



AN INVESTIGATION OF CAUSES AND SETTLEMENT MECHANISMS OF ETHNIC CONFLICT AMONG THE GUJI-OROMO AND SIDAMA OF WONDO-GENET WOREDA, SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA

Abraham Asnake and Dagne Shibru Abate

ABSTRACT

This study discussed the inter-ethnic conflict between Sidama and Guji Oromo of Wondo Genet Woreda. The Guji and Sidama people share various cultural, social and political elements, such as similar egalitarian government system, common traditional practices, identical Cushitic ancestry and communal history. These comparable elements have made their resemblances far much stronger and deeper than their dissimilarities. Due to these, the two ethnic groups had experienced nonviolent and concrete socio-cultural inter-relation and cooperation for a long period of time. However, following the 1991 administrative changes, violent conflicts erupted between them in 2007, 2008 and 2010 where many lives were lost and several people were displaced from both sides. This study looked into the root causes of these conflicts with detailed highlights on their social, economic and political consequences. The study also explored the conflict resolution activities and institutions involved in the process. It further scrutinized the post-conflict transformations and integrations in the area and presented the way forward to persistent conflict management. Using fieldwork conducted among the Sidama and Guji and analysis of secondary data from different sources, the study revealed that, the repetitive Sidama-Guji conflicts were not produced by the mere existence of ethnic diversity. Instead, they were the result of modern inter-ethnic differences in political ground and other instrumental features such as income, occupation and general living standards. As the study's finding evidently disclosed, it was discontents over unequal distribution of financial resources, trade benefits, political power, job opportunities and infrastructures, which led the two groups of people into violent conflicts. Moreover, these differences were basically manipulated by educated and influential elites of both groups. The Guji and Sidama elites utilized ethnic differences as instruments to mobilize the people and instigate conflicts for their own personal ends; typically aiming at achieving better political and social status.

KEYWORDS: Ethnic conflict, identity, Sidama people, Guji-Oromo people.

INTRODUCTION

Most of the conflicts in the contemporary world are taking place in terms of ethnic lines. To mention



some, ethnic cleansing of Yugoslavia, Hitler's Germany genocide against ethnic Jews, the Rwandan genocide of Hutu and Tutsi, the Marathion conflict in Darfur, the Nuer and Dinka conflict in Southern Sudan, Kurdish struggle for independence in Iraq and Syria are the most important and common ethnic based conflicts (Blagojevic, 2009: 2). However, it is clear that not all parts of the world are equally prone to ethnic conflicts. Certain places and states, especially those in the

developing world are more apt to this kind of conflicts than other places and states (Kanbur, et al, 2009: 3). For several decades the African continent was kept busy by ethnic related conflicts. With some differences in the rate of incidences almost every part of the continent experienced such kinds of struggles. Akapule (2008: 1) equally stated ethnic induced conflicts in Africa keep on recurring in various parts of the continent. Since the 1960s there have been ethnic related conflicts in countries like Mali, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Burundi, Chad, Congo Brazzaville and Niger which forced millions to flee their home and millions to die (Jinadu, 2007: 8-9).

Among the rest parts of the continent the Horn of Africa is well known for its extended intra-state conflicts (Shale, 2004: 2-3). Being one member of the region, Ethiopia too hosted repetitive internal instabilities due to civil wars for a number of decades. From those widespread intrastate conflicts or wars the ethnic related violence are at the center. Since the 1991 ethnic based administrative structure, there have been quite a number of violent inter-ethnic conflicts in almost every corners of the country (Sisay, 2007: 5). Some of the recent conflicts which resulted from the redrawing of the old administrative boundaries of Ethiopia, include the conflict between Guji and Sidama nationalities along their common borders of Oromia and SNNPR; amid Oromia and Somali regional states in the area of Shinle; between Oromia and Gumuz around Eastern Wollega in Oromia and KamashZone in Benishangul-Gumuz regional state; between Benishangul-Gumuz and Amhara regional states; the ethnic conflict between Anywaaand Nwer of Gambella; and "conflict on the frontiers between Borena of Oromo and Gerri of Somali" (AIMDG, 2009: 29-30; Sisay, 2007: 9)and *Afar* and *Esa*ofthe Rift Valley region. It was after the 1991 federal arrangement that fighting started between the Sidama and Guji of Wondo Genet *Woreda*. The conflicts took place in 2007, 2008 and 2010 causing several civilian casualties, large numbers of human displacement and other diversified forms of socio-economic impacts. In addition to those instantaneous impacts, the conflicts also led to the weakening of contemporary socio-economic, political and cultural ties between the two people. The violent conflicts among the two groups then forced the government to intervene and settle the dispute through organizing a referendum. The finding of the study showed that the recurring Sidama-Guji conflicts were produced from competition for economic resources, claims over self-administration status and modern inter-ethnic differences in political ground.

