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Inter-Ethnic Pastoralist Conflict and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in South West Ethiopia Regional State: The Case of Suri and Dizi Communities

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the causes, consequences and conflict resolution mechanisms of inter-ethnic pastoralist conflicts in South Western Ethiopia focusing on the Dizzi-Suri pastoralist communities. To this end, the study employed a qualitative research approach. Non-probability sampling design was used and informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Tribe leaders, elders, iconic community representatives, youths and concerned government bodies were the sources of the primary data and hence diverse voices of the study communities were heard. In doing so, primary data were collected through in-depth interviews, key informant interviews and focused group discussions. The collected data were analyzed and discussed using the thematic analysis technique. The study found that the causes of conflicts between Dizzi and Suri pastoralist communities are either externally or internally rooted. The external causes are entrenched from the attacks of the external forces mostly from the Toposa Bumi tribe of South Sudan. Internally, the established harmful traditions of the local communities like the tradition of giving a high amount of dowry during marriage arrangements and revenge encourage the community members to rob livestock are the major causes of conflicts. Competitions over resources, illegal trading and illegal fire arming are other causes of conflicts in the area. Government officials and security forces are found to have aggravating roles in the existing conflicts in the area. Loss of human life, erosion and disruption of social interaction, revenge, displacement and disruption of basic public institutions are some of the social crises resulting from the conflicts that happened at different times. The local communities are feeling as if they are politically marginalized by the federal government. Implementation of different peace-making tools like community mobilization, consultation and peace campaigns were in place to resolve the bloody conflicts in the area. Reconciliation focused on rebuilding social interaction between the Dizzi and Suri pastoralist communities was also the focus of the intervention. In a nutshell, the study found that the nature of conflict is found to be long-lasting; its causes and actors are multidimensional; its consequences are complicated and devastative. However, the resolution mechanisms in place to manage and end the conflict are found to be very limited and not effective. Thus, to resolve the long-lasting conflicts of the area, informal traditional conflict resolution mechanisms should be seriously considered towards reconciliation, rebuilding of the eroded social interaction, and genuine community consultations to end the conflict.

Introduction

Pastoralism is a subsistence pattern in which people make their living by tending domesticated animals and those who make their living in pastoralism are called Pastoralists (Rweyemamu, 2019). According to Jobbins & McDonnell (2021), it is an umbrella term that covers diverse cultural practices and modes of livestock mobility, including nomads who are continuously on the move and cover thousands of miles year-round to seminomadic herders whose livestock move seasonally or only over short distances. For researchers like Daniel et al, (2017), pastoral communities differ from other populations by certain common characteristics. Pastoralists derive a substantial share of their livelihoods from livestock and share communal rangeland resources.

According to Mkutu, (2001), pastoralists constitute a significant portion of world population. As to him, 500–600 million people live in the arid and semi-arid parts of the world out of them 30–40 million depend entirely on animals and 50–60% is found in Africa. Thus, the Horn of Africa contains the largest grouping of pastoralists in the world. Regionally, Sudan has the highest pastoralist percentage globally while Somalia and Ethiopia rank third and fifth respectively. In Djibouti, one third of the population is pastoralist. The semi-arid and arid areas in the Horn make up 70% of the total land area, which provides an average of 20 to 30 percent of GDP. At the local level, as much as 70% of cash income is generated from livestock (Ibid).

In Ethiopia, pastoralists comprise significant number of the population and occupy large areas of the country. In this regard, pastoralists in Ethiopia occupy 61% of the total territory of Ethiopia and are estimated to represent 12% of the population (Abdulahi, 2005). The majority of pastoralists in Ethiopia belong to the Somali, Boran and Afar groups. There are also some other small groups of pastoralists in western Ethiopia (Ibid). The Dizi and Surma communities are pastoral and agro-pastoral groups found in West Omo Zone of South western region of Ethiopia. These communities maintain amicable ties with each other through exchange of goods and services on the market, marriage and rituals. The prevailing patterns of interactions between the Dizi and Surma are sometimes cooperative and sometimes conflict-ridden and the conflict and violence are more intense and destructive (Abeje, 2006).

