Ethnic Conflict between Oromo-Gumuz in Western Ethiopia Since 2008

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

For a long period, conflicts and instability in any part of Ethiopia have become a complex and interconnected problem that is present as part of the debate among Ethiopian communities. The primary security challenges in Ethiopia largely emanate from political exclusion/power struggle, ethnic and religious-based discrimination, violation of human rights, the proliferation of SALW, and poverty/famine as a significant threat to people's security. To strengthen this point, the article aims to study the causes of the Oromo-Gumuz inter-ethnic conflicts since 2008 along the border area. The study employed qualitative descriptive research to meet the stated objective of the study. Purposive sampling techniques were used to gather information. To attain the study objective, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used as primary data. Primary data were gathered from different informants in both Oromo and Gumuz. The study's finding showed that the leading cause of the conflict between the Oromo and the Gumuz was competition over farmland and grazing land, border disputes, and lack of good governance. The presence of arms dealers and cattle raiders hiding in the name of ethnicity split the communities.

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ACRONOMYS

B-G.   : *Benishangul-Gumuz*
EPRDF : *Ethiopia People Revolutionary Democratic Front*
FGD   : *Focus Group Discussion*
IDP   : *Internal Displaced People*
OLF   : *Oromo Libration Front*
SALW : *Small Arms and Light Weapons*

1. INTRODUCTION

The perennial nature of inter-community conflicts between Gumuz and Oromo in the western part of Ethiopia began over land-related issues and was triggered by cattle looting between ethnic groups for many complicated reasons. The area is very volatile and exposed to tension and armed conflict for the last few years. The Gumuz community is living in the Kamashi district in the amalgamation of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state of Ethiopia and bordered on the East and south by Oromia regional state [1,2]. Communities in these areas and border areas have strong socio-cultural, economic, and religious ties. Nevertheless, the relationship between ethnic groups in the area is known for long and frequent conflictual relationships, especially after 1991. The conflicts that happened in the area resulted in a large number of people and animal displacement, human deaths, and the burning of a house occurred in different years.

Under the federal political system, the issues of rent-seeking are easily manipulated by political leaders for their advantage, and in so doing they spoil the needs of one group and clash with the needs of others. Kamashi zone in Benishangul-Gumuz region is mainly the focus of this study and inserted by the above-stated problem, especially since in the middle of 2008, and 2018 a violent conflict erupted along the administrative border with West and East Wollega Zones (Oromia regional state) followed by many causalities.

The researcher identified that the problem is not a set of ethnic federalism, but the practicability of the system that the political administrators' open vacuum for corrupter that gone wild. Seeing that, in many kebeles of the study area the causes of inter-ethnic conflictual problems were rooted due to the rent looking for some political leaders at the federal and regional level, which seems to play a role in the making or breaking of Oromo-Gumuz relations [3,4].

Nevertheless, there is no apt solution found to the problem rather the trend is like finding a solution when conflict has erupted among ethnic groups then leaving the conflict management mechanism was not organized and proactive [5-7]. Therefore, this research study attempts to identify the main causes of the Oromo-Gumuz conflicts and notify political and social efforts to address the problem to promote the peaceful coexistence of the residents. The result of the study can be used to inform and influence policymakers in different jurisdictions on peacebuilding interventions and policy discussions related to the conflict [8-10]. Even today, protracted violence dubbed ethnic' in several areas has continued and interethnic relation remains bothersome. So I believe that this kind of study will grant access to up-to-date and reliable information about the existing and actual situation of the conflict and provide an alternative solution concerning the existing problem.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research method of this study is a qualitative one. In qualitative research, the researcher is central, in which data are mediated through the researcher or the "human instrument" The study requires data collection that embraces perception and examination of the causes of conflict or groups engaged in instigating or managing conflict. For making a detailed description, diagnosis, and explanation of conflict and its effects on inter-ethnic coexistence in Ethiopia. This method was selected due to the reason that the type of data that have been collected and the nature of the research itself were qualitative.

