

The Dynamics of (Agro) Pastoral Conflicts in Eastern Ethiopia

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Abstract

Ethnic-based resource conflicts were common in eastern Ethiopia among the Afar, Ittu-Oromo and Issa-Somali pastoral groups. This research attempted to identify the trends and prevalence of violent conflicts and the factors encouraging the rival groups to instigate conflicts. Qualitative data were collected from community leaders, ordinary members of the communities, and government official at various levels through one-on-one interviews, focus group discussions and field observations. The quantitative data were collected through household survey from the 128 households randomly drawn from the three districts of Meiso-Mullu, Meiso and Amibara. The results revealed that the trend of violent conflicts is increasing because of increased resource scarcity, absence of property rights, and weak customary institutions. The new political and administrative arrangements following the introduction of ethnic based federalism gave the existing conflicts new a dimension. The research revealed that socio-political factors and competition over scarce natural resources, particularly on water and pasture land, were found to be among important causes for most (agro) pastoral conflicts in the study area.

Key words: Resource competition, ethnic conflict, property rights, and eastern Ethiopia.

Introduction

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Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa and remained to be a 'unified' state at early age unlike that of many states in the African continent. Also, it is a home of diverse and multi- ethnic/clan groups. These multi-ethnic groups in the country are intermingled with each other partly owing to an early formation of 'state' and partly due to the socio-economic interactions and resource sharing (through voluntary agreements and forceful occupation) of these multi-ethnic groups living in the different regions of the country. It is hard to find a well-defined, demarcated and recognized regional, zonal and district level political boundaries between these diverse ethnic/clan groups mostly among the pastoral and agro-pastoral communities of Ethiopia while they have unique features of socio-cultural practices. Many of the various ethnic/clan groups are also mixed and intermingled with each other and share a common culture.

Although these multi-ethnic/clan groups share common culture, recurrent violent conflicts between ethnic/clan groups and even between communities of the same ethnic group were common in the region. However, the incidences of such violent conflicts and wars have been dramatically declining and consequently the ethnic-based boundaries were minimized following the formation of strong and centralized state since the 19th century and reached its climax in the 20th century during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie I (1930 – 1974) and that of the Dergue (1974 -1991) regimes. As a consequence, various ethnic/clan groups have co-existed for many centuries although there was people's perception of the feeling of suppressed hatreds, hostilities and domination of one group over the other during these successive regimes. The fact was that one group didn't dominate the other but political elites of certain groups did that and the whole group of which the elites belong should not be blamed. Following the rhetoric declaration of the revolution by the Degue (1974), the expectations among the various ethnic groups were highly scaled up particularly among the Oromos, Somalis, Afars and Tigreans, all of whom were striving for autonomy and/or independence (Berouk 2010).

As a result of these historical incidences attributed to the development of people's perception to the feeling of suppressed hatred, hostilities and domination of one group over the other in turn led to the emergence of ethnic-based ethno-national rebel groups and secessionist movements in the 1960s and 1970s (Berouk 2010). To mention some of the prominent rebel groups

are the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) in 1972, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in 1961, Afar Liberation Front (ALF) in 1976, Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in 1975, Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in 1976, Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in 1986, and Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) in 1961/1976 (Berouk 2010).

Ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia are now common and recurrent across the different regions where there are competing and divergent ethnic groups following the establishment of federal system by creating largely ethnic based territorial units (Alem 2003). Such conflicts are mostly due to resource based inter-ethnic conflicts and the competition for political representations (district, zonal, regional and federal level representations). During severe drought, the (agro) pastoral groups try to move out to their neighbouring rival groups crossing their border which leads them to violent conflicts (Stiles 1992). Inter group/ethnic conflict between (agro) pastoralists has been interpreted as a competition for pasture (Blench 1996) and also access to land and its natural resources (Taha 2007). This resource competition is also exacerbated by the intertwining factors of environmental degradation, population pressure, unequal distribution of power, lack of good governance and changing consumption pattern of the (agro) pastoralist communities (Homer- Dixon 2007).

Empirical studies show that the increasing nature of resource scarcity is the main cause of conflicts in different parts of the world (Homer-Dixon 2001; Tir and Diehl 1998; Hauge and Ellingsen 1998) particularly conflicts among the (agro) pastoral communities where resources are getting scarce and hence the competitions are becoming so intense. Access to scarce resources such as grazing lands and water points are the major causes of the Issa, Afar and Ittu conflicts that are historically documented in these areas (Getachew 2000 and 2001; Ayalew 2001, Markakis 2004). Similar studies in East Africa also show that resource scarcity is the principal cause for recurrent conflicts among different (agro) pastoral groups (Ayalew 2001; Opschoor 2001; Getachew 2001) and environmental scarcities have profound social consequences contributing to insurrections, ethnic clashes, urban unrest, and other forms of civil violence, especially in the developing world (Homer-Dixon 2001). However, the research hypothesized that it is not only resource scarcity that causes pastoral conflicts in the region but also other intertwining socio-economic and political factors.

The resource based ethnic conflicts are as a result of fluid and contested nature of ethnic geography² and when the new structure of the federal arrangement came into practice it is difficult to clearly demarcate their boundaries. When the political boundaries are demarcated, the different ethnic groups claim and the same territory not only for resources but also for their attachment to “their ancestral land” (identity issue) and political significance. These create ethnic tensions and animosities and gradually turn in to violent ethnic conflicts. Conflicts between (agro) pastoralists have existed for centuries in different forms and are not new phenomena in eastern Ethiopia and its neighbouring regions in the horn of Africa. The causes of ethnic conflicts among the Issa-Somali, Ittu-Oromo and Afar pastoralists in eastern Ethiopia are diverse, complex, and dynamic and are intertwined in its nature. However, the scenery of pastoral conflicts has been changing over time from traditional ways of confrontation to the use of modern automatic weapons which ultimately increased its devastating nature over the most vulnerable groups like women, children and the elderly.

According to Gedi (2005:46) various recent studies have stated that the Ethiopian local and regional level administrations have failed to provide timely and ‘lasting solutions’ to the longstanding and recurrent resource based inter-ethnic pastoral conflicts. Besides, the Ethiopian state interventions (both regional and federal level) are mostly limited and inclined towards coercion and as fire brigade rather than long-term oriented solutions in their attempts to contain and resolve resource-based and other inter-group conflicts (Hagmann and Mulugeta 2008). Moreover, community elders³ in Mieso district perceived that these conflicts in eastern Ethiopia have intensified and changed in their magnitude over the last three decades due to a range of factors including changes in the federal structure of Ethiopia, demographic pressure and the impacts of climate change and variability. The Afar, Issa-Somali and Ittu-Oromo pastoralists share common pastoral resources in the arid and semi-arid areas of eastern Ethiopia and the Afar and Issa-Somali in the republic of Djibouti. The (agro) pastoral conflicts in the

² Ethnic geography here refers to the geographical boundaries of the various ethnic groups that they owned/settled for long years and currently belong to that territory. It is the geographical boundary of a certain ethnic group indigenously administered by their respective ethnic leaders.

