

Pastoralist Forum Ethiopia (PFE)

Conflict transformation and peace building initiatives among the pastoralists of Upper Awash Valley

*A study report based on preliminary field observations
and community training workshop*

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1. Introduction

Pastoralist Forum Ethiopia (PFE) commissioned a researcher to undertake conflict situations in Afar and Kereyou pastoral domain. The main purpose of the study is to support the advocacy works of the forum on conflict by research findings while the specific objectives are to review and synthesis the conflict situations in Afar and Kereyou communities; propose intervention areas to transform conflict and build peace; and recommend the roadmap to sustain peace in the area.

2. Background

Groups in Upper Awash Valley that are always at the loggerhead constitute the Oromo (Kereyou and Itu), Afar and Argoba¹. Afar on the one hand and the Oromo branch of Kereyou and Itu on the other hand are pastoralists who raise cattle, camel, shoats, camel, and donkey, as the result share the same resources necessitated by their pastoral way of life and boarder proximity. The pastoral movement, which underpins pastoralism, brings them into contact across the boarder, where there are leftovers of resources when their major resource base across the Awash River and plains have been confiscated. Even if both the Oromo and the Afar have displayed long time conflict, the recent (since 50 years) has changed the magnitude and style of conflict.

Resource alienation of the pastoralists pushed them onto the dry and rocky hills where they could hardly have any thing to rely on. The Awsah National Park and Metahara Sugar Plantation from the Oromo side, and the cotton and fruits Farm from the Afar side has done lots of wrong against them. The cumulative effect is the exacerbation of conflict. The Argoba, who dowel on the hilly northwestern side of Kereyou country, are settled farmers who at the same time raids considerable number of livestock. For this reason and others that are hinted to in the following sections, these communities are in tense conflict through ages.

3. Analyzing the Problem

Conflict as a social phenomenon, has a tremendous impact on the peaceful functioning of a society. With its cruel hand of combat between or among the warring functions, it claims life. The social group that in most cases involve in this riddles is usually the youth, the most productive section of any society. Its havoc uproots families there by harms the vulnerable group such as the elderly, women and children. Conflict destabilizes economic performance, political stability, and social tranquility. It impedes development and hamper any hope social and economic developments. Among the groups that are mentioned above, the impacts of this phenomenon has been observed year after year, and the combatants themselves provides a tangible testimony for the undesirable fact of conflict. Therefore, it crucial to look into the underlying causes of this conflict and address.

¹ This study mainly focused on Kereyou and Afar communities. However, the author advices that similar model can be used with the Argoba, an ethnic group neighboring the Afar and Kereyou.

3.1 Animal raid

According to the main belligerent, the Oromo and the Afar, the immediate factor that entices conflict is animal theft or raid. Raid happens by any group at any time while the animals graze in the field unattended or by gunning down the herders or by stealthily and carefully intruding into the villages of the victim. Then animals will be taken away, to remote place or put among the animals of the raiders or else taken to the market after the news of the raid goes down. Booties will be shared among the members of a group that undertook the raid. A single incident of raid would create chains of raids that might escalate into a major war.

3.2 Revenge

Revenge is the main driving force of the raiding chain, once an incident occurs. Revenge is shrouded by cultural conception of masculinity and invisibility in which a person who is not capable of revenge is seen as coward and worthless guy and mocked at by every one. There is also an economic aspect of revenge. In a raid, a household or a group of people might totally lose their animals to the raiders since raiders could do anything they can to maximize the number of the stocks they take. The victim has no option than doing the same against the groups that have already done harm to him, since awaiting for the natural reproduction of animals can not give immediate return for his family to live on.

