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**Local Conflicts and Ethnic Relations Among *Konso* and *Derashe* of  
Southern Ethiopia: Case Study**

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**Abstract**

*This study is an investigation of the causes of local conflict between the Konso and Derashe people of Southern Ethiopia. The principal objective of this study is to unearth the causes of the conflict between these two ethnic groups. The methodology employed relied on qualitative approach using both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was generated through both in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions. The study indicated that the causes of conflicts in these areas are multiple relating to economic, political, social and cultural factors like, incompatible attempt of using protected areas, a gradual weakening of indigenous institutions, inefficient mechanism of diagnosing and concomitant handling strategies of conflicts by the political authority, dalliance of justice delivery for complaints filed, and the circulations of false allegation by individuals are mentionable. Despite conflict, Konso and Derashe people have many symbiotic relations. They share similar tribal group, intermarry each other, and share common resources. The dynamics in their relations across time is associated with the involvement of various actors having incompatible interest and needs. It can be concluded that social and economic networks between Konso and Derashe have been increasingly complex; their economic interests are so interlinked despite conflicts. Efforts have been made so far to curb this conflict through formal and informal institutions but in vain. Therefore, peace building endeavors should consider the real problems and interests of the parties and address major causes of the conflicts through both changes in attitude and in the application of policies designed within the context of the region in consultation with the local people.*

**Key words:** *Konso, Derashe, Local Conflict, causes, dynamics, threat, implication, peace process*

## Background

Conflict is a multi-dimensional social phenomenon which is an integral feature of human existence; essential to the ongoing process of history, to social change, and transformation. Conflict arises because of a perceived incompatibility over material or symbolic resources (McCandle, 2007:75). Conflict is also perceived as an inevitable phenomenon in society and/or a natural part of our daily lives (Isard, 1992; Amadou, 1999; Conteth, 1999). What, indeed, makes conflict so is the fact that it can occur due to human relations and interdependence. Amadou (1999:23) identified two principal ways of human interaction that led to different forms of conflicts. First, the pursuit of different goals, values, needs, and interests by individuals or groups of individuals; and second the competition for the use/control of scarce resources makes access to them restricted and must be controlled.

In post colonial period, Africa is mired in intra and inter-state conflicts. These conflicts take different forms, and different criteria have been used to classify them. As Nhema (2004:11) succinctly pointed out the nature and sources of conflicts in Africa include, among others, the fragile nature of the state, endemic poverty, economic inequality, and exclusionary governance system that do not allow participatory political arrangement. Multi-ethnic Africa is beset by ethnic conflicts. Together with other factors, the recent waves of democratization in continental Africa have added a momentum to the conflicts and have highlighted the salience of ethnicity and ethnic identities in both the political arena and other areas of national activity (Nhema, 2004:13).

A growing literature on the subject aptly reveals that Ethiopia is not spared from such ethnic conflicts. There is, rather, a consensus among scholars that the inter-group conflict, particularly in recent times, is on the increase(Asnake,2004).

Some scholars have identified the major causes of ethnic conflicts in the country. Bahru,(2008) for instance, identified four such basic causes. These are over centralization, marginalization, deliberate exploitation by the elites and competitions for scarce resources. Limiting himself to the post-1991 period, Asnake (1994:55) on his part made a three broad division of ethnic

conflicts and tensions related to the federation of Ethiopia. According to him, the emerging trends of ethnic conflict are competition and conflicts in multiple identity regional states; tensions in majority-minority relations and problems relating to the delineation of regional boundaries.

In an attempt to draw a conflict map of Ethiopia, Ayele and Getachew (2001) as cited in Tesfaye (2007:79) grouped the causes for ethnic conflicts into the following three categories:(a)resource based; example Afar and Issa as of the early 1950s,Afar and Amhara in north Shewa from as far back as the 1920s; (b)boundary issues: Borana and Gari, Gurra and Arsi etc;(c)language :WOGAGODA project that caused conflicts particularly between the Gammo and Wolayta.

According to Wario and Karen (2009:2) ethnic conflicts and violent raids in the past decades among pastoralists and cultivators is mainly emphasized on increases in populations, ecological stress, a dwindling resource-base and the resulting competing claims over scarce natural resources. Though the precarious ecological and economic position of pastoralists is a fact, the claim that natural resource scarcity induces conflicts has to be tested empirically.

### ***Justification of the study***

The frequency and magnitude of conflicts have increased and the causes of conflicts and the actors involved have become more complex. Conflicts now cause high numbers of human deaths, damage to assets, displacement and migration, poverty and greater dependency on food aid.

A separate study made on Guji-Gedeo conflict by Hussein (2002) and Asebe (2007) can best exemplify the complexities of the issue. While Hussein explained the Guji-Gedeo conflict primarily as a resource based, the latter put down such conclusion as totally untenable. For Asebe, the conflict between the two groups is basically a question of self-government but not primarily the outcome of resource competition.

According to Mulugeta, conflict between the *Dantas* of Southern Nation, Nationalities and Peoples Region and their neighboring communities is initiated by inter-elite competition in the form of demand for change in the names and status of their *Woredas* and aspirations of local political control (Mulugeta, 2001:76).



Furthermore, as many scholars (Asnake, 1994; Merera, 2000; Bahru 2008) have rightly argued, the ethno federalism, presented as a solution to the perennial ethnic questions, has saddled the country with lots of problems. Ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia, as such, continued unabated.

