: namely Rufiji, Mafia and Kilwa. The RUMAKI Seascape has important ecological features that harbour natural habitats, ecosystems, plant and animal species of tremendous local, national and international importance. Despite its ecological importance, the Seascape faces many challenges including poverty. The challenges limit sustainable conservation of the unique biodiversity in the coastal areas. Thus, improved management of this important seascape is key to sustain the ecological, social and economic development for the present and future generation. Deterioration in the RUMAKI ecosystem has impacted major natural assets and development investments around coastal waters of Tanzania.

### 2.1.3. Soknot

The SOKNOT transboundary conservation area broadly covers the following three ecosystems in two countries of Tanzania and Kenya: Mara-Serengeti; Amboseli-West Kilimanjaro and Tsavo-Mkomazi. The SOKNOT transboundary landscape forms a connected network of protected areas, including core wildlife dispersal areas and functional corridors; with the resultant ecosystem services underpinning community livelihoods and sustainable development in Kenya and Tanzania.

### 2.1.4. Water Tower Landscape

Water Towers Landscape is one of the four landscapes/seascapes designed in the new Corporate Strategic Plan of WWF. This landscape is unique as it forms the larger part of water sources in Tanzania that are critical for human wellbeing and contribute to economic growth of Tanzania. The landscape area estimated to be 158,000 Km<sup>2</sup> and covers East Usambara Mountains and lowland forests; other eastern Arc Mountain forests and nature reserves (Uluguru, Nguu, Udzungwa, Uzungwa, Nilo, Mount Rungwe, Kipengere, Kilombero, Magombera). The landscape also hosts important National Parks (Saadani, Ruaha, Mikumi) and the Southern Agriculture Growth Corridor of Tanzania. The major rivers flowing out of these water towers include Pangani, Ruvu, Wami, and Rufiji. These rivers supply water for agriculture, hydropower, domestic and industrial use, livestock as well as wildlife. Furthermore, the Landscape covers major food producing regions, known as national food reserves. These regions are Morogoro, Iringa and Mbeya. In addition, large proportion of hydropower that feed the national grid is generated from these water towers.

## 2.2. Procedures for Data Collection

Key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions were used for data collection. Before the actual interview and discussion, the interview and discussion guides were pre-tested then the interview guide was revised based on the responses received. During data collection in pre-identified organizations, we asked for consent from the head of the respective organization and individuals for discussion before the actual interviews and discussions. After receiving permission, we explained the purpose of the study to the respondents and confidentiality of their responses. The interviews were conducted with the head of organization using either Swahili or English languages and lasted for 45 minutes for each respondent.

## 2.3. Sampling Design and Sample Size

The study involved 30 organizations. Stratified sampling design was used to stratify organizations according to public, NGOs and CBOs, then those playing at local, national, regional and global level policy dialogues were taken into consideration. We employed proportionate sampling to select

number of organizations in each stratum. Sample of organizations from each stratum was selected purposively. Two criteria were used in the selection; age of organization, and type of policy advocated. In this regard, organizations with long experience in policy advocacy and dealing with more than one natural resource were most preferred for in depth interview. We conducted 3 Focus Group Discussion with public, NGOs and CBOs separately. Each group with 5-8 individuals.

## 2.4. Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data were collected. Secondary data were collected through document review. The documents reviewed included Forest policy of Tanzania, Wildlife policy, Fisheries policy, Land policy, National Development Vision 2025 and; National Development Strategy 2016/2017-2020/202. Primary data were collected through in-depth interview with key informants and Focus Group Discussion.

In depth interviews were conducted with 30 heads of organizations to collect data on areas of strength and weakness within organizations. Followed by 3 Focus Group Discussions conducted to a group of 5-8 members to gain a general understanding of the strength and weakness of organization but also for validating the information collected. The interview and discussions were conducted in two steps: 1) to identify areas of strength and weakness of organization, and 2) analyse strength and weakness in areas identified. Some of areas of strength and weakness include, but not limited to: employees (number and qualifications), internal and external network, presentation of policy issues, relationship with policy makers and Media.