³ Interviews with community elders in Mieso town, April 24, 2014

study area in the previous times were less brutal and devastating as they mainly involved the use of traditional weapons such as bows, arrows and spears. However, due to the widespread availability of illegal small arms and light weapons that infiltrated through the porous boundaries of these pastoralist communities with the neighbouring countries, the conflict has significantly increased its lethality and severity as well as the actors involved in the conflict⁴.

Before the early 1990's when the ethnic-based federal structure by the Ethiopian constitution was introduced and implemented, these conflict prone areas (the study area) were generally governed under the Hararghe province during the Imperial regime and with two distinct Awrajas (provinces), namely the Adal and Gara Guracha Awraja for the Afar and Oromo ethnic groups, and that of the Issa and Gurgura Awraja for the Issa and Gurgura clans of Somali. During the Derge regime all the three ethnic groups in the area and their sub-clans were administered in the same province, i.e Hararghe province and with the administrative sub-province named as Issa, Adal and Gara Guracha Awraja. However, even during the two previous regimes, the areas had experienced a series of devastating conflicts (Harari Regional State Administration Archive, accessed on June 2014).

It was under such socio-cultural and political structure of the country that the Ethiopian Peoples Republic Democratic Front (EPRDF) has introduced the new system of ethnic based federalism as the best state structure and political-governance strategy to share power and decentralize political and economic governance in the country (Keller 2002). Ethiopia is constitutionally a federal state as of 1995 when the Ethiopian constitution recognized the rights of the different ethnic groups in the country to their language and culture. The constitution divided the country into largely nine ethnic-based federal states though it doesn't answer the questions of some nations and nationalities like the Sidama to be a state. The 1995 constitution hoped that the political paradigm of multi-ethnic federalism enhances the prospect for peace, stability, growth and development and redresses the

⁴ Some of the actors involved in pastoral conflicts in the area are (agro) pastoral communities, some administrative officials at various levels who have a stake in the conflict, the Diaspora community, the neighboring regional governments, ethnic based rebel groups/ secession movements in the area, contrabandists, among others.

socio-political and governance problems committed in the past (Assefa 2011).

However, ethnicity has become the primary means of ethnic mobilization as it is a rewarding strategy in that numerous conflicts (both political and violent), have been sparked by decentralization, and the success of the regional political elites in territorial gains render into more administrative power, land, tax revenue and food aid (International Crisis Group 2009). According to Mahmoud (2006), factors like the introduction of ethnic based regionalization, ethnic politics at the national level, and state implemented ethnic based boundaries are major causes of conflicts among feuding groups in southern and eastern Ethiopia, who have laid claims on crucial range of resources in certain pockets and on disputed boundaries which have strategic economic/political interests.

Furthermore, the new political and administrative arrangements under EPRDF gave the existing conflicts new shapes and paradigms. The conflicts are generally between the Oromo, Afar and Somali ethnic groups, where the three rival groups share porous and contested borders thereby serving as a fabric for ethno-political and ethno-territorial competition which is the feature of most inter-regional pastoral conflicts in Ethiopia. The regional boundaries between the three regional states are poorly defined and remained controversial and are rarely enforced. Most of the violent (agro) pastoral conflicts that occurred in the past few years in the study area were managed through the military interventions of the federal government in the form of fire brigade on temporary basis.

This research was conducted in areas where various ethnic groups belonging to the different regional states amidst existence of fluid and contested regional boundaries. This research was done in the pastoral and agro-pastoral conflict prone areas of eastern Ethiopia particularly in the Meiso-Mullu, Meiso and Amibara districts where it is inhabited by multi-ethnic/clans pastoral groups in the form of rivalries and competitions for resources. The primary actors of conflicts in the area are the Issa and Hawiya clans; the Afar; and the Ittu, Alla and Nolle clans, each representing the three different ethnic groups, namely the Somali, the Afar and the Oromo respectively. There are also secondary actors of the conflicting parties expressing their interests through the primary contenders or actors (Adan and Pkalya 2005) which further complicated the conflict situation such as the

federal and regional governments, zonal, district and kebele level administrators, NGOs, local elders, the Diaspora, opposition parties, rebel groups/secessionists; and others.

The study primarily focuses on conflicts that have been observed in recent times between the three rival ethnic/clan communities of eastern Ethiopia (Afar, Issa and Ittu and other Oromo clans in the area) that are located along the poorly demarcated and contested borders of the three different regional states, namely Oromia, Somali and Afar. The primary objective of the study is to assess the different kinds of causal factors for the occurrence of violent forms of recurrent conflicts among the various ethnic groups in the study area.

Methodology

The study area

The research was carried out in Eastern Ethiopia where the three distinct ethnic groups namely the Afar, Issa-Somali and Ittu clan of Oromo predominantly live together but violently. The Afar, Issa and Ittu clans belong to the Afar, Somali and Oromia Regional States of Ethiopia respectively. The research was carried out in Amibara district of Zone 3, Afar Regional State; Meiso Mullu district of Shinille zone, Somali Regional State and Meiso district of West Hararghe Zone, Oromia Regional State in eastern Ethiopia. The area is one of the most affected by the impacts of the recurrent conflict and drought conditions in Ethiopia which hampered to sustain the traditional modes of (agro) pastoral livelihoods. The study area is largely arid and semi-arid with high temperatures and low precipitation. The Issa clan inhabited Shinille zone of Somali region and borders with Djibouti and Somaliland in the north and east respectively; Jijiga zone in the southeast, and Oromia and Afar regions in the south and west respectively.

The dominant clan group in the zone is the nomadic Issa. Gurgura, Gedabursi and Hawiya clan groups are also the agro-pastoral residents in the zone. The Ittu, Alla and Nolle clans of Oromo ethnic group inhabited Meiso district, West Hararghe zone of Oromia Regional State. They are pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities. The Afar ethnic group particularly the Weima and Debnie clans inhabit the Afar Regional state bordering both Somali and Oromia regions.

