

THE IMPACT OF INTER-ETHNIC CONFLICT ON DEVELOPMENT IN ETHIOPIA

<https://doi.org/10.47743/jopafl-2023-27-23>

Demillie MOLLAW

Addis Ababa University, Center for Federalism and Governance Studies, College of Law
and Governance, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
demilliemollaw@yahoo.com

Abstract: Ethiopia is known for its long history of highly centralized, exclusive and suppressive governance system which came to an end with the adoption of multi-ethnic federal political system in 1991. The new ethnic federal state arrangement was believed to bring peace, provide a new basis for unity and reduce conflicts. However, ethnic conflict has become the day-to-day experience in different parts of the country. Afar Regional State is one of the constituent units where conflict has been prevalent. Different researches indicated that conflict affects socio-economic development in various ways. The objective of this paper is to analyze the impact of inter-ethnic conflict on the socio-economic development of Afar Regional State in Ethiopia. The data for this paper were gathered through qualitative methods as well as review of published and unpublished documents. Specific tools for primary data collection include key informant interviews, focus group discussion, and observation. The study analyses the causes and consequences of conflicts between Afar and its neighboring ethnic groups, the Issa-Somali and Amhara. The study reveals that the restructuring of the country along ethnic lines has transformed the century-old resource-based conflicts among pastoralist communities into territorial conflicts. The paper concludes that interethnic conflicts have been adversely affecting the socio-economic development of Afar Regional State.

Keywords: Afar, Amhara, conflict, development, Ethiopia, ethnic, Issa,

Introduction

Ethiopia adopted ethnic federalism and structured the regions along ethnic lines following the endorsement of the current constitution in 1994. Like other nations, nationalities, and peoples, the federal system created an opportunity for the Afar people to have their own separate regional state. This political empowerment of Afar was expected to accelerate the socio-economic development of Afar Regional State. Nonetheless, according to various sources, the Afar region remained to be the least developed regional state within the Ethiopian federation. The paper analyzes the impact of inter-ethnic conflicts on the socio-economic development of Afar Regional State. The paper begins with a brief note on the nexus between conflict and development. This was followed by an analysis the conflict between Afar and Issa Somalis as well as the conflict between Afar and Amhara neighboring communities and the impact of these conflicts on the socio-economic development of Afar Regional State

Literature review

Conflict–development nexus

One of the topics on which academics in the field of social science are focusing is the relationship between conflict and development. According to trend observations, conflict

affects economic growth and low economic growth raises the chance of conflict (McIntosh and Buckley, 2015). Nevertheless, this is not always true because different environments exhibit conflict and economic growth in very different ways (Ibid). Military expenditure contributes for an additional 18% GDP both during and after war, which reduces per capita growth by 2.2%.annully. Insecurity can affect the economy in a variety of intricate ways. Through a variety of pathways, insecurity can cause economic activity to be disrupted, with potentially significant and enduring impacts. Violence and devastation can induce fear, which can impede economic growth and led to the collapse of political institutions and public services like education and health. Countries might get caught in endless cycles of conflict that impede economic progress when institutions are weak (Mueller and Tobias, 2016).

The following explanation may illustrate the multidimensional and comprehensive impacts of conflict on development:

Conflicts impose immeasurable human suffering and large economic and social costs. The loss of human life; destruction of infrastructure, human capital, and institutions; political instability; and greater uncertainty associated with conflicts can impede investment and economic growth not only during conflict but also afterward, making it difficult to escape the "conflict trap." In addition, conflicts tend to complicate public finances, lowering revenue by destroying part of the tax base while raising military expenditures... (Kothari et al, 2019: 25).

Sub-Saharan Africa has been marred by conflicts during the past several decades. Although the intensity of conflicts has decreased in recent years when compared to the 1990s, the region remains prone to conflict, with approximately 30% of countries affected in 2019 (Fang et al, 2020). Conflicts in the region have resulted in unimaginable human suffering and significant financial costs. Similarly (Kothari et al, 2019) asserted that controlling other determinants of growth, conflicts have a significant negative effect on economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa. Some of the key channels through which conflict impedes economic growth are decreased investment, trade, and productivity, along with human and physical capital destruction through forced displacement and devastating effects on education and health care. A major consequence of conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as elsewhere, is the displacement of populations (Ibid). In this context, Stavenhagen (1996), contends that the economies of many countries ravaged by civil war and other kinds of political strife have been set back by years, if not decades. Empirical studies conducted in different countries would attest the adverse effects of conflict on development. For instance, according to Onono (2016), ethnic conflicts among Turkana and Pokot communities in the northern principalities of Kenya have been manifested in competition and control over the use of scarce natural resources, raids, and cattle rustling. These conflicts resulted in ineffective resource utilization, reduced mobility, and food insecurity. He further asserted that persistent conflict undermines local economies as well as the entire country's economic performance.

The experience in Ghana also showed similar effects of conflict on development. Like in Kenya, the causes of ethnic conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana are varied. Mbowura (2014), mentioned that Kpandai District in Northern Ghana was enmeshed in an inter-ethnic conflict between the Gonja and the Nawuri over land rights. Apart from the loss of human lives and property, the war disrupted economic and socio-cultural activities. Similarly, a study conducted in Nigeria revealed that conflict has a significant impact on

the economic development of Nigeria (Ijeoma, 2014). This is because conflicts often disrupt economic activities and thereby reduce the per capita taxable capacity of the economy. Countries in the Horn of Africa have faced many inter-communal armed conflicts. The economic costs of the various wars and conflicts are also likely to be huge given the massive destruction of property and profound socio-economic disruptions. Some view conflict as the single greatest barrier to the region's socio-economic development (Kidane, 2011). Similarly, Yigzaw, et al. (2019), argued that conflict and population displacement are among the most significant contemporary problems facing the Horn of Africa.