The problem

Since the second half of the 20th century, conflicts within national boundaries have become increasingly dominant. One third of all countries have experienced civil conflicts, and they often appear to be ethnic in nature (Esteban et.al, 2012: 1). These internal conflicts are the primary causes for the deaths and displacements of millions of people across the world. Besides its civilian victims, conflicts over identity have caused diversified impacts that can be categorized into social, economic, political and environmental impacts. According to African Report: N°153 (2009: 25) between 1991 and 2005, several thousands of people were killed, enormous amount of property was destroyed and many people were displaced in inter-ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia. Wondwosen (2008) and Záhořík (2008: 22) referring to the official report of the Ethiopian Federal Police outlined that, in 2007-2008 alone, there were 28 ethnic related conflicts in the country. The conflict between the Sidama and Guji Oromo of Wondo Genet *Woreda* was one of the many conflicts. These two ethnic groups had co-existed in a complete peaceful and harmonious ways for countless years. Both of them did not even used to consider themselves as separate ethnic groups, because they share the same ancestral origin, cradle land, residential environment, economic system, ways of life, related languages and they are as well tied with marriage bonds.

Since they have lived together harmoniously and peacefully for many years, it is unprofessional to pin their conflict with primordial based ethnic divisions. Therefore, if ethnicity by itself is not the fundamental cause for the violent conflicts among these two ethnic groups, what was it? This study, unlike the previous ones that had been conducted by a number of scholars from various disciplines, descriptively investigated the basic causes of the conflict between the Sidama and Guji Oromo of Wondo Genet *Woreda*.

OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the study was to investigate the major causes that contributed to the rise of ethnic rivalry and conflict among the Guji Oromo and Sidama communities of Wondo Genet *Woreda*.

The specific objectives of the study were:

To examine the pre-conflict relationships of the Guji Oromo and Sidama communities of Wondo Genet *Woreda*.

To identify and explain the major causes and consequences of the ethnic conflict in the study area.

To discuss the roles played by different governmental bodies (local, regional and federal governments), elders, customary institutions and women of both groups in the conflict and conflict resolution endeavors.

METHODOLOGY

Considering the ontological dimension of the topic to be investigated, that is constructivism (social reality is regarded as subjective fact), we (the researchers) utilized a qualitative research approach in this study. Unlike the quantitative technique, “which rely on collecting data that is numerically based and amenable to such analytical methods as statistical correlations, often in relation to hypothesis testing” (Walliman, 2006), the qualitative epistemological foundation of the study depends on methods that help in interpreting detail and sensitive human actions. Besides, it centers on the process of theory development rather than testing. Therefore, throughout the study, we were totally dependent on qualitative research approaches and data were qualitatively gathered, analyzed and interpreted. Quantitative data were only used when it is obligatory, such as, to show the demographic size of an area or some other kinds of statistical skin. Both primary and secondary data gathering methods were used to obtain relevant information required to carry out the study. The primary data were collected through observation, key informant interview, focus group discussion and casual conversation. Secondary data were collected from different sources, such as books, publications, journals, *Kebele* archives and *Woreda* police reports pertinent to the conflict and its resolution endeavors.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Guji and Sidama are people with shared primordial characters, such as common ancestry and descent. In olden times, they also shared indistinguishable language (*afan Oromo*), common cradle land, and way of life. However, as antagonism with the half brother Arsi forced the two siblings to split apart and migrate into different directions from their home land, evolution of the present day ethnic identity cropped up between them. Thus, in the course of their migratory routs, they were able to adapt different forms of economic systems (later becoming the same), different but related types of language (*Sidaamuaffoandafan Oromo*), political arrangements (*Gada* and *Luwa*) and other cultural traits. Regardless of the above mentioned transformations, the Guji and Sidama people reunited in Wondo Genet and lived in peaceful and mutually co-existence way for several years. Instead of distracting their relationships, the dissimilarities enabled them to live interdependently and reciprocally until recent times. Probably, it is their myth of common ancestry and descent that has helped them to build up an extended nonviolent co-existence and cooperation. Accordingly, it is reasonable to state that, the Guji-Sidama conflict was not produced by the mere existence of ethnic diversity or ancient hatred. Instead, it was resulted from modern inter-ethnic differences in political ground and other instrumental features such as income, occupation and general living standards. Furthermore, to recognize that the conflict was instrumental, it is important to look at areas where persistent claims, competitions and conflicts were taking place. Those controversial sites include Geke Market place (connecting Kela 01 and Intaye *Kebeles*), Wondo Genet Forestry College (amid Gotu Onoma and Wosha Soyama *Kebeles*), Shebelle hot spring resort (amid Wosha Soyama and Shasha Kekele *Kebeles*), Green Hotel (between Kela 01 and Intaye) and Elfora beef factory (amid Chuko and Busa *Kebeles*). Rivalry and frequent conflicts on these business establishments indicated that the Sidama-Guji conflict was/is the result of economic competitions, i.e. both groups aimed to get a better share of income from the local economy. Obviously, in this competition for economic benefits, ethnic entrepreneurs were in the driving position.

