



Full Length Research Paper

**The Dynamism of Contemporary Pastoral Conflict along the Border of South Eastern Oromia Region:
 The Case of Some Selected Woredas of Bale Zone**

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to assess the dynamism of contemporary pastoral conflict in the border areas between Bale Oromo and Somali ethnic communities of Ethiopia, with particular emphasis on the causes and critical actors of conflict, and the way-out as well. In order to achieve this objective, the design of this study was based on descriptive qualitative research method employing personal interviews and group discussions. To discern relevant and credible informants, the researchers used the purposive-sampling technique with some elements of snowball sampling approach. Relevant literatures and documents on conflict in the regions were also utilized. The finding of the study disclosed that the causes of contemporary conflicts along the border of these ethnic communities arise from various historical, economic and more importantly, political factors – politicization of ethnicity and the border. Both direct and indirect actors participated on exacerbating this inter-communal conflict. Although government, in companion with different Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders, has carried out different activities to solve the problem, some basic contributing factors and problems remained unabated: the process of border demarcation is lagging, returning Internal Displaced People (IDP) to their original place is only partially succeeded and those IDPs in the camps are facing different critical challenges.

Introduction

Conflict is commonly taken as a main source of poverty and threat to pastoral communities that live in the scorched lands and border areas. As many researches

and documents indicate, most of these conflicts within pastoralists, and between pastoralists and semi-pastoralists are resource induced conflicts.

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Sharamo (2014) expounded that in most of African countries, violence, inter-clan warfare and conflict are almost synonymous with livestock keeping populations and nomadic culture. The clash between these communities arises from disagreement over the use of scarce resources including land and water. The communities along the border, especially of the southeast part of Ethiopia are no exception. Their way of life is reliant on livestock herds, pastoral and agro-pastoral economic activity-dependent on resources such as land, water, grazing and pasture. Besides competition on grazing land and water, cattle raiding are also an essential trend to the cultural identity as well as to the social, political and economic organization of pastoral communities in the border areas. It is concerned with a ritual process in the sense that young men in the community practice it to verify that they are ready for manhood.

Moreover, the culture of holding land in the forms of 'communal tenure' was familiar in these communities. Accordingly, the use of this common resource is regulated by councils of elders. Due to the fact that the areas of these pastoral societies were dominated by elders, conflicts could not be beyond the control of these elders who were collectively responsible for the governance of the community (Quam, 1996). In this sense, inter-ethnic conflicts have been fixed by these key role players due to their nature of participatory, openness and flexibility.

However, like many other Eastern African countries, in Ethiopia, different circumstances have altered the nature of traditional pastoral conflict into something that is more violent, linked to wider political, economic and social dynamics. According to Menkhaus (2008) for instance, these factors include climate change, competition over dwindling grazing lands

and water resources, stemming from human settlements escalation and politicization of communal relations.

On the other hand, traditional governance institutions among these pastoralist communities have been gradually eroded and so that has weakened the ability of community elders to exercise control over young men. Here, indeed, obtaining eldership can be possible not by merit but by wealth. Further, as Duffield (1998) expounded, the elders' authority has been undermined by the introduction of a market economy and the increased polarization of rich and poor that resulted in labor migration.

In addition, as strong guns are available in the hands of pastoral communities, stealing livestock has become not a cultural matter but instead an unscrupulous method of resource accumulation (Mkutu, 2003). Hence, accordingly, this economic based change over generation stringently harms communal relationships and molds the nature of conflict and violence in rural areas around the border.

More importantly, what significantly shifted the historic resource driven clan conflict to politically sponsored and politically-driven violent ethnic conflict was the politicization of ethnicity that grounded in post 1991 ethno-centric federal system of governance in Ethiopia (Mekonnen, 2019). The inquiry of this paper is also strongly implies that ethnic politicization is what highly changed pastoral conflict into something that is more violent. Local officials, regional and federal authorities have been manipulating ethnic sentiments to satisfy their various personal and group interests. There has been high prevalence of illegal business dealing activities by some federal security force and Somalia regional government *Liyu Police*¹, which made the problem more severe and

¹ The term '*Liyu Police*' represents regional special force

complicated. This also paved the way for the engagement of the politically interested external forces. Likewise, the proliferation of small arms, disagreement on ethnic boundary delimitation, availability of contrabandists, illegal traders, black markets and corrupt local officials are also what are highly intensifying the contemporary inter communal violence as well as making the process of conflict resolution and peace-building more difficult and complicated.