The impact of conflict on development in Ethiopia cannot be exceptional. The introduction of ethnic-based federalism gave the existing conflicts a new dimension (Bamlaku, et al, 2015). In this regard, Abbink (2006) argued that the most observable impact of federalism in Ethiopia has been the decentralization of ethnic conflicts at regional and local levels. In the same fashion, Lubo (2013:66) asserted that "In spite of the creation of ethnic federalism as an endeavor to address inter-ethnic conflictual problems in Ethiopia, many ethnic conflicts have occurred after 1991".

Ethnic-based resource conflicts are common in eastern Ethiopia among the Afar, Ittu-Oromo, and Issa-Somali pastoral groups. According to Bamlaku et al. (2015), the trends and prevalence of violent conflicts are increasing due to increased resource scarcity, absence of property rights, and weak customary institutions. Moreover, the research revealed that socio-political factors and competition over scarce natural resources, particularly water and pasture land, were found to be among the most important causes of most (agro) pastoral conflicts. Various studies attest that pastoral areas have never been places where livelihoods run peacefully. Access to and competition over scarce resources are the major causes of conflict that has been historically documented in pastoral areas (Getachew, 2001; Markakis, 2003; Rettberg, 2010; Yasin, 2010; Kelemework, 2013; Mu'uz, 2015; Biniyam, 2016). Most of the literatures written on Afar -Issa conflict shades light on causes and effects in terms of loss of life and destruction of infrastructure. Such literatures overlooked the impact of conflict on the overall development of Afar Regional state. Therefore, this study investigates the interface between conflict and development in Afar Regional State by examining the driving forces behind interethnic conflicts between Afar and its neighboring communities, the Issa Somalis and the Amhara.

Research methodology

Research Design

Research Design is the conceptual structure within which research is conducted. It is the blueprint for collection, measurement and analysis of data. Research design articulates what data is required, what methods are going to be used to collect and analyze this data, and how all of this is going to answer research question (Kothari, 2004). This study applied descriptive and explanatory research designs to investigate the happen (descriptive) and the why it happen (analytical) aspect of the problem being researched. The study also employed qualitative research approaches to generate detail and appropriate information helpful to understand the perspectives of the various categories of people regarding the research topic.

Sample Size

Purposive and snowballing sampling technique was employed to get knowledgeable participants voluntary to discuss about the issue to be researched. As suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2016), this technique helped the researcher in removing worthless answers and gaining comprehensive and practical viewpoints. Generally, 96 participants were interviewed from federal institutions, regional, Zonal and Woreda levels administration, community members as well as Tendaho Sugar factory workers. The researcher also conducted focus group discussions with a group of 6- 8 purposefully selected participants in each focus group discussions both in the regional capital and in the three selected Woredas. Interview schedules comprised of open-ended questions and the schedule was communicated to participants.

Data Gathering Instrument

This study was based on primary data and secondary sources. The data were collected between 2017, and 2020 from a wide category of people in different locations. The researcher used a variety of data gathering tools in order to collect a wide range of information which enabled him to investigate the topic in depth. Accordingly, data for this study was gathered through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, personal observation and document analysis. ss. Structured and semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions was used because it allowed the respondents to talk at length about their experiences, views and events. Focus group discussions were conducted with selected Woreda Office heads, educated Afars, pastoralists, civil servants, Youth and women.

Analysis of Data

The data collected through the different instruments were systematically analyzed to make final conclusion. According to Simon(2011), dealing with qualitative data involves “organizing the data, dividing it into manageable parts, synthesizing it, looking for patters, figuring out what is significant, what needs to be learned and selecting what to tell others”. According to Cresswell (2005), in qualitative research data gathering and data analysis go side by side. Thus, the data analysis process started from the time of the first interview, the first observation, the first focus group discussion and the first document record.

Results and discussion

The conflict between Afar and Issa in post 1991 federal Ethiopia

Afar Regional State was established following the introduction of federal system in Ethiopia in 1991. However, during the transitional period (1991–1994) the Issa Somalis trespassed into Afar territory (Biniyam, 2016). During this period, the Issa controlled more territory than they had in thirty years (Mu'uz, 2010). The Issa crossed the Awash River and controlled the three Kebeles in Afar territory namely Adaytu, Gedamaytu, and Unduffo. Participants of the interview and focus group discussants also asserted that the Issa used the short transitional period of instability and disorder as a grace period for their intrusion deep into Afar territories.

Afar and Issa were in conflict for centuries. Thus, EPRDF inherited the Issa-Afar violent conflict with great vigour due to the ever-growing and changing issues that make it difficult to solve the old with the rise of new issues (Mu'uz, 2015). According to an educated Afar, lack of knowledge on the part of the EPRDF fighters regarding to whom the above kebeles

belong to, helped the Issa to take root in Afar lands. Biniyam's statement corroborates this idea, which he states:

The EPRDF force, particularly the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) fighters who controlled Adaytu and its surroundings, first met the recently arrived Issa. They had no knowledge about the area or the Afar-Issa conflicts. Hence, they considered the Issa the native inhabitants of Adaytu because they met them there before the Afar groups. They preached for the peaceful coexistence of the two groups at Adaytu instead of giving room to the claims of ownership rights, (Biniyam, 2016:51).

The Issa controlled areas by displacing the Afar, and this changed the nature of the conflict from a resource conflict to a political-territorial conflict. The control of Afar territories by Issa-Somalis has intensified the conflict between the two ethnic groups. In this regard, Biniyam (2016), asserted that ethnic federalism has aggravated and transformed the age-old Afar-Issa conflict from a resource-based conflict into a boundary conflict. For instance, in 1993, well-equipped Afar men opened fire against the Issa at Ell-Wuha, 35 kilometers away from Adaytu, and about 150 Issas were killed (Yasin, 2010). Conflicts between the two ethnic groups resulted in the loss of human life and livestock, loss of animals in raids, depletion of financial assets, destruction of infrastructures, and degradation of natural resources (Rettberg, 2010). However, loss of land plays a prominent role in raising conflict because of its economic and symbolic function, places that symbolize their social identity. For this reason, it is easier for pastoralists to name lost territories than lost family members in the conflict (Ibid).