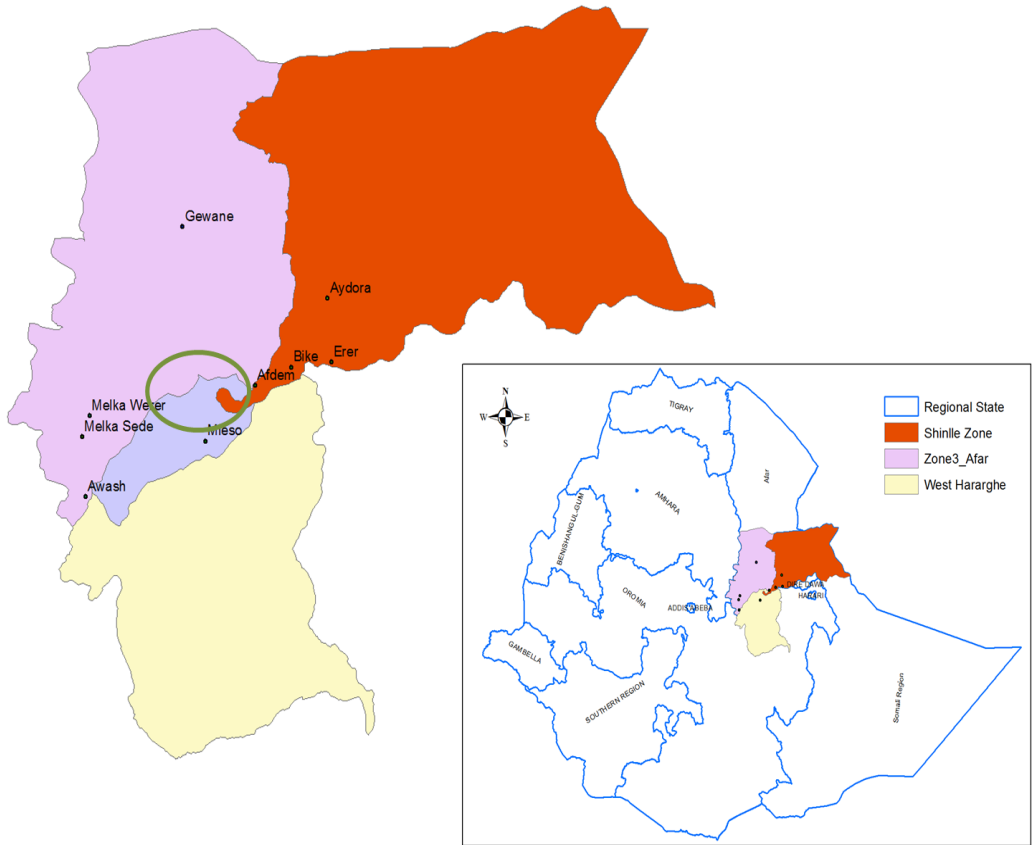


Figure 1: Map of the Study area (the three districts in the three zones in the circular area)

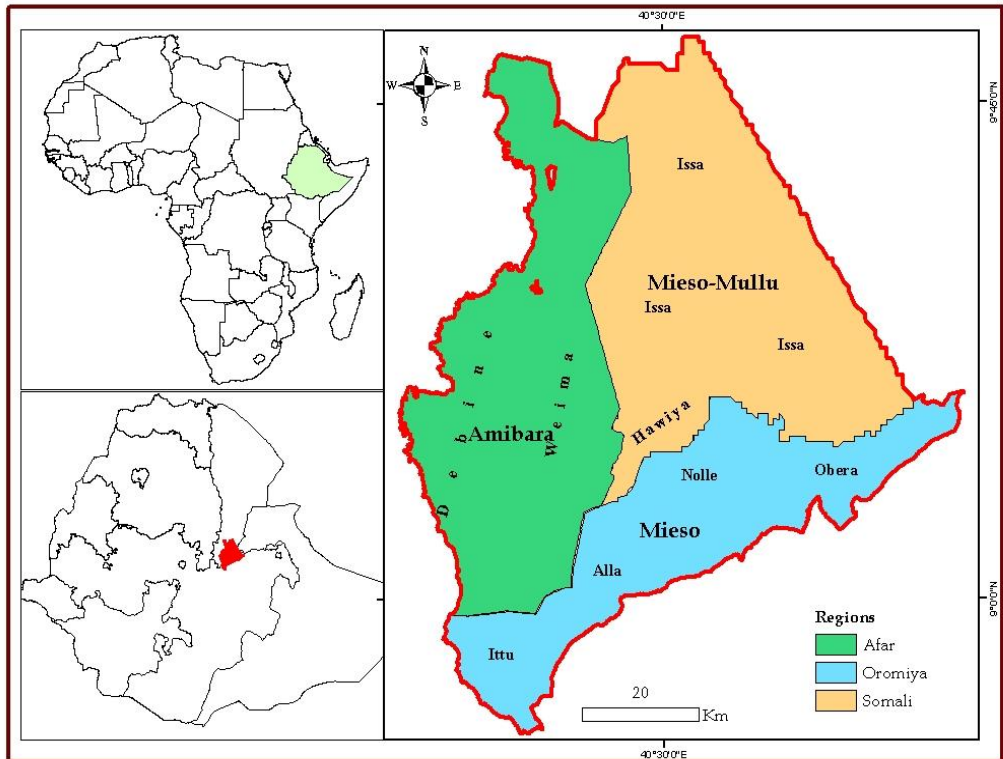


Figure 2: Map of the study area with clan distribution

Data and methods

We involved qualitative and quantitative information in our study. The quantitative data were generated through surveys in 128 randomly selected households of the Mieso-Mullu, Mieso and Amibara districts. The main questions covered in this topic were the perceptions of (agro) pastoralists to the factors encouraging the (agro) pastoral communities to instigate conflicts. They were also asked about the prevalence, trends and the factors for the increasing nature of violent conflicts. Based on the qualitative information gathered from the author's personal observations, key informant interviews

and focus group discussions, respondents were asked to rank on the survey determined with a five point Likert scale, namely (1) always, (2) mostly, (3) sometimes, (4) rarely and (5) none for the different alternatives given about how the different factors instigate conflicts and also contribute for the increase of violence in the area. Respondents were also given an opportunity to suggest additional factors not listed in the survey. The field work was conducted between February 2013 and November 2014.

A total of six kebeles⁵ (two kebeles from each district) were selected purposively based on the severity of drought and conflict situations while the 128 household heads for the survey were selected randomly from the six kebeles.

The qualitative data were generated through using semi-structured key informant interviews, focus group discussions, personal observations and informal discussions. In-depth interviews with key informants were conducted and data generated in order to have thick description of the events under discussion. Key informants and focus group discussion participants were selected based on their age and level of awareness about their culture, society and environment and heads of households and members holding positions in customary institutions preferred. A total of 16 Issa, 18 Ittu and 14 Afar for individual interviews; and 6 focus group discussions for each groups (Issa, Ittu and Afar) were conducted and the participants were selected from the (agro) pastoralists, clan leaders, community elders and representatives, zonal and district level officials of the three districts.

Secondary sources of both published and unpublished documents such as reports, letters, cases, and annual plans were also reviewed and analyzed thematically. The unpublished documents were found mostly in the archives of Harari regional state administration, the zone and district level administration and security, justice bureau, agriculture and natural resources offices of the three districts.