In other words, the study was objectively intended to identify and examine the interethnic conflict management strategy established by the ruling government rather than making any experimental analysis. Accordingly, the qualitative method enables the researcher to be flexible enough to conduct data collection, by identifying informants using purposive sampling methods and interviewing using structured open-ended questions

The source of data is from both primary and secondary sources. Thus, a combination of data collection instruments will employ to obtain and

cross-check information. The primary data will be generated from key informants' interviews, face-to-face interviews, and focus group discussions while secondary data sources are mainly used relevant documents produced by the government and academic researchers.

The interviews were chiefly open-ended to explore the views of the key informant. Accordingly, in the study site (i.e. Kamashi Zone, West, and East Wollaga Zone,) from each Zone researcher will conduct four FGDs which encompass seven members who have direct concerns about the conflict.

Generally, it is difficult to confidently accept oral information as perfect, I carefully checked and counter-checked with secondary sources available in different offices in the State of Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz Region.

The Population and location of the study mainly focus on three Zones. Kamashi Zone from Benishangul Gumuz region, West, and East Wollega Zones from Oromia Regional State (see below: map of study zones and woredas). Specifically, to collect primary data in six Woredas namely: Yaso and Belo-jogonfoy, Kamashi Woreda and Agalo-meti woreda from Kamashi Zone, Haro limu and Sasiga, Woreda from East Wollega Zone, Boji-dermaji and Gimbi Woredas from West Wollega Zone will be selected which faced blistering conflict and because of the advantages like geographical distribution, population composition, and their livelihood and those areas are purposefully selected to get reliable information through key informant interview and focus group discussion on the same issues in a different context.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Causes of Oromo- Gumuz Conflict

The study has a long and complex history of conflicts, related to issues such as competition over resources and population movement; ethnicity; resettlement programs; relations to the central state. The following are some of the issues that push people into conflict.

3.1.1 The similarity in the lifestyle of the two pastoralist societies

Some experts on conflict argue that similarities between societies have more opportunities to lead to conflict than a society with a difference.

The same lifestyle means that having the same material and spiritual interests, having the same feeling of threats and dangers, and sharing similarities will lead to an interest in the same things, material and spiritual which subsequently lead to conflict. Population pressure and others harm the co-existence of these populations.

3.1.2 Natural resource conservation and use

Similar to the lifestyle of the population living in these regions are natural resource conservation and use. The existence of the pastoralist and semi-pastoralist was based on the herding of their cattle and the products of their cattle. Farmland, grassing land, and thus preserving the forest both by the farmers and regional administrations is the survival issue for the farmers but there is no sufficient awareness of this issue. Thus, due to a lack of awareness on the preservation of natural resources, deprivations of these natural resources are becoming so obvious. Consequently, the scarcity of natural resources will lead to the expansion of conflicts.

3.1.3 Presence of illegal small arms

Pastoralists straddling border regions of Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz regional states are armed. They engage in cattle rustling to restock herds, so that fight over grazing land and water with the increased use of modern weapons increases insecurity, and leads to high losses of lives. Small arms and light weapons (SALW) are abundant. Thus, more people can carry rather loaded pack animals to move from place to place and are cheap and widely available to use by the mass of the countryside communities. The acquisition of small arms by any member of society is considered to be a top priority to protect themselves from enemies because governments in the region cannot provide adequate security for their citizens. Individuals who lived in these cyclical scenarios of animosity feel forced to use these as a matter of individual as well as collective security.

They believe that the possession of firearms by large numbers of people is an asset. The majority of youth attach great value to a semi-automatic rifle because it is considered an assurance to gain power over the opposed groups. These weapons were simple to be used by one group against the other. Therefore, the easy availability of small arms in the vicinity has contributed to human insecurity. Even today, the

presence of small weapons is a great question among the communities in the region of Ethiopia. Furthermore, the presence of arms dealers from different areas indirectly added fuel to the fire.

The occurrence of inter-ethnic conflicts in Kamashi was triggered by the presence of illegally owned arms. This was due to conflicts related to agricultural land and well-armed people who occupy all the land bordering the area. This creates cartels renting guns to perpetrate crime and inter-ethnic conflicts). They legitimize the use of both legal and illegal arms by colluding with ethnic vigilante police to heighten inter-ethnic conflicts. The Greed versus Grievance Theory by Collier and Hoeffler (2004) was qualified since one hires a gun because of greed for money and possesses the same gun as a genuine grievance of self-security.