Efforts of Resolving Afar-Issa Conflict

Conflict between Afar and Issa became the day-to-day experience in post-1991 federal Ethiopia. The first meeting between officials and representatives of the ethnic groups was held at Awash, 7 Kilo town, on 17 July 1994. A document was prepared that contained proposals like options for common resource use arrangements, establishment of joint peace committees, and working together on conflict management (Biniyam, 2016). In 1996, the presidents of the two regional states gathered at Duftir (Afar region) and discussed on the conflict between the two ethnic groups (Michaclson, 2000). At the Awash Conference officials from Afar Zones and Siti Zone of the Somali Regional State, along with local elders, and a federal government representative came together and agreed to establish a Joint Afar-Issa Peace Committee (JPC) at the regional, Zonal, and Woreda levels of administration. After years of reluctance, the federal government finally showed its concern about the conflict between Afar and Issa following the outbreak of the Ethio-Eritrean war in 1998. The delegation of the federal government promised to bring lasting solution to the conflict after defeating the Eritrean force (Biniyam, 2016). The split in the top leaders of the TPLF in 2001 adversely affected the Afar-Issa peace efforts and war violence began escalating once again (Muauz, 2018). In 2010, the Joint Peace Committee on Peace and Reconciliation (JPC) held meetings in Awash, 7 Kilo between Afar and Issa and tried to resolve tensions between the two ethnic groups. However, none of the meetings tried to touch the root causes of the conflict that had been simmering for years (Yasin, 2010).

The federal government failed to fulfill its promise of resolving the boundary issue between the two ethnic groups. The JPC was unable to stop deaths and lootings on both sides and that the government's intervention was not serious. The Afar continued to claim their

historical rights over Issa-inhabited Kebeles in Afar region, while the Issa claimed constitutional rights to live in these areas. The federal government faced the dilemma of having to choose between the contrary solutions demanded by the rival parties. A decision in favor of the historical rights of Afar would alienate the Somalis, while a referendum desired by the Somalis would upset the Afar (Markakis, 2003).

Successive committee meetings could not avoid conflicts between Afar and Issa. In March 2002, about 13 Issa-Somalis were killed and 10 others wounded in clashes between the two ethnic groups over grazing land and water Sources (Markakis, 2003). This conflict affected truck drivers along the main road, which created a fuel shortage in Addis Ababa. The severity of the conflict forced the federal government to give due consideration to start peace talks (Ibid). However, consecutive meetings could not bring tangible solutions due to the irreconcilable claims of the conflicting parties (Ibid). Moreover, according to the explanations of interviewees and focus group discussants, the federal government was also playing a kind of fire brigade role to ensure the safety of the main road instead of searching for lasting solutions to conflicts between the two ethnic groups. In this regard Yasin (2010), asserted that the fruitless chain of meetings held by the JPC at Awash 7 Kilo wound up its mission in 2004 without bringing any tangible solution.

Sporadic conflicts continued due to the irreconcilable interests of Afar and Issa-Somalis over the ownership rights of the three contested Kebeles inhabited by ethnic Issa Somalis: Adaytu, Gedamaytu, and Undufo. According to Yasin (2010:192), "the joint administration of the contested hamlets has demolished around forty-seven houses in Gedmaytu and a number of illegal settlements in Unduffo." In 2008, the major town of Gedamaytu was banned as an illegal Issa settlement, and a huge stock of contraband commodities was confiscated after a fierce battle against federal and regional law enforcement forces. However, within a few months, the Issa re-inhabited the town and began to use it as a hot spot for the contraband trade more than before (Asnake, 2013).

The federal government's stand vacillates like a pendulum to either of the sides depending upon the situation. For instance, in 2008, the federal government considered Gedamaytu an illegal Issa settlement. Regarding this, Muauz (2017), pointed out that in a meeting held at Awash 7 Kilo in June 2011, the Ministry of Federal Affairs proposed a recommendation to provide legal recognition of the Issa inhabited territories. This enraged the Afar, and participants in the meeting walked out of the meeting hall. The Afar expressed their discontent against the federal government by violently attacking federal government truck drivers and trucks of the TPLF-affiliated endowment enterprise, Trans-Ethiopia. Participants in the interview asserted that the federal government gave less attention to the continuing violent conflict between Afar and Issa. They added that the federal government usually gives concern to peace talks when the conflict disrupts the main road, which is the lifeline of the country. They further explained that the irreconcilable claims of the parties to the conflict, Afar and Issa make it difficult to find out lasting solution.

Clashes between Afar and Issa ethnic groups continued along the boundary of the three contested Kebeles (Adaytu, Gedamaytu, and Undufo), located along the highway between Addis Ababa, Djibouti. Data obtained from the reports of the Ministry of Federal Affairs and the Afar Peace and Security Administration Bureau showed that Afar and Somali Regional States signed a memorandum of understanding on December 17, 2014 at Awash 7 Kilo in the presence of representatives of the Ministry of Federal Affairs and the Deputy Prime Minister. The agreement recognized a 'Special Kebele Status' for the three contested

Kebeles predominantly inhabited by Issa-Somali ethnic groups under the administration of Afar Regional State.

The Afar-Issa violent conflict came to a rapid halt in 2014 after the two regional states signed a memorandum of understanding with the intention of bringing lasting peace, development, and good governance among the people of the two regional states living along border areas. Afar and Issa elders interviewed at Andido and Gedamaytu on February 11 and 13, 2019 respectively, expressed that relative peace was restored after the 2014 agreement. Participants of the interview also explained that relative peace prevailed for at least four years, referring to the period after the 2014 peace agreement. A resident of Halai-Debi Kebele in Amibara Woreda explained: "These days we are peace with the Issa-Somalis, but we never trusted each other. They often steal our livestock, and we reacted by stealing theirs." Based on the memorandum of understanding, a committee was set up to demarcate the boundaries of the three Kebeles: Adaytu, Gedamaytu, and Undufo, and Sub-Kebeles. The committee accomplished the task of demarcating the administrative boundaries in January of 2016. Then the federal government presented the report to the regional state governments and they were asked to forward their feedback to the committee. The regional state governments did what they were asked. The committee made minor corrections on Gedamaytu demarcation points and presented the final report (Afar Regional State Peace and Security Administration Bureau, February 14, 2016).