FINDINGS

The Pre-conflict Relationships

Both, the Southeastern and Northern Guji have a long history of relationships and common cultural features with the Sidama. Especially, the northern neighbors mixed themselves with the Sidama and lived together for a very long period of time in an area called *WondoMellga* or *Wondo Genet*. Due to this, both had developed strong cultural and social ties which were rarely threatened by conflicts and if sometimes endangered; those strong ties; that are tough and unbreakable, were capable of settling the violence peacefully. On the contrary, the Guji had antagonistic relationship with their closest relatives, the Arsi and Borena. As historical narratives stated, these three groups of people: the *Guji*, *Borana* and *Arsi*, once upon a time were living together in a place known as *Haroo-Walaabuu*, which is found in *Uraaga* districts of the present day GujiZone. Based on this folktale, Guji elite's even claim the *Guji* land as it is a center of all Oromo people and they believe all Oromo were originated from *Guji* (Muhammad, 2008). In addition, living communally, all of the three groups customized themselves to speak *AfanOromo*, which is one of the languages of Cushitic branch and adapted similar religious belief, memory of shared history, alike traditional practices and even common psychological makeup (Dagne, 2013; Tadesse, 2002; Asebe, 2007). However, having all the above parallel cultural elements, these groups of people have experienced frequent competitions and conflicts for an extended period of time. On the other side, the Guji, particularly the one who inhabited a newly established *Woreda* in the north, were able to construct a strong relationship with a slightly dissimilar ethnic group: the Sidama.

In their joint existence, both of them had collaborated with each other during good and bad times. They also used to participate in different forms of social institutions and events of one another, such as funerals, weddings and inter-marriage ceremonies. Their strong bond also goes to the extreme of wishing good fortunes to one another in proceedings like rituals and yearly holydays (Brehanu, 2012) and collaboration in times of external threats often coming from the Arsi Oromo. Correspondingly, my interviewees and FGD participants of both groups stated that, historically, the Sidama and Guji Oromo used to help one another during the strife over natural resources against their common rivals, the *Arsi*.

CAUSES OF THE ETHNIC CONFLICT

The Sidama and Guji of *Wondo Genet* are people with shared social and cultural practices, cradle land, common ancestral root and descent. These two people have a long history of relationships, which dated back to 1000 A.D - as per elders. Therefore, besides their myth of cultural affinities, it is this prolonged account of peaceful co-existence that helped both of them to develop strong cultural and social ties which were rarely threatened by conflicts. Their strong unity in many cultural and emotional bonds is further portrayed through military alliance, where the Sidama allied with Guji every time the latter involves into conflict in opposition to the Arsi. However, when the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in 1991 with its 'ethnic federalism' administrative system, the former *Wondo Genet*, had been divided into two (geographically based) administrative provinces known as *WondoWosha* and *WondoKela* has been amalgamated into one *Woreda*, under the SidamaZone of SNNPRS. This was done by considering *Wondo Genet* as ethnically uniform. Previously, *WondoWosha*, which included four peasant association, such as *GotuOnoma*, *ShashaKekele*, *WoshaSoyama* and *WoteraKechema*, located at the south of *Shashamane*, was administered under the Shoa province of *ShashamaneWoreda*. *WondoKela*, including *Kebele* peasant associations like *Kela*, *Basha*, *Busa*, *Eddo* and *Borja* on the other hand had been part of the former Sidamo province under the authority of *Awassa ZuriaWoreda* (Costantinos, 1999: 4). Following this alteration in government administrative structures, the Guji expressed their dissatisfaction claiming that they are dominated by the Sidama in a number of economic, political and social arenas. Among their accusations, the Guji delineated that they have been facing different forms of discriminatory practices and continuing uneven distribution of goods, services, political power and inadequate education and health services. Thus, due to the aforementioned dissatisfactions among the Guji, brutal conflicts exploded between them and the Sidama where many civilian lives were lost, property damaged and several people