## 2.5. Data Analysis

Data were subjected to Nvivo 10 software for thematic analysis. Deductive codes were drawn from SWOT framework. The technique helped to reduce the volume of recorded information to a set of categories that represent strength or weakness that are within the organizations. Key Informants Interview was conducted to 30 stakeholderds to determine the level of engagement and commitment of the organizations with Government and other key players. asked two questions to measure extent of stakeholder's engagement and level of commitment. Each question contained 6 statements. A three points Likert scale was used for each statement where 0 = Not all, 1= sometimes, and 2 = frequently and where 0 = Not all, 1= slightly committed, and 2 = Highly committed for engagement and commitment respectively. Consultant team also asked respondents to explain why for each option chosen and how engagement was done. In assessing organizations engagement, five broad levels of engagement process suggested by Lemke and Harris-Wai were considered, the levels were (i) inform (e.g., fact sheets, websites, open houses), (ii) consult (e.g., public comment, focus groups, surveys, public meetings), (iii) involve (e.g., workshops, deliberative polling), (iv)

collaborate (e.g., citizen advisory committees, consensus building, participatory decision making), and (v) empower (e.g., citizen juries, delegated decisions) [24]. In this study Government refers to all public organizations and others key players refers to CSOs and local communities. All interviews were audio recorded for deductive thematic analysis using Nvivo 10. We also considered additional notes that were taken immediately after each interview [5, 48]. Descriptive analysis was calculated by MS excel to obtain level of engagement and commitment.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Profiles of Consulted Organizations

The 30 organizations dealing with biodiversity conservation were consulted. The organizations that were consulted include NGOs, Government institutions (including Government departments/agencies/authorities), academic and research institutions, and CBOs. Out of 30 organizations consulted in this assignment, 33% (n = 10) were NGOs, 23% (n = 7) were Government department/agencies/authorities, 10% (n = 3) were academic and research institutions and 33% (n = 10) were CBOs.

### 3.2. Areas of Strengths and Weaknesses Within the Organizations

Strength and weakness of organizations in policy advocacy regarding biodiversity conservation are very important for future investments. Matter of fact is that no any organization has strength without weaknesses. It was realized that out of 30 organizations consulted, 10 organizations deal with policy advocacy issues and the main strengths identified include: Some NGOs have convincing power and managed to influence policy changes, they are trusted by the government authorities, regional and global partners, and have managed to organize different policy dialogues and forums for biodiversity conservation. For instance, TNRF in 2019 managed to organize meeting which involved seven (7) Ministers and through that meeting various policies and laws with negative impact to biodiversity conservation were amended. Among the amended regulation/policy was issue of the wildlife investors to own hunting block for 5 years which is very short time for the investor to realize the profit, through policy advocacy in 2020 the regulation was amended to 10 up to 15 years for the investors to own hunting blocks. Further TNRF through policy advocacy influenced inclusion of people with primary education to contest for Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) leadership. Other strengths identified were connection to many other organizations at national, regional and global levels, good relationship with mass media (e.g Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation (TBC), Independent Television (ITV) and Azam Television), social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram)

and capacity to present policy recommendations to policy makers.

The main weaknesses identified were limited budget for implementation of the policy advocacy activities as they rely on

external (donor) funds. Out of ten (10) organizations dealing with policy advocacy, nine (9) organizations have limited policy advocacy capacity (skills). **Table 2** presents areas of strengths and weaknesses of the consulted organizations.

**Table 2.** Strengths and weaknesses within the organizations to enable more effective future support, investment and partnership.