The Ministry of Federal Affairs prepared an agreement document comprised of six articles. It was expected that the governments of the two regional states would sign the final agreement in June 2017. According to Article II of the agreement document, the aim of the agreement was to find lasting solution to the conflict along the boundary and to integrate the neighboring communities through development and good governance, as well as to ensure reliable and sustainable peace in the area (MoFA, 2017).

Recent Situation of Afar-Issa Conflict

The short-lived relative peace between Afar and Issa began to deteriorate in 2018 when clashes erupted among neighboring communities. The researcher participated during the new prime minister's discussion with representatives of the Afar people on June 28, 2018 in Semera. Regional leaders at different levels, community elders, and clan leaders who participated in the conference raised several questions regarding various issues. A participant from Amibara Woreda raised problems related to conflict in which the Afar people have been involved as:

The Afar people have been in conflict with almost all of their neighbors for centuries, and the conflict between Afar and Issa has become worse now than ever before. We expect that your government will come up with a quick response and provide lasting solution to the conflict. The boundary demarcation agreement has to come into effect to stop the displacement of many Afar and the gradual expansion of the Issa-Somalis into Afar territories.

In this regard, one educated Afar mentioned that the relative peace situation lasted for about four years after the December 2014 agreement between the two regional states. However, conflict between Afar and Issa started with vigor in the last quarter of 2018, which became the norm soon after. For instance, according to the data obtained from the Peace and Security Administration Bureau of Afar Regional State, conflict suddenly erupted in Undufo Kebele on the night of December 24, 2018. The Special Forces of Afar Regional

State moved to the Keble to pacify the area, but they clashed with equipped individuals. In this conflict, four people were killed and thirteen others were wounded. Moreover, the movement of vehicles hauling loads and passengers along the Addis Ababa-Djibouti highway was interrupted until the middle of the next day. Moreover, on December 26, 2018, armed men (militants) equipped with machine guns coming from the direction of Djibouti killed eighteen Afar and thirty-six others, including old men, children, and women, were wounded. During this attack, several domestic animals were also killed, and properties were vandalized.

The shared agreement among participants of the interview and focus group discussants was that the conflict situation had become worse than the previous ones starting from the beginning of 2019. Afar interviewees mentioned that the Issa Somalis living in the three special Kebeles have enjoyed self-administration for the last four years under the Afar Regional administration. However, the conflict between Afar and Issa relapsed in January 2019. In this regard, one of the interviewees explained that the current conflict was caused by Issa's rejection of their integration into the Afar Region and their desire to be part of the Somali Regional State. In order to loosen the conflict, the federal government decided on the withdrawal of Afar Special Forces from Gedamaytu, which enraged the Afar.

The Afar protested against the decision of the federal government and soon conflict broke out in January 2019. During this conflict, the Addis Ababa-Djibouti main road, through which 90% of the country's import-export trade passed was blocked. This historical event was televised by the EBC on January 13, 2019. An educated Afar elite who supported the action taken by Afar protestors echoed his ideas as:

Forced withdrawal of the Afar special force from the three Kebeles is denying the ownership rights of the Afar Regional State over its own territory. Members of the Afar Regional State police force were living in these Kebeles inhabited by the Issa Somalis to ensure peace in the area. But conflict aroused when the Issas burned the flag of Afar Regional State. The withdrawal of the Afar special force from Gedamaytu implies unlawful loss of our territory. Like other Ethiopians, the Issas can live in the designated special Kebeles, own property, and engage in different activities, but the land belongs to the Afar Regional State.

The peace initiatives failed to bring lasting solutions to the conflict between the Afar and Issa ethnic groups. One of the interviewees considered the successive peace initiatives as fire-brigade tasks because the concerned bodies rushed to a meeting only after a conflict broke out. For instance, the Ministry of Peace discussed with community elders and religious fathers on January 25, 2019, due to the eruption of conflict in the second week of January. Participants in the meeting agreed that blood shading among brotherhood communities (Afar and Issa) must be stopped immediately. One of the Issa elders who participated in the meeting passed the following message: "We the Issa and Afar people are Muslims, and conflict between Muslim communities is immoral. It is contrary to the rules of Alah. We have to call up on our community members to stop shading a single individual's blood from today on."

Community elders and religious fathers who participated in the discussion agreed to organize a joint committee, to move down to the communities, open consecutive discussion forums with the community and to perform the following two important activities. First, the leadership has to create awareness for members of the community regarding the effects of conflict on their socio-economic life. Second, organizing consecutive peace forums

aimed at creating a foundation for enhancing a sense of brotherhood and unity among the Afar and Issa communities.

The Minister of State for Peace and Reconciliation has said that the conflict between the Afar and Issa ethnic groups will be resolved step by step by working hand in hand with the local community. He also asserted that contrabandists and other forces engaged in illegal practices have been playing a significant role in provoking conflicts between the two ethnic groups. First, peace will be restored, then the law will be respected, and then the focus of the government will be to eradicate poverty, which has been the long aspiration of the community. To that end, a joint committee was established, comprising of members from both sides, to void the possible occurrence of conflict in the future.

Peaceful way of life among the bordering communities of Afar and Issa has not been materialized despite peace resolution efforts. The three Kebeles in Afar Region inhabited by the Issa remained to be sources of conflict between Afar and Somali Regional States. According to one Issa community elder interviewed at Gedamaytu, on May 2, 2019, twelve people were killed and three others wounded by Afar Regional State special forces. Following this incident, the new government of Somali Regional State expressed its opposition to the integration of the three Kebels into Afar Regional State.

The same idea was reiterated by an educated Somali elite as:

The three Kebeles (Adayitu, Gedamayitu, and Endufo) were illegally decided to be administrated under the Afar Regional State. These Kebeles were taken following the decisions of corrupted leaders and contrabandists who worked only to satisfy their personal interests. The Somali Regional State Cabinet decided to legally incorporate these Kebeles under the Somali Regional State administration. The cabinet denounced the agreement reached by the former presidents of the two regional states in December 2014, blaming it on the fact that the incorporation of the three Kebeles into the Afar Region had no constitutional basis(Interview,13 September 2019,Addis Ababa).