Needless to say, conflict destroys human lives as well as social, cultural, economic and political bases of their survival. Here, making inquiries to understand the nature, causes, critical actors and consequences of conflict is very important to prevent and manage intra-national political boundary conflicts, which is less researched in the above mentioned areas. Violent conflict can result in social problems such as collapse of law and order, distraction of economic activities, people displacement, destruction of governmental structures, ever exploitation of natural resources, politicization and manipulation of ethnic sentiments and religious differences by domestic power elite and international business interests, and so and so forth.

That said, besides the contemporary one, the conflict between Oromo and Somali ethnic groups of Ethiopia has long history. For instance, the 1970's conflicts including the then Ethiopian government-backed Oromo and Afar attacks on some clans of Somali on borders, and the conflict during Siad Barre government war against Ethiopia, which in turn, intensified the inter-ethnic conflicts between these ethnic groups can be stated. Here, it is very important not only to improve our understanding of the nature, causes and consequences of conflict between these ethnic groups along the border areas, but also to come up with

possible measures to be undertaken towards conflict prevention, resolution, and post-conflict rehabilitation.

Materials and Methods

The Article is intended to assess the dynamic nature of conflict in the border area between Bale Oromo² and Somali ethnic communities of Ethiopia, with particular emphasis on the causes and critical actors of conflict and instability. In line with this, it also provides valuable recommendations to the regional and federal Governments, and to the recently established Ethiopian Administrative Boundary and Identity Issue Commission. To achieve this purpose, the design of this study was based on qualitative research method employing both primary and secondary data. It fused research conducted in the selected *woredas* of Oromia region including Dawe Kachen, Dawe Sarar, Gurra Damole, Laga Hida, Madda Walabu, Rayitu, Sawena and some Somali individuals who are living in Oromia region yet, based on interviews with community elders, local officials, *woredas* Disaster Risk Management (DRM), IDPs and public servants. Significant literatures on conflict in the regions were also analyzed.

² The term 'Bale Oromo' in this paper represents only those Oromo ethnic group who lives in Bale Zones,

Oromia Region. It is not to mean such an Oromo clan which is called Bale Oromo.

Results and Discussions

The Historical of Overview of Oromo- Somali Conflicts

Following Nigeria, Ethiopia is ranked as the second populated country among African countries, having more than 100 million people and nearly 80 different ethnic groups with diverse linguistic, religious and cultural identity. This multifaceted nature of diversities couldn't have been prohibited these communities to live together in harmony and co-existence for centuries (Mekonnen, 2019).

However, even if it is not part of their daily life, conflicts in Ethiopia between different ethnic groups are not new phenomenon. But, the dynamics, drivers and intensity of the conflicts differ from time to time with its vibrant behavior. The narrations and histories of the core causes of conflicts in this country have complicated political, social, economic and cultural contexts. As such, the historical and contemporary conflict between Oromia and Somali regions can be described as part of this history of conflict in the country.

The conflict along the border of southeast part of Ethiopia, particularly between Oromia and Somali Regional States of Ethiopia has long history. According to Catley & Iyasu (2010), the history of conflict between Oromo and Somali started in the 1970s when Ethiopian army intentionally poisoned the wells of Issa clan, which resulted in livestock and human deaths. Actually, Oromia and Somali regions have common way of life-sharing language, religion and culture. Despite these close relations, the two ethnic groups have experienced intermittent conflicts over resources including land and water especially since 1991. This conflict displaced people from Somali to Oromia and from Oromia to Somali due to

discontents of their groups on the uses and allocations of pasturelands and water resources, demarcation dispute, drought and other factor between the regions. As the 10th round (March-April) of the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) indicates, hundreds of people died and more than one million people were displaced by this conflict as of mid-April 2018. According to this report, in both Oromia and Somali regions, although some IDPs were displaced since 2012, the vast majority of the displacements took place in 2017 and 2018.