displaced from their home villages. The first active conflict was in May 2007 when a small clash between members of two families at a place called *Shumulantu*, served as the beginning of a broader ethnic based conflict which instantly expanded to other close *Kebeles*. This conflict brought the injury of some individuals, displacement of others and destroyed unidentified amount of property. Later on, in April 2008, quite serious and intense clashes broke out across all *Kebeles* of the *Woreda*. This conflict led to the loss of many lives, injuries, displacements and millions worth of property damage. The third conflict took place in 2010 at *Eddo Kebele*, i.e. subsequent to a referendum held and it lasted for a couple of days. This one was also a very severe strife where many people lost their lives, hundreds of others were displaced and enormous amount of property was damaged.

ACTORS OF THE CONFLICT

The Sidama/Guji conflict involved elite groups of both people, seeking for acquisition of political power. These key actors are also responsible for creating co-actors via initiating ethnic prejudices and stereotypes among the two people and generating a widespread conflict between them. Last but not least, other ethnic groups of the area, such as the Hadiya, Kembata and Wolayita were also engulfed by the conflict and associated themselves with either of the two conflicting parties.

REPERCUSSION OF THE CONFLICT

Wherever it occurs, ethnic conflict is characterized by destructive impacts. Likewise, the conflict among the Guji Oromo and Sidama of Wondo Genet *Woreda* has produced social, psychological, political and economic impacts. As key informants from both groups stated, the repetitive conflicts of the *Woreda* lead to the loss of many lives, thousands of displacements, the breaking down of family ties, disruption of education and business activities and destruction and looting of properties such as houses, farms, cattle, granaries, shops and other business institutions belonging to both ethnic groups. As we were able to understand from the responses provided by governmental bodies and research participants, there is no common consensus on the number of people killed, injured and displaced. For example, the *Woreda* Administrative offices estimated civilian casualties of the conflicts around 33 with displaced people numbering about 2,200 and property damage accounted to millions of Ethiopian birr. The above quantity is not accepted by opposition parties, which are based in foreign countries, putting the death toll and displaced people of the violent conflicts to 82 and over 3000, respectively. They also claim that both communities lost more than the amount of property approximately declared by the regional and central government bodies. FGD and key informant interview participants on their side speculated different numbers of people killed, injured, displaced and amount of property damaged. For example, one of our key informants, who is from *Intaye Kebele* stated, "*the 2010 conflict (which is the most recent violent conflict) alone took the lives of 38 people (most of them being from the Sidama), displaced hundreds from both conflicting groups and lead to a great sum of property damage*" (interview with peace and security bureau official, *Intaye Kebele*, January, 3, 2015). Another informant from *Chuko Kebele*, whose younger sister and brother participated in the conflict in support of the Sidama, claimed that generally in the nine *Kebeles* (*Aruma, Eddo, Baja, Chuko, Kela, Abaye, Wotera Kechema, Wosha Soyama* and *Gamacho Baja*) where the Sidama are the majority, a number of Guji Oromos were killed, their houses and belongings were burnt and looted and those who survived forced to leave their residences for neighboring Guji Oromo dominated *Kebeles*. He added that the same thing happened in those four *Kebeles* (*Busa, Sheshama Kebele, Intaye and Guto Onoma*) which are predominantly inhabited by the Guji, in which the Sidama were victims of the Guji act of violence. The conflict also created a new and previously non-existent identity categorization of "Us" and "Them". This categorization was clearly witnessed in the course of interviews and focus group discussions where participants located themselves using the term "Us" and viewing others (members of another ethnic group) via the category or grouping term of "Them". As stated by many interview informants, this ethno-linguistic fragmentation and classification served as a foundation for the development of different

types of ethnocentric outlooks between the two conflicting groups which further diffused to other minorities such as the Wolayita, Kembata, Hadiya, Guraghe and Amhara.