This study revealed that bandits just like cattle rustlers use sophisticated automatic weapons which overpower the rudimentary ones used by government security agents. The government's compromised monopoly of the instruments of power and force has opened opportunities to perpetuate illegalities. More often than not, the political elite within the government has used a legal process such as mopping out guns from the Rumuruti Division of Laikipia County to politically empower certain communities. The Pokot have often failed to surrender guns when the Samburu and Turkana do so. The discriminated community automatically loses confidence in the state apparatus to ease tension and takes the law into their hands

Asmallarms and light weapons (SALW) are abundant more people can carry them rather than loaded on pack animals to move from place to place and are cheap and widely available to use by the mass of the population. These weapons were simple to be used by one group against the other. Available information from the local communities reveals that the acquisition of small arms by any member of the society is considered to be a top priority to protect themselves from the enemy. Individuals or communities who lived in these cyclical scenarios of animosity feel forced to use these as a matter of individual as well as collective security. They believe that the possession of firearms by large numbers of people is an asset. The majority of youth attach great value to a semi-automatic rifle because it is considered an assurance to gain power over the opposed ethnic

groups. Therefore, the easy availability of small arms in the vicinity has contributed to the escalation of the inter-ethnic conflict.

A large number of weapons were also obtained by some pastoralists and farmers for the protection of their lives, cattle, horses, and other natural resources from all that bring danger to them. From the existing reality, however, weapons around the study area are detrimental to peace and security. Even today, the presence of small weapons is a great question between the communities of Yaso and Haro Limu woredas.

The Gumuz culture encourages the use and possession of weapons as a great asset. Traditionally, Gumuz is well-experienced in using traditional arrows and bows which they use for hunting wild animals to gain their daily food. However, these small arms were employed by many individuals for criminal purposes. This in turn hinders the development activities of the community in the study area.

Furthermore, the presence of arms dealers from different areas indirectly added fuel to the conflict. These groups are often targeted when conflict breaks out as they are assumed to give information and arms to the opposite sides.

3.1.4 Lack of good governance

The manifestation of poor governance is violating human rights. When the basic human right is violated, not respected or there is no human right at all, being alive is questionable, and running routine activities becomes suspended, talking about good governance will be challenging and need attention. The result will be a quandary and instability.

In relation to this, societies living where the two regions are bound to have been affected by poor governance that lessens their co-existence and mutual problem-solving capabilities. And also, this poor governance resulted in this society not enjoying their similarity in languages, and religion and sharing a history of suppression. It resulted in poor democratic exercise, lack of co-existence, quandary, mutual economic development political, social, and not asking for their basic democratic right as well.

Regarding the governmental structure, if there is no balancing and working at the grass-roots level, and seeking solutions to their problems,

the structure would rather be harmful than benefit the society. In this case, the society and government structure will gradually have differences. This difference, in turn, will have an impact on society which has been living hormonally go to conflict. Tradition conflict resolution mechanisms have been weakening, they have left no one with traditional options to resolve problems in society. Following this, areas, where these two regions share boundaries, have not found any political and legal solutions for a sustainable democratic process.

3.1.5 Lack of sufficient infrastructure

Reduction of poverty and good governance will reduce conflicts. There are some promising initiatives in areas where these regions share a boundary toward development though these areas are not well developed yet. Unquestionably, these initiatives will have fruits if their quests for peace in the areas are going to be addressed. These initiatives have complicated the economic, social, and political situations in the areas.

3.1.6 Ethnicisation political elite competition

Competition for power and resources at the federal level has taken place along ethnic lines and much of the violence that shook the country has been tied to disputes between groups within the ruling party. This political elite competition is not an inescapable function of the federal structure, but rather, an outcome of the nature of political party organization and practice.

Under the EPRDF's rule, the party and state structures have though de jure separate in practice, become intertwined. One of the consequences of this merger has been the employment of state resources as a currency for the ruling party to maintain and increase its large body of party members. State rents tied to political and bureaucratic actions have, particularly after the controversial 2005 parliamentary elections, been an important incentive for increasing the membership of the ruling party from around 700,000 in 2005 to seven million in 2015.