As Bale Zone Disaster Risk Management (DRM) data shows, between 2017- 2018 only, a total number of 137,472 (21,932 households) Bale Oromos were displaced from Somali region and within Oromia region along the border area of Bale Zone and Somali region. From the six *woredas* of the study area (Dawe Kachen, Dawe Sarar, Gurra Damole, Laga Hida, Madda Walabu, Rayitu and Sawena) only, around 96543 people were displaced. Accordingly, though only 40,387 IDPs were returned and relocated to their previous areas by the efforts of the regional and federal governments and other devoted individuals of the region, the remaining 97,087 IDPs people were sheltered to other places; some of them are relocated to different towns in Bale Zone while others are still in different camps.

Based on our field trip observation, and discussion made with *woredas'* DRM offices and IDPs, there is acute shortage of water supply, shelter, food, sanitation and nutrition. Likewise, there is a critical demanding of protection, health services and schooling provision. According to IDPs report, women and children were exposed to sexual harassment, mistreatments and labor exploitation; moving in the jungle for searching fire wood and traveling more than three hours to get water. And, since their temporary

shelter and toilet were damaged by wind, some households with their adults and children are living outside their ripped-out shelter and are subjected to harsh weather conditions. Especially, women were highly affected due to lack of confidentiality and protection. Furthermore, mothers are more exposing to the protection challenges during birth giving and after that in the harsh shelter environment. Unsurprisingly, there are some cases in which two to three households are settled in a single small tent. Likewise, thousands and thousands of Somalis were also dispelled from Oromia Region and the border areas.

Ethnic Federalism and Oromo-Somali dispute

As many scholars argue, although it has enormous advantage, ethno-centered federalism engenders many problems. For instance, some writers and politicians strongly argue that Ethiopian ethnic based federalism of 1991 has given resolute autonomy to ethnic communities for self-determination up to secession and this can weaken the power of central government. As this approach of federalism gives high concern for establishing new inter-regional boundaries line, it paved the way for local actors and regional authorities to strengthen the domination and manipulation of the territorial and political identity of their ethnic states (Adegehe, 2009; Abdi Ismail, cited in Abduselam, 2018), which leads to inter-regional boundary conflicts and may also to country disintegration. Besides these local and regional actors, the then dominant ruling party has also used this discrepancy to clash one region with other in the intention to weaken their power, lengthening its own authority and accumulating huge capital through illegal trades. “Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) was sponsoring violence between different ethnic groups

mainly in Oromia, Somali region, Benishangul and other regions” (Mustefa Mohammed, President of Somali Regional State, interview with EBC, Dec 17, 2020). This reality has being vividly disclosed after the government of Abiy Ahmed came to power, since 2018. More to this, this phenomenon of endowing greater autonomy to regional actors and weakening the power of central government encouraged stakes for other contrabandists and external political groups to worsen the territorial dispute.

Based on the above realities, it can be argued that albeit this structure of federalism is the only option for responding to the questions of diversified Ethiopian communities and avoiding domination and exploitation, the power of central government should be better strengthened and the spirit of synergy and working together of all regional governments alike should be prevailed for the betterment of the country. This should be in the way that does not compromise the regionals constitutional rights of self-determination. If not, this unbridled autonomy of regional state and border politicization leads to strong ethnic centrism or ethnic radicalism, which at the end may be resulted in the disintegration of the country.

The Major Causes of the Conflict

While Oromia and Somali communities along the border have close relations as they have common way of life with sharing language, religion and culture, the two ethnic groups have experienced sporadic conflicts over resources including land and water for a long period of time³. The root cause of this conflict according to our respondents is discontents of their groups on the uses and allocations of pasturelands and water resources as far as the life of most of these

³Interview with Somali individuals living in Bale Zone, Oromia, May 2020

communities is principally rooted in traditional cattle raiding and competitions on pasturelands and water resources. Moreover, as it mentioned previously, politicization of ethnicity and ethnic based federal system of post 1991 changed the traditional resource oriented clan conflict to politically driven inter-communal violent conflict. Furthermore, as our collected data designates, the interest of external forces especially on Somali regional state has escalated the occurrence and intensity of the current violent conflict between the two regions. Disagreements over exactly where the Oromia-Somali border should lie have resulted in several referenda, but full demarcation has never occurred, contributing to ongoing strains. Over time, unemployment, livestock rustling and politicization of communal relations has become an instrument of violence among these pastoral communities (Menkhaus, 2008). Seeing commonly, the major causes that have been exacerbating the ethnic conflict between the two communities include absence of demarcations of boundaries, politicization of ethnicity, intensified cattle rustling, proliferation of small arms, and weakening and undermining of traditional governance systems. Inadequate land tenure policies, socio-economic marginalization of pastoralists, and absence of inadequate policies to cope with droughts and disasters are also another factors that have stimulated the conflict.