⁵ Kebele (Amharic word) is the lowest administrative unit below a district

Table 1: Description of livelihood type of sample respondents by district

No	Livelihood type of respondents	District						Total	
		Meiso-Mullu		Meiso		Amibara			
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Crop faming	0	0.0	4	9.5	0	0.0	4	3.1
2	Pastoralist	5	10.9	0	0.0	23	57.5	28	21.9
3	Agro-pastoralist	41	89.1	37	88.1	17	42.5	95	74.2
4	Other	0	0.0	1	2.4	0	0.0	1	0.8
5	Total	46	100	42	100	40	100	128	100

Respondents were asked to rate the causal factors instigating conflicts as very important, important, not sure, less important and not important. The result of the chi-square test indicates that the responses between the three study sites are significantly different in all factors that are encouraging the rival communities to instigate conflicts. This indicates that the perceptions to the response factors that are employed by the (agro) pastoral communities of the three study sites are different due to their difference in socio-economic, political and resource factors. Then index values were calculated to rank the perceptions by weighing the (agro) pastoralists' perception (within and between the study groups) and then by multiplying it with arbitrary values to each alternative. Accordingly, the factors encouraging the rival to instigate conflicts were ordered according to their importance.

Result and Discussion

The study primarily focuses on conflicts that have been observed in recent times between the three rival ethnic/clan communities of eastern Ethiopia that are located along the poorly demarcated and contested borders of the three different regional states. It focuses on the different kinds of causal factors that encourage the rival groups to instigate the violent forms of conflicts among the various ethnic/clan groups in the study area. The study

also focuses on the prevalence and trends of ethnic/clan conflicts among these rival groups. It also tries to assess the factors contributing for the increasing nature of conflicts among these ethnic groups for the last two and a half decades which are induced and aggravated by the historical, structural and temporal manifestations of conflicts among these ethnics/clans groups in the study area.

Description of the Sample Respondents

As shown in Table 1 the sample households in the Meiso-Mullu district of Somali region and Meiso district of Oromia region are largely agro-pastoralists (89% and 88% respectively), the neighbouring rival communities of Amibara district of Afar region are mixed (57.5% are pastoralists and 42.5% are agro-pastoralists). It is understood that the life style of agro-pastoralists is generally considered as sedentary in that only young members of the household temporarily move outside their homesteads in search of pasture and water.

Factors Encouraging the Rival (Agro) Pastoral Communities to Instigate Conflicts

(Agro) pastoral communities in the study area suffer from the recurrent conflicts for centuries. The mobility of the rival groups in and around the other localities and their actions against their rival groups, easy access and circulations of firearms and movement of armed groups are reported as ways of detecting the escalations of tensions and conflicts among the ethnic groups. The occurrence of recurrent and severe drought which has a direct implication on the availability of key natural resources particularly water and grazing lands is also reported as one of the indicators implicating the occurrence and escalations of tensions and conflicts in the area. The result of the chi-square test shows that the responses between the three study sites are significantly different at 1% in all factors that help to identify the escalations of tensions and conflicts in the area.

In addition to the perception of respondents on the manifestations of tensions and conflicts, attempt was also made to identify the conditions where the rival communities are encouraged to enter into violent forms of conflicts.

Identifying these factors will help to design policies and programs that build peace in the areas. The factors instigating conflicts among the (ago) pastoral communities are given Table 2 and discussed in the following few paragraphs.

Table 2: Factors encouraging the rival communities to instigate conflicts by district

Factors encouraging the rivals to instigate conflicts	Meiso-Mullu		Meiso		Amibara		Both (three)		Chi-square test
	Index	Rank	Index	Rank	Index	Rank	Index	Rank	
Occurrence of drought	1.97	1	3.35	1	4.26	1	8.23	1	43.1***
Prevalence of disease	1.10	12	1.58	10	2.52	9	4.42	1	27.6***
Decline in their income	1.45	8	2.56	5	3.00	6	6.02	8	26.0***
Consent of the officials	1.69	7	2.38	7	3.54	4	6.63	5	26.1***
Powerful group's conflict with our group	1.72	5	2.45	6	2.94	7	6.39	6	23.3***
Political instability	1.75	3	3.03	4	3.74	3	6.96	3	44.0***
When their income improves	1.17	10	1.56	11	2.05	12	4.44	10	17.2**
When they think that we are weak	1.72	5	1.97	8	2.77	8	6.03	7	13.6**
Easier access to weapon	1.29	9	3.09	3	3.76	2	6.76	4	45.4***
When there is territorial delineation	1.86	2	3.27	2	3.35	5	7.86	2	27.1***
Pressure from other groups	1.74	4	1.89	9	2.43	10	5.65	9	13.3**
When we get some benefits	1.12	11	1.49	12	2.17	11	4.06	12	39.5***

*** 1% significant level, ** 5% significant level

Respondents were asked to rate the factors that can encourage the rival communities to instigate violent conflicts as always, mostly, sometimes, rarely and none (Table 2). The result of the chi-square test indicates that the responses between the three study sites are significantly different in all factors that encourage the rival groups to instigate violent conflicts. This indicates that the factors that encourage the rival groups of the three study sites to instigate conflicts are different due to their different socio-economic, political and resource factors. Then index values were calculated to rank the perceptions by weighing the (agro) pastoralists' perception (within and between the study groups) and then by multiplying it with arbitrary values to each alternative. Accordingly, the factors that are expected to encourage the rival groups to instigate conflicts were ordered according to their importance.

Occurrence of drought and disease: The occurrence of drought which affects the availability of pasture and water as well as crop production in the rival community was ranked as first important factor by all sampled respondents of the three study sites with the response pattern being significantly different at 1% between the three study areas (Table 2). This implies that the main causes of violent conflicts in the study area are related to resource scarcity and its competition. Besides respondents were also asked to rate the occurrence of disease as a factor encouraging the rival communities to instigate conflicts and it was reported as the last 12th, 10th and 9th factor for Meiso-Mullu, Meiso and Amibara districts respectively. From the survey result it is reported that the eruptions of (agro) pastoralists' livestock diseases is not the main cause of violent conflicts in the study areas although it badly affects their livelihood strategies.

Decline of the income of the rival groups: When the income of the rival groups decline for any reason and their livelihood activity is threatened, there is the likely of entering into conflict, which is the eighth, fifth and sixth important factors instigating conflicts for Meiso-Mullu, Meiso and Amibara district respondents respectively. On the other hand, when the income of the rival groups improves, respondents of the three study sites reported that the likely of erupting conflicts is less compared to the other factors listed in the table above which is the 10th, 11th and 12th factor for the Meiso-Mullu, Meiso and Amibara districts respectively.

Consent of the administrative officials: Respondents were also asked to rate when the competing groups get the approval from their administrative officials at various levels such as kebele, district, zonal and regional to go to conflicts, they reported that it is the seventh for Meiso-Mullu and Meiso and the fourth important factor for Amibara district respondents respectively. This implies that selected administrative officials at different level who have their own personal interest (i. e conflict entrepreneurs) can fuel up/instigate (agro) pastoral conflicts while their culture and social bonding dictates that they have peaceful co-existence (sharing common market, inter-marriage especially among the Oromo with Somali, the Oromo with the Afar).