| SN | Organization | Areas of strength  | Areas of weaknesses  |
|----|--------------|--|--|
| 1  | SUHODE       | Personnel (advocate) - has 15 staff who are dedicated and committed in policy advocacy, Relationship with decision policy makers - has good relationship, Presentation of policy issues - has ability to prepare documents in simple language for the policy makers, Internal or external networking - has partnership and coalition with other organizations at national level and government institutions in policy advocacy, and Practical experience - has long term and practical experience in policy advocacy.  | Funding advocacy – has limited fund for advocacy, and Resources for advocacy – has limited working facilities like transport.  |
| 2  | TNRF         | Personnel (advocate) - Has communication and experienced staff in policy advocacy, Media relationship - has established good relationship with various media (Radio, Tv mass media and websites), Internal and external network - has connected to many other organizations at national, regional and global levels that deals with biodiversity conservation and policy advocacy, Presentation of policy issues - has established a forum for policy advocacy involves different stakeholders, Relationship with CBOs - has connected with CSOs and CBOs at grass root, and Advocacy agenda - has well prepared advocacy agenda | Funding advocacy – has no sustainable fund for advocacy, it depends on project, and Practical experience – mainly on forest and wildlife, not on fisheries.  |
| 3  | CWMAC        | Personnel (advocate) – has staff with experience in policy advocacy, Practical experience – has sufficient experience on policy dialogues which resulted to regulation changes, Relationship with CBOs – is an apex body of AAs, Relationship with decision policy makers – has good relationship with parliamentary committees, Internal and external network - has connected to many other organizations at national, regional and global levels that deals with biodiversity conservation and policy advocacy, and Advocacy agenda – has policy advocacy agenda with budgets.   | Funding advocacy – has limited fund for advocacy   |
| 4  | MCDI         | Relationship with CBOs – is trusted by community managing VLFRs, Advocacy agenda – has policy advocacy agenda, Practical experience – has field based experienced, Personnel (advocate) – has qualified staff and committed staff, Relationship with decision policy makers - Good relationship with Regional Commissioner (RC) and District Commissioner (DC), Presentation of policy issues – has project-based forum, and Internal and external network – has connected with other organizations at local, national, regional and global and is financed by many donors.  | Funding advocacy – has small budget and some time they have limited budget for policy advocacy,<br>Coverage of operation - mainly four regions specifically southern part of Tanzania, and Personnel (advocate) - has few staff dealing with policy advocacy activities.   |
| 5  | MASHA        | Internal and external network – has trust and well known at regional level (Mtwara), and Practical experience – has experience working in environment and livelihood activities since 2008.  | Funding advocacy – Limited funds for the training,<br>Limited internal and external network,<br>Resources for advocacy – limited transportation facilities,<br>Advocacy agenda – there is no policy advocacy agenda, and Do not have skilled policy advocates (lobbyists). |
| 6  | TaTEDO       | Internal and external network – has many stakeholders at national, regional and global levels that are working together in various projects, Practical experience – has participated in formulation of vision and strategy government  | Funding advocacy – lack sustainable fund. Donor driven fund, in most cases implement donor objectives Personnel  |

| SN | Organization | Areas of strength   | Areas of weaknesses   |
|----|--------------|---|---|
|    |              | and other organizations, Presentation of policy issues – has project-based forum, Relationship with decision policy makers – has good relationship with parliamentary committees, and Advocacy agenda – has policy advocacy agenda for specific projects.   | (advocate) - has few staff for advocacy activities  |
| 7  | TuNA         | Practical experience – has practical experience in policy advocacy, Internal and external network – has members at Regional level (Mozambique, Zambia, Kenya and Madagascar), and Personnel (advocate) – has strong leaders experienced in policy advocacy skills.  | Funding advocacy – depend funds from donor to implement their activities are donor driven     |
| 8  | TAREA        | Funding advocacy – has many donors (e.g Netherland, GIZ, BFZ) and partners, Advocacy agenda – has policy advocacy agenda related to renewable energy, Internal and external network – has members at different levels and has partnered with national, regional and global stakeholders, Relationship with decision policy makers - Has the contact person at Ministry of Energy and minerals to support policy advocacy activities, and Understanding policy environment - participate in preparation of government policy, strategies, rules and regulations regarding re-new able e energy   | Personnel (advocate) - has few staff dealing with policy advocacy issues.                     |
| 9  | MJUMITA      | Personnel (advocate) has skilled policy advocates (lobbyists).and committed team, Media relation – has good relation and has been used mass media like Abood in policy advocacy, Relationship with decision policy makers – has good relationship with the Ministry and parliamentary committees, Advocacy agenda – has policy advocacy agenda, Practical experience – has long term knowledge in policy advocacy, Relationship with CBOs – is trusted by local based networks of community forests, Presentation of policy issues – has annual forum, and Internal and external network – has many stakeholders including WWF, MCDI, TFCG, TNRF etc.   | Funding advocacy – funds not sufficient for policy advocacy (only stick in project area)      |
| 10 | TFCG         | Personnel (advocate) - have experienced policy advocacy personnel and committed team, Advocacy agenda – has policy advocacy agenda, Media relation – has good relation with media and has been maintained e.g., Dairy News, Relationship with decision policy makers – has good relationship with the Ministry and parliamentary committees, Advocacy agenda – has policy advocacy agenda, Practical experience – has long term knowledge in policy advocacy, Relationship with CBOs – is trusted by several villages managing forests, Presentation of policy issues – has annual forum e.g. sustainable charcoal, Internal and external network – has many stakeholders including WWF, MCDI, MJUMITA, TNRF and at regional and global levels. | Funding advocacy – Lack direct funds for policy advocacy but depends on the donor objectives. |