As different studies expound, there has been a disagreement on ethnic boundary delimitation between these two ethnic communities especially post 1991. Disagreement on ethnic boundary delimitation induced by post 1991 ethnic federal system, distribution of resources and political powers changed the traditional recourse induced conflict to inter-regional boundary and intra-ethnic conflicts (Mekonnen,

2019). According to him, despite the referendum has taken place in October 2004 in the 456 *kebeles*, it did not bring solution because of different limitations; rather it boosted the conflict and the violence into a full-grown war. Somali people did not accept the result of the referendum due to their claim that the referendum process was erroneous because it was manipulated, corrupted or abused (Ronald H, 2006).

The prevalence of intensified cattle rustling between Oromo and Somali in general and between Oromo in Bale and Somali community around the border in particular is also another factor that has been backing this quarrel. Moving beyond limited cattle rustling among pastoralist communities, it has become entrenched in broad criminal networks escalating the national and regional black market activities.⁴

Moreover, the availability of small arms, including automatic and semi-automatic weapons around border area, especially on the hands of Somali pastoralists made traditional cattle raiding more tedious and escalates criminal activity (including criminal gangs), which in turn has put the process of conflict management and resolution in to more difficult situation⁵. In addition to this, the other respondents from Sawena strengthen this idea in contending that the conflict is intensified with frequent incidents of indiscriminate killings when federal army are not available in the area. Further to this, since Oromo are highly disarmed because federal government suspects them that they support Oromo Liberation Front, the Somali easily attack the Oromo to prevent them from use of grazing areas along the border of the two regions. And, the Somalis are more difficult to disarm due to their nomadic nature (mobility) and cross-border access. This was resulted in physical power imbalance,

⁴ Interview with IDP at Laga Hida, May 2020

⁵Ibid

which made Oromo more vulnerable to large-scale risks of loss of property and life.⁶

The erosion and undermining of traditional governance systems also contribute for conflicts among society. As many findings elucidate, there has been a gradual weakening and undermining of the power of traditional leaders and governance systems in these pastoralist communities. This exigency have crippled down their valuable role to manage and prevent conflict and incidence of criminality (Richads and Bekele, 2011). As our respondents contended, federal and regional state policies are not in favor of these traditional systems, rather, it either neglect or undermine the systems. As such, the development and expansion of formal government in these peripheral areas was resulted in the declining of the power of traditional customary institutions, which has repercussions on the ability of communities not only to handle conflicts but also to manage the cohesion of the community. Furthermore, our respondents argued that there is negligence in proper use of traditional reconciliation mechanisms and promoting it for inter-regional peace initiatives as well. Besides, since most of the remaining pastoral lands are managed in fact according to traditional governance systems, these inconsistencies with national and district state regulations lead to confusion.

Inadequate land tenure policy is also another sporadic factor that stimulates conflict between communities in the peripheral areas. The local elders we interviewed told us that the laws that have been implemented in regions give little considerations for the demands of pastoralist communities though these laws are important to enable these people secure tenure and ownership of land. According to Ahmad Shide

(2005), policies that have been practiced by governments in Ethiopia is said to be contrary to the needs of pastoralists; but it rendered high consideration to ranchers, horticulturalists, and other resource users in the expense of pastoralist interests.

Accordingly, as privatization of land tenure has ensued, communities have doomed to lose access to water and grazing land, which consequently deepened the problems of access to scarce resources as well as managing of competition for these limited resources. Being backed by the erratic factors such as drought and famine, the consequent risks of violent conflict have amplified as lack of grazing land and water has led to ranch incursions and related conflicts.

Political manipulation of ethnicity and post 1991 ethnic based federal system of governance are the stringent factors for violent conflicts and mass displacing in this historically peripheral area. As it mentioned in the forgoing discussions, these precarious factors transformed the traditional resource-induced clan conflict to politically driven severe conflict. In line with this, as Menkhaus (2008) pointed out, the attachment of external forces to the situation, especially from the side of Somali regional state, has heightened the occurrence and intensity of the current vicious quarrel between the two regions. Because of the politicization of ethnicity, most of recent violent conflicts between these pastoralist communities along the border vicinities have a strong ethnic impetus. Likewise, during dealing with conflict causality and potential solutions, what is raise as a dominant theme is the concern of governance systems, and more importantly the concern of regional state boundaries.