The culture of heroism and warfare among the pastoral communities is also scaled up when natural resources are getting scarce and hence the competition becomes intense among these ethnic/clan groups. Resource based conflicts (land, water and other and petty quarrels) are turned into ethnic tensions and take on ethnic dimensions due to politicized ethnicity and the current motto of ethnicized politics. This idea is supported by the works of Markakis (1998) and Balcha (2007) that many ethnic hostilities in the Horn Africa have occurred because of the scarcity of resources; however, after the 1991 policy change in Ethiopia resource based conflicts now easily flare up into bloody ethnic conflicts due to ethnic entitlements to such resources.

The consent of the administrative officials at regional, zonal, district and kebele levels indicated that selected individuals/administrative officials have personal interests in the violent forms of conflicts that encourages the rival (agro) pastoralist communities to get into conflict. One of the reasons for such individual interests is power competition within and between the regional states. This competition needs the support of their subordinates at grass root level (ethnic and clan members).

When a powerful group enter into conflict with another group: In such competition when a member of a powerful group spontaneously enters into conflict with another member of the rival group, there will be the outbreak of ethnic/clan based violent conflicts between these competing groups, the fifth, sixth and seventh important factors for the Meiso-Mullu, Meiso and Amibara district respondents respectively. In other words, the proposition of assessing the role of administrative officials in conflicts is that in the prevailing political situation where regional states are structured along ethnic lines, the resolution

of violent (agro) pastoral conflicts are mostly left to the military of the Federal Government. In this federal structural arrangement where territorial borders mostly in the (agro) pastoral areas are loosely defined, some local administrative officials could attempt to achieve some strategic and personalized objectives by motivating the local community to trigger conflicts. Hence, this research hypothesized that those local and regional administrative bodies could play a significant role in triggering conflicts by implicitly or explicitly encouraging their communities to activate the recurrent conflicts. One of the reasons behind this explanation is that the main source of conflict between the study communities of Meiso-Mullu, Meiso and Amibara districts seems to be motivated by selected administrative officials/bodies in that the reaction of the regional bodies is higher than the local communities and they are considered as conflict entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, due to the political elite's manipulations, the three ethnic/clan groups were forced to capitalize on their differences instead of their similarities. Community elders of the three districts reported that some political elites want to avert the referendum results by instigating tensions and conflicts among the (agro) pastoralist communities in the area. Due to such personal interests the (agro) pastoral communities were always under pressure by few elites at various levels that push them to engage into conflict with the other neighbouring pastoral ethnic/clan groups who used to live on peaceful terms.

When access to weapon is easier: Respondents have also reported that when it is easy for the rival groups to access automatic weapons, they are encouraged to trigger conflicts. The perceived importance of this factor in providing rivals to trigger conflicts differs between the three study areas. While the perceived importance of easy access to weapons as a factor for triggering conflict is stronger among respondents of Meiso and Amibara districts (3rd and 2nd most factor respectively), it is weaker among the Meiso-Mullu district sample respondents (9th factor). Easy access to weapons could provide them the courage to meet their economic and other interests through forceful means leading them to instigate conflicts. Michael et al (2002) argued that access to illegal arms is a cause of (agro) pastoral conflicts. Whether the presence of easy access to weapon leads to violent conflicts or not can depend on many other factors such as the presence of strong rule of law, the accommodativeness of society, the surveillance system, etc. Easy access to

weapon by the poor, disintegrated and divided society becomes the sources of social, economic and political crisis. The respondents of Meiso and Amibara districts, including administrative bodies, reported that their rival Issa clan of Somali have not only the access weapon (due to their location), every individual Issa clan member has also the legal right to have gun in the sense of protecting their livestock from the attacks of wild animals. They complained that the government is not providing equal right to access to weapon. Whatever, unequal access to weapon coupled with these various socio-economic, institutional and political environments can provide some groups the courage to take forceful measures over others. In other words, the presence of power asymmetry between rival groups exacerbates the tensions and conflicts and also has its own repercussions on the resolution and negotiation processes. According to Beyene (2007), the existence of power asymmetry coupled with other factors among the rival groups in Meiso area is a cause of conflicts.

When there is territorial delineation: The presence of territorial demarcation around the contested regional borders were reported by the sample respondents as the most important factor that encourages the rival communities to instigate conflicts, which is ranked as the 2nd factor for both Meiso-Mullu and Meiso district respondents and the 5th for respondents of Amibara district. This demarcation is the result of the implementation of ethnic based regional administration in the country which created a fertile ground for ethnic conflicts among the (agro) pastoralists of eastern Ethiopia.

Border demarcations usually take place after the referendum results are officially announced on contested areas of Oromia and Somali Regional States. A case in point is the Oromo who were displaced from Bike of Somali region and settled in Meiso town, and the Somali who were displaced from Bordede and Meiso town of Oromia region and settled in Meiso-Mullu district of Somali region in a new settlement site named Hardim. However, there is a controversy on this place that Hardim is not under the district of Meiso-Mullu rather it is an illegal settlement by the Hawiya Somali on the area between Oromia and Afar regional states. The field based assessment revealed that this displacement and resettlement of people is due to the ethnic based conflicts over the control of certain territories and its subsequent referendum which took place in 2004 among the contested areas between Somali and Oromia regional states. This implies that in the timeline of

conflict analysis, conflicts erupt in the area when there are referendums on contested localities and the announcement of their results as well as demarcations of boundaries. In connection with this view, it is now common that ethnic based federal arrangement in Ethiopia has enforced ethnic entitlement of land and other local resources in the delimited ethnic constituencies or ethnic homelands and thereby becoming an obstacle for intra-regional and inter-regional people's movement as it creates fear and suspicion among the different ethnic groups (Balcha 2007).

For example, the 2004 referendum between Somali regional state and Oromia regional state on disputed kebeles and districts negatively impacted on the increasing tensions and ethnic cleavages, to some extent to the intension of "ethnic cleansings" of one over the other as if someone who is out of place is considered as a threat for the next referendum which resulted in forced human displacements from their work/living areas. A case in point is the 920 households⁶ who were displaced from the various kebeles and districts of Shinlle zone of Somali regional state like Erer, Gotta, Bike, Afdem, etc who were settled in the north west outskirts of the town of Meiso, Meiso district of West Hararaghe zone. Mieso district administrative officials reported that it was only for the 836 households that were able to construct houses with the help of the Oromia regional government and some NGOs who are working in the area. On the other side, officials further added that large numbers of Somalis were also displaced from the different kebeles and districts of the Afar and the Oromia regions following the 2004 referendum announcement results.