### 3.3. Level of Engagement and Commitment of Each Stakeholder with the Government and Other Partners

It was revealed that there is frequently engagement of MCDI, MJUMITA, CWMAC, TaTEDO, SUHODE, TNRF, TAREA and TFCG with government in area of vision, strategy and management, skills and advocacy strategy development and less engagement in area of monitoring, evaluating and learning. However, the engagement level of each NGO with government and other key partners in a number of areas differ to some degree. Furthermore, it was noted that engagement and commitments of NGOs with Government as well as other partners in area of financial planning and sustainability do not exist (Table 3). Generally, it was revealed that the type

and extent of key stakeholders engaged by each organization depend on context of the programme or policy, available resources as well as the power-sharing structure of the organizations involved. Therefore, the engagement methods used by each organization vary. For example, the engagements of most organizations were through consultation and collaboration while a few organizations involve other stakeholders during engagement process. This is because stakeholder engagement processes require adequate resources (time and funding). Respondents reported that a major challenge in stakeholder engagement is inadequate financial resources to ensure effective engagement.

*“We are supposed to engage wider stakeholders in the process of advocacy strategy development but we have not been able to effectively to do so due to inadequate financial resources, the extent of stakeholders engagement normally depends on the available resources”* (Head of Tanzania TuNA

Fisheries National Alliance).

This situation undermines the capacity of the organization to understand both the political and technical dimensions in order to positively influence public policy for the benefit of constituent. Therefore, in order for the organization (in this

case NGOs) to become effective policy advocates, it is important for the organization to understand the policy making process and the wider policy environment in which they operate.

**Table 3.** Level of engagement of the organizations with Government.

| Area <sup>1</sup>             | MCDI | MJUMITA | CWMAC | TaTEDO | TuNA | SUHODE | MASHA | TNRF | TAREA | TFCG |
|-------------------------------|------|---------|-------|--------|------|--------|-------|------|-------|------|
| Vision                        | 2    | 2       | 2     | 2      | 1    | 2      | 1     | 2    | 2     | 2    |
| Skills                        | 2    | 2       | 2     | 2      | 1    | 2      | 1     | 2    | 2     | 2    |
| Programme planning            | 0    | 0       | 0     | 0      | 0    | 0      | 0     | 0    | 0     | 0    |
| Advocacy strategy development | 2    | 2       | 0     | 2      | 1    | 2      | 0     | 2    | 2     | 2    |
| Engagement impacts            | 2    | 2       | 2     | 1      | 1    | 2      | 0     | 2    | 1     | 2    |
| Monitoring and evaluating     | 1    | 1       | 0     | 1      | 1    | 1      | 1     | 1    | 1     | 0    |

Key: 0= Not at all; 1=Sometimes; 2=Frequently

It was noted that there is frequently engagement of MJUMITA, TuNA, SUHODE, TNRF and TFCG with other partners in area of vision strategy and management, skills and advocacy strategy development and engagement impacts while sometimes these organizations except TFCG engage other partners in monitoring, evaluating and learning (Tables 4 and 5). However, engagement of all the 10 organizations with other partners in financial planning, accountability and sustainability does not exist. Frequently engagement of the organization with other organizations or government may help an organization to understand various centers of power, hence seek to build alliances as well as essential networks that could help to influence policy. Furthermore, MJUMITA, TuNA, TNRF, TAREA and TFCG seems to have high engagement at all levels (national, regional and global) while the engagement of SUHODE and MASHA end at national level only. For example, in 2022, TFCG sat on the National Taskforce for development of the National Forest Financing Strategy, a

multi-stakeholder policy forum hosted by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism to address how forests are financed in Tanzania. It helped develop a draft strategy aimed at sustainable financing for forests, which is key to biodiversity conservation. High levels of engagement by the TFCG have received international recognition. In 2021, the Executive Director of TFCG was awarded an international human rights prize in recognition of the organisation's work in community-based forest management and environmental governance. This recognition enhanced the organisation's global visibility and strengthened its participation in international conservation and advocacy forums. MJUMITA also participated in international climate governance processes linked to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change through civil society forest networks. Discussions addressed community rights, carbon markets, and biodiversity conservation through policy dialogues and consultations, strengthening recognition of community participation and local knowledge in global climate mitigation frameworks.