Of the many areas in Ethiopia which have been prone to such violent conflict, the Konso-Derashe (Segen area zone) which is a home for pastoralists, agro-pastoralists, and cultivators has been one of them. As empirical research shows the pastoral and agro-pastoral groups of the Segen area, the *Konso* and *Derashe* included have been engaging in intermittent raids and counter raids and the *Konso* and *Derashe* conflict is explained in terms of competition for scarce resources without looking other sufficient conditions leading the two groups into conflict (Yohannes, 2005).

However, it is our strong contention that, such broad categorization of causes has its own drawbacks in that it may result in the obvious danger of overgeneralizations and hence would lead to the misinterpretations of specific conflicts, like in our case the Konso-Derashe conflict. In other words, it either under-explains or ignores local particularities partially or altogether. Thus, to have a complete picture of the *Konso-Derashe* conflict, one needs to look at the impact of long history of relations, the radical state restructuring of the post-1991 period and the resulting salience of ethnicity on the political and social arenas of the country on the conflicts of the stated groups.

## ***Research Gaps***

Despite the growing interest in the study of inter-ethnic conflicts, yet much is left either unstudied or scantily studied in Ethiopia. The same holds true for *the Konso-Derashe* case, which so far is not exhaustively researched particularly no case study was conducted on the stated groups. Moreover, the underlying local social dynamics, national and regional changes and how they impact on needs and aspirations of identity groups and inter group relationships requires to be clearly and fully captured. Besides, the process involved in the deterioration of relationships between these groups into conflict such as contexts, structures, relationships and actors maintained protracted nature across decades are vital aspects little addressed or unexplained. In addition, giving a remedy to the conflict badly demands a correct understanding and interpretation of the conflict situation. This entails identification of its underlying causes and

triggers, identifying the actors with their needs and interests, the changes and transformations of causes and contributing factors for the dynamics it underscored over time. As such, there exists a knowledge lacuna. Accordingly, this study intends to contribute in filling the existing knowledge gap on the aforementioned case.

### ***Objective of the Study***

The general objective of this study is to explore the causes and dynamics of local conflict among the *Konso-Derashe* of southern Ethiopia and to examine the nature of the conflict and its subsequent impact on the groups under study.

### ***Research Methodology***

*Segen* area zone is one of the most diverse zones in Ethiopia with varied ethnic groups. The intensively cultivated highland areas of *Konso* and *Derashe woredas* mark the south-western limit of traditional highland ox-plough agriculture in Ethiopia. Outside these settled and primarily cultivated areas are vast semi-arid terrains supporting agro-pastoral groups that are at various stages of transition from nomadic to sedentary livelihoods. The lowland areas of *Konso* support agro-pastoral groups that practise a mixed agriculture (livestock rearing supplemented with crop cultivation). The primary livestock in these areas is cattle, with supplementary flocks of sheep and goats (Yohannes, 2005).

***Konso Special Woreda:*** this *woreda* is bordered with *Derashe* in the North, *Oromia* and *Burji* in the south east and southern *Omo* zone in the west. *Konso* has a total of forty three *kebele*, out of which two of them are urban *kebeles* and the rest are rural. Karat is the capital of *konso* “special *woreda*”.

***Derashe Special Woreda:-*** in the earlier times, the name of the *woreda* was *Gidole*. *Derashe woreda* is bordered with *Koyira* and *Burji* in the East, *Konso* in the South, *Bonke* in the West and *Arbaminch Woredas* in the North. Five different ethnic groups are living together in *Derashe special woreda*. The *woreda* has a total of twenty six *kebele*’s.

This study is supposed to be an exploratory type, hence the methodology adopted for the purpose is a qualitative one. The rationale of relying on this method is in contrast to quantitative research, qualitative method strives to understand the meaning of an experience (Patton, cited in Merriam, 1988). Moreover, Holliday (2002) says that in opposition to the notion of survey in quantitative



research, in qualitative one the aim is to go deep into a definable setting in which phenomena can be placed meaningfully within specific environment. Such an environment can be groups of people, institutions, cases, geographic areas and communities.

Above all, qualitative research is one of specific relevance to the study of social relations, owing to the fact of the pluralization of life worlds (Flick, 2002). Some central ideas guiding qualitative research like the perspectives of the participants and their diversity and the reflexivity of the researcher would be better considered. Hence, conducting the research problem, which is conflict having volatile/dynamic in its nature in qualitative research is found to be ideal. As Flick (2002) precisely puts, the problem under study is the determining factor for choosing a method. Hence, this study employed a qualitative research design and the data is analyzed qualitatively.

### ***Sampling Technique and Size***

The selection of key informants was through purposive sampling, a non probabilistic method. To qualify this purpose, snowball sampling has been used. This is a technique where the researchers first identified contact persons i.e. village chiefs and the village chiefs' in turn introduced the researchers to the knowledgeable persons. The village chiefs were acting as a contact persons to identify the elders in the two communities. This is called snowball sampling.

Since the research focus include historical perspectives, the researchers selected mainly knowledgeable elders and in positions of leadership as key informants. On the recent conflict, the informants comprised of the provincial administrations, political representatives and members of peace committees and others who are found to be directly or indirectly affected by the conflict.