No attempts of border demarcations were made between Afar and Somali and Afar and Oromia Regional States. Since the key natural resource such as grazing land, water points, arable land and forests are getting scarce and scarce; there are multiple claims over the access and ownership of such scarce resources. Due to this, the (agro) pastoral communities are always alert and sensitive for any attempts to assign/relocate these resources to another community during the referendum. When they perceive that such acts disfavours their interests, one of the rival community attempts to instigate conflicts over the other. This implies that border delineations among the competing groups in contested areas are being carried out before reaching

⁶ Interview with the Mieso district administration, April 27, 2014

agreements between the claimants group on key principles and functional ground rules and procedures upon which the border delineation will be made and enforced. It could also be the fact that there is no rule of law governing and enforcing defiance to the decision.

Occurrence of political instability: The survey result also showed that the prevalence of political/social instability within the community encourages the rivals to instigate violent conflicts. This is straight forward that the existence of political instabilities provides the stronger groups a better opportunity to revenge past harms, to own resources, or just to show their power/superiority over the weaker groups. Since intervention of the Federal Government and the administrative bodies on violent conflicts are easier in time of stability, it is likely that instability especially political one reduce such interventions. While both the respondents of Meiso-Mullu and Amibara districts ranked the prevalence of political/social instability as the 3rd important factor in instigating rivals to trigger conflicts, respondents of Meiso district ranked it as the 4th important factor with the pattern of responses being different at 1% significance level.

When one group believe that their rivals have weak cohesion: Respondents were also asked to rate their perception that rivals get the courage to instigate conflicts when they think that their competitors have weak cohesions due to political/social instabilities and other manmade and natural calamities. Accordingly, respondents of Meiso-Mullu district ranked it as the 5th important factor that encourages the rivals to instigate conflicts while respondents of both Meiso and Amibara districts ranked it as the 8th important factor.

Incidence of pressure from other powerful groups: The other factor that forces one community to instigate conflict over another is the incidence of pressure from other powerful groups. When one stronger group pressurize the other weaker group, the weaker group can attempt to transfer the pressure onto another weakest group. The perceived importance of this factor in providing rivals to trigger conflicts differs between the three study areas. While the perceived importance of this pressure as a factor for triggering conflict is stronger among respondents of Meiso-Mullu district (4th), it is weaker among Meiso and Amibara districts (9th and 10th) respectively. The survey result also

showed that in all selected districts of the sampled respondents, the factor community went in to conflicts when the rivals get some benefits from governmental and a non-governmental organization is ranked as the least factor in instigating conflicts.

In general, the FGD participants at Meiso further concluded that the elites at kebele, district, zonal, and regional level have repetitively devised new and divergent forms of mechanisms in creating tensions and conflicts if they got dissatisfactions in their political positions. Some of their mechanisms of creating tensions and conflicts in the community are the promotions and practice of illegal resettlements on contested areas. Second, the erecting of the regional flags outside of their respective administrative regional boundaries which has its own implications on the question of ownership rights of such areas. Third, the illegal constructions of schools, health post and other infrastructures on contested and unclear boundary areas so as to claim the area as if it is theirs. Fourth, the establishment of illegal custom posts/check points on disputed areas. These check points named by the Somali as Genda Aliware are temporary which are only for market days. Best examples of such custom posts in the area are a check point at Qiqiliftu and Derba Woltane kebeles. In connection to this factor, there is the practice of illegal and un-proportional tax collection from both the Somalis and the Oromos on market days. Fifth, the political elites also practiced the collection of forced tax revenues from pastoral and agro-pastoral residents outside of their administrative areas usually on contested localities.

The prevalence of violent conflicts in the study area

The survey result showed that there is a significant difference in the frequency of violent conflicts between the three study districts (Table 3). According to the sample respondents, 31% replied that violent conflict in Meiso-Mullu district of Somali region with the neighbouring communities of Oromia and Afar regions occurs once every year, while 24.4% of the respondents reported that it occurs more than twice a year and an equal proportion of them also reported that it depends from year to year. A low proportion of respondents (2.2%) reported that violent conflicts in Meiso-Mullu district occur rarely while about 8.9% of the sample respondents replied that it occurs twice every year and the same number of respondents reported that it is difficult to determine. Of the total respondents of Meiso

district, 29.3% reported that violent conflicts in the area occur twice a year and an equal proportion of respondents (29.3%) still reported that it occurs more than twice a year. About 36.6% of the respondents reported that it differs from year to year. On the other hand, 28.9% of the respondents of Amibara district reported that violent conflicts in the area occur roughly twice every year, only 10.5% reported that it occurs at least once in a year as well as it is difficult to determine and an equal proportion of respondents have also reported as it is rarely frequent and the remaining 21.1% of the respondents reported that it varies from year to year.

Table 3: The prevalence of violent conflicts in the three districts

No	Frequency of violent conflicts	District						Total	
		Meiso-Mullu		Meiso		Amibara			
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Once every year	14	31.1	4	9.8	4	10.5	22	17.7
2	Twice every year	4	8.9	12	29.3	11	28.9	27	21.8
3	More than twice a year	11	24.4	12	29.3	7	18.4	30	24.2
4	Rarely	1	2.2	0	0.0	4	10.5	5	4.0
5	Varies from year to year	11	24.4	7	17.1	8	21.1	26	21.0
6	Difficult to determine	4	8.9	6	14.6	4	10.5	14	11.3
7	Total	45	100	41	100	38	100	124	100
8	Pearson Chi-Square	20.7***							

*** 1% significant level

A detailed examination of the result at kebele level showed that the incidences of conflicts between kebeles vary within districts. The kebele level distribution showed that some (agro) pastoral communities experience more frequent conflicts than others. From the sampled kebeles of the three districts, the most conflict prone areas are Hulka Doba, Hameti-Metadehima and Qurqura kebeles. Hulka Doba predominantly inhabited by Hawiya clan of Somali borders with the rival clan and ethnic groups of Issa Somali, Afar and Oromo. Hameti-Metadehima is also one of the most conflict prone areas of Meiso district in which conflicts basically occur with their rival Issa pastoralist groups in and around the Assebot Mountain. On the other hand, Qurkura kebele is a junction for the three contending parties (Hawiya in alliance with Issa, Afar and Oromo primarily Ittu) in and around Hardim,

Bordede, Birgade and North West of Assebot Monastery and, therefore, it is one of the most conflict prone areas in the region where one can observe intermittent violent conflicts among the rival groups.

Furthermore, FGD participants at the Meiso district Security Office reported that the Somali Regional State has also its hands in mobilizing the well trained and armed soldiers in attacking the civilian pastoralists in Obensa kebele of Meiso district. According to these FGD participants, at Obensa, elderly women were raped, several houses were burned, and there was also the loss of human lives. Security officers also added that well trained and armed soldiers moved through a Red Cross's vehicle from Shinlle zone into Obensa and Hardim areas where there was fresh and fierce fighting. The use of the Red Cross vehicle for armies' transportation was against the rule of International Red Cross Association because a vehicle or any other resource allotted to humanitarian assistance should not be used for military purposes⁷.