<sup>1</sup> Area; i= Vision, strategy and management (organizational strategy, strategic review, leadership development, governance and management conflict resolution and gender and social diversity).

ii= Skills – technical and process skills of individuals and organizations

iii= Programme planning and sustainability (financial planning and accountability, financial sustainability

iv=Advocacy strategy development, constituency building, and power of influence,

v= Engagement impacts and advocacy with national

vi=Monitoring, evaluating and learning

**Table 4.** List of NGOs and their regional and international partners in biodiversity conservation.

| SN | NGO     | Regional and international partners  |
|----|---------|--|
| 1. | TFCG    | the University of Copenhagen, the University of Cambridge, University of Florida, Oxford Brookes University, the Trento Museum of Natural History, ICRAF, the International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology and the Missouri Botanical Gardens.   |
| 2. | MCDI    | Forest Services of United States, Darwin Initiative, the university of Edinburg, and Forest Stewardship Council  |
| 3. | TaTEDO  | Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development, Sustainable Environmental Development Watch Kenya (Sus-Watch Kenya), Joint Energy and Environment Projects of Uganda, International Network for Sustainable Energy and Nordic Folkecenter for Renewable Energy of Denmark  |
| 4. | TAREA   | Alternative Energy Africa, Climate Technologies Centre and Networks, East Africa Renewable Energy Partnership, The Enzkreis, Deutsch-Tansanische Partnerschaft e.V Global Off-Grid Lighting Association, Power4Africa, Museum of Science in Trento, Swedish International Development Agency, Wind Empowerment, Urbis Foundation, and SNV Netherlands Development Organisation.  |
| 5. | MJUMITA | Niras International, Endofur,  |
| 6. | TNRF    | International Union for Conservation of Nature, Care International in Denmark, and the International Livestock Research Institute, United Nations Capital Development Fund locale, The East African Community (EAC), United States Agency for International Aid (USAID), United National (UN) and European Union Tanzania delegates, International Institute for Environmental Development, Tanzania Norwegian, Finland, Swedish, Canada, Belgian, Dennish, Netherland China, Germany embassies. |

Of the 10 studied organizations, it was revealed that half of them except MJUMITA, CWMAC, MASHA, TAREA and TFCG were highly committed with the government in area of vision strategy and management, skills and advocacy strategy development and engagement impacts (Table 6). For instance, TNRF provided capacity building to Tanzania Parliamentary Friends of Environment on how to effective deriver biodiversity conservation issues in the parliament. This situation strengthens the relationships between governments and NGOs even when things get tough it is easily for the organization to be persistent, extremely resilient and find possible script for how to handle things in a friendly manner. Policy advocacy is a new role to most of the NGOs and it require adequate time for best success, in this way NGOs doing this role need to be highly committed with the key partners in the biodiversity network at national, regional and global levels.

It was noted that almost all the organizations except MCDI were highly committed with other partners in area of vision strategy and management, skills and advocacy strategy development and engagement impacts (Table 7). This situation helps these organizations to have outstanding performance in

biodiversity conservation hence attracted key partners at regional and global levels. On the other hand, 7 organizations were slightly committed in monitoring, evaluating and learning while MJUMITA, TFCG and CWMAC were not committed with any other partners. It is suggested that when an individual approach something in a half-hearted hope or not at all committed, then the perception that an individual will generate will be marginal at best. Effective policy advocacy could be achieved when an organization is highly committed with others. The head of MCDI put it in this way;

*“ We have memorandum of understanding with the District Councils where the organization operates. The memorandums of understanding require MCDI to involve government officials in each activity that the organization will be carrying out. For example, in 2020, MCDI reviewed its Constitution and government officials at district level were closely involved”* (Head of MCDI).

All respondents reported that there is no need for the organization to have commitment with other organizations in financial planning as well in monitoring and evaluating because these are internal issues of the organization.

**Table 5.** Level of engagement of the organizations with other key partners.

| Area      | MCDI | MJUMITA | CWMAC | TaTEDO | TuNA | SUHODE | MASHA | TNRF | TAREA | TFCG |
|-----------|------|---------|-------|--------|------|--------|-------|------|-------|------|
| Vision    | 1    | 2       | 1     | 1      | 2    | 2      | 1     | 2    | 2     | 2    |
| Skills    | 1    | 2       | 1     | 1      | 2    | 2      | 1     | 2    | 1     | 2    |
| Programme | 0    | 0       | 0     | 0      | 0    | 0      | 0     | 0    | 0     | 0    |

| Area                          | MCDI | MJUMITA | CWMAC | TaTEDO | TuNA | SUHODE | MASHA | TNRF | TAREA | TFCG |
|-------------------------------|------|---------|-------|--------|------|--------|-------|------|-------|------|
| planning                      |      |         |       |        |      |        |       |      |       |      |
| Advocacy strategy development | 1    | 2       | 1     | 1      | 2    | 2      | 0     | 2    | 2     | 2    |
| Engagement impacts            | 1    | 2       | 1     | 1      | 2    | 2      | 0     | 2    | 1     | 2    |
| Monitoring and evaluating     | 1    | 1       | 0     | 1      | 1    | 1      | 1     | 1    | 1     | 0    |