The insidious deeds of Abdi Ile government and TPLF war generals can be mentioned here. As the

⁶ Interview with former leaders at camp, May 2020

informants forwarded, the strong political actors behind the violent conflicts between these two ethnic communities, especially of 2017 and 2018 were Somali *Liyu Police* and some federal government war generals. This calculated manipulation of ethnic identities to gain political advantage and control of power was the cause of intra state conflict between Oromo and Somali, which characterized by structural violence.⁷

According to our respondents, the clash which started blowing up at the beginning of 2017 was unusual. It was politically-driven and the newest in a series of clashes that were happened and flowed previously. It was huge conflict in magnitude and damage; resulted in hundreds of deaths and millions of displacements. According to our respondents and many other documents, the root cause of this extraordinary and political oriented conflict was the increment of Ethiopia Somali militia that had been sponsored by then ruling and dominant party, TPLF. It was a bottleneck time for TPLF and so that they provoked and highly supported the conflict to stop the massive rallies and protests against their government in Oromia.

Political and socio-economic marginalization of pastoralists and the absence of adequate policies to cope with droughts and disasters also played significant roles in escalating violent conflicts instigated along the border areas.

The Critical Actors of the Conflict and their Motives

The actors who usually participate on this conflict can be divided in to two categories. The first one is those who directly participate on the conflict while the second is those who participate indirectly. Accordingly, the direct participants are people who are living along

the border. Most of these people are pastoralists and nomads, and they very often compete for grazing land and water. Similarly, the traditional cattle raiding practices is also familiar in this area. Especially, competition on pasturelands and water resources is usually aggravated during draught and famine. Since there are also some agricultural activities, people around the border sometimes fight for land for farming. Moreover, different levels of government structure, local government, and local clan, regional armed police forces, unemployed and aggrieved youths also became direct participants. As our informants said, during the worst violent conflict of 2017 and 2018 for instance, regional armed police forces (Somali Liyu Police) had been supported by the TPLF government and defense forces. This is to control the strong protest in Oromia region and to tradeoff the power of Oromia regional government.⁸

As many studies debunked, since couple of decades in the past, there have been the involvement of indirect actors in the Oromo-Somali conflict including Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) political forces and their supporters. Likewise, external forces like the Greater Somalia dreamers and their supporter were participating in the conflict in one way or another (Mekonnen, 2019). Some of our data also hints the surreptitious involvement of Al Shabab in the conflict. Their wicked intention lurks here around the border.

As our data indicate, this violent conflict is most of the time commenced from Somali side for the fact that they have a strong border claim with Oromo for a long period of time. But, the counter attack from Oromo side for self-defense and revenge is also not simple because local government actors, local armed

⁷Interview with local elders in Bale, and Somali individuals who are living in Bale Zone, May 2020

⁸ Interview with local officials from the study areas, Oct. 2020

men and regional armed police forces usually participate.

The activities of TPLF led Ethiopian defense force to silence the country and to conduct illegal business-like contraband can be mentioned here as a part of these indirect actors. The then federal government secretly declared proxy war on Oromo to disturb Oromo protests and the issue of Addis Ababa Integrated Master Plan so as to divert attention from center to periphery and to cripple down the power and unity of Oromo people.

The role and influence of Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and their synthesizers here is also not simple business. This activity of OLF is also the cause for Oromo to be increasingly disarmed. This is not to say that the activity of the OLF was to disarm the Oromo, but it is to say, the government used to disarm the Oromo under the pretext that they supported the OLF. Although the real intention here is to weaken the power of Oromo people, the TPLF led government disarmed them surreptitiously plotting that they support OLF. In contrary, Somalis are highly armed, putting Oromo more at risk of large-scale loss of property and life.