Attempt was also made to make the sampling representative of the population by including respondents from both *Konso* and *Derashe* ethnic groups. That is, informants from the two *Woredas* were equally represented. The selection of conflict prone *kebeles* from the two *woredas* was made on the basis of different issues that led the groups into conflict. In this study therefore; a total of 50 respondents were interviewed. Thus, the data collected in six phases with a total of 60 days.



## ***Data Collection Methods and Sources***

This study used both primary and secondary data sources. Essentially, however, the study relied on primary data that has been generated through fieldwork. The information gathered included historical and socio-cultural relationships from the imperial regime to the present. Besides, information on the factors that underlie the recent conflict between the two communities were also collected. This enabled to understand the genesis of conflict between the two communities. The focus of data gathering has been on the historical state of affairs between the two communities and how a number of factors played different roles that resulted in conflicts. This type of data was collected through different data collection tools. These include:

### ***❖ In-Depth-Interview with Key Informants***

The researchers have undertaken a series of unstructured and semi-structured interviews with individual key informants. Key informants were selected on the basis of the knowledge they have on the research. Accordingly, those individuals who are well versed in the culture, tradition, and history of their respective group were selected as key interviewees. In most instances, the elders are the opinion leaders in the traditional arena as they participate in the daily management of community affairs. Oral interviews with key informants were conducted through direct contact via the use of field assistants. During the interview time, questions both structured and unstructured has been clarified and informants were allowed to interpret the question the way they understood it since the discussion was conducted in the local languages of the study communities through field assistant.

### ***❖ Focus Group Discussion(FGD)***

The research theme, local conflict is a very sensitive issue which demands a critical weighing of information. Thus, for the purpose of data triangulation and methodological merit, FGD has 'high face validity' hence; the researchers have employed it as one data collection tool. Employing FGDs assists not only to generate fresh information that would complement the data coming through other methods but also to check and counter-check the reliability of data gleaned from individual informants. In the FGD, the researchers took local administrative bodies, clan leaders and others who have a good deal of knowledge about the issue as participants. As focus



groups take a long time to arrange and to transcribe the recordings, small number is recommended when participants are likely to have a lot to say on the topic and when the research topic is controversial.. As Morgan cited in Bryman (2004:35), suggests the typical group size is 6-10 members. Viewed from the above vantage point, the topic at hand needs to take small participants. Accordingly, the researchers arranged small number of participants within the stated range (6-7) and the researchers conducted eight FGDs- four from each group.

### ❖ *Document Analysis*

The researchers also used document analysis to come up with a comprehensive picture of the *Konso-Derashe* conflict. This instrument is obviously helpful to obtain data from documents like study reports presented on an inter-*woreda* conference on inter-group conflicts, their causes, consequences and resolutions that was held in both *Woredas* and the minutes of peace conferences, including situation reports. Besides, in order to put in context the research problem and to inform the study with clear theoretical insight, different books, and periodicals, were used.

### ❖ *Method of Data Analysis*

Qualitative research design equipped with Strategic Conflict Assessment analytical model was employed to analyze this local conflict. The rationale behind using Strategic Conflict Assessment (SCA) model as a method of analysis is that it focuses on analysis of conflict structures, actors, and dynamics (DFID, 2002). Although for analytical purposes it is useful to divide analysis into these three areas, in reality they are closely inter-linked and should be viewed holistically. The first step in this regard is to analyze the long term factors underlying violent conflicts in the study area in order to make an assessment of the structural vulnerability of the two *Woredas* to the outbreak/intensification of conflict.

## Result and Discussion

### *Divergent views on the origin of the people under study*

According to some oral informants, there are many assumptions intertwined about the origin of *Konso* people. Among these, the first assumption states that their forefathers were originated from a certain Gourd, the big calabash known as “*kantytta*”, in *Konso*. The second assumption also point out that the *Konso* people were born from a “heap of termites,” which is locally known as “*Xonsita Kuite sookayta*”. This view bear a resemblance to the bible version “God created man from soil and mud”. The aforementioned two assumptions correspondingly claimed that *Konso*’s were native people to the area. Unlike the above two assumptions, others believe that *Konso* people come from other areas as a result of the pulling and pushing factors. In this regard, most of the *Konso* elders revealed that the origin of their forefathers was from *Borena*, particularly from *Liben* clan. They argued that initially these people had settled in different areas around *konso* however, they gradually settled in the present areas of *konso*.

On the other side of the spectrum, limitations of sources are the major difficulties in tracing and giving conclusive information about the origin of the *Derashe* people. Divergent scholarly assumptions and oral legends are forwarded to shed light pertaining to the origin of the *Derashe* people. Most of the assumptions presented “clan” based analysis, which assumed that the nine clans that formed the present day *Derashe* people generally categorized into two major assumptions.

The first assertion contended that the two different migrations that occurred before and during 16<sup>th</sup>c from different part of the area such as *Borena*, *Liben*, *Gewada*, *Alle* and *Ajolota* came to settle in the present day *Derashe* land. Based on the above hypothesis, *Kolayt*, *Kalayt*, *Argamayt*, *Malita* and *Karchita* were migrated during the 16<sup>th</sup>C; however *kansita*, *kret*, *Aelayit* and *Ketay* were living before 16<sup>th</sup>C. The second assumption also states that the *Derashe* people were the mixture of different peoples who were coming from different areas. According to the *Derashe* legend, the father of *Derashe Titipa* and *kala* of *konso* was the son *Matto*. However, these two brothers quarrelled and then *Titipa* moved and established *Derashe*. Generally most of the assumptions conclude that the *Derashe* people might have had come from other areas due to unknown reasons (Hamsamo, 1993).