The trend of violent conflicts over the past 25 years in the study area

As shown in Table 4, the majority (87.2%) of the respondents of Amibara district believed that incidences of violent conflict over the past 25 years has increased and the rest of the respondents (12.2%) believed that there is no change in the trend of conflicts. Sampled respondents in this district believed that the conflict trend over the past 25 years is increasing. Almost the same percent of respondents in Meiso district (85%) replied that it is increased, 10% of them responded that it is decreased and the rest 5% responded that there is no change at all in the trend of violent conflicts. With regard to the Meiso-Mullu sampled respondents, 71.4% of them reported that the trend of violent conflicts over the past 25 years has increased, only 2.4% replied that it has decreased and the rest 26.2% reported that there is no change in its trend. The result of the chi-square test shows a significant difference between the three sampled districts. A detailed inspection on the result at kebele level shows that it has increased in some sample kebeles and no change in others. About 19%, 35% and 26.3% of the Kurfasewa Shinlle, Hulka Doba and Qurqura respondents respectively reported that there is no change in the trend of violent conflicts in the study area. On the other hand all the respondents (100%) of Awash Arba kebele of Amibara district, 90% of Hameti

⁷ Interview with Meiso district Security Officers, October 07, 2013

Metadehima and 80% of Sodomugoru Misra kebeles of Meiso district and 81% of Kurfasewa Shinlle kebele of Mullu district reported that it has increased. This indicates that the trend in the frequency of violent conflicts in all the sampled kebeles is generally increasing though there are some differences in the degree of responses. The reason for the increase of violent conflicts in the study area is the scarcity of natural resources and its competition which is impacted by the recurrent drought in the region as a result of climate change and also due to the increase in population pressure. Community elders in the study area also reported that the absence of clear and agreeable regional borders among these rival groups is also a cause for violent conflicts when one group claimed and encroached a certain territory.

Table 4: The trend of violent conflicts over the past 25 years by district

No	How is the trend of violent conflicts over the past 10 years?	District							
		Meiso-Mullu		Meiso		Amibara		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Increased	30	71.4	34	85.0	34	87.2	98	81.0
2	Decreased	1	2.4	4	10.0	0	0.0	5	4.1
3	No change	11	26.2	2	5.0	5	12.8	18	14.9
4	Total	42	100	40	100	39	100	121	100
5	Pearson Chi-Square	12.3**							

** 5% significant level

The field survey indicated that the extent of conflict among the different ethnic groups occur for a number of reasons. For instance, in the Sodomogoru Misra kebele of Meiso district, the source of conflict is competition over farmland and water. The majority of the population in these kebeles is agro-pastoralist; they are always in competition on fertile land for crop production

with the neighbouring Hawiya clan of Somali. In these kebeles the main source of water for both competing groups is the Hassen Chero water point (Ella) which is found at Sodomogoru Misra kebele at a distance of almost 2km from Meiso town to the south east direction. The two groups have currently equal access to the water point, but their conflict is on the claim of property rights ownership. Such conflicts of ownership rights between different users of these scarce resources are quite common phenomena everywhere.

However, the conflict becomes intense, severe, frequent, and violent if the two groups of users differ in their ethnic groups and if there is no clearly defined property rights ownership among the different users. Apart from the historical hatred that can fuel the resource competition into conflict, differences in ethnicity can make cooperation in the distribution and management of resources difficult. So as to manage such types of conflicts effectively, it is now required more than the involvement of customary institutions which were previously the most effective conflict management institutions in most (agro) pastoral communities. The functions of customary institutions are now restricted in resolving and managing conflicts if the rival groups belong to the same ethnic/clan identity. This is because the contending parties have strong connectors which strengthen their social ties. Connectors are those factors that promote people to remain connected across sub-group lines despite the divisions created through the conflict.

Some of the commonly observed connectors are the common culture (norms, values, principles, sanctions, beliefs manifested in their language and religion), inter-clan/ethnic marriage alliances, and celebrating festivals at different occasions, celebrating ritual ceremonies, and social service providing institutions. According to Turner (1969), rituals play an important role in achieving and enhancing the societal oneness, in his term 'communitas'. Turner (1969) further elaborated that rituals are social drama that resolve crises by dramatizing the advantages of cultural values, principles, sanctions and social arrangements. Ritual ceremonies are performed in response to the breach of law during times of societal conflicts to restore the fractured social order and maintain the status quo. Such ritual practices are performed in societies for the intended purpose of restoring and maintaining the social order if the rival groups who are engaged in blood feud

belong to the same ethnic groups having common moral values, principles, and sanctions that are commonly governed by their customary institutions.

However, if such conflicts are between different ethnic groups having different cultural background, the various differences among the rivals coupled with the historical animosities may hinder the (agro) pastoral customary institutions to effectively deal with the inter-ethnic conflicts. This is because the competitors have weak connectors and strong dividers. The dividers are those factors that divide the competing groups and identify/magnify the sources of tensions such as revenge killings/blood feud, the practice of theft of property and cattle raiding, the actions and propaganda of conflict entrepreneurs, border disputes, hatred and historical enmities, and the like. As a result of this, the involvement of the modern system of conflict management and resolution composed of various agencies at various levels is now required to resolve and manage such inter-ethnic conflicts.

Sampled respondents were also asked about the status of modern/legal institutions to deal with the existing conflicts in the study area. The majority of respondents in Meiso (78.6%) and Amibara (60.0%) districts reported that they are not strong enough to deal with the existing conflicts while the majority of respondents (about 65.2%) in Meiso-Mullu reported that they are strong enough to deal with the existing conflicts. With regard to the status of customary institutions in dealing with the existing conflicts, all sampled respondents in Amibara (100%) and 66.7% of respondents in Meiso districts reported that customary institutions are no more strong enough to deal with the existing conflicts while 73.9% of the Meiso-Mullu sampled respondents reported that they are still strong enough to deal with the current conflicts.

3.5. Factors contributing for the increasing nature of violent conflicts

The reasons for the increasing nature of violent conflicts in the study area are diverse and complex in nature. Some of the factors contributing for the increasing nature of violent conflicts in the area but with various degrees of influence are the increase in resource scarcity, the absence of well-defined property rights, the weakness of local institutions to enforce property rights, the weakness of legal systems, the biased political treatment between administrative regions, and the like. The result of the chi-square test shows that there is no significant difference in the response of the sampled respondents to the factors for the increasing nature of violent conflicts among the three study sites. This implies that the responses of all sampled respondents across the three districts and kebeles towards the factors contributing for the increasing nature of violent conflicts in the area are almost the same.