Given that the four constitutive parties of the front are Organised along ethnic lines, the distribution of economic and political resources has also taken place through ethnic-based patronage structures (this includes both the legal distribution of official posts in the government, as well as the illicit benefits accrued through some of these positions).

In the process of competing for power and resources, party officials on all sides have consistently and systematically framed disputes in nationalistic terms and mobilized their ethnic constituencies. Political elite competition has consequently spilled over into communal conflicts that have led to mass violence and displacements**.**

Ethnic politics have in general also come at the expense of meritocracy and economic efficiency. Most importantly, it has also provided the four EPRDF parties with ethnic constituencies whose support is almost guaranteed through the perpetuation of a discourse of "ethnic interests" and fear of other groups. Both conflicts within the EPRDF and with opposition parties are increasingly becoming devoid of substantive policy and ideological differences and revolve around ethnic group privileges. Sustainable economic development and a functioning democratic and federal governance arrangement will be difficult to achieve in the current ethnicized framework of political competition

The way forward must, therefore, involve a de-ethnicisation of competition for resources at the federal level. This is difficult but not impossible. The first and most important step in this direction must be to reorganize the ruling EPRDF from a front composed of four ethnonational organizations into a cross-ethnic and unitary party.

The EPRDF had in its origins an extensively formulated class-based ideology, which explicitly prioritized the interests of Ethiopia's peasantry (which account for more than 80 percent of the working population). Over the last decade, its ideological commitment has weakened, and it has transformed into a party that tries to cater to various and contradictory interests. It will thus tame communal conflicts caused by competition between party officials and it will encourage the formation of opposition to the EPRDF that is cross-ethnic and based on a different ideological platform than nationalism.

Ethnic politics is not a necessary evil that Ethiopia must live with it is rather an existential threat. And now, more than ever, it is time to think about the possible institutional mechanisms that can contribute to transforming politics away from it. There is no silver bullet that
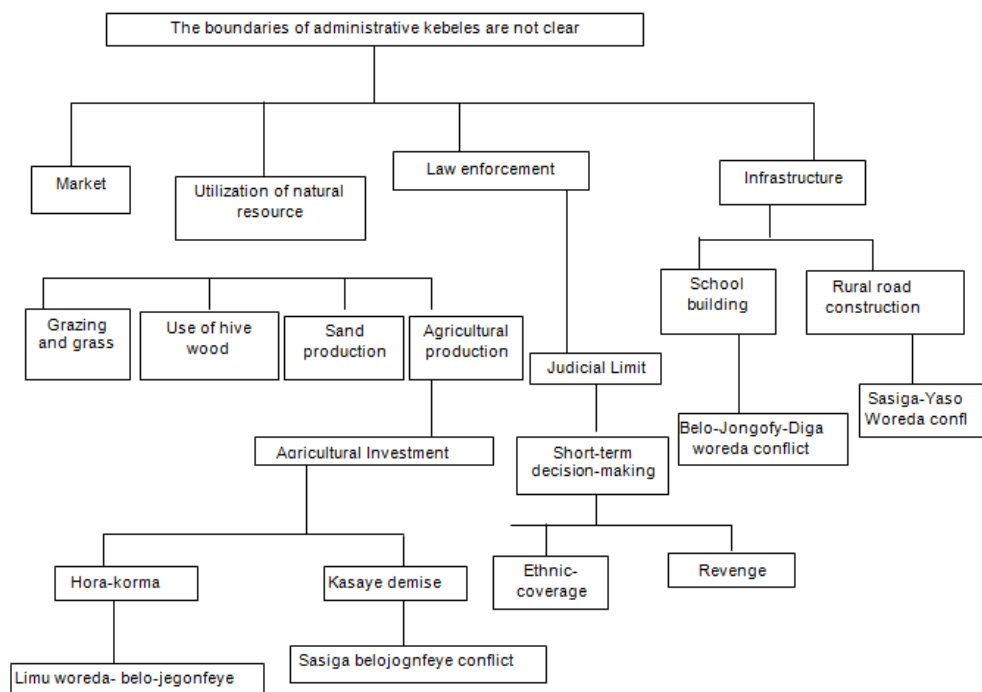
Diagram 1. Conflict analysis in related to the causes

can de-ethnicism politics in Ethiopia. Instead, many individual measures such as those we have outlined above can, over time, make ethnicity a less salient and central feature of how people and politicians conceive of their political interests and how they mobilize against power.