### *Nature of Konso –Derashe relations*

It is known that geographical proximity and sharing of a certain boundary between two or more ethnic groups have its own determinant role in their harmonious and conflictual relations. Cognizant of this fact, looking into specific *kebeles* of *konso* sharing boundary with their neighboring *Derashe* is pertinent to determine the nature of their relations across time. Some of the *Alle* *kebeles* incompatible with *konso* include *Kerkerte* against *Masoya*, *Eyana* against *Gelgelana Qolmele*, *Madaga* against *Borkora*. These *kebeles* had been hot spots of conflict during the time of data collection and we even witnessed the Federal police patrolling the problem landing in the middle of the two boundary. *Konso* *kebeles* in conflict with *Derashe* includes *Malagana Dugaya* and *Garche*. Common resource sharing becomes the cause for this conflict. As one of our informants from the area revealed the nature of conflicts in the 1990s between these two ethnic groups /*kebeles* in the following manner:

*“In the 1990s when conflict arose between these two kebeles of Konso and their Derashe counterparts, people used scorched earth tactic; burning homes, farm products leaving nothing for the “enemy”. Recently however, this tactic was outdated and people turned to use rifle for fighting. Individual clashes immediately turned into group....”*

On the other hand, *Konso*’s conflictual relation with the neighboring *Borena Oromo* is seasonal in its nature. It is only at the beginning of the rainy season that the two are fighting as both groups came to graze and water their animals at the common resources. Regarding the *Konso-Derashe* relations, they have many things in common. For one thing, both *Konso* and *Derashe* share similar tribal group, as a result, they had been intermarrying each other. Besides, they share resources together harmoniously.

Recently, however, the new administrative arrangement creates a new special *woreda* called *Alle*, which was formerly found under the political administration of *Konso* and *Derashe* special *woredas*. *Gewada* special *woreda* has been established by taking seven and ten *kebeles* from *Konso* and *Derashe* special *woreda*’s respectively. Five *Konso* *kebeles* share boundaries with *Derashe* *woreda* from these *Melgna duguaya* and *Garche* *kebeles* have exhibited a number of conflicts with *Derashe* due to different reasons at different times. The major cause of conflict

between these groups relies on resource utilization, particularly to those *kebeles* who share boundaries. Therefore, it will be a blind judgment for those who argue that “there exists a conflict between whole *konso*’s against whole *Derashe*’s”. In this regard, *Gelebo*, *Fuchucha* and *Ba’eyide kebele*’s of *Derashe* has exhibited peaceful interaction and harmonious relationship with their *konso* neighbor. Even though resource is not the only cause of every conflict, one can argue that the prevailing peaceful coexistence between these *kebeles* may be because of the non-existence of any meaningful shared resources.

### ***Grounds for positive interactions***

From the outset, both the *Derashe* and *Konso* claim identical place of origin: the “*Borena* land of *Liben*”. They also count themselves as brothers *Kala* and *Titipa*, the former being the father of all *Konso* and the later for *Derashe*. Furthermore, all the clans found in *Konso* are also found bearing some minor waddling of letters in their naming and pronunciation, which further strengthens their historical and kinship ties. Based on such reckoning of clanship, any *konso* man say, from *Pasanta* clan would never marry a girl from *Pasanta* of *Derashe*, and vice-versa.

Economically, the agriculturalist *Derashe* supplies the *Konso* market with vegetables and cereals from the irrigated areas of *Ghato* and the lowland portions of *Derashe* territory. In turn the *Konso* areas are also dependable source for cattle and livestock for *Derashe* markets. Specially, a staple crop-*teff*, from *Komsiyye* and *Kabura* areas made its way to *konso* and beyond, which further enhances their economic ties.

Since 1985 however, there exists intermittent conflicts where some of these conflicts had been managed by locally organized peace committees. If the conflict is beyond the capacity of these peace committees, it is the government which intervenes. But none of the government peacemaking efforts were/are ignoring the traditional and cultural process of peacemaking of both societies. It accommodates the indigenous mechanisms of addressing conflicts.

### **Causes of the conflict**

#### **A. *Economic oriented causes***

First, unplanned utilization of water sources-typically *Ghato* River which in period of peace serves both the *Derashe* and *Konso Kebeles* adjacent to each other. Attempt to block its volume that flows and irrigate *Fuchucha* areas of *Konso* villages produced animosity. Though this factor is not directly related with *Melegana Dugaya*’s of *Konso*, the conflict begin with the *Derashe*



*kebele's* between *Shilele* and *Hayibena*. However, the vanquished group always retreats to the neighboring *kebele Melegana Dugaya*. The *konso* does also have the tradition to donate shelter and protection to the guests what so ever they are. Consequently, they experience some conflicts with those who try to attack their enemies.

Second, incompatible attempt of using protected areas such as *Abulo* and *Alfacho* for grazing and agriculture is another causal factor. The *Konso* neighborhoods tries to expand their share of the place for grazing land for their livestock, while the *Derashe* exerts effort for maximizing the share from the same land for agriculture. Trespassing by agro-pastoral cattle over agricultural fields of the *Derashe* served as a sparking match for conflict between individuals. In this regard, harvesting seasons are constantly remained periods of suspicion and stress among adjacent villagers of *Konso* and *Derashe*.