In provoking or catalyzing the Oromo-Somali pastoral conflict, particularly that of 2017-2018, the involvement and influence of federal government, the federal defense military force and Somalia *Liyu Police* was strong. Despite of their responsibilities to offer security matter and protect the welfare of the community, there are different circumstances in which these security forces have participated in fueling violence conflict, compromising their responsibilities blatantly. For example, higher local security officers and other officials were arrested by the government

mainly from Somali region for their participation in inducing the noxious conflict of 2017 and 2018. As Ethiopian government explained the issues through different medias, these actors involved either supplying firearms or directly participating in the conflicts. On this point, all the informants both in interview and discussion strongly criticized the local security forces from the side of Somali Region for instigating the conflicts. The local elders had fresh memory in this case, as the Somali *Liyu Police* highly incited and partake in the fights.⁹

According to the informants in the area, by the wicked actions of these local security forces, there was a strong inclination of turning individual cases into group conflicts and violence. Accordingly, to secure their interest, these security forces from the Somali side seem to have been handling individual cases against the principle of good governance, without the will of the community even. According to the above respondents, what made the situation more distractive and complicated was that there was companionship between federal defense military force and Somalia government *Liyu Police* due to their common surreptitious political goal and their high involvement in illegal business activities together, including gun running, contraband and so forth.

The participation of a number of business men in the conflict of the area is another one. Based on what our respondents told us, their involvement can be perceived from two perspectives: their interest to pursue the cause of their ethnic group, and their zeal to secure their position and benefits on the trade of the area. Here, these business men abruptly turn out to be more visible in urban centers by means of using their economic power and exploiting as well as politicizing

⁹FGD with elders, and interview with security forces and government officials at Sawena, Rayity and Laga Hida, Oct. 2020

the ethnic causes. As such, they attract and encourage government organizations and officials into their networks to get popularity and appreciation, which in turn, let them do what they want. Thus, this comradeship paved the way for few businesses to operate above the law and involve in all compartments of illegal activities such as gun running, smuggling of goods across the border and human trafficking.

Government and NGOs' Humanitarian Response.

Government Response

Since the beginning of 2017, the Ethiopian government with its different supporters has been responding to the impact of inter-communal violence along the Oromia-Somali border. According to OCHA (2018), the Ethiopian government has set a number of political and humanitarian measures not only to respond to casualty, the displaced people and provide humanitarian aids but also to solve the problems from a grass root level. At the inception of 2017, Ethiopian government established a National Steering Committee chaired by Deputy Prime Minister under the Ministry of Federal and Pastoralist Affairs. The main duty of this committee is to critically assess and address the humanitarian impact of the Oromia-Somali conflict through identifying needs, and working to stabilize the situation and guarantee service continuity.

The Ethiopian government effort to address the conflict displacement is generally structured under three sub-committees reporting to the above Steering Committee. To begin with, in both Oromia and Somali regions, a multi-disciplinary team was organized to devise an IDP rehabilitation plan that comprises a relocation/return plan and livelihoods options/compensation packages to be offered. Here, relocation and compensation plans, which include the intention surveys, the damage and loss assessment findings and

livelihoods background of IDPs are informed by the IDPs' sub-categories (Ibid).

The second sub-group of the steering committee is the Border Demarcation Sub-Committee. It was set up to develop and finalize border demarcation process. To ensure enduring solutions to the intermittent inter-communal violence in these areas, the third committee, Cross-Border Development Sub-Committee was organized to carry out border infrastructure development endeavors. In support of this, most of respondents witnessed that the current government of Abiy Ahmed has taken a number of measures in response to the country's displacement crisis, including peace-building activities, promoting voluntary returns, devising programs to support those who prefer to integrate into their host and those in the collective camps.

But, while various actions of peace building and community conferences have been taking, the process of border demarcation exercise remained soundless yet. Thus, it is sound to suggest that the governments of the two regions in connection with federal government should tirelessly work more on reaching agreement on official demarcation by consulting people from both sides. Diligent work on de-emphasizing the border or demarcation significance is also essential to reduce ethnic chauvinism and travestied overvaluing of the border. The border should be depoliticized or de-ethnicized through encouraging elders and religious leaders to solve their problems by themselves and allow both ethnic communities to move freely from one side of the border to the other. People's movement across the border should not be blocked as both regions along the border, particularly Somali, are occupied by nomadic societies.