The above diagram 1. elaborates on the causes of conflict analyzed in diagram one and Suggestions for suggestions and suggestions as follows.

- To do good neighborliness and work after the administrative boundary has been identified to respond to administrative boundaries and claims;
- Ensure and enforce law enforcement; And each district law body, starting with the implementation of the law itself;
- Discuss with the community the process of deploying community policing at the border in order to carry out strict crime prevention activities to ensure its legitimacy.
- Work to resolve and stabilize a series of reconciliation conferences that have closed the door to civil disobedience and the right to trade.
- Unresolved killings and robberies combine traditional with modern conflict resolution; Provide solutions that reflect the rule of law.
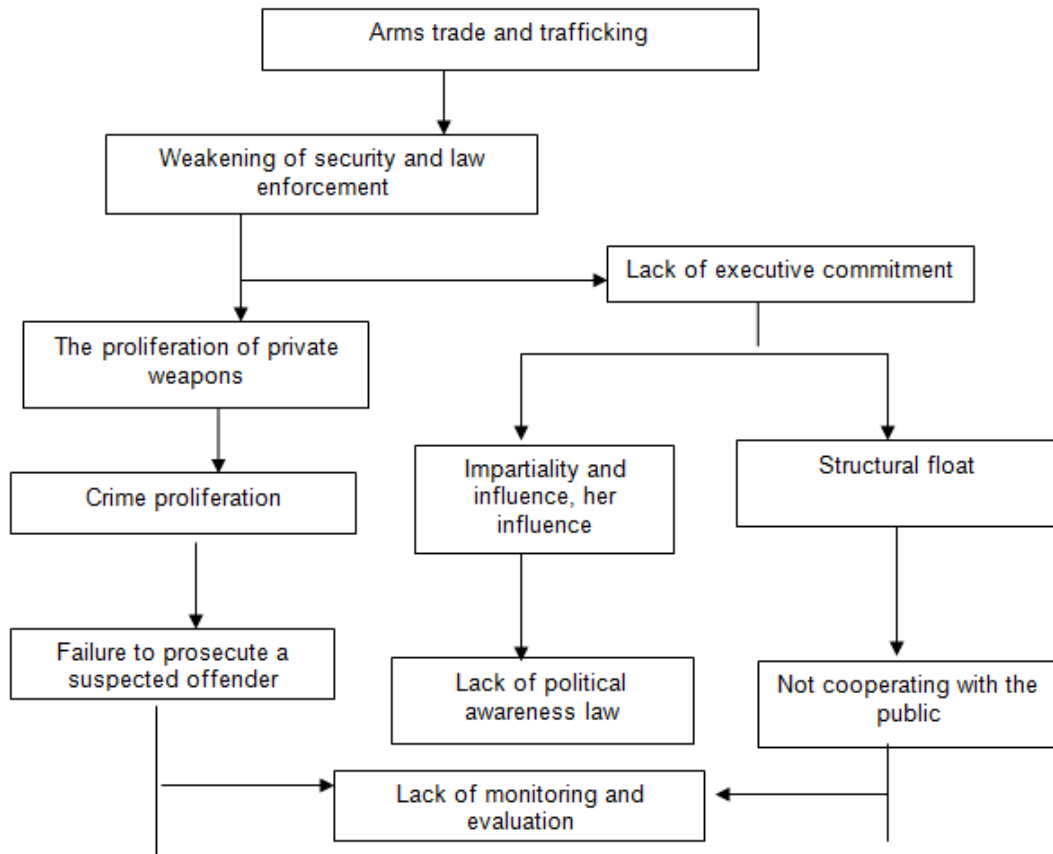
3.2 The Results of Diagram 2, Analysis in Terms of Solutions

Organize security forces to work in collaboration with the public and develop awareness training and discussion forums; Provide political and legal awareness training to law enforcement and security forces in collaboration with the public to bring perpetrators to justice. Struggling with short-term psychology, Facilitating employment for the unemployed and for them to become cooperative and productive. Conducting regular inspections, monitoring, and evaluation of arms dealers and subversive structures that may undermine the structure of exploitation; Reporting offenders to the judiciary.