According to an Afar senior official, the Somalis inflicted heavy damage on Afar people on October 12, 2019. Since then, both sides accused each other of taking the initiative to the conflict. Following this incident, a meeting was organized which was chaired by the prime minister on October 18, 2019 in Addis Ababa. The presidents of the two regional states expressed their sorrow for the deaths that occurred. This agreement was televised by Fana TV on the above date. The president of Somalia Regional State explained that the leaders of the two regional states have to work in cooperation with the federal government to solve the problem. He also underscored that the leaders of the two regional states at all levels should work hard to bring lasting peace in the area. Afar and Issa Somalis living in the Afar region have been conducting meetings to find final solution to the conflict between the two ethnic groups. Many feared that this was just another example of ritual peacemaking without any substance, which didn't address the root causes of the conflict. On the other hand, the president of Afar Regional State asserted that they have to strengthen relations between Afar and Issa Somalis in order to resolve the problem.

A three-day peace conference was conducted at Adayitu Kebele in Mille Woreda, where participants discussed peace and reconciliation between Afar and Issa. Interviewees asserted that the conference was organized based on the unswerving interests of community elders, religious fathers, and federal and regional state leaders. This conference was televised by Fana TV on November 1, 2019. Participants of the conference discussed on

the role of political entrepreneurs in rousing conflicts between Afar and Issa. The president of Afar Regional State, Ato Awol Arba, explained about the conference as:

This is a historical conference because it was conducted based on the initiative of the people themselves. Conflicts in these areas have not been caused by the people themselves rather conflicts have been sponsored by individuals who want to destabilize the area. Conflicts have been motivated by contrabandists for political gain. In this conference, participants mentioned that they didn't want to be in conflict and condemned the involvement of external forces. The questions of the Issa residents in the designated towns are education for their children, supply of water service, and good governance. Therefore, the two regional states should work in cooperation to ensure the prevalence of peace and stability in the area, which in turn would help to address the demands of the people (Fana TV, November 1, 2019).

Three weeks after the Adaytu conference, a similar conference was conducted at Undufo Kebele in Gewane Woreda. Participants of the interview mentioned that contrabandists and other anti-peace forces have been instigating conflict to endanger the peace and unity of Afar and Issa just to satisfy their own self-interest. Conflicts have been occurring every week and every month between the two ethnic groups claiming the lives of several people and causing material destruction. At the end of the conference, the president of Afar Regional State, Ato Awol Arba, put the keystone in Adaytu Kebele to construct a boarding school for the Issa Somalis living in the Afar Region (on November 21, 2019, by Fana TV). Despite the successive peace conferences mentioned above, conflict between Afar and Issa communities broke out after a month. The experience showed that Afar and Issa Somalis repeatedly entered into conflict after several peace negotiations. The shared agreement among many respondents is that community elders, religious fathers, and regional leaders at different levels have to think one step ahead of the people to find lasting solution to conflicts and to ensure peace and stability in the area.

Afar-Amhara conflict in post-1991 Ethiopia: an overview

Causes and Consequences of Afar-Amhara Conflict

Evidences showed that neighboring Afar and Amhara communities have lived in peace for centuries with sporadic disputes caused by customary competition over scarce resources (Yasin, 2010). Remembering, conflicts in the past, participants of the interview mentioned that cross-border ethnic killings as a cultural practice among the Afar and Amhara bordering communities for the sake of pride and fame was the other cause of conflict between the two ethnic groups beyond competition over resources. In this case, a person kills another person belonging to another ethnic group in order to gain fame among his ethnic group. This in turn maintains the cycle of revenge, which adversely affects the relationship among neighboring communities. In this regard, (Ibid) asserted that interest to be regarded as a hero within one's own society, competition to show ethnic supremacy, revenge for lost lives and properties, and wealth accumulation were factors aggravating the conflict between Afar and Amhara neighboring communities.

The introduction of ethno-regional administrative structure in Ethiopia since 1991 has changed the nature of conflict between Afar and Amhara neighboring communities. The Afar regional state shares more than 400 kilometers of boundary with the Amhara National Regional State, from Kobo Woreda of the North Wollo Administrative Zone in the north

to Ankober Woreda of the North Shewa Administrative Zone in the south. According to Yasin (2010), four out of ten zones in the Amhara region share boundaries with three out of five Zonal administrations in the Afar region. More than 130 Kebeles in 26 Woredas of both regional states share boundaries. The Amharas living in Kebeles sharing borders with Afar are pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities. The Woredas of Amhara Regional State sharing borders with Afar Regional State are Kobo and Habru Woredas (North Wollo), Worebabo Woreda (South Wollo Zone), Jille Timuga, Bati and Kewet Woredas (Oromia Zone of Amhara Region).

People living along the border areas of Afar and Amhara Regional States have long historical social and economic interaction. For instance, when Afar entered with their cattle and camels into Raya Kobo (North Wollo), the local people welcomed them. Interviewees asserted that market exchange, lending, and borrowing relationships among communities living along border areas have never been interrupted. Similarly, the neighboring communities of Sodoma Kebele of Habru Woreda in the North Wollo Administrative Zone of the Amhara Region and Chifra Woreda in Zone One of the Afar Region have lived together for years, and these residents have marriage relations. However, trying to move into the neighboring grazing sites would automatically lead to deadliest fighting during shortage of pasture (Interview, Afar and Amhara community elders, Mersa and Semera, March, 2018; December 2019).

The frequency, magnitude, and characteristics of conflict along the border areas of Afar and Amhara Regional States seem to be escalating due to frequent armed disputes caused by territorial claims following the introduction of ethno-regional administrative structure in 1991 (Yasin, 2010). According to the participants of the interviews, conflict became the day-to-day experience in three out of the 13 Woredas of Amhara regional state sharing boundaries with Afar Regional State.