3.3 Culture and mutual perception

The three belligerent in the referent region have different perception of one another, which is largely based on bad feelings and animosity. The Kereyou perceive the Afar as *'people without any trust'*. And if you come across a Kereyou guy and ask him of what he thinks of the Afar, he would tell you that *'it is not possible to make peace with the Afar since they are people imbued with lie and betrayal. The Kereyou always go for peace while the Afar always like war. Afar do not have laws that govern their live, rather they live in life of revenge and turmoil. Even if they live with you for long time and make you their friends, be aware that they would kill you one day! Never go in front of an Afar but after him to watch out what harm he might do on you.'*

Almost similar perception from the other side, saying, 'the Kereyou are thieves who always go for someone's property'. This perception and mutual suspicion breaks out into war even in time of a relative peace, for example, when animals of conflicting groups graze together within one's grazing territories. Both group also rate one another as number one enemies to the other. In its symbolic form, the killer of an Afar is the most renowned person than the one who killed any one else. A killer of an Afar decorates himself in especial costume, which gives him special position among the society and other killers. The same is true among the Afar. The idea of male invisibility, strength, and courage is expressed in the raid and killing conducted against one another.

3.4 Commercialization

The forms of conflict have been changing from time to time. Earlier on, conflict occurs mainly for cultural reasons, i.e. killing an enemy as this confers fame and virility on the killer. Booty was taken as a token for defeating an enemy than for its use value. Nowadays, even if the symbolic aspect still exists, conflict because of raid occurs for the need to boost ones own cash income through sells of animals. Livestock price are getting higher as traders come from many corners of the region. Nowadays, animals are being exported to the gulf region in big number that there is a big demand on the market. Change in the life and consumption style of the pastoralists also goes with this new development. Many of the pastoralists very often go to the town than usual for enjoying themselves by drinking beer and other beverages.

In the case of the Kereyou and the Afar, chewing *chat* (*Catha edulis*, a stimulant plant) is becoming very popular. A person in a day expends more money on chat and associated drinks like beer and coco-cola than any other consumption items that his household could use for two to three days. They are now getting used to modern household utensils, radios, and clothes, and other consumption items. These all requires cash income, which in this case is obtainable by selling animals on the market acquired through raid. Raid saves the perpetrator's own animals from selling, which he might keep for bad times.

3.5 Lack of good governance

Government as an important stakeholder in the local configuration of power is an important institution having impact on the relations of peoples. Local government institutions such as Woreda administration, police and the judiciously in respective regions are the immediate responsible organs of good governance.

Local people, both the Kereyou and the Afar accuse their respective government organs for their incapability to contain conflict or render legal solution for the problem. Government institutions in Woredas are fettered with sectarianism, lack commitment, ability and efficiency, and skilled human resources. The Afar administration is accused of totally siding with the Afar and even some of them were personally involved in the 2002 combat between the Afar and the Kereyou. The Afar is known for hiding the culprit, and is unwilling or incapable to give back animal raided. The mishandling of six Kereyou prisoners and their final death in prison is an example that still creates mutual suspicion among the respective administration and peoples. On the other hand, the Kereyou administration lacks commitment and has no ability to take care of Kereyou cases properly. The Kebele officials themselves are involved in the sharing of the booty thereby play an important role in giving sanctuaries to raiders.

The legal provision and the judiciary are also not locally sensitive. In many cases, raiders are freed on due to lack of full testimonials. The raid takes place under the cover of darkness or in the wilderness during daytime where and when anyone could not see. Lives are lost in this case. According to the Ethiopian Penal Code, the legal requirement that obligates the plaintiff to produce three eyewitnesses is adapted to the local specific conditions. According to some key informants, the judges are not also willing to handle this type of cases as conflict is taken as normal condition. Conflict among the pastoralists are still seen as childish and need not or could not be mitigated.

3.6 Boundary conflict

The Afar and the Kereyou also claim territories along the borders. Each of them put their territorial boundary into another's territory. The Afar claims that their territory goes as far as Fantalle Mountain, while the Kereyou have the same claim into the territory of the Afar. The same claim exists between the Kereyou and the Argoba.