#### B. *Political causes*

A gradual weakening of indigenous institutions comes at the first line of political cause. The *Konso* and *Derashe* nationalities have their own indigenous means of conflict resolution in history. But it confronted a threat from the political structures since the period of Haile Sillase's regime who introduced '*balabat*' (landlordism) system at the expense of the operating local structure. These institutions had been obliged to implement the regime's ideology down grading their traditional roles. This trend sustained during the military regime, which imposed the role of revolutionary activism on the local *Poqallas* and *Damas* of *Konso* and *Derashe* respectively. This adversely affected the autonomy and freedom of the institutions in acting on local disputes. Informants from both *Konso* and *Derashe* revealed that the interventions of few local Cadres as a peace-making committee nominally elected by some groups in the process of indigenous conflict resolution made these institutions and rituals weaker and weaker. Parallely, trends of intra and inter-ethnic conflicts in both *woredas* increased in frequency only one during imperial and Derg regime-in 1972 and 1977, respectively and five times up to date in 1993, 2001, 2002, 2008; and 2009.

Furthermore, inefficient mechanism of diagnosing and concomitant handling strategies of conflicts by the political authority proved significant setback for the tense sense of animosity between these people. Undermining the traditional rituals accompanied each phase of conflict resolution on both cultures, to which the society strongly abides by, men in office revert to



“poor” implementation of dry facts in “science” (own words of respondents). The combatants being under imposition and fear of “politics” accept the negotiation for face value and agree to make peace. The typical case-in-point is the peace conference held at *Ghato* on 27<sup>th</sup> of October, 2008 which burst in to open conflict only after a day. Besides, lack of clear local policy for common pool resources where two territories situated between the two *woredas* are worth mentioning: the *Abulo-Alfecho* and *Guliche* forest areas, which both *Konso* agro-pastoralists and *Derashe* agriculturalists compete for livelihoods. The local governments of both *woredas* were unable to enforce strong regulation over the utilization of the mentioned places until the end of our field work.

Last but not least, dalliance of justice delivery for complaints filed. For more than three times, as their copied written complain at different administrative levels reads, dwellers of *Kayyama kebele* of *Derashe woreda* were badly complained for “*maltreatment by adjacent kebele leaders, as motivated by the woreda officials*”, since 2008. They complained for being under continuous “siege” by people of their nationality for “unproved” and politicized allegation of making alliance with *Konso* people to fight *Derashe*, and chased away from their long-established living quarters. Such complain is on the official table of *Kayama* villagers for the reason that the government authorities failed in investigating the truth and making justice. Though the government may have its own approach, it seems delayed at least for they received insignificant answer in written form.

### ***C. Social oriented factors***

Primarily, the circulations of false allegation by individuals can be mentioned fueling conflict. A case in point in this regard has been the existence of two historical incidents. The first was the 1969 conflict between *Kayama* against *Anota* and *Holte* against *Wallesa*. In that year, a game/competition between two youth of *Kayama* village to bring courageously the leaf of ‘*sokke*’- tree from Lake *Chamo* in the dark night crossing the wild trough *Holte* was negatively conceived by the latter as if the boy was polluting their village with drought. The first person who caught the boy at *Holte* village circulated a bad news of the case, motivating the *Holtes* against the *Kayamas* to fight for such “devilish” deed. Then, conflict arose and self-destruction followed for some brief period’s sendoff lasting doubt between the two groups. The other unproved allegation though traces some reckoning of cause to the first case came in 2008.

categorizing *kayama* villagers as making secret alliance with *Konso* neighborhoods living around *Kabura* to expose secrets of *Derashe* making an oath to be adopted to a *Konso* for protection. Though remains challenging to prove its reality, as both the parties strongly argue toward their own truth, it further deepens the division and suspicion between the aforementioned villagers.

### **Attempts for peace process**

Some of the conflicts had been managed by the locally organized peace committees. If the conflict is beyond the capacity of these peace committees, it is the government which intervenes. But none of the government peacemaking efforts were/are ignoring the traditional and cultural process of peacemaking of both societies. It accommodates the indigenous mechanisms of addressing conflicts. Government was intervened to resolve the *konso/Derashe* conflict particularly the peace conference which was held in 2009 assumed giving final solution to the problem. However, after three days of the peace conference, the conflict re-erupted within *Derashe kebeles*. The overpowered *Shilale/Hayibena* chased by their opponents and retreated towards their neighbor where they found shelter and protection of *Melegana Dugaya* of *konso*. Few local Cadres who are nominally elected by some groups and intervened as peace-making committees in the process of indigenous conflict resolution nevertheless, this made institutions of conflict management and rituals weaker and weaker. All the way, trends of intra and inter-ethnic conflicts in both *woredas* increased in frequency. Informants revealed that only single conflict happened during the Imperial and Derg regime in 1973 and 1977 respectively but in recent years it became recurrent that happened in 1992, 2001, 2002, 2007, 2008 and even we witnessed during the period of data collection in 2012.

In the process of both conflict prevention and management, the role of Mercy Corps-NGO project is immense. In the first place, it involved in awareness creation as to how the local people resolve conflicts with in themselves and others thereby making efforts by organizing inter and intra-ethnic sport club in harmonizing their relationship especially for the young generation.