An interviewee from the Afar Regional State Peace and Security Administration Bureau explained that conflicts between the neighboring Woredas of Afar and Amhara regional states have been erupting every day, every week, and every month. The Amharas entered into Afar territory, drawn by the availability of vast arable land. This uncompromised interest has been the source of conflict between neighboring communities. Repeated conflicts between neighboring communities of the two regional states have several consequences, like loss of human life and injury, destruction of resources, robbery of property, and recycling of revenge (Interview, December 2018 and March 2019, Semera). The shared agreement among participants of the study was that the contested areas are pieces of agricultural land and residential areas. Mille Woreda (in Zone One of the Afar Region) entered into conflict with Bati Woreda of Oromia Zone of Amhara region over ownership rights of one Kebele called by Afar as Jeldu and Chachatu by the Oromo in Amhara region. Community elders on both sides mentioned that the clash between the two ethnic groups was severe in the first two-three years after the new federal restructuring of the country. According to one Afar elder, women had never been the target of cross-border traditional conflicts. Unlike this experience, in 2002, about thirty-two Afar women were killed by Amhara militia on their way home after attending a market in the Amhara region. This shows the changing nature of conflict in post federal Ethiopia.

Community elders mentioned that most of the Woredas of western Afar were under the administration of the former Wollo Province. Ethnic Conflict between Afar and Amhara communities living along the border intensified after the adoption of ethnic federalism in

Ethiopia. Sporadic conflicts have resulted in the loss of human life, theft of animals, displacement of people, and interruption of social interaction as well as problem of ensuring the rule of law in the area. Interviewees and focus group discussants explained that conflicts between the two neighboring communities become more intense since the beginning of 2017. They mentioned that the July 2017 conflict lasted for about three days and 12 people were killed on both sides. They added that the loss of human life and displacement of people has been increasing from time to time and lasting solution to conflicts not yet found. In the words of one community elder from Sodoma Kebele:

The peace committee of Chifra Woreda and Sodoma Kebele has negotiated several times, but neighboring communities soon entered into conflict again. The main cause of the current conflict is the question of ownership rights to a place called Jara. Both sides claimed that Jara belongs to them. The inability to find lasting solution has contributed to the sustenance of the problem (Interview, January 12, 2018, Meressa).

Local administrators and community elders were trying to resolve the July conflict, but they soon entered into a new conflict in September 2017, and the security situation around Jara became very tense. This conflict started on 12 September 2017 and lasted for three days. According to interviewees, two farmers from Habru Woreda in Kebele 23, and another from Direluka village in Kebele 24, were killed by Afar gunmen on the 12th and 14th of September, respectively. As revenge, Amhara farmers moved into Afar villages where four Afar were wounded in a fire exchange, but how many Afar were killed is not known (Interview, February 2018, Sodoma).

Another interviewee explained that the current Chifra Woreda of the Afar region was part of Habru Woreda in Wollo province during the military regime. Following the administrative restructuring of the country in 1991, Chifra became part of Afar Regional State. The Amharas along the border area still feel that Chifra belongs to them. This territorial claim has been the source of repeated conflicts between the two ethnic groups living along border areas. He underscored that conflict has been significantly affecting the relationship between neighboring Afar and Amhara communities. For example, unlike in the past, Amharas have stopped attending the market in Chifra, a town in the Afar region, out of fear of retaliation. Similarly, the movement of Afar into Amhara Woredas and Kebeles has been restricted.

Recent Efforts of Resolving Amhara-Afar Conflict

Public conferences and discussions forums have been organized among Afar and Amhara regional state leaders with the intent of avoiding conflicts along the border areas. For instance, according to Amhara Mass Media, Afar and Amhara regions' Regional Councils and neighboring Woredas' People to People Peace Conference were held in Woldia town (North Wollo) on 14 March 2019. In this conference, more than 800 people participated, including regional state presidents, members of regional state councils, representatives of neighboring Woredas' administrators, security forces, community elders, religious fathers, and representatives of local communities (Amhara Mass Media Agency, March 2019).

At the Woldia conference, a paper entitled "The Relationship between Amhara and Afar Peoples, Values as well as Directions on Possible Solutions to Conflicts" was presented. Participants at the conference identified the following six main causes of conflicts between Afar and Amhara neighboring communities: First, cross boundary use of arable and grazing land. Amhara pastoralists and agro-pastoralists want to use the vast arable and pasture land

of Afar Woredas and Kebeles due to shortage of arable and pasture land on the part of Amharas. The Afar also used to send their animals to Amhara Woredas like Raya Kobo and Habru during times of natural disasters like draught. Second, territorial claims because Amharas still considered Chifra Woreda as part of Amhara regional state although it is under Afar Regional State following the restructuring constituent units in federal Ethiopia. Third, culture of killing and revenge, if an Afar killed a person belonging to the Amhara ethnic group, the families and relatives of the deceased will take revenge by killing the murderer or his family and close relatives. This vicious circle of conflict has been adversely affecting the relationship between these neighboring communities. Fourth, labeling clashes between individuals as ethnic conflict which as a result conflicts between individuals belonging to the two ethnic groups have been converted into ethnic conflicts. Fifth, the role of ethnic conflict entrepreneurs (individuals who have been deliberately disrupting the long historical brotherhood relations and blood ties among neighboring Afar and Amhara communities); and Sixth, lack of commitment on the part of leaders (administrators) at different levels, illegal human traffickers, contraband traders, and individuals engaged in illegal arms trafficking.

Participants of this conference mentioned that discussing the causes of conflicts could not help to solve the problem unless all the concerned bodies took tangible measures. In this regard, one participant asserted:

Discussing about the problem without taking measures against those who have been causing conflicts between the two ethnic groups will not help to avoid the problem. Who is guilty has to be made clear (either Afar or Amharas) and regional governments need to have firm stand to take measures on ethnic entrepreneurs. Moreover, we have to give our ears to elderly people, community leaders, and fathers of peace if we don't want to see people die of conflicts sustained among neighboring communities.