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

Tsegaye (2004), in his work titled *“State Constitutions in Federal Ethiopia”* pointed out that the government of Ethiopia is already accustomed to certain regularities in its response to conflicts. The first usual task is, during the violent clashes, to send police or troops in order to stop the violence and seek out perpetrators. Then, the parties will be called for a meeting and given warnings. Followed by an appeal to community elders to mediate, hand over perpetrators and conclude agreements under government supervision. Afterwards, the dead will be buried, the displaced either return or remain in other areas to which they had fled and no compensation for life or damage will be made by the state legal institutions, although it sometimes occurred between local conflicting parties. Similarly, in each of the three conflicts which took place in Wondo Genet *Woreda*, it was the SNNPRS special force, which made the first moves to intervene and calm the situations, followed by the Federal military service. Since the whole Wondo Genet *Woreda* was under the administrative authority of SidamaZone during the conflicts, it was the responsibility of SNNPRS special force to primarily interfere into the strife.

However, the Southern region defense force could not win the trust and confidence of the Guji people who were accusing it for adopting double standard at the time of settling the clashes. That means, since this force was dominated by recruits from SidamaZone and other SNNPRS territories, it was seen as biased in stabilizing the hostility. Many of the Guji informants interviewed at IntayeKebele felt that the intervention made by the SNNPRS special force was fruitless and it made the existing situation even worse. As to them, this regional force was biased; imprisoning and harassing dominantly members of the Guji community and backing violent attacks on their properties and belongings. Sidama informants at Chuko completely disagree with the above mentioned claims, arguing that the Southern regional defense force was not taking sides in its actions of calming down the violence. Instead it was utilizing every possible ways to bring peace and stability in the area. Nevertheless, the incapability of the SNNPRS’s special force to settle the Sidama-Guji conflicts led to the coming of the Federal military force into the mediation podium. Ever since, the Federal force was on duty, there was relative peace and stability in the area. However, as competitions and hostilities began to escalate once again, the House of Federation sent an independent investigation committee comprising 13 members to find out the legitimacy of the Guji’s claim for self-governing *Woreda* and analyze whether a referendum is desirable to alleviate the problem. After the team’s investigation, which lasted for about twelve months, the HoF finally decided to hold a general vote on the 13 disputed *Kebeles* of Wondo Genet *Woreda*. According to the result of the referendum which was conducted in October 2008, four *Kebeles* (*Busa, SheshamaKebele, Intaye and GutoOnoma*) were won by the Oromia ethno-regional State. The remaining nine *Kebeles* (*Aruma, Eddo, Baja, Chuko, Kela, Abaye, WoteraKechema, WoshaSoyama and GamachoBaja*) were given to SidamaZone of the SNNPRS. The referendum, however, did not bring an everlasting solution for the rivalry and ethnic conflicts of Sidama and Guji. In other words, it did not solve completely the conflicts between the two groups of people regarding their territorial confinement. Rather its decisions in some places such as Eddo *Kebele*, (i.e. fallen under SNNPRS) rose complaints and counter complaints, once again creating a violent conflict between the two people over who should administer the *Kebele*. Therefore, the Federal government’s action of exercising a referendum as an absolute remedy for the conflict in Wondo Genet *Woreda* was a failure.

CUSTOMARY INSTITUTION: THE FICHA

When realizing the weakness of its ‘best’ and final conflict resolution mechanism, the federal government of Ethiopia recognized and acknowledged the significance of operating indigenous mechanisms of conflict resolution instruments in the then Wondo Genet *Woreda*. Therefore, with the partnership of SNNPR and Oromia Regional States, the national government arranged suitable conditions for the conflicting parties to clear up their problems in their own hands, i.e. using their own indigenous conflict resolution

mechanism. Then, the council of elders recruited from Guji, Sidama and other neighboring communities made use of their communally shared customary conflict resolution approach called the '*ficha*', in order to restore the social stability and bring together the disconnected mutual associations between the people. Particularly, in 2011, the Federal and both Regional States organized elders from the Guji and Sidama of Wondo Genet and other 'neutral' areas, such as Habela and Arsi, to mediate the conflicting groups through '*ficha*'. For this purpose, twelve elders were chosen from each of these communities and took part in the conflict resolution and reconciliation procedure.