Key: 0= Not at all; 1=Sometimes; 2=frequently

*Table 6. Level of commitments of the organizations with Government.*

| Area                          | MCDI | MJUMITA | CWMAC | TaTEDO | TuNA | SUHODE | MASHA | TNRF | TAREA | TFCG |
|-------------------------------|------|---------|-------|--------|------|--------|-------|------|-------|------|
| Vision                        | 2    | 2       | 2     | 2      | 2    | 2      | 2     | 2    | 2     | 2    |
| Skills                        | 2    | 2       | 2     | 2      | 2    | 2      | 2     | 2    | 1     | 2    |
| Programme planning            | 0    | 0       | 0     | 0      | 0    | 0      | 0     | 0    | 0     | 0    |
| Advocacy strategy development | 2    | 2       | 0     | 2      | 2    | 2      | 2     | 2    | 2     | 2    |
| Engagement impacts            | 2    | 2       | 2     | 2      | 2    | 2      | 0     | 2    | 2     | 2    |
| Monitoring and evaluating     | 1    | 0       | 0     | 1      | 1    | 1      | 1     | 1    | 1     | 0    |

Key; 0=Not all; 1=Slightly committed; 2=Highly committed

*Table 7. Level of commitments of the organizations with other partners.*

| Area                          | MCDI | MJUMITA | CWMAC | TaTEDO | TuNA | SUHODE | MASHA | TNRF | TAREA | TFCG |
|-------------------------------|------|---------|-------|--------|------|--------|-------|------|-------|------|
| Vision                        | 1    | 2       | 2     | 2      | 2    | 2      | 2     | 2    | 2     | 2    |
| Skills                        | 1    | 2       | 2     | 2      | 2    | 2      | 2     | 2    | 1     | 2    |
| Programme planning            | 0    | 0       | 0     | 0      | 0    | 0      | 0     | 0    | 0     | 0    |
| Advocacy strategy development | 1    | 2       | 2     | 2      | 2    | 2      | 2     | 2    | 2     | 2    |
| Engagement impacts            | 1    | 2       | 2     | 2      | 2    | 2      | 0     | 2    | 2     | 2    |
| Monitoring and evaluating     | 1    | 0       | 0     | 1      | 1    | 1      | 1     | 1    | 1     | 0    |

Key; 0=Not all; 1=Slightly committed; 2=Highly committed

## 4. Discussion

The assessment of ten consulted organizations revealed a diverse landscape of strengths and weaknesses that shape their ability to influence policy, engage stakeholders, and drive biodiversity conservation initiatives. A notable strength shared by the organizations is their clear commitment to policy advocacy, with several demonstrating substantial impact on national policy reforms. Organizations such as TFCG, TNRF, MJUMITA, and MCDI have established themselves as credible voices in natural resource governance. Their convincing advocacy approaches, combined with longstanding relationships with government authorities and international partners, have enabled them to shape high-level policy dialogues and reforms. This aligns with literature emphasizing that legitimacy, trust, and strong reputational capital are essential for effective civil society advocacy and influence [6, 21, 28, 37, 49]. TNRF's policy advocacy achievements illustrate the potential of well-coordinated and evidence-informed advocacy. The organization's convening of seven Ministers in 2019 served as a catalyst for meaningful amendments to wildlife-related laws that previously undermined biodiversity conservation efforts. By influencing the extension of hunting block ownership tenure from 5 to 10–15 years, TNRF contributed to creating more stable investment conditions for wildlife-based enterprises. Similarly, their advocacy supporting the inclusion of individuals with primary education in Wildlife Management Area (WMA) leadership demonstrates a nuanced understanding of community governance dynamics. These examples support previous findings that sustained engagement, strategic targeting, and inclusive policy framing increase the likelihood of policy change [10, 16, 26, 40–41]. Another significant strength among the organizations is their networking capacity. Many maintain strong linkages with regional and global actors, which enhances their visibility and access to knowledge, resources, and advocacy opportunities. Connections with mainstream media platforms (such as TBC, ITV, and Azam TV) and active social media presence further strengthen outreach efforts and public engagement. Such networks are consistent with network governance scholarship, which posits that collaborative relationships amplify organizational effectiveness and foster shared accountability for conservation outcomes [9, 23, 38].