3.7 Resource competition

The alienation of important water and pasture sources along the Awash Valley by the Sugar Plantation, Awash National Park, the Commercial Cotton Plantation and other commercial farming coupled with ever growing population and urbanization resulted in shrinkage of grazing land and thus threatening pastoral livelihood systems. In the main, blockage of water sources by the above land grabbers have made the two rivalry groups to move to the border areas to exploit the Bulga River, the only water source remaining lying on the easterly side of

the border, and Dunkuku pond on the western border. The Afar, the Kereyou, and the Argoba (on the eastern side of the border) contend on these resources day and night. As the result of fear of attack from either side, the grazing land on the border usually remains unused, exacerbating the scarcity of grazing land.

3.8 Poverty and population growth

The demographic and economic factors are also attributed to exacerbating conflict situation. When one dwell on the question as to which group of wealth status involve in raid, it is observable that the poor are the ones. Decrease or absence of livestock is a severe economic shock since livestock is the mainstay. Whenever drought hits the region, the poor are the most vulnerable groups. It is also hard for the poor to revive since no or very few stocks might remain after the shocks. So, replenishing once herd through raid whatever cost it might take is the shortcut to solve the problem. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to conclude that the poor are the only groups engaging in raid.

The young wealthy stockowners are also very active since they want to accumulate more wealth. The general decrease in the number of animals and productivity (due to decrease in animal reproductive rate as the result of dwindling pasture, water resources, and disease problems in main) while the human population keeps increasing also result in low human to livestock proportions, which means prevalence of pastoral poverty and insecurity.

4. Past initiatives

CARE Awash has conducted peace-building initiatives in Afar and Kereyou. Even if these initiatives have laid a base, it has not bear fruits for few of the following problems:

- the initiatives did not involve the youth who are very active in the conflict;
- it was not institutionalized (peace committee were not build and interlinked with that of the government);
- government administration, police, and the judiciary were not actively involved or either lack capacity in terms of conceptualization of conflict and resources;
- lacked legal provisions that are pertinent to local and event specific,
- lacked improvement of access to resources from the community side.

Any forthcoming initiative therefore must try to tackle the above problems.

5. Stakeholders analysis

The anatomy of the groups that directly or indirectly involve in the conflict in the area gives light as to which part should get involved in the peace making process.

5.1 Social section of the belligerent

Within the group that are directly involved in the conflict, there is difference of orientation and level of involvement.

5.1.1 Women

The involvement of women can be seen from three perspectives depending on the age of the women.

a. **Young women** are sometimes said to be the movers of raid behind the scene. The young ones, mostly those who are married to the old men, have usually got extramarital relation with the young men. This relationship is sometimes called *sanyoo* (it is taboo to say this in public). This relation involves male's virility and invincibility, which is displayed by killing enemy or conducting raid against an enemy. The young women vie among one another, though secretly, to have a relation with the renewed and famous raider called *manjoola*. A manjoola therefore have got a great chance of having relation with many women. A woman who has a relation with a man who is not a manjoola wants her partner to show himself having a masculine posture: he need to raid to be famous. Therefore, she refuses to sleep with him, saying, "I cannot sleep with hand without gun" (a colloquial expression that refers to the manjoola). This person is then enticed to raid since he will be ashamed if he cannot show his virility. Then after the raid he has to bring a testimonial of a killer or a raider, symbolized in the feather of *guchi* (typical bird whose feather is so esthetic). Then he shows this to his sanyoo. Now she can sleep with him.

b. **Young and the old women** involve in a war by serving the fighters with water on the spot of fighting lest the fighters suffer from the lack of water if injured. They chase away animals from the fighting area so the enemy force would not take them.

c. In older days, though this is not practiced this time, women are the initiators of negotiation by telling the need to negotiate by crossing the border. Culturally, both from the Afar and the Kereyou, women are spared from being killed even on the war spot. In general, women are the important social group for conflict and peace building.

5.1.2 The Youth

The young men are the one who usually go for the raid and the fight. They are so energetic, do need booty to boost their animal wealth to make themselves famous. They are the one who want to be praised by the women, and want to have as many sanyoo as possible. They are also the one who involve in adventure. In short, they are the prime movers of raid and fight, and they are the one who loose their life easily.