As Sidama and Guji informants discussed, the committee of these elders first gathered together and talked about the way they settle the conflict in a typical and harmonious manner. Then, they made promises not to side or demonstrate ethnic preferential treatments at the time of their arbitration and reconciliation practice. *AbbaGadaof* the Guji Oromo further stated that, before the conflict resolution process was initiated, both elders also demanded (mainly the Guji, whose members were the majority among the detained) the release of their respective ethnic affiliates who have been under arrest since the start of the 2007 conflict. As to him, throughout the durations of the repetitive conflicts, a number of people were imprisoned from both groups. Among them, there were persons who were sentenced for 5 to 15 years and some others sentenced to serve life imprisonment. However, elders of the Sidama and Guji got together ahead of the conflict resolution act and presented their appeal to the SNNPRS and federal government for the discharge of those people under custody. The appeal was lastly agreed by the concerned governmental bodies and all the jailed persons were freed from prison to hear their verdict via the customary structure. This demand was mainly made to avoid possible post-reconciliation grievances that could occur between the two factions and get rid of potential tensions ones and for all. A Sidama elder from Wosha Soyama similarly claims that "it was through this mechanism that we brought the long lost peace in our area. The acceptance of our request also benefited those people who were imprisoned without concrete evidences and given jail sentence despite their absence. Thanks to our big effort, they walked out free." Therefore, it was after all the above courses of actions that meetings of resolving the conflict and bringing sustainable peace and co-existence in the *Woreda* set off. Those elders recruited from Wondo Genet and the neighboring communities utilized customary structures of *ficha* to arbitrate the two factions and made reconciliation among them. As per *ficha*, the conflict settlement and reconciliation process was started with a sacrifice made by individuals who have committed a crime and proved to be guilty by a court. Each criminal slaughtered a sheep and took out the lung while the sheep is struggling to breathe and smoothly wipe up both of his eyes with it. After this purification act families of the victims and the convicted ones from both ethnic groups joined together to signify their reunification and held big feasts in which either members took part in each other's party. As a final phase, the elders declared that, if any one of the two factions tries to avenge or kill one another again, they would be alienated and face rejection from the society. This social sanction was done according to the oral law of *Seera*, which is also common among the Sidamas and Oromos. Here, in relative terms, the customary conflict resolution system was more successful in moderating between the two groups and creating reconciliation among victims. However, unlike past times, it did not entirely end up in negative competitions and tensions among the two groups. This shortcoming of the traditional conflict resolution instrument for the most part can be attributed to the continual intervention of government bodies in matters that should have been sorted out by elders of the beholder communities. The persistent governmental intervention, which was also the character of past regimes, undermined customary institutions and played a prominent role in weakening the capacity of traditional communities such as the Sidama and Guji, to prevent and manage conflicts in their own indigenous ways. Besides, both informants claim that, the reluctance of the government to resettle the displaced persons and provide compensation for those thousands of victims who lost their homes, crops, business assets, cattle and other belongings undermined the success of the indigenous conflict resolving mechanism to guaranty sustainable social cohesion and past like reciprocal social relations among the two people. In sum, we have seen cases where *ficha* (a traditional conflict resolving institute amid the Sidama and Guji) play significant role in bringing peace and solidity among the two societies. But, to improve its success of resolving conflicts,

more autonomy must be granted. This does not mean that cooperation with lawmaking bodies is futile. It is also very important to encourage the role of women participation in combating violent conflicts in their communities.