Mercy Corps attempt for peace building to resolve conflict that arose due to utilization of forest resources in the adjacent area between three common users is unsuccessful. For instance, they organized a negotiation in December, 2011 however; three weeks later there existed minor clashes. The main reason for the delay of peace process and unfinished negotiations is the failure



of Mercy Corps to invite representative from *Amaro Kelle* into the negotiation table, who are the main common beneficiaries from the forest. According to informants, this forest is originally belongs to *Malagana-dugaya (Konso)* but as displaced persons from either *Derashe* or the *kebele* themselves distract the forest which in turn exacerbates the already scares grazing resource and hence, increasing the *Malaganadugaya's kebeles* internal instability and persistent threat for peace.

In each ethnic group there are different sub-ethnic groups. Historically the assimilation of the subgroups was eased through intermarriage. The solidarity between sub-ethnic groups is aimed at ensuring sufficient power to protect resources including fending off attacks and invading other areas during the early times. Moreover, a broader alliance of sub-groups assures greater mobility and access to diverse ecosystems. It also enables exchanges of experience as different sub-groups specialize in different economic activities such as crop-cultivation (*Derashes*), livestock husbandry (*Konso*). This however does not mean that such practices are exclusively carried out by the two.

In the study area, there are two sets of institutions involved in conflict resolution and management. The first is the traditional institutions managed by elders. These institutions are effective in managing conflicts within their own ethnic groups and they also play a role in resolving conflict outside their ethnic group. The second is the set of decentralized government bodies that are organized on the basis of administrative structures and boundaries. In each *woreda* there is a peace and security committee which is mandated to prevent and control conflicts in its area. However, its intervention is often reactive taking place when tensions have already erupted and turned into deadly conflict. A case in point was the 2009 Federal police intervention in the conflict between *Konso* and *Derashe kebeles* had a failure story. This second set of institutions is also hampered by the limited experience and knowledge of staff on conflict resolution and sometimes by biased attitudes among staff due to ethnic affiliations with the conflicting parties besides; they are often camped far from the areas where the conflicts take place accurate information about the conflict reaches their offices late.

### ***Local initiatives for conflict prevention***

There are some instances of how conflict can be resolved peacefully. One is encouraging a peaceful culture in dealing with issues around territorial fluidity and reciprocity. Due to the risks and uncertainties inherent to agro-pastoralism, mutual use of resources across different territories



is a foundation of the agro-pastoral system and ensures the survival of these groups. We can draw good lesson from *Malagana dugaya kebele* inhabitants who well-come the displaced persons from *Derashe kebeles*. Peaceful methods of sharing could significantly reduce conflicts.

Secondly, peace as an asset needs to be exploited. The traditional pastoralist and agro-pastoralist system considered peace as a prerequisite and therefore peace-making groups exist in each ethnic group which is meant to facilitate peace negotiations among conflicting groups.

Third, culture of tolerance-under the traditional pastoralist and agro-pastoralist system in the study area, tolerance is an asset so that all conflicts do not necessarily have to lead to violence. The local elders and peace-making groups spend some time investigating the causes of conflicts to understand the origin. Whether conflicts are accidental, intentional, individual or group-motivated, elders make suggestions for peaceful resolution.

Fourthly, intermarriage is another option where the conflicting groups of *Konso* and *Derashe* widely practice intermarriage as a means to facilitate social harmony and cement peaceful relationships. Intermarriage is more frequent during periods of smooth transaction between these groups. For example, some *Derashe* respondents indicated that many *Konso* women come to purchase sorghum during the harvesting season subsequently they marry *Derashe* men. Besides, in times of peace exchange of commodities among neighboring ethnic groups serves as a trust-building mechanism. For example, in the past and still the present the *Konso* and *Derashe* have exchanged crops, livestock and other products this would strengthen the bondage between the two groups despite minor conflicts. Furthermore, a conflict between the two *Derashe Kebeles* that erupted in 2008 was still latent due to the absence of adequate compensation to the victim *kebeles* despite involvement of the Federal Government.

In addition to the above options, the government's backing for launching and consolidating local militia to sustain peace is generally seen as an optimistic progress by most communities in the study areas. However, there should be careful consideration of who controls these groups to make sure that they do not become actors in provoking conflicts. For example, to prevent any intra-ethnic conflicts the process of education and awareness creation is applied. One of the *Konso* "kala"- king explains how "intra-ethnic representatives are rarely sent to the families of those members of society with improper behavior to let them know so that they can deal with them before they disrupt social equilibrium". The "Kala" also underlines that *Konso* children are taught from childhood about the principles of justice, fairness, mutual interdependence and



tolerance as a basis for conflict prevention. Yet he also indicates that there are many cases where children are taught warfare tactics against ‘enemies’.

### ***Challenges to local peace-making***

Peace-making in the study areas faces many challenges, some of which are outlined below.

Primarily the young generation usually does not abide by the traditional rules and regulations and they tend to be more bigoted and impatient than older people. Unemployment and a lack of access to education though promising progress in recent years among the young generation have also contributed to the intensification of conflicts. Secondly, individual behaviors- heroism and a culture of killing an enemy is highly admired and consecrated in almost all ethnic groups. This tradition is still observable in some ethnic groups though the magnitude for initiating conflict these days is minimal. Thirdly, there exists marginalization of traditional practices due to the fact that many of the modern institutions do not accommodate either local rules/regulations or recognize the conflict resolution experience and skills of elders. This is because government institutions are not modified to drawing on elders’ skills – for instance, most elders are illiterate. Thus, lack of incorporating the local knowledge with modern system of resolving conflict is an indication of marginalization.

