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## ASSESSING CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF ETHNIC CONFLICT IN WONDOGENET WOREDA BETWEEN THE SIDAMA AND GUJI-OROMO PEOPLE

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### ABSTRACT

*Ethnic conflict is tremendously spreading in the world in general and in Africa in particular during post-liberalization periods. The main causes of ethnic conflict are competition over natural resources, sharing political and administrative powers (power rivalry), religious issues and an attempt to secure more political and military powers to control the existing resources in a given area. To this effect, to investigate causes and consequences of conflict, the study took a sample of 54 respondents from the two conflicting adjacent kebeles. From the total of 54, 42 were households and 12 were government employees. Out of 42 informants, 28 households were issued structured questionnaires and 14 were made to participate in FGD. Out of 12 government employees 7 were reached with structured questionnaires and 5 were made to attend FGD. The study has found out that the causes of conflict in the study area are competition over resources located on the border. Moreover, anti-peace elements who wanted to achieve their hidden agenda are fueling the conflict from behind. Therefore, the concerned body has to pay attention and use traditional and national intervention mechanisms to bring peace and stability in the area. There should be good governance in both the Kebeles to teach the respective people to solve their problems around the table in civilized manner rather than opting to the devastation of resources including the precious human lives in the era of 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

### KEYWORDS

Ethnic conflict, Sidama people, Guji-Oromo people.

### INTRODUCTION

Today, ethnic conflict is tremendously spreading in the world in general and in Africa in particular. The main causes of ethnic conflicts are believed to be competition over natural resources, sharing political and administrative powers, religious issues and an attempt to secure more political and military power to control the existing resources in a given area. The good example of such ethnic conflict in Africa was the one which took place in Rwanda between two groups resulting in the death of millions of people and created a shock all over the world with all human beings. According to *Befekadu Zeleke and Diribissa Abate*, most of the wars in the Horn of Africa for the last decades have been described in terms of ethnic conflicts: the civil wars in Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Djibouti. As stated by these two writers, ethnic conflict is simply a cleavage between groups based on differentiations in ethnic identities, while inter-state ethnic conflict is a conflict that arises between different ethnic groups within a state. Another conflict that has been remained arising for many years is the conflict on the issue of religion, which has been occurred in the Northern part of Nigeria between Christian and Muslim communities which has been resulted in the death of hundreds of people during the conflict.

In the case of Ethiopia, Ethiopia is a country inhabited by more than eighty ethnic groups. As it is the country of so many different tribes, the occurrence of conflicts is unavoidable in one way or the other. According to *Befekadu Zeleke and Diribissa Abate*, even though the magnitude and the damage resulted from the conflict is not as wide as those mentioned in Rwanda and Nigeria, and the loss of life and damage of resources are limited, there have been serious conflicts in some parts of the country. A good example of this is the conflict between Gari-Somali and Borena people, Afar and Oromo People in the Northeast of the country, and conflict between Amara and Oromo people in the Southwest part of the country. We can also cite another conflict which took place around Jima and Agaro between Christian and Muslim communities which demanded the involvement of government security to put it to an end. During the Derg regime, these ethnic groups were not given due attention and as a result different ethnicity conflicts were arisen between various ethnical groups. Even though there were such serious problems at a time, they were not as such pronounced as the country was centrally administered by the central government. After the downfall of the Derg regime in 1991, a transitional government was established in the country by a charter. Among the different objectives addressed by the new government was the decentralization of administration to the regions and the local-level units for the new Ethiopia and its different ethnic groups to:

- Reduce the inter-state ethnic conflict that has divided the Ethiopian society for centuries,
- Promote equitable material conditions in all areas of the country, and
- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public sector performance on the field (Cohen, 1995).

Hence, nine regional governments and two city administrations were established. Ethnicity was the major criterion used in drawing the boundaries between these states. This move perpetuated the Ethiopian tradition of drawing administrative boundaries along ethnic lines, boundaries that continue to provoke disputes today (Brietzke, 1995). Furthermore, little attention was given to the regions' respective geographical size, population densities, agriculture and resource bases, and levels of infrastructure, existing administrative capacity, or ability to generate revenues. As a result, states differ greatly in size and potential. This further increased inter-state differences among the ethnic groups in the country. As these different regional governments based on their ethnic backgrounds started to be established, the issues of ethnic claims over resources those were considered common such as minerals, land and water, became fuel for conflicts. Thus, this inequitable economic background led to different ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia. Recent clashes between the Ethio-Somali people and the neighboring Oromos in the east, between the Afar and the Oromos in the northeast, the different conflicts in the south and conflicts between the Amharas and the Oromos in the southwest parts of the country are just few examples. (<http://www.ossrea.net/index.php?option>). Although the Ethiopian government has been trying to resolve these conflicts using different mechanisms, the problem still exists in different parts of the country.