Despite these strengths, several weaknesses were also revealed, highlighting the need for targeted organizational strengthening. A critical limitation across nearly all organizations is insufficient budget allocation for policy advocacy activities. Financial constraints undermine the continuity, depth, and strategic scaling of advocacy initiatives. Research shows that underfunding is a common bottleneck that restricts civil society's ability to participate effectively in governance processes and sustain advocacy momentum [3, 32, 29]. Additionally, nine out of the ten organizations lack skilled policy advocates, with the exception of MJUMITA. Limited staffing

capacity reduces the ability to generate evidence-based policy recommendations, engage in high-level negotiations, or influence complex governance systems. This gap is widely documented in organizational development literature, which highlights human capacity as a core determinant of institutional influence and resilience [1, 2, 12, 22].

The analysis of engagement patterns revealed varying degrees of interaction and commitment between the organizations and key stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society groups, and international partners. Many organizations particularly MCDI, MJUMITA, CWMAC, TaTEDO, SUHODE, TNRF, TAREA, and TFCG demonstrate frequent engagement with government, especially in areas such as strategy development, advocacy capacity building, and sectoral planning. These interactions indicate a relatively strong alignment with national conservation priorities and reflect the organizations' credibility as partners in governance processes. Prior research suggests that frequent engagement fosters trust, mutual learning, and policy responsiveness [7, 39, 42–26]. Engagement with other non-governmental actors was also significant, particularly among MJUMITA, TuNA, SUHODE, MASHA, TNRF, and TFCG, which operate across national, regional, and global levels. These patterns demonstrate the strategic importance of partnerships in biodiversity conservation, where complex environmental challenges require multi-level collaboration and knowledge exchange [8, 25, 39, 42]. Organizations such as TNRF exemplify this through their participation in major conferences, forums, and trainings relating to policy advocacy, pastoral livelihoods, illegal wildlife trade, and women's rights. Their collaborations with actors including the United Nations, the European Union, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the East African Community (EAC), and the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) highlight the value of transnational networks for addressing both local and global conservation issues.

However, engagement remains uneven across different domains. A notable gap is the limited engagement in monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL), which is essential for adaptive management and evidence-based decision-making. Strengthening CSO participation in MEL could enhance transparency, accountability, and the effectiveness of biodiversity and climate initiatives. One potential approach is the adoption of joint monitoring and review mechanisms, where government agencies, CSOs, and community representatives collaboratively assess project implementation and outcomes. Such participatory monitoring practices can facilitate knowledge exchange, improve learning, and ensure that policies and interventions are responsive to local contexts and stakeholder experiences. Similarly, organizations exhibit very low engagement with government in financial planning and sustainability, a finding consistent with literature highlighting challenges in CSO financial governance [4, 17]. Although organizations such as CWMAC, TaTEDO, MASHA, TAREA, and

TFCG demonstrate high commitment in strategic and advocacy-related engagements, the absence of financial coordination constrains long-term partnership sustainability.

Overall, the findings indicate that engagement levels depend heavily on program context, resource availability, organizational capacity, and existing power-sharing arrangements. Organizations with stronger networks, greater visibility, and more skilled personnel exhibit deeper engagement, while those with resource limitations remain confined to lower levels of participation. Strengthening organizational capacity in MEL, financial sustainability, and strategic advocacy will therefore be essential for enhancing future partnerships and maximizing conservation outcomes.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1. Conclusions

The findings clearly demonstrate that while many organizations possess notable strengths particularly strong staff qualifications, technical expertise, and valuable networks there remain critical weaknesses that limit their overall effectiveness. Insufficient staffing levels, weak communication capacities, and inconsistent relationships with policymakers and media institutions present significant barriers to organizational growth and influence. The use of the SWOT framework provided a rigorous and structured understanding of these internal dynamics, revealing that organizations must strategically address these gaps to enhance their institutional resilience and capacity for meaningful engagement. Strengthening internal systems, building communication and policy analysis skills, and expanding networks will be essential for improving performance and securing future investment and partnership opportunities.

Similarly, the assessment of engagement and commitment levels with government actors, CSOs, and local communities revealed a pattern of uneven and mostly lower-level engagement across organizations. It was revealed that the type and extent of key stakeholder engaged by each organization depend on context of the programme or policy, available resources as well as the power-sharing structure of the organizations involved. It was noted that CSOs were frequently engaging with government and other players in e.g. advocacy strategy development though differ to some degree. However, engagement and commitments of CSO with Government as well as other players in area of financial planning and sustainability do not exist. While several institutions demonstrated consistent engagement and dedication, many operated mainly at the “inform” or “consult” levels, with few reaching the deeper collaborative or empowerment stages of participation. This highlights the need for organizations to adopt more structured and participatory engagement approaches that foster shared decision-making and build stronger, trust-based relationships with stakeholders. Enhancing these engagement pathways will not only strengthen governance outcomes but

also position organizations as more credible, influential partners within policy and development arenas. Together, these conclusions emphasize that targeted capacity investment and deliberate relationship-building are crucial for elevating organizational performance and impact.