### **Gender Dimension of the conflict**

According to focus group discussants, in recent times the *konso* women are aware of how much conflict is destructive and what so ever the consequence is undesirable. Therefore, mostly the *konso* women are engaged in resolving and culminating the situation rather than spoiling as they did in previous times. This was evidenced in the 1993 conflict, *konso* women was having a potential role in instigating conflict by disseminating information to the other neighbor *kebeles* by using their “unique voice” shouting loudly which signals the war has begun come and fight. They also stand at the back of their force during the actual conflict, to help the wounded and provide food and other necessities to their fighters and they encourage them to fight tenaciously at the same time they discourage retreat and defeat. Based on the aforementioned evidences it is logical to conclude that *konso* women play a great role in instigating conflict as well as increasing violence and destruction in previous times.

On the other hand, their *Derashe* counterparts are also on the same line of action making their voice for counter-action for lost and uncompensated resources during conflicts irrespective of the peace-process on the table. This very fact was played openly on the peace process of 2008 chaired by regional dignitary where by a “woman” as clearly stipulated by informants made statement about the failure of the peace negotiation for the fact that compensation for their lost properties is ignored hence, woman disturbed all the process toiled for days at once by saying: “*we shall robe someday their property and then ask for peace if we are now forced to agree for injustices made to us*”

### **Potential threats existing today**

The *konso-Derashe* conflict can be placed under the category of latent conflict. There are recently potential threats that rough the peaceful relations between the *Konso* and *Derashe* ethnic groups. The first and perhaps the foremost potential threat is the prevalence of loose administration of some commonly utilized resources. A case in point is the forest utilized by the joint *Derashe kebele* of *Malagana Dugaya* versus *Amaro Kelle woreda*. Either of these parties did not respect the decisions over the use of the reserved forest named *Abulo -Alfacho* forest and grazing land which the three parties are using in common and in competing manner. Particularly *Derashe's* displaced persons and *Amaro Kelle's* keen interest in the area remained a potential internal threat to the *Konso kebele's* mentioned above. Even though, *konso's* have harmonious relationship with *Amaro kelle*, recently the *Derashe's* by passed over *konso's* territory conflicting with *Amaro kelle* around the area of *Abul-alfecho*. As the result, the *konso's* placed under great suspicion by *Amaro kelle's* as if they/ *konso's*/ are cooperating with *Derashe's*. The focus group discussant argued that sooner than later this might be instigating conflict with *Amaro kelle* and *Derashe's* because, we are considered as cooperative and our territory is crossed to inflict conflict respectively.

Unlike the previous tradition, the displaced persons decided not to return back where they belongs, rather they began permanent settlement near to *Melegana Dugaya kebele*. This makes the relationship between the conflicting parties at ease. On the other hand, though, they welcomed the *Derashe* initially as they did before, now days the dwellers of *Melegana Dugaya kebele* believes that “*our welcomed guests are causing some sort of problems such as land grabbing and deforestation*”. This basic dissatisfaction between the displaced and the hosts

created some grievances and will remain potential cause of conflict in the future. If this problem remained unsolved, the existing latent relationship will change its phase whenever the underlying grievances become strong enough, then a triggering event marks the eruption phase of the conflict that would later be transformed/escalated itself into full scale violence. As mentioned above, the existence of displaced person from *Derashe woreda* is becoming a huge burden to *Melegana Dugaya kebele* dwellers. If they are not resettled to their original place the future relationship will be highly contested.

The second potential threat to the prevalence of peace in *Malagana-dugaya (konso kebele)* is the establishment of trajectory institution-school on the private land of 17 household farmers and failure to give them a productive land as a substitution. This remained a hot issue unresolved until the end of this research letting the fate of 17 households to confront a fugitive life. Hence, the search for other settlement area became a potential threat to the prevalence of peace hindering local development in the aforementioned *kebeles*. Thirdly, unsettled claims of *Konso* living on the lower course of *Ghato* River to use the water for irrigation and the limited access permitted by *Ghato* agriculturalists of *Derashe woreda*. Besides, the controversial allegations and counter actions between *Kayama* villagers on one hand and *Holte, Wallesa, Anota* and *Ataya kebeles* on the other hand are implications of corresponding weakness by local institutions to bring peace and mutual trust. Rather than relying on indigenous mechanisms, the government resort to enforce law by stationing a special police force at *Wozeka*.

The fourth potential threat accentuates the *woredas* fragile relation with their neighbor *woredas* in general and the newly established *woredas* in particular. As mentioned above, *Gewada kebele* was established by taking some formerly *konso kebele*'s. Therefore, some of the *konso kebele* shared boundaries with *Gewada* such as *Borqera, Gelebo, Maderinagizaba, Massoya* and *Gelgelanaqolmale*. This had an adverse impact on the future relations each *woreda* as there exists claim and counter claim for ex-territory. This administrative arrangement is becoming the potential threat of conflict for future relationship of these *woredas*, putting the relation at its latent stage. Even some of *Gewada kebele* were formerly administered by *konso special woreda*, exhibit a manifested conflict with neighboring *konso kebele*'s. Two major causes were worthy mentioned for these conflicts, one is the utilization of resource-both parties are interested in utilizing *Delbena* Rive for irrigation. The second cause of conflict was ethnicization and categorization of “the *Kolme* people”. The *Kolme* people are found in both *Konso* and *Gewada*



administrative *woredas*, even though they ethnically belong to *konso*. Consequently, the *Gewada's* believes that they are legitimate to the land where the *kolmes* settled today. As a result, they began to withdraw the *kolme* people forcefully.