Another Afar-Amhara security forum was organized in Kombolcha Town (South Wollo Zone) on 19 September 2019. Regional state presidents, community elders, representatives of local administrators and commanders of the North-Eastern Command have participated in this forum. The shared agreement among participants was that conflicts between the two ethnic groups have several adverse effects. According to the evaluation made by participants, the South Wollo and North Shewa Zonal administrations have shown improvement in terms of both reducing the rate of occurring and resolving conflicts. But Habru Woreda of the North Wollo Zone has a weakness in resolving its conflict with Chifra Woreda of the Afar region. They also asserted that the Woreda and Kebele administrations have to work in close cooperation with the security organs to ensure peace and security along the border areas. Moreover, as part of avoiding conflicts both regional state governments have to handover criminals, presenting them before the law to ensure the respect of the law (Amhara Mass Media Agency, September 2019).

The various conferences and discussions held so far did not help to avoid the ongoing conflicts between Afar and Amhara ethnic groups. In order to avoid the adverse effects of conflict and find lasting solutions another peace conference was organized at Woldia Town on 12 November 2019. The researcher has participated in this conference and had the opportunity to hear who said what during the discussion. In the opening statement of the conference, the Head of the Office of Woldia Town Amhara Democratic Party underscored that frequent conflicts have been disrupting the peaceful way of life and free movement of people between neighboring Woredas and Kebeles in Afar and Amhara regional states. He

asserted that, unlike the past, in recent years, Afar have not been entering into the towns in North Wollo Administrative Zone like Woldia, Kobo, and Mersa. He expressed his wish that the conference would help to identify the main causes of conflicts and to create favorable conditions for peaceful co-existence among neighboring communities. This sentiment was voiced by an Afar participant of the conference as:

We knew Woldia as our home and it was our second town. Our parents attended their education in Woldia, and we sent our children to school in Woldia. Many Afar have married wives from here, live and eat together with Amharas. There are boys and daughters born to Amhara mothers and Afar fathers, which indicated the existence of a healthy relationship between the two ethnic groups. But situations have been completely changed in recent years. I hope today's discussion will enable us to identify the political entrepreneurs who have been exacerbating conflicts for their own self-interest and lay the foundation to bring lasting solution to the conflict.

The shared agreement among participants of the conference was that lack of commitment and integrity on the part of Zonal, Woreda, and Kebele leaders on both sides, have contributed to the perpetuation of conflicts among people living in bordering areas of the two regional states. In this regard, the North Wollo Zone Administrator argued that leadership problem was the main cause behind the conflict between Afar and Amhara neighboring communities. He further elaborated that Woreda and Kebele officials have been exacerbating conflicts instead of being part of the solution. He urged that administrators have to be the vanguard in creating stability in their respective areas, working hard for the prevalence of peace and ensuring the security of all lines (roads) connecting the various towns of the North Wollo Zone with the Afar region.

One of the Afar participants underscored that community members would not have been involved in conflicts had they been properly led by administrators at different levels of regional state governments. He further mentioned that leaders had to create awareness among the people regarding the adverse effects of conflict. He concluded that the Woreda leaders of the two neighboring communities have to settle their differences first to find lasting solutions to the conflicts between the neighboring communities. This sentiment was voiced by a senior military officer from Northern Command, who attended the conference as:

Unnecessary scarifies were paid due to lack of commitment and absence of proper follow-up on the part of the leadership at different levels. In particular, the leadership of Chifra, Worebabo, and Habru Woredas should work hard to mitigate or at least minimize the effects of conflicts occurring in their respective areas. The community can profit only when we ensure our security and cooperate against our common enemies, poverty and backwardness.

The other main cause of the escalation of conflicts between neighboring Afar and Amhara communities was the weakening of traditional methods of conflict resolution. Participants of the conference underscored that intervention of political leadership at different levels of government has been undermining the role of community elders and religious fathers in resolving conflicts. For instance, one participant mentioned that communities have encountered problems because of the weakening of the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms which were effective for centuries. As a result, recurrent conflicts that were considered minor in the past are now getting harsher, causing loss of human life and

destruction of material properties. An elderly Afar further strengthened the above idea when he stated:

In the past, community elders were able to get robbed/rustled cattle back within few days through discussion. When a person was killed from one side, the elders could stop further killing through reconciliation. But today, killing has increased more than ever before. The involvement of the political leadership has exacerbated instead of reduced the occurrence of conflicts.

Discussants of the conference call for the practical implementation of the agreements reached. For instance, in the words of an elderly Afar participant:

We are currently debating in a pleasant setting (the hall), but people are dying there. We might get people killed when we return back to our homes. Therefore, what matters is not the issue we have discussed in this conference hall. Rather it is our commitment to put what we have agreed upon here into practice and make use of it for development and prosperity by bringing lasting peace among people living in border areas.

One of the interviewee explained that coordination among the stakeholders is very important to bring criminals before the law and to avoid the escalation of conflicts. In the same fashion, an Afar participant explained that they have to focus on their future peace and forget their memories of past conflicts. They suggested that people-to-people relationships have to be strengthened; ethnic entrepreneurs have to be identified and brought before the court if lasting solution is needed to end conflicts between the two ethnic groups. Seven months after the Woldia Conference, another peace conference was conducted in Dessie Town on 26 June 2020. Higher leaders from the Afar and Amhara regional states met to discuss on the ongoing border conflicts. Discussants asserted that the governments of the two regional states have to follow up and stop the actions of those political entrepreneurs who have been trying to instigate conflicts that have been causing loss of human life and destruction of properties (Amhara Mass Media, June 26, 2020).

Conflict resolution efforts made so far have been unable to bring lasting solutions. For instance, the Afar gunmen burned villages in places called Humnanu and Borena, in the Oromia Zone of the Amhara Region on 12 December 2020. According to one interviewee, this conflict has caused serious damage to human life and property. He further asserted that the current conflict is more severe than the previous conflicts. This conflict is different from past conflicts because, first, heavy weapons were employed in the fighting, and second, the fighting was conducted in a tactful manner.

Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to investigate the impact of inter-ethnic conflict on the socio-economic development of Afar Regional State in Ethiopia. The study conclude that cross-boundary competition over scarce resources have been the norm between Afar and its neighboring Issa Somalis and Amhara pastoralist communities. Attempts of resolving conflicts remained unsuccessful across regimes. The restructuring of regions along ethnic lines following the adoption of federalism in Ethiopia has changed the resource-based conflicts into territorial conflict among neighboring ethnic groups. The recurrent Afar-Issa conflicts had caused the loss of great number of people on both sides, displacement of many thousands of pastoralists and disruption of the day-to-day activities of people living

in conflict-ridden areas. The conflict has significantly affected the traditional mobility of pastoralists denying them access to alternative grazing lands. These conflicts remained unsolved to date because authorities of the federal government and regional state lacked the will and commitment to thoroughly examine the main cause behind repeated conflicts and find out an appropriate solution which could be accepted by the parties to the conflict. Interethnic conflicts are still going on adversely affecting the socio-economic development of Afar Regional State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research the following recommendations are recommended: The federal government needs to have genuine concern, commitment and wholeheartedly support regional states in the process of finding lasting solutions to conflicts among them. The leadership of Afar, Amhara and Somali regional states should create awareness to members of communities regarding the adverse effects of conflicts on their own living conditions in particular and the development of their respective regional states. The leadership Afar, Amhara and Somali regional states should use the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms as an important means instead of relying only on the modern conflict management. The leadership of Afar, Amhara and Somali regional states should give appropriate support to the Joint Peace Committees to maximize their role in resolving conflicts.

References

1. Abbink, John (2006). Ethnicity and Conflict Generation in Ethiopia: Some problems and Prospects of Ethno-regional Federalism. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 24(3): 389 – 414 <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589000600976729>
2. Asnake Menbere (2013). Dynamics of Pastoralist Relations at Change: An Exploration into the Causes of Afar -Karrayu Conflict in the Awash Valley. *EJOSSAH*.
3. Bamlaku,et'al (2015). The Dynamics of (Agro) Pastoral Conflicts in Eastern Ethiopia *.EJOSSAH.Vol. XI, No. 1.*
4. Biniyam Aklilu (2016). A Historical Survey of the Issa-Afar Conflict from 1936 to 1994. Unpublished MA Thesis, Haramaya University, Ethiopia
5. Creswell, John (2005). Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
6. Fang et'al (2020).The Economic Consequences of Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa.IMF Working Paper, African Department. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3758054#
7. Getachew, Kassa (2001a) Resource Conflicts among the Afar of North-East Ethiopia. In: M. Salih, T. Dietzand G.M. Ahmed (eds.)*African Pastoralism: Conflict, Institutions and Government*. London: Pluto Press, pp. 145–171
8. Ijeoma, Ngozi(2014). Impact of Cost of Conflict on Economic Development in Nigeria.
9. Kelemework, Tafere (2013).Peace-making from Within: The Tradition of Conflict Resolution in Northern Afar, Ethiopia. *EJOSSAH Vol. IX , No. 1.*
10. Kidane Mengisteab (2011). Critical Factors in the Horn of Africa's Raging Conflicts. Discussion Paper 67. Uppsala.
11. Kothari, C.R (2004). *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*. 2nd Edition.New Age International (P) Ltd. Publishers.
12. Kothari et al (2019). The Economic Consequences of Conflicts: In- Regional Economic Outlook. *Sub-Saharan Africa : Recovery Amid Elevated Uncertainty*.

13. Lubo, Teferi (2013). The Post 1991 'Inter-ethnic' Conflicts in Ethiopia: An investigation. *IJOLACR*. Vol. 1 (1), PP. 108-115.
14. Markakis, John (2003). *Anatomy of Conflict: Afar and Issain Ethiopia*. Review of African Political Economy, PP. 445 – 453.
15. Marshall, C. and Rossman, G (2016). *Designing Qualitative Research*. 6th Edition, SAGE, Thousand Oaks.
16. Mbowura, Cletus (2014). Inter-Ethnic Conflicts and their Impact on National Development, Integration and Social Cohesion: *IJOHASS*. Vol. 4, No. 7(1).
17. McIntosh, K. and Buckley, J. (2015). *Economic development in fragile and conflict-affected states: Topic guide*. Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.
18. Michaelson, Marc (2000). *Afar-Issa Conflict Management*
19. MoFA (2017). *Memorandum of Understanding on the Boundary Demarcation along Neighboring Areas of Afar and Somali Regional States*.
20. Muauz, Giday (2017). *Anatomy of Issa-Afar Violence: A critical Analysis of Issa-Afar Violence and the Imperative for its transformation in Post-1991 Ethiopia*. *Journal of Developing Societies* 33(3):1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0169796X17716998>
21. Mueller, H. and Tobias J. (2016). *The Cost of Violence: Estimating the Economic Impact of Conflict*. International Growth Centre.
22. Mu'uz, Gidey (2010). *The Afar-Issa Conflict in Post-1991 Period: Transformative Exploration*. (MA Theses Addis Ababa University).
23. Mu'uz Giday (2015). *The Geopolitics and Human Security of the Afar in the Post-Cold War Period*. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol.9(6), PP. 225-253
24. Onono, Perez. (2016). *Economic Effects of Inter-community Conflicts In Kenya: Evidence of the Importance of Peace in the Realization of Sustainable Development*. *IJOCAD*. 3(2): 118-129
25. Rettberg, Simone (2010). *Contested Narratives of Pastoral Vulnerability and Risk in Ethiopia's Afar Region*. *Pastoralism* Vol.1 No.2. Practical Action Publishing.
26. Stavenhagen, Rodolfo (1996). *Ethnic Conflict and Economic Development*. In: *Ethnic Conflicts and the Nation-State*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.
27. Yasin, Mohammed (2010). *Regional Dynamics of Inter-ethnic Conflicts in the Horn of Africa: An Analysis of the Afar-Somali Conflict in Ethiopia and Djibouti*. Dissertation, University of Hamburg.
28. Yigzaw et al., (2019). *Causes and Impacts of Internal Displacement in Ethiopia*. *African Journal of Social Work*, 9(2), National Association of Social Workers.



This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution - Non Commercial - No Derivatives 4.0 International License.