### 5.2. Recommendations

Based on the study findings, it is recommended that civil society organizations (CSOs) strengthen their capacity to engage effectively with policymakers, government policy analysts, and other key actors in the policy process, including building and maintaining strategic alliances with influential individuals and institutions to enhance their ability to influence the formulation, improvement, and implementation of public policies affecting biodiversity conservation. CSOs should also promote mutual learning by sharing experiences and strengths, which can improve advocacy strategies and understanding of government responses to policy initiatives. In addition, CSOs need to enhance their skills in translating policy recommendations and technical pronouncements into clear, simple, and persuasive messages that can facilitate policy uptake and action. Reducing overdependence on external donor funding through diversified resource mobilization is equally important, as this can strengthen organizational sustainability and credibility in policy advocacy. Finally, improved engagement and commitment with diverse stakeholders during programme planning and implementation are essential to minimize conflicts of interest, broaden advocacy networks, and enhance understanding of power relations within the policy process, all of which are critical for effective policy advocacy.

### Abbreviations

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| AU     | African Union   |
| BMU    | Beach Management Unit   |
| CBD    | Convention on Biological Diversity  |
| CBFM   | Community Based Forest Management   |
| CBOs   | Community Based Organizations   |
| CITES  | Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora |
| COMESA | Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa                                   |
| CSOs   | Civil Society Organizations   |
| CWMAC  | Community Wildlife Management Area Consortium                                   |
| DED    | District Executive Director   |
| EAC    | East African Community  |
| EU     | European Union  |
| FBD    | Forestry and Beekeeping Division  |
| FZS    | Frankfurt Zoological Society  |
| GN     | Government Notice   |
| IC     | Inclusive Conservation  |

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| IOTC    | Indian Ocean TuNA Commission                          |
| IWT     | Illegal Wildlife Trade                                |
| IRA     | Institute of Resource Assessment                      |
| JET     | Journalists Environmental Association of Tanzania     |
| MASHA   | Mtwara Action for Self Help                           |
| MCDI    | Mpingo Conservation and Development Initiative        |
| MCT     | Media Council of Tanzania                             |
| MJUMITA | Mtandao wa Jumuiya za Usimamizi wa Misitu Tanzania    |
| MLF     | Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries                   |
| MLSH    | Ministry of Land, Settlement and Housing              |
| MNRT    | Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism             |
| NLUPC   | National Land Use Commission                          |
| NGOs    | Non-Governmental Organizations                        |
| PAMS    | Protected Areas Management Support Foundation         |
| RUMAKI  | Rufiji-Mafia-Kilwa                                    |
| RWBO    | Ruvuma Water Basin Office                             |
| SADC    | Southern African Development Community                |
| SOKNOT  | Seascape, Southern Kenya Northern Tanzania            |
| SUA     | Sokoine University of Agriculture                     |
| SUHODE  | Sustainable Holistic Development                      |
| SWOT    | Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats      |
| TBC     | Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation                     |
| TAFORI  | Tanzania Forestry Research Institute                  |
| TAHOA   | Tanzania Hunters Associations                         |
| TAREA   | Tanzania Renewable Energy Associations                |
| TaTEDO  | Tanzania Traditional Energy Development Organization  |
| TAWA    | Tanzania Wildlife Authority                           |
| TAWIRI  | Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute                  |
| TFCG    | Tanzania Forestry Conservation Group                  |
| TFS     | Tanzania Forest Services Agency                       |
| TNRF    | Tanzania Natural Resources Forum                      |
| TPHA    | Tanzania Professional Hunters Association             |
| TuNA    | Tuna Fisheries National Alliance                      |
| UDSM    | University of Dar es Salaam                           |
| UNFCCC  | United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change |
| UNDP    | United Nations Development Programme                  |
| USAID   | United States Agency for International Development    |
| UN      | United Nations  |
| VLFR    | Village Land Forest Reserve                           |
| WD      | Wildlife Division                                     |
| WMA     | Wildlife Management Area                              |
| WWF     | World Wide Fund for Nature                            |

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**Kajenje Magessa:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

**Lawrence Mbwambo:** Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Resources, Software, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

## Conflicts of Interest

Authors declares no conflicts of interest.

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