## **Implications of the conflict**

Inter-ethnic conflicts have long-term consequences. Once conflicts erupt, they lead to loss of human lives, destruction or theft of property and forceful encroaching on others' territories for pasture and water access. The relationship between the concerned ethnic groups remains tense, which continues conflicts for generations. It also complicates or undermines the traditional conflict resolution procedures. The tension between ethnic groups limits free movement or other sorts of interactions and subsequently prevents effective utilization of the available resources. It is also found out that there is a strong desire on the part of the affected communities (displaced persons) to develop mechanisms that would allow for the resumption of unhindered and safe movement of people and goods across different areas. They suggested that free movement could be a successful mechanism to bring about peace amongst conflicting groups and eventually foster the safe movement of people and goods. The conflicts between the two *kebeles* in 2007, 2008 and 2009 claimed the lives of many innocent people at night and the loss of livestock and burning of the entire villages of *Kayama*, and *Shilale kebele*. This brought food insecurity and subsequent dependency on food aid from government and other international donor organizations.

## **Conclusion**

Social and economic networks between agro-pastoralists of *Konso* and peasants of *Derashe* have been increasingly complex, their economic interests are so interlinked despite conflicts and each may have a reason to be interested with the well-being and functioning of the other. Positive relationship between *Konso* and *Derashe* could also be conceived in terms of symbiotic relationship based on mutual dependence and mutual advantage with implied complementarities in the social, ecological and economic spheres.

Most of the incidents of conflict between *Konso* and *Derashe*, seems clashes over key livelihood resources of water, pasture, and land located in adjacent boundaries of both special *woredas*. Nonetheless, they constitute only one aspect of a much more complex interaction between the



two groups. These resources are vital in the lives of both agro-pastoral *Konso* and agrarian *Derashe*, for pastoral production and farming activities—a core in their livelihoods and survival.

In the study area, there are actors behind every action of trigger for the actual conflict and these actions are bound to invite reaction from other actors. Inadequate mechanism of handling conflict incidents by political and NGOs in the area found to be exacerbating factor in reinventing conflict rather than resolving them sustainably. Besides, proper analysis of causes and natures as well as actors in some conflicts are lacking by the concerned authorities in charge of making peace. Sometimes the causes are left somewhere, as most research participants maintained and the negotiation process and mechanisms are operating elsewhere.

## **Recommendations**

It is clear from the research that conflicts in the case study areas have multiple causes and many of these causes are linked to developmental and livelihood issues. Some cultural beliefs and traditions can further fuel these conflicts and contribute to the prevalence of mistrust between these ethnic groups. Local conflicts also easily take sub ethnic dimensions internally, in terms of the administrative borders of districts and sub-districts. A multi-layered approach is therefore required, from a range of different actors (different levels of government, from the federal to the local; traditional leaders and community mediators; other civil society organizations; regional inter-state organizations, international NGOs; international donors), to address the conflicts in a sustainable way. The single case in point in this regard is the involvement of Mercy Corps in these intra and inter-ethnic conflicts of *Konso* and *Derashe* within the *Derashe*. A number of recommendations for resolving conflict were proposed during consultations with the two ethnic groups working at the grassroots level. These suggestions were supposed to be priorities for community-based and local peace-building endeavors. The following recommendations are informed by these discussions held at the grassroots level.

*Support conflict-sensitive development:* donors should support conflict-sensitive development interventions designed to improve food security and agricultural productivity and diversify livelihood options for communities under investigation. It is crucial that these interventions are designed through dialogue with local communities to ensure that they reflect community needs and priorities and those they do not exacerbate conflict or mistrust between communities by fuelling perceptions of unfair advantage to some groups.



*Ethiopian government and international donors:* donors should also support capacity building and training for non-governmental and community-based organizations to strengthen their ability to provide input into local government decision-making on conflict resolution and the design of conflict-sensitive development strategies.

*Improve dialogue between donors, government and civil society:* designing, implementing and evaluating conflict-sensitive development strategies will require improved dialogue between donors, government and civil society. Forums and processes to encourage dialogue and enable civil society to participate in development frameworks at the national, regional and district levels should be established and strengthened.

*Support community-based peace-building initiatives:* donors and government should support local peace-building initiatives, such as awareness-raising activities, mediation and dispute resolution, and peace committees.

*Strengthen conflict early warning and response systems:* a proactive early warning and response system is needed to identify conflict risks at an early stage and take action to prevent the escalation of tension into violent conflict. Early warning involves a systematic collection of conflict information, analysis and reporting which should then trigger proactive early responses.

*Raise awareness and harmonize modern and traditional processes:* with local government involvement and support, NGOs and community-based organizations should help raise awareness and build capacity of local leaders and communities on good governance, laws and regulations as well as constitutional issues – including their constitutional rights as pastoralists and agro-pastoralists. This would encourage dialogue and understanding of the differences between modern and traditional systems and enable communities to be more strategic in addressing their problems. At the same time, the value of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms needs to be acknowledged and steps should be taken to enhance the positive contribution they can make.

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