Table 5: Reasons for the increase of violent conflicts by district

No.	Reasons for the increase of violent conflicts			Response	District						Total		Chi-square
					Meiso Mullu		Meiso		Amibara				
					N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
1	The absence of well-defined property right	Yes	28	90.3	30	83.3	34	94.4	92	89.3	2.4		
		No	3	9.7	6	16.7	2	5.6	11	10.7			
		Total	31	100	36	100	36	100	103	100			
2	Weak customary institutions	Yes	30	96.8	31	88.6	31	91.2	92	92.0	1.6		
		No	1	3.2	4	11.4	3	8.8	8	8.0			
		Total	31	100	35	100	34	100	100	100			
		Yes	28	90.3	31	86.1	33	97.1	92	91.1	2.6		

3	Weak legal system	No	3	9.7	5	13.	1	2.9	9	8.9	
						9					
		Tota	3	100	3	100	3	100	101	100	
		l	1		6		4				
4	Due to biased political treatment between regions	Yes	22	71.0	22	61.1	27	79.4	71	70.3	2.8
		No	9	29.0	14	38.9	7	20.6	30	29.7	
		Total	31	100	36	100	34	100	101	100	
5	Due to increased resource scarcity	Yes	30	96.8	33	91.7	29	90.6	92	92.9	1.0
		No	1	3.2	3	8.3	3	9.4	7	7.1	
		Total	31	100	36	100	32	100	99	100	

There is the absence of well-defined property rights ownership among the pastoral and agro-pastoral communities of Ethiopia. Vital resources like grazing lands and water points are communally owned, accessed and managed by the customary institutions. However, the roles of customary institutions have gradually declined while the modern systems are not yet fully implemented in most (agro) pastoral areas. Modern pastoral land tenure system which ensures the land ownership rights of pastoralists is not yet functional. The survey result showed that 90.3 %, 83.3% and 94.4% of the respondents of Meiso-Mullu, Meiso and Amibara districts respectively reported that (agro) pastoral conflicts in eastern Ethiopia are increasing from time to time due to the absence of well-defined property rights particularly water points and grazing lands which are their key natural resources next to livestock.

The gradual decline and weakness of customary institutions to enforce communal property rights is also reported by the sample respondents (about 96.8 %, 88.6 % and 91.2 % of Meiso-Mullu, Meiso and Amibara districts respectively) as a factor contributing for the increasing nature of violent

(agro) pastoral conflicts. The ownership, access and management of pastoral commons as well as managing and resolving conflicts were the duties and responsibilities of customary institutions for long centuries. They were more effective and efficient in their applications than the modern institutions. However, these days the roles of customary institutions in inter-ethnic conflict resolutions in particular and the overall societal day to day affairs in general are becoming minimal for various reasons. As a result there is the need for the involvement of the modern system of resolving such conflicts.

Furthermore, increased resource scarcity is reported to be the most significant factor contributing for the increasing nature of (agro) pastoral conflicts in all sampled kebeles of Meiso-Mullu, Meiso and Amibara districts as 96.8%, 91.7% and 90.6% respectively. (Agro) pastoral resources are getting scarcer due to the influence of climate change and variability and population pressure. The competition over such scarce resources fuelled by the mismanagement of vital resources and the politicization of ethnicity aggravates the frequency of (agro) pastoral inter-ethnic/clan conflicts in the area. This is primarily due to the politicization and ethnicization of regional boundaries that hinders the traditional practices of accessing the grazing communal lands across regional borders that helps the (agro) pastoralists to increase their productivity through mobility as well as to survive the recurrent and prolonged drought seasons on the core principles of reciprocity, tolerance and mutual benefit. The conflict due to resource competition creates one of the greatest insecurity challenges to the (agro) pastoral production systems of the Afar, Issa and Oromo in eastern, north eastern and southern Ethiopian lowlands (Getachew 2000).

In addition, the perceptions of sampled respondents towards the influence of biased political treatment between regions is reported to be less compared to the other factors though there are beliefs and responses from the focus group discussions and key informant interviews that these competing groups with their administrative regions are not equally treated. The Afar and the Oromos are accused by the Issa-Somalis for being allowed by both the regional and Federal governments to their unrestricted influx and armed with modern automatic weapons while the former were prohibited access/own and having very few registered weapons only in the hands of kebele militias. This creates power asymmetry between the rival groups. The Somalis on the other hand have counter responses to their rivals that this is a false accusation and

they believed that the Issa-Somali are marginalized and ignored in development interventions while they are living in harsh environmental conditions. They also confirmed that they have light weapons for the primary purpose of protecting their cattle from the attacks of wild animals.

Conclusion and the way forward

Conclusion

Ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia are now common and recurrent across the different regions where there are competing and divergent ethnic groups following the establishment of federal system by creating largely ethnic based territorial units (Alem 2003). Such conflicts have existed for centuries in different forms and are not new phenomena in eastern Ethiopia and its neighbouring regions in the horn of Africa. The causes of ethnic conflicts among the pastoralists in Eastern Ethiopia are diverse, complex, and dynamic and are intertwined in nature. Some of these factors identified in this research are the occurrence of drought which affects the availability of pasture and water as well as crop production in the rival community, when the income of the rival groups decline for any reasons and their livelihood activity is threatened, when the rival groups get consent from the political bodies, the presence of territorial demarcation around the contested regional borders, when the rival have easy access and circulations of fire arms, among others.

In more vulnerable (agro) pastoral communities of eastern Ethiopia where they are economically very poor, their easy access to illegal weapons can be very chaotic and problematic in their day to day life. In communities where the institutional and technological environment is weak to enforce the rule of law, the administrative structure is ethnic-based, the competitions over deteriorating natural resources are stiff, the property rights are weakly defined and poorly enforced, and more importantly in a situation where the weapons are easily accessible only to some groups, force becomes the rule of every game which is the characteristics of most (agro) pastoralist societies in eastern Ethiopia in particular and the Horn of Africa in general.

The way forward

Interventions by the military of the Federal Government should not only be a fire brigade service rather there should be a long lasting solution to the

problem which requires a holistic and integrated approach towards creating strong institutions that constrain opportunistic actions, enforce human and property rights, and promote cooperation. The introduction of ethnic based federalism in Ethiopia restricts easy movement of pastoralists across regions and even national borders in search of pasture and water. This requires the attention of the policy makers for the recognition to the flexibility/mobile nature of pastoral ways of life during drought seasons irrespective of manmade regional boundaries. If not possible, there should be another alternative solution to the deteriorating environmental conditions which put pastoralism under pressure as a livelihood strategy. The absence of clearly defined regional boundaries and that of the property right regimes in the pastoral areas of eastern Ethiopia is a deep rooted problem and cause for most pastoral conflicts in the region. Therefore, there is an urgent need to address such problems by clearly demarcating the contested regional boundaries and also addressing land tenure issues.

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