NGOS AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS RESPONSE TO THE CONFLICTS

During the 2007 and 2008 ethnic conflicts the response of NGOs, either in settling the violence or intervening with relief assistances and re-establishing the displaced were null. As to both informants, the non-governmental organizations involved in the conflict via conducting rehabilitation programs for the victims only after 2010 Eddo incident. For the period of this conflict, which was also called the '*post referendum conflict*', a number of people lost their lives, hundreds of houses went up in flames and a significant amount of property looted and vandalized. In response to these unconstructive impacts, non-governmental organizations such as Plan Ethiopia and the Red Cross developed rehabilitation programmes and provided the victims with food aid and most of the necessary materials that are needed for reconstructing their destroyed houses. However, both Sidama and Guji informants argued that the relief assistances made by the two institutions for the displaced (homeless), injured and for those who lost their belongings, were not enough compared to the losses. In addition, informants blame government officials of the two ethnic groups for conducting ethnic based preferential treatments and corruption throughout the efforts of re-establishment actions. In the case of religious institutions, informants mentioned that there were circumstances of adopting double standards, i.e. churches and their leaders being engaged in both settling the conflict and manipulating it. Having the same religious faith, which is dominated by protestant Christianity, some church leaders of both ethnic groups showed ethnic based affiliation in the course of the conflicts. Others, on the contrary, appeared to play a mediating role in the ethnic conflicts and helping to create an enduring peaceful environment.

CONCLUSION

The Guji and Sidama are people with shared primordial characters. Due to this they have experienced a long history of harmonious relations. However, following the 1991 change in the system of government and administrative policy, the peaceful relations between these peoples deteriorated and competition emerged; eventually leading to repetitive conflicts. Based on the findings of the study the recurring Sidama-Guji conflicts were produced by competition for economic resources, modern inter-ethnic differences on political grounds and claims over self-administration status. The repetitive conflicts of the *Woreda* lead to the loss of many lives to the displacement of thousands, the breaking down of family ties, the disruption of education and business activities and destruction and looting of properties such as houses, farms, cattle, granaries, shops and other business institutions belonging to both ethnic groups.

The ethnic conflict and the growing despondency in both groups forced the House of Federation to carry out a referendum in October 2008. The referendum was successful in bringing peace and order to the area. It stopped the violent conflict by recognizing and granting four *Kebeles* (*Busa, SheshamaKekele, Intaye and GutoOnoma*), which are predominantly inhabited by the Guji, a self-administration status under the Oromia Regional State. However, since the government did not follow a solution that satisfied both sides, there is still continuing competition and ongoing conflict between the two groups. Since a referendum usually is a win-lose conflict resolution mechanism, it always generates grievances and unhappiness among conflicting factions. Consequently, the post referendum period in Wondo Genet has produced a number of contemporary socio-economic and political impacts such as lack of trust and discrimination between groups, competition among local governments over bordering resources, policy barriers, rampant corruption and rent seeking behaviors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to manage and resolve the conflicts, both regional and federal governments carried out different measures like organizing peace conferences, conducting referendum and demarcating disputed

territories. Nevertheless, these measures could not totally get rid of the repetitive conflicts; rather, they altered the manifest and active nature of the conflicts into latent competitions and fighting. This latent conflict has further led to the deterioration of historical inter-ethnic linkages among the conflicting parties. Particularly in Sidama-Guji bordering *Kebeles* such as Kela o1 and Intaye, WoshaSoyama and ShashaKekele as well as Busa and Chuko, where there are silent controversies on their territorial outer limits; sustainable peace is not yet achieved. Sometimes occasional conflicts occur between the two groups who live in these adjacent *Kebeles* of the Oromia and SNNPR state. Thus, although the manifest Sidama-Guji clash was settled, the conflict has not been addressed well and hence, there is still tension and mistrust among the conflicting parties. Therefore, before the existing post-conflict situations flares up other violent conflicts, causing extra threat to the social cohesion and integration of the two groups, well-timed remedies should be provided.

- First of all, community based education and awareness rising should be provided to prevent possible ethnic conflicts and promote peaceful co-existence and mutual reciprocity among the two parties.
- Throughout the study it is discussed that causes of the Sidama-Guji conflicts are generally related to social, political and economic discriminations and exclusions. The study's finding evidently disclosed that there were dissatisfactions regarding unequal distribution of financial resources, trade benefits, political power, job opportunities, schools, health centers, electricity and other forms of infrastructures, which had led the two groups into brutal conflicts. Thus, through enhancing equitable distribution of the aforesaid resources and infrastructures it is possible to resolve contemporary and potential inter-ethnic conflicts.
- The SNNPR and Oromia Regional states, West Arsi and Sidama *Zonal* administrations and administrations of Wondo and Wondo Genet *Woredas* should also work in collaboration to eliminate the communities' negative stereotypes about ethnic diversity and promote mutually dependent and supportive social ties. This can be achieved via organizing community oriented gatherings and conferences on the need for inter-ethnic harmony, peaceful co-existence and social integration.
- The indigenous institutions operating in both communities need to be recognized and strengthened instead of being overlooked. They can be consulted on their view regarding conflict resolution. The government should also adopt and apply legal instruments and strategies, both at national and regional levels, to work hand in hand with indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms and the council of elders.
- Encouraging women, youth, religious leaders, NGOs and the media in conflict prevention and peacemaking efforts will have pivotal roles. Besides, every stakeholder should take part in peace building endeavors.
- Furthermore, besides intervening during clashes and violent situations, the government should also work towards conflict prevention.