When we compare the ethnic conflicts that took place in different regions, their occurrence is numerous in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS), the main reason being that the region consists of many ethnicities. The number of ethnic groups in the region is high incorporating as many as 56 different ethnicities. Accordingly, different tribal conflicts took place between different ethnic groups as follows:

- Kore and Guji-Oromo
- Gedeo and Guji-Oromo
- Sidama and Wolayita
- Bodi and Konso
- Sidama and Guji Oromo (Wondo Genet)
- Balesto and Bodi and many others.

The conflicts between these groups happened to occur because of resources such as water and grazing land and currently for other resources located on the borders when the regions were separated through the decisions of referendum. Such conflicts are reported to result in deaths of human being and looting of different resources.

The main purpose of this study is to identify the major causes of ethnic conflicts and strategies used to minimize them within a state and to recommend those strategies that apply:

- To discuss the major causes for ethnic conflicts in multi-ethnic societies,
- To briefly discuss the nature and consequences of inter-state ethnic conflicts in the study area,
- To forward the major strategies that should be used to mitigate ethnic conflicts in the study area,

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to Donald Rothchild and Edward Azar (1966), the ethnic conflict takes place when ethnicity, race, religion, language, culture and identity have become too complex and make it difficult to resolve or manage. Ethnicity has a strong influence and sound on ones status in community. Conflict in some African countries has been arisen because of inequality and as inequality is manifested among groups the conflict is inevitable. In line with the above opinion, the ethnic conflicts which have been taking place in different parts of Ethiopia among different ethnic groups were generally based on economic, political, cultural, religious, and social factors. According to a number of investigators on the case, the conflict that took place in the study area relates with the above factors especially after the downfall of military regime in 1991. Accordingly, the country was divided into 9 regional governments and two city administrations. At the time, ethnicity became major criteria for boundary demarcation between the mentioned states with a view to solve the ethnic conflicts which prolonged during the two former governments (Haileseelasse and military regimes). Even though the demarcation of political and administrative boundaries along ethnic line had positive impacts, aftermaths it continued to provoke disputes especially at the borders of different states. One of the reasons which have been provoking disputes repeatedly at the borders of the inter-state ethnicities is the resources which are located between different ethnic groups at the border of two or more states. For example, if there is a health center located at the border of two states, some anti-peace elements provoke the conflict by aggravating the issue of the resource at the border as heart burning key element as if the state can not exist if that specific resource is not given to it.

According to Brietzke, such conflicts are the products of little attention during the demarcation of states. As stated by Brietzke, little attention was given to the region's respective geographic size, population density, agricultural and resource basis and levels of infrastructure, existing administrative capacity, and ability to generate revenues. As a result, states differ greatly in size and resources potential and divided into "haves" and "have not". Befekadu Zeleke and Diribissa Abate also share the same view as stated here above (<http://www.ossrea.net/index.php?>).

The problems of inter-state conflicts between the Sidama and Guji Oromo in the study area of Wondogenet Woreda have initiated the researcher to go for the in-depth empirical investigation of the problems and to come up with the possible solutions that can contribute for the mitigation of such consequences from occurring now and again in the area. Conflict is antigrowth and development thereby corrupting the attention and focus of those involved in anti-peace effects. Anti-peace elements are the provokers of the conflict plunging others those who are not alert into the consequences of conflicts. Not all conflicts are dangers and threats. However, it should be managed intelligently and effectively to convert them into opportunities.

### GENERAL OBJETIVE OF THE STUDY

General objective of the study is to identify the root causes of conflicts which took place between the Sidama and Guji-Oromo ethnic groups in Wondogenet Woreda and to find out potentially sustainable remedy for the same.