As most of our informants and data obtained from Bale Zone DRM Office designated, even though the current federal and regional governments, collaborating with different stakeholders played their own role to resettle and manage the violent conflict broke out along the border areas of the two regions, the effort is not adequate to culminate the sorrow life of IDPs. According to our informants from Dallo Manna and Madda Walabu, Oromo communities along the border areas have no trust in federal government and its structures because they believe that federal government's activities is a full of partiality and bias in serving and treating them. This is to mean that all of the then federal government organs are in favor of Somali community at the expense of Oromo people around the border. Their delivery of services and protection were highly sympathetic to Somali people. According to them, even today, that believe is in the mind of many Oromo around the border; thus, both federal and regional governments should give guarantees and sympathy to Oromo as well to avoid that partiality and bias.

Additionally, our gathered data indicate that there have been significant limitations with government such as its weakness in: foreseeing and handling the conflict quickly, identifying the core sources of the conflict, strengthening the relationship and mutual understanding of both ethnic communities, having comprehensive conferences between the two communities and all-embracing consultations accordingly. Therefore, the above mentioned limitations should be corrected, strong and instant actions are to be taken to come up with a comprehensive conflict resolution and management mechanism to resolve and manage this recurring and complicated conflict situation.

Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)' Participation

Conflict could not be fully resolved without active participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). They play a critical role in the international response to conflict crises. Especially, in many African developing countries like Ethiopia, their contribution is huge including conflict resolution efforts, development assistance, institution-building, and donation for humanitarian relief. Particularly, as far as they employ strict policy of neutrality in their activities, NGOs that participate on humanitarian relief are very important in providing humanitarian aid to the victimized communities from both antagonists regardless of their political, ethnic, or religious attachment.

Likewise, as data we obtained from Bale Zone DRM office shows, several donors – including ECHO, OFDA, Ethiopia Humanitarian Fund, DCA, Wako Gutu Foundation, UAE, IRC, GOAL Ethiopia, UNICEF, Save the Children and so forth have participated on the response to the impact of inter-communal violence along the Oromia-Somali border, which took place in September 2017 through 2018, and caused loss of life and huge displacement. Charitable NGOs, in support of Ethiopian government, have been providing lifesaving assistance by flexing existing resources and working to scale-up immediate funding priorities (OCHA, 2018). The support from Oromo at large was also played a significant role in providing lifesaving assistance and humanitarian reliefs.

What is more, as different scholars recommend, international and Local NGOs, bilateral and multilateral organizations should not focus only on the problems associated with humanitarian relief funds. Rather, their role should be extended to subsume

fundamental tasks such as early warning functions, conflict prevention and management, promoting co-operation, peace building activities and human rights monitoring. This is very critical either to solve the problem from the grass root level or to give a comprehensive solution when it happened. However, as most of our informants admitted, the works of both international and Local NGOs on the above fundamental tasks were not significant as much as required in pastoralist communities along border areas of Oromo and Somali. With respect to humanitarian aids and rehabilitation practices even, there was significant shortage. Furthermore, according to some of our respondents from Dallo Manna and Madda Walabu, since some of NGOs indicate partiality and lack of neutrality, many people, especially from Oromia side, do not believe them.

According to many IDPs we met during data collection, they have been facing different problems such as acute malnutrition incidence, medicine and medical supplies shortage, safe water shortage, lack of sanitation and hygiene facilities, lack of temporary learning facilities, WASH services, school feeding, learning stationary and so and so forth (see also OCHA, 2018). Thus, since these problems cannot be halted by government alone, both international and local NGOs should be impartial and strongly stand with government in saving and rehabilitating the IDPs.

The Role of Elders, Religious and Clan Leaders in Conflict Resolution

In many societies in the Horn of Africa, elders including Abba Gadas and local clan leaders play a vital role in managing public affairs in general and conflicts in particular, especially in pastoralists and semi-

agrarian communities along the border areas. More importantly, their role is very essential in the local areas where there is a prevalence of the absence of formal state recognition. They usually carry out tasks such as protecting and maintain the social, political, economic, cultural, religious and spiritual wellbeing of the people they belongs to (Tobias, 2007).

Similarly, collaborating with the government in the process of resolving conflict and restoring lasting peace among the communities, elders, Abba Gadas, clan and religious leaders play a significant role as they actively participate on the activities to seek out the solution and to bring an outcome of respect to their differences as well as to promote reconciliation between the two neighboring societies.