5.1.3 The Elderly

The elderly, under normal conditions, are the negotiators of peace and blood payment. They are leaders and symbols of unity for the groups that are involved in conflict. They are the mouthpieces of the young ones. The youngsters respect, in most cases, the words of the elderly. The peaceful negotiation is usually aimed at three elements:

Firstly, to get blood payment from an enemy when members of own group is killed, secondly, to get back animals raided, and thirdly, to gain a temporary respite from intense conflict and also get access to resources on the border during acute dry-season. However, when the elderly believes that the peaceful negotiation has failed from attaining the above objectives due to what they believe to be the fault of the opposite group or the enemy, the elderly will informally and tactically push the young to take revenge or take back the animals lost by force.

5.1.4 The *Halake*

The Halake are a group, mostly from the Itu section, who settle on the border between the Afar and the Oromo where both Afar and Kereyou do not graze. Theoretically, they have a neutral position. They live in a peaceful relation with both sides even though, both belligerent accuse them of allowing an enemy stock to intrude into the territory of the other, and sometimes of informing one group about the where about and the war plan of the other.

5.1.5 The *gosa, fira* and marriage relation

Paradoxically, even if the Afar and the Kereyou describe one another as enemies, they also claim that they have clanship relation (the saying in local language, Oromiffa, is *nuti gossumma walirraa qabna*). Gosuma or clan relation is an important social bond between the Afar and the Kereyou in their own respective cultures. Gosa is the one who pay blood many when you kill and gain blood payment for your family when you are killed. It is the prime-organizing factor in terms of social, political, and economic life of an individual. Its symbolic function is so immense in fomenting animosity against a person who is believed to be an enemy and friendship to a person who is believed to be a friend. This relation helps them to help one another in accessing pasture and water to one another during acute dry time. This relation develops into settling in another territory by the permission of a group who claim to have this gosuma relation. In this case there are many Oromos who settled among the Afars, speak the language and fomented good relationship, and vice versa.

The *fira* relationship develops as the result of grazing together and knowing one another. Then develops into strong bondage of helping one another in acute dry time. Marriage relations develop out of these relations. Normally both the Afar and the Oromos say that they do not marry one another, but there are cases where marriage relations develop. Women from both side run into the other when they get divorced. These forms peaceful relation between the two groups, despite the fierce animosity that prevails.

5.2 The NGOs

NGOs are seen these days as agents of change as they intervene in development activities that directly or indirectly affect the lives of these groups. They are important and strong partners in transforming conflict. So, any intervention should include them. Some of the NGOs that are working in the areas have already tried to transform the conflict, and their experience is so helpful.

5.3 Government, police and the judiciary

The government is, at all its levels, is an important force that can play great role in changing the conflict situations. Firstly, the government is the prime source of policy, which affects the relations of the groups in terms of resources distribution, boundary delimitation, political representation, formulation of legal framework that is pertinent to event and local specific, allocation of enough manpower to local government level to handle conflict, and capacity building of government personnel who are involved in this task.

The involvements of the government in genuine conflict mitigation should therefore encompass these important fields. The police and the judiciary also play a great role since the execution of the legal framework directly involves them. Their understanding and sensitivity to the issue plays a great role. The community always complains the inability, or unwillingness of these bodies in discharging their duties and responsibility. In general there is very obvious problems concerning the government, the police and the judiciary in transforming conflict genuinely.

6. Conflict intervention areas

6.1 Methodology

The way we go forward with the mitigation of conflict decides the degree of success or failure we are going to register. The most relevant methodology however is firstly, the involvement of the community, government administration, police and the judiciary, the Sugar Plantation, the Awash National Park and the NGOs at different levels, and secondly, the combination of modern and traditional means of conflict transformation, thirdly training of the non-pastoral group of the stakeholders in rationale and viability of pastoralism.