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The specific objectives of the study are:

- To identify the causes and consequences of inter-ethnic conflicts in the area,
- To identify the problems and their impacts in the study area on the involved groups, third parties and on the development agenda in the area,
- To find out that who is provoking conflicts and why,
- To imply accountability and responsibility to concerned bodies,
- To identify the goals and motives of the conflicting parties,
- To present possible intervention mechanisms and strategies which should be employed by the pertinent bodies to stop the conflict and maintain peace and stability between the two conflicting parties in the study area.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Nevertheless, conflict is the phenomenon affecting social and economic development of the area involved in it, not much attention was given to it to bring about fraternity between the ethnicities involved. This study is undertaken to find out the reasons why inter-ethnic conflict is very hot issue in some areas (like in the study area) than in others. The Study tries to identify main causes of conflict between the Sidama and Guji-Oromo ethnic groups at this time of 21<sup>st</sup> century and attempts to shade conflict resolution mechanisms. It is also to investigate internal and external factors which escalated inter-ethnic conflict in the area and to launch proactive prevention mechanism to bring about peaceful coexistence among the concerned parties.

The study will be very helpful and contribute to policy-makers at regional and federal levels, law enforcement institutions, police forces and other concerned government officials to take pragmatic measures in order to get rid of inter-ethnic conflict in the area.

### SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Ethiopia is a country inhabited by more than eighty ethnic groups. As a result, there are clashes between the Ethio-Somali people and the neighboring Oromos in the east, between the Afar and the Oromos in the northeast, the conflicts in the south and conflicts between the Amharas and the Oromos in the southwest parts of the country are just few examples. Even though there are inter-ethnic conflicts in many places, this study is more confined to the inter-ethnic conflict between the Sidama and Guji-Oromo in Wondogenet Woreda as it is very difficult to cover all the inter-ethnic conflict sites in different regions of the country.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study faced several bottlenecks during the study period in the area. These include:

- Lack of organized data about the conflict in the study area.
- Scarcity of finance allotted for the study.
- Inaccessibility of the target respondents as both conflicting parties have been considering the researcher as a spy of government.
- Transportation problem because the study area is out of the route obliging the researcher to walk long distances to meet the respondents.

This and other constraints were experienced by the researcher during the conduction of investigation in the study area.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Source	:	Primary and secondary
Data Collection Technique	:	Questionnaire, interview and focus group discussion.
Sample Unit	:	employees, elderly people, government officials, head of households
Sample Size	:	54 respondents were selected randomly consisting of 42 households and 12 government employees from both conflicting kebeles. From the total of 42 households, 28 were issued structured questionnaires, and 14 were made to participate in FGD. Out of 12 government employees, 7 were issued structured questionnaires and 5 were made to participate in FGD.
Sampling Technique	:	Simple random sampling
Statistical Techniques used	:	tables, averages and percentages are used to clearly discuss the causes of conflict in the area mentioned.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The necessary data for this study were collected mainly from primary sources using questionnaires and interviews from government employees, elderly people, government officials and heads of households that were selected from Wosha Soyama and Shasha Kebeles which are currently situated in Wondogenet Woreda of SNNPR and Wondo Woreda of Oromia Region, respectively. Secondary data were collected from different books, journals, government reports, documents from Zonal and Woreda offices and online sources to substantiate the data collected from primary sources. These Kebeles were selected purposefully because ethnic conflicts were pervasive and repeatedly took place in both areas. To this effect, from the population in both Kebeles, 54 sample respondents were selected using simple random sampling method. Out of the selected sample respondents, 42 respondents were households equally selected from both Kebeles employing simple random sampling technique. Among these respondents, for 28 households structured questionnaires were dispatched, collected and administered. Fourteen households were participated in focus group discussion (FGD). Furthermore, 12 government employees were involved for this study. Out of these, 7 employees were distributed with structured questionnaires and their responses were collected and administered. The rest five employees were participated in FGD. From the total respondents, 10 (18.5%) were female and the rest 44 (81.5%) were males.

Regarding age distribution of the respondents, 40.7 percent of them are found in the age group between 19 and 30 years. 31.5 percent of the respondents are categorized between the age group of 31 and 40 years whereas 25 percent of the respondents are found to be between 41 and 50 age groups. The remaining 3.8 percent of the respondents are categorized in 51 and above age groups. From this, it can be summarized that 72.2 percent of the respondents are young people in the age group between 19 and 40 which can easily be supposed to emotionally involve in conflicts. The other thing is that 54 respondents have 324 family members which evidences that the two Kebeles have very extended family members requiring more area of land to live in to sustain the livelihood of their families.