As it mentioned in the foregoing themes, albeit there have been a stringent tendency to erode and undermine traditional governance systems, customary rules and power of traditional leaders, their role to handle conflicts and regulate peacemaking, access to resources, and other social aspects is yet freshly enormous. Corroborating with the governments in the case of Oromo-Somali conflict, particularly that of 2017-18 for instance, elders, Abba Gadas, clan leaders and religious leaders played a pivotal role in handling the conflict, encouraging negotiations and reconciliation, searching the solution, and assisting the rehabilitation process in the aftermath of inter-communal violence¹⁰. Here, it can be recommended that both regional governments should actively promote and reinforce the role of these actors to depoliticize ethnic sentiments and de-ethnicize the border so as to solve the problems from grass root level as well as avoiding its potential to reoccurring in the future.

Additionally, since there are some elders and clan leaders who are dishonest, partial, and bias because

¹⁰ Interview with local elders, officials and office of NDRMC Bale Robe branch, Oct. 2020

of their political, religious and ethnic affiliation, most of the people do not believe and accept them.¹¹ Therefore, government should identify a trustworthy elders, religious leaders and clan leaders during dealing with the problem of conflicts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Boundary conflict is not a new phenomenon for many African countries, particularly for countries in the Horn of Africa. It seems that it is becoming part of their norms as it has political, economic and security implications. As such, its formidable impacts have been scrutinized by deferent researchers. However, when we come to the case of Ethiopia, particularly around the border areas, which is less researched, the situation is different due to the fact that the cause of conflict is not disagreement on national boundary but on intra-national political boundaries. Ethiopia is a diversified country with more than eighty different ethnic groups, and she has been exercising an hold together federalism since 1991. In view of this, the post 1991 federal restructuring of Ethiopia, ethnic - based federalism, interlinked both the concept of ethnicity and boundary. Although intra-state boundary is most of the time considered as just lines of geographic jurisdictions of administrative units within a single country, if it is not properly demarcated, it has strong political significance as it can be politicized and ethicized by elites and other some politically provoked groups.

With regard to the case of Oromo- Somali for instance, inter communal violence have been heightened around the border. In fact, these two ethnic groups have been living together for a long period of time with a slight temporary conflict over grazing land and water. But, nowadays, due to the fact of

politicization of both ethnicity and border, the historic resource based conflict was drastically changed to political based ethnic conflict. As this study investigated, although the perplexing political issues including politicization of ethnicity and the border is the contemporary main cause, the causes of this conflict is multifaceted including disagreement on pasture land and water, lack of infrastructures and good governance, cattle rustling, absence of official demarcation, political manipulation of ethnicity and the like. For instance, the embarrassing conflict of 2017 and 2018, which caused hundreds of deaths and more than a million IDPs were the result of these awkward politically driven detriment.

That said, the contemporary conflict between these ethnic communities involved actors such as those who systematically manipulate ethnic identities to gain political advantage and control of power, Somali *Liyu Police* and some federal government war generals, contrabandists, illegal traders of federal and regional government bodies, corruptors, ethnic based business men that pursue securing their position and benefits on the trade of the area and so forth. The then dominant party, TPLF, has been indirectly instigating ethnic conflicts to weaken the power of the people and regional governments, and to silence the demonstrations and rallies against its government at that time, especially in Oromia. Therefore, this study widely disclosed different causes of inter-communal violent conflicts with its dynamics, the major critical actors and the way-out too. Here, the research investigated very important outputs that are essential for both federal and regional governments of Ethiopia, for the newly established 'Ethiopian Administrative boundary and

¹¹ Interview with officials and civil servants at Madda Walabu and Dallo Manna, May.2020

Identity Issue Commission,' for researchers and other stakeholders. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher suggested that: i, Ethiopian government should establish official demarcation between the border of Oromo and Somali communities as soon as possible, and this ethnic boundary delimitation should be depoliticized and de-ethnicized through allowing both communities to cross the border and live together in harmony; ii, the government should effectively control the increasing of small arms, sophisticated cattle rustling, contrabandists, illegal traders, corruptors, politically provoked ethnic based business men and the like; iii, immediate response should be given for people's problems such as lack of good

governance and good services, poor infrastructures (including water, roads, health care, schools etc.), inadequate land tenure policy and the erosion of traditional governance systems; iv, both regional governments should hold a continuous conferences and discussions between both ethnic communities, which is crucial for mutual understanding of the communities, and de-politicization and de-ethnicization of the border; and the government should also clear the border areas from the influence of politically motivated external groups

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

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