REFERENCES

- African Institute of Management, Development and Governance: (AIMDG). (2009). *Ethiopia: Country Self-Assessment Report*. African Peer Review Mechanism, Addis Ababa: Ethiopia.
- African Report: N°153. (2009). *Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and Its Discontents*. Crisis Group, Nairobi/Brussels.
- Akapule, Adadi, (2008). *Ethnic Conflict in Africa: the Need to Search for Remedies*. www.modernghana.comGNA, 16 July 2008.
- Asebe, Regassa. (2007). *Ethnicity and Inter-ethnic relations: The "Ethiopian experiment" and the case of Guji and Gedeo*. A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy in indigenous studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tromso, Norway.
- Berhanu, Borji. (2012). *Assessing Causes and Effects of Ethnic Conflict in Wondo Genet Woreda between the Sidama and Guji-Oromo People*, International Journal of Research in Commerce, Economics & Management, Volume. 2, Number. 5.
- Blagojevic, Bojana. (2009). *Causes of Ethnic Conflict: A Conceptual Framework*. Journal of Global Change and Governance, Volume 3, No. 1: 4.

- Costantinos, BT. (1999). *Natural Resource Competition, Conflict and their Managements: Case Study from Wondo Genet, South Central Ethiopia*. Centre for Human Environmental and Development. Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.
- Dagne, Shibru. (2013). *Conflict and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in Ethiopia: the Case of Gedeo and Guji Ethnic Groups*. Thesis submitted to Andhra University for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Anthropology. Andhra University: India.
- Esteban, Joan. et al.. (2012). *Ethnicity and Conflict: Theory and Facts*, American Association for the Advancement of Science. USA.
- Jinadu, Adele. (2007). *Explaining & Managing Ethnic Conflict in Africa: Towards a Cultural Theory of Democracy*. Claude Ake Memorial paper no. 1, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Sweden.
- Kanbur, Ravi, Rajaram, Prem and Varshney, Ashutosh. (2009). *Ethnic Diversity and Ethnic Tension: an Interdisciplinary Perspective in Ethnicity and Ethnic Strife Symposium*. Central European University in September 25-27, 2008. Ethnicity and Ethnic Strife: Special Issue of World Development. Rajaram, Prem and Varshney, Ashutosh. Cornell University, NY.
- Muhammad, Shamsaddin. *Oromos and Sidamas Unite, Forging Kushitic Unity against Abyssinian Tyranny*. www.oromoliberationfront.info. April 14, 2008.
- Sisay, Gebre. (2007). *What Role Should Civil Society Organizations Play To Address Ethnic Conflicts in Ethiopia* in: International Conference on Ethiopian Development. Michigan University, USA. August 2-4, 2007. The Challenges and Opportunities for Peace and Development in Ethiopia and Northeast Africa, 2000: Schneider Hall Publisher Company.
- Shale, Victor. (2004). *Ethnic Conflict in the Horn of Africa*: Journal of ethnicity and ethnic conflict in the Horn of Africa. Volume 1, No.19: 2-3.
- Tadesse, Kiphee. (2002) *Five Hundred Years of Sustainability? A case study on Gedeo Land Use (Southern Ethiopia)*. The Netherlands: Tree mail Publishers.
- Tsegaye, Regassa. (2004), *State Constitutions in Federal Ethiopia: A preliminary Observation, A summary for the Bellagio Conference*. University of Amsterdam: Law Faculty, Amsterdam.
- Walliman, Nicholas. (2006). *Social Research Methods*, London: SAGE Publications.
- Wondwosen, Teshome. and Záhóřík, Jan. (2008). *Federalism in Africa: The Case of Ethnic-based Federalism in Ethiopia*, International Journal of Human Sciences. Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 22.