Regarding the respondents marital status, 73.3 percent of the respondents are married and 26.7 percent of the respondents are unmarried singles. As it can be seen from the respondents' family ties, it can be understood that there is strong bond between family members because all married couples have not experienced any event of divorce in the study area.

As far as educational status is concerned, 14.9 percent of the respondents are found to be those who can not read and write while 9.2 percent have obtained adult education. On the other hand, 17.5 percent of the respondents have attended grades 1 to 6, 35.2 percents grades 7 to 11, and 11.1 percent grades 11 to 12. Moreover, 7.4 and 4.7 percent of the respondents are holders of diploma and degree education, respectively. As the researcher has personally observed during the field survey, majority of people who were involved in the conflict of Sidama and Guji-Oromo ethnic groups have low educational status. But, this does not mean the educated people may not be involved in an ethnic conflict. However, comparatively the people who are uneducated are vulnerable to conflict along with their poor economic conditions that works like a fuel on fire while comparing with literate/educated. According to the data collected from the respondents, the educated ones those who want to attain their evil targets have pushed the uneducated ones as a means deceiving them with false promises.

Occupation has direct correlation with the daily life of the given society. The kind and nature of occupation can determine the daily activities and living standards of the people. The people who are involved in daily labor work have low living standard and low income. As far as livelihood of the respondents is concerned, 38.8 percent of the respondents are farmers, 16.7 percent are merchants, 22.3 percent are government employees, 16.6 percent are self-employed and the rest 5.6 are religious leaders.

In any country, the income level of its population is very important as it determines the type of activities in which its citizens participate. Some scholars have argued that people involved in conflict due to unfair resource share, power rivalry, competition for self-administration and the like. As it can be seen from the responses, 63 percent of the respondents earn less than Birr 1000 only per month.

The purpose of discussion about housing is that the housing systems determine the living condition of the given society in the area. The type of housing may also be determined by economic conditions and life status of the people. As we can assure from the responses of the respondents, about 38.8 percent of the respondents are living in houses made from corrugated iron sheet and mud. On the other hand, 31.5 percent and 3.8 percent of the respondents live in grass covering and bamboo made houses, respectively. The remaining 8.4 percent of the respondents live in other kind of houses not mentioned here.

According to the responses collected from the participants, the majority of people living in the study area are conflicting parties: Sidama and Guji-Oromo, 35.1 percent and 27.6 percent respectively. Other ethnic groups residing in the study area are not problems. Rather, they have been victims because of conflicts arising intermittently between the two mentioned predominant ethnics.

According to the response of the respondents, 62.1 percent of the respondents live in the area for more than 10 years, and therefore, they know each other well. Before the two Kebeles departed from each other through the referendum conducted in the area, the people used to live together sharing happiness or sorrow.

According to the elders in the study area, there was strong relationship between the two ethnic groups and one used to wish good fortune to the other. Even when they slaughter animals, they wish good things for each other. In the past, when Sidama slaughtered animals, they used to bless Guji-Oromo saying "Eli-Gujera" meaning "Oh God! Bring good things to Guji people". Guji-Oromo also used to say the same to Sidama people living in the area. Then, why they are hostiles to each other today? Some respondents indicated that rent seekers who are running after their personal benefits are using the people as shield to hit targets listed in their agenda by provoking and aggravating minor issues as if big mistakes have been committed by the other ethnic group and that their group is losing if they do not attack the other group by force.

From the above points it can be inferred that both ethnic groups had strong social and economic co-relation during early periods. They had collaborated with each other during the times of happiness and sorrow. They used also to participate on funeral, wedding and inter-marriage ceremonies. As far as their economic relationship is concerned, they helped each other during the time of cultivating the land, constructing houses, lending money to somebody facing financial problems and so on. Then, why are they such bitterly hostiles with each other, currently? As it has been mentioned here above, the provokers of conflicts are rent-seekers, those who want to achieve their hidden agenda at the expense of innocent societies.

## CONCLUSIONS

Today, ethnic conflict is tremendously spreading in the world in general and in Africa in particular. Ethiopia is a country inhabited by more than eighty ethnic groups. As it is the country of so many different tribes, the occurrence of conflict is unavoidable, and as a result, minor conflicts have taken place at some places as in the study area. However, the magnitude and the damages resulted from the conflict is not as pervasive as those mentioned in other African countries.