4. DYNAMIC OF THE CONFLICT

4.1 During Summer

As in other parts of the country, summer is a time for farmers to harvest and prepare for the field, which could lead to conflict between neighboring farmers over agricultural land. In addition, during the summer, conflicts over the distribution of produce often occur after plowing the fields in the former Gumuz kebeles in search of agricultural land. Occasionally there is a time when neighboring Oromo farmers enter empty-handed.

Digram 2. Arms trade and trafficking conflict analysis related to the causes
Sources: designed by the research in 2020

4.2 Winter

The neighboring farmers of the two communities are engaged in farming as well as in other parts of the country during the winter. However, due to land scarcity or large tracts of farmland, it is inevitable that there will be an expansion of the farmland or that the Gumuz will push the border over and over again.

4.3 Spring

During this time, the farmer prepares extensive fields; it is clear that he was expanding his farm. As a result, there is no clear administrative boundary between the two neighboring communities; Conflict was evident during the preparation of the field.

5. THE MAJOR ACTORS OF THE CONFLICT

According to key informants, actors are those individuals or groups whose aim is to benefit from chaos, during and after the conflict. Identifying those groups involved in the conflict and their motives for intensifying violence is necessary to dig into the interconnection of the parties. Furthermore, finding out various actors gives good insight for mediators who play a major role in peacemaking and resolving the conflict. Accordingly, the parties involved in the conflict were not only those from the two antagonistic ethnic groups but also from many other secondary parties. The researcher tried to identify and examine those parties directly associated with the Oromo-Gumuz conflict as well as those groups who indirectly took part in the escalation and de-escalation of the conflict. The following actors are identified as having taken key roles in the conflict. These were local administrators (Militia, Police, and Kebele leaders), secondary persons (non-Gumuz and non-Oromo), and Arms dealers.

5.1 Local Administrators

According to this research, local administrators include local leaders, militias, policemen, and

other accused persons that are expelled from the federal and regional bodies and lived with the people. A source at our disposal underlines that cattle robbery and the burning of many houses and crops during the conflict were not only done by ordinary people, but we're also backed by the local police, local militia, and local government officials in the respective district.

Local officials and farmers in Kamashi zone for organizing youths and attacking Oromia wolega zones, naming whom he said had a leading role. They started shooting at the Oromo people and killing them on September 26, and since then each day people get killed," According to local informants and higher officials from the Oromia Regional States, the input of local leaders, the police commissioner, and other militias were evident. The acts exerted pressure and led to the loss of many lives and the burning of hundreds of homesteads. They played a great role in sustaining the conflict and encouraged the youth to do what they want against an opponent group.

The actors would like the evacuation of the Oromo from the area. In such conditions, their role was negative and encouraged the Gumuz youth to kill the Oromo and burn their properties. Some Oromo farmers who were affected by the violence claimed the involvement of local police, militia, and local administrators in looting and burning properties. They state that local government agents, in general, have had a duty to maintain the status quo of the conflict. Thus, the failure of local leaders to maintain peace could diffuse possible crises. Hence, the local administrators also contributed to the escalation of the conflict in the study area.

5.2 Arms Dealers

Arms dealers are also one of the major actors in the conflict because they are engaged in facilitating the process of escalation and de-escalation by supplying different types of SALW with ammunition to the local people. The key informant said the conflict between Oromo and Gumuz was due to historical enmity and land disputes and was exacerbated by corruption and the proliferation of arms. Merchants from different areas were indirectly involved in the conflicts by trading commodities and smuggling arms and ammunition. In the same way, investors have been seen in this situation as agents of conflict accelerators. One investor who was already working in the area and two investors who were working in Anger Gutin Woreda have tried to transfer illicit weapons

[11-13]. The eyewitness indicates that investors who were coming to BGRS and who were afraid to take possession of land were said to have been involved in arms transfers. Others were allegedly sending weapons to the conflict areas from Nekemttee, Asosa, and Gimbi towns. Their actions had a great contribution to aggravating the conflict.