6.2 Overall Activities

Conduct training workshop for the government administration, police, the judiciary of the Awash Fantalle administration of the Afar and the Fantalle Woreda administration of the Oromia National Regional State, and Sugar Plantation and the Awash National Park Officials on the following issues:

- Orientation on pastoral way of life and contribution to the national economy²;
- The interaction between conflict and development;
- Types and methods of conflict resolution, the difference between the traditional and modern mechanism and their relative importance;
- Lessons of past conflict resolution endeavors;
- And the role and responsibility of each stakeholder and how to coordinate efforts³

Conduct workshops between the communities of each region, Afar and Oromo, consisting of the youth, women, and elderly.

- Independent body should carefully conduct the selection of the participants (not the Kebele or the Woreda administration since they only pick up those who are conspicuous). Experience showed that the direct participants in the conflict like the youth, clans that are always active in raid, and women have been excluded.

Establish Peace Committees

- Peace Committee will be formed in each region (Afar and Oromia) among the respective people beginning at Kebele or gosa level. The representatives will form another bigger committee at the Woreda level.
- Traditional social structures like gosa and neutral people like the Halake must be included or should play a primary role. Specific ways to effect this should be supported by research.
- That will be linked to the formal Peace Committee that is formed by the government administration, police and the judiciary.
- Committees consisting representatives Peace Committees from the already established committees from Afar and Oromo will be formed. The meeting place will be on the boarder or hosted by both groups turn by turn.
- The roles and responsibilities of the committee at each level will be identified and reiterated at every meeting.

²This is very important since individuals of these organs perceive pastoralism as backward, irrelevant, and environmentally insensible way of life. This kind of attitude impedes them from genuinely acting towards positive contribution.

³ These are not the only points. Other relevant issues must be included when the work practically begins.

Fund for the duties of the Peace Committees

- The community, to strengthen participation and develop sense of ownership, will contribute an initial fund.
- NGO should channel fund for the committee.
- Specific ways and procedure of managing the fund will be prepared

Cultural Exchange

- The respective people whose audience will be invited from both sides will prepare cultural festivals. On this day feasts will be prepared on which both group eat, drink and exchange ideas. The inclusion the main protagonist of the conflict i.e. the youth, in the aforementioned workshop and committees and then on this cultural festival is very important.

Constructing water points on the borders of both communities, which will be managed by committees from both sides, will create common grounds and interest, and help to bring them together. Each step will be documented to draw lessons and learn from mistakes.

Baseline research should be carried out to know more of the local specific dynamics, for monitoring and evaluation purposes. The Afar side is little known this time. Research, before the execution of this program is so essential to refine these activities itself.

Undertake advocacy work, first, to change policies that are related to resources, especially the alienation of pastoralists from their pasture land and water points which led to resource inaccessibility and then conflict, second, to push government offices and personals to fully involve in conflict mitigation activities. Advocacy could be carried in several ways among which the following are visible for the moment: Panel discussion on topics of conflict, which are general or local specific, direct personal contact of the concerned bodies, newspaper columns, interviews and electronic broadcast, and other suitable means.

Strengthen traditional Early Warning system. Early warning systems do exist. Sever scarcity of resources due to drought, the possibility of revenge due to previous attack, and the Geda system of time reckoning and associated cultural way of identifying an impending outbreak of fighting are some of the EWS that are commonly used. Similar system also exists in the Afar areas. So, the committees that are going to be establish will have to use this early warning systems in identifying the impending conflict.

7. Recommendations

- The above steps are not monolithic rather subject to improvement. The conflict management need to be institutionalized
- The involvement of the youth and women is so crucial, which the previous effort did not recognize.
- The active involvement of government administrative bodies is so important
- Traditional means of conflict resolution should be fully employed and should be integrated to the modern one.
- Traditional conflict early warning system must be properly identified and used.
- Advocacy on the issues of pastoralist right and access to resources must strongly be waged among key policy makers.
- The whole activity must be effected through genuine *community participation, and other stakeholders especially the administration, police and the judiciary. The community must be the center of conflict management and peace building*