The main causes of ethnic conflict are believed to be competition over natural resources (pastoral land used for cattle grazing and water), sharing political and administrative powers, religious issues and an attempt to secure more political and military power to control the existing resources in a given area.

To bring about peace, stability and order in the study area, peace and negotiation conference was held in December 2009. However, some conflict seekers have not been satisfied by decisions made round the table and opted for refighting raising questions of boundary demarcation issues between Intaye and Kella Kebeles; Busa and Chuko Kebeles; the issue of Kella (Checking point) and the question of Wondogenet Forestry College. As the solution to such questions was given by referendum, raising them again complicated situation. The questions were not responded in time by the concerned body and resulted in the devastation of resources including lives of people.

The findings of the study indicate that political and economic conditions are the major source of the different ethnic conflicts in the study area. The major political issues are related to decentralization and self-determination, which usually give rise to the publicity of ethnicity. The economic issues are associated with the interest of controlling the checking point (Kella) and collect taxes and generate more inland revenue to be utilized as the budget for respective Woredas in the study area; while lack of education among the mass, poverty and high population growth aggravate the ethnic conflicts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Most of time, ethnic conflicts lead to violence; social strives and converted into felonious crimes and civil wars. Thus, if there is any, it should be handled properly from very beginning. If it is treated well, it might not have led to destruction of property, loss of human life and threats to development.

- Both regional governments, in collaboration with Federal Government, should take fair and proactive conflict prevention measures based on FDRE Constitution.
- According to the finding of the study, there is a lack of coordination and cooperation between the two regional governments on the on-going conflict. So, both regional governments should have given more focus to conflicts as it hampers the developmental activities in both regions.
- Two regional governments should involve themselves and attempt to radically solve problems thereby participating elders from both sides and using traditional mechanisms of conflict settlement.
- People in the area should be thought of about the values of tolerance in order to eliminate the possibility of occurring of conflict.
- Boarder-peace-council should be established involving prominent and influential elders including the “Gedas” of the both society and give them peace and stability responsibility to bring about sustainable order, stability and peace in the area and make the society focus on the growth and development of the study area. Moreover, the established council should present the boarder report to two respective Woreda Councils every three months regarding the current situation in the area. The elders can also use the traditional way of condemning and ostracizing of those who are likely to provoke conflicts in the area as one means of peace keeping mechanism.
- The concerned bodies should give to the people in the area continuous training to create awareness about the benefits and advantages of peaceful co-existence and vice versa. Fraternity of people should be promoted in order to maintain peaceful co-existence between the two conflicting societies.
- The two Woreda Councils should work hand-in-hand in order to identify the conflict provokers and take corrective actions against them in the two adjacent Woredas in such a way others can learn a lesson.
- The questions raised by the people should require timely response as delays may lead to devastation of property and human lives.

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## APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Appendix 1: Personal Characteristics of the Respondents					
Measures	Age group	Items		Frequency	Percent
		M	F		
Age and sex					
	19-30	17	5	22	40.7
	31-40	13	4	17	31.5
	41-50	12	1	13	25
	51 and above	2	-	2	3.8
Marital Status	Married	-		38	73.3
	Single	-		16	26.7
Educational status	Non-reading and writing		8	14.9	
	Adult education		5	9.2	
	Grades 1-6		10	17.5	
	Grades 7-10		19	35.2	
	Grades 11-12		6	11.1	
	Diploma		4	7.4	
	Degree		2	4.7	
Occupational status	Farmers		21	38.8	
	Merchants		9	16.7	
	Government employees		12	22.3	
	Self-employees		9	16.7	
	Religious leaders		3	5.6	
Monthly income	< 500		13	24.2	
	501-1000		21	38.8	
	1001-1500		12	22.3	
	1501-3000		7	12.9	
	Above 3000		1	1.8	
Category of ethnic groups	Sidama		19	35.1	
	Guji-Oromo		16	27.6	
	Amahara		8	14.9	
	Kambata		2	4.7	
	Wolayita		3	5.6	
	Guraghe		4	7.4	
	Hadiya		2	4.7	
	Others		-	-	
Years of stay	Between 1-5 years		7	12.9	
	Between 6-10 years		13	25	
	Between 11-20 years		11	20.3	
	Between 21-30 years		7	12.9	
	Above 30 years		16	28.9	

Source: survey data collected by the researcher

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