5.3 Politicians

Politicians are the ones that cause the divisions in the area, it looks that displacement was caused by well-organized groups that had a political motive. There is much evidence from TPLF agricultural investors who have felt their farms were threatened. The Oromo people told me they have lived peacefully with Gumuz for a long time and didn't anticipate this major conflict.

The researcher has seen many heart-breaking things during data collection and people are suffering for reasons they even don't know or care about. Particularly, TPLF ex-leaders as caused this conflict. TPLF ex-politicians see only their own political interests however they don't worry about communities' interdependence.

6. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT

The outcome of the conflicts in the study area was the following: Social relationships in the society were interrupted. For example, not marketing in the same market. Inter ethnicity living together has been limited, not even crossing the others' residents Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced due to ethnic conflict in the Kamashi Zone of the Benishangul Gumuz Regional State. According to the East & West Wollega Zone Disaster Preparedness Office over 148,000 people have been uprooted from their living places and temporarily settled in various public institutions, among others, including health centers, schools, and police stations in both east and west Wollega zones in 44 IDPs sites with no sleeping facilities like blankets and mattress. The conflict has caused the loss of human lives, the looting of livestock, the burning of dozens of houses, and rapping. Also, many schools have fully or partially burnt.

Displacement in East Wollega is spread across 10 woredas, 16 collective sites, and 57 host

communities. Five houses built from grass ownership belonging to Oromo farmers were completely burnt on 11/12/99 in Bedasa Adugna kebele Five houses built from grass ownership belongs to Oromo Farmers were completely burnt on 11/12/99 in Bedasa Adugna kebele. 500-hectare investments whose ownership belongs to Mr. Zelalem Beyene were burned as a result of two Woreda violence.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it can be understood the current new dilemma conflict between Gumuz-Oromo ethnic groups is challenging the Ethiopian Federal Government and it requires a policy for conflict management in inter-ethnic disputes not only for two ethnic groups but for the whole country. Previously, the Gumuz-Oromo Conflict is a resource-based conflict that was part of the livelihoods-conflict cycle; but, in 2018 the situation has become more complicated due to governance factors. In general contexts, the Gumuz-Oromo conflict dynamics were affected by the natural resource potential of the region, Land use, and ownership, Woreda or administrative distributions among the Gumuz or Oromo as well as federal political power division, and regional volatile political issues.

In post-1991, some fundamental points have been underscored for the security in the study area. First, the long-lasting integration and cooperation between the Oromo and the Gumuz created a complex socio-economic setting in the western frontier where federalism should have been implemented with great care. Secondly, it should have been understood that the Oromiya and BGRS Regions share a long boundary that implies a good opportunity for development if better managed and crisis when mismanaged. Thirdly, the increasing vitality of the region for large-scale agriculture, mining, and other investments would also make the region a potential resource conflict area.

In order to restore the peaceful coexistence of the two communities, the researcher expressed the hope that the following solutions would be significantly reduced and a lasting solution could be found if implemented by the community, kebele, woreda, zonal and regional leaders. Conflicts between neighboring kebeles are mainly related to claims, administrative boundaries, and structural overlap; The two regional governments, in collaboration with the federal government, hold a referendum in accordance with Articles 46 (2) and 48 (1) of the Constitution.

After a permanent settlement of claims and boundaries; Recognizing that it is about changing and changing the attitudes of the community by strengthening development activities in the area to prevent and resolve conflicts in the border area; Informing stakeholders, in particular, allocating a budget for the local condominium development forum; It should devise a strategy and implement conditions and monitor that the budget is being used for its intended purpose; The country's major poverty reduction plans should focus on the woredas that are experiencing conflict; Because often conflict and poverty are the root causes of conflict.

experts, and elders who participated in this study and provide me with valuable data and information. They contributed much to this study and helped me much during the data collection process. Finally, this dissertation would have been incomplete without the generous information from several localities in Benishangul-Gumuz, and the Oromia region. Particularly, those who participated patiently in the focus group discussion (FGD) and extensive interviews.

Thank you all!!!

COMPETING INTERESTS

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