Despite the above facts, pastoral areas in the Horn of Africa are found to be conflict hotspots (Bekele, 2010). Violent conflicts involving pastoralists have become widespread and increasingly severe throughout much of the Horn of Africa (Abdulahi, 2005). Relating to this, Getachew (2001) claims that pastoral communities in the lowland areas of Ethiopia face more threats to their mode of life and survival nowadays than earlier times. In the post-1991 period, several episodes of inter-communal tensions and conflicts over territorial issues have taken place between regional boundaries. To mention a few, inter-ethnic conflicts between the Borena and the Gerri, the Afar and the Issa, the Guji and the Gedo, the Issa and the Ittu-Kereyu, and the Afar and the Kereyu Oromo, Boran and Digodi are reflections of the current inter-ethnic and pastoralists conflicts in Ethiopia across and across the border in Kenya (IPSS, 2012: Asnake, 2002).

According to Sisay (2007), pastoralist ethnic conflicts in are clashes among two or more ethnic groups due to demand for power, resources, identity, social status and the like. It refers to situations where people mobilize against others on the basis of their ethnic identity. Conflicts increasingly present themselves as ethnic conflicts with ethnic identity serving and instrumentalised as the rallying point or the mobilization agent for the manifestation of the conflicts.

There are different causes of conflicts in the pastoralist communities. Political marginalization, frequent and serious droughts, lack of equitable access to water resources, increased competition for available land between ranchers, agriculturalists and pastoralists and wildlife, land tenure, weakening of traditional governance, insecurity, cattle rustling and small arms are found to be the major factors of conflict in pastoralist areas (Mkutu, 2001). Likewise, as a research conducted by IPSS (2012) indicated that

competitions over pasture, water and livestock raiding have been ongoing causes of pastoralist conflicts. Decline of local traditional institutions, contested borders, poor governance, cultural practices intensified and shaped by political factors, particularly, the interventions of the government and local administrations, changes in administrative boundaries have been other causes for pastoralists' conflict

Conflicts

caused by the above mentioned factors have resulted in many negative and devastative impacts. Raiding cattle, killing and kidnapping people on intermittent basis are some consequences of conflicts in pastoralist areas (Abeje, 2006). On the other hand, the volatile border areas have become a safe haven for criminals due to mistrust and lack of political and social will to hand over criminals and bring them to justice by the governments and the communities in focus (IPSS,2012).

According to Dagne (2009), the adverse effects of violent ethnic conflict and classifies into three categories. Ethnic conflict could be resulted in political, economic and socio-cultural effects. The political effect of ethnic conflict could be the weakening, disintegrate and possible collapse of the central government. What is hinted here is that ethnic conflict can play a crucial role both in the collapse of the central government; and at the extreme cases, the disintegration of the country totally. Ethnic conflict leads, to the breakdown of law, order and stability. From economic angle, ethnic conflict destroys the very bases of development: environmental resources, economic infrastructure, deter long run investment and the productive labor force will be drained, hence production and productivity decline. The Social upshot of inter-ethnic conflict concerns loss of social services, displacement of people as refugees, humanitarian crisis, vulnerable groups Women, children, and the old as well as the disabled who often seriously affecting.

Regardless of the difference causes, efforts have been made to manage conflicts happened in between pastoral groups. For instance, Gereb is a joint institution which functions as an indigenous court run by a council of elders from the Afar and the Wejerat (IPSS, 2012). According to Abeje (2006), restoring peace and stability through negotiation is a prerequisite for the development of the Maji area. There is a need to encourage the participation of indigenous clan-based institutions in dealing with disputes between the two ethnic groups. Elders of conflicting groups and their respective social organization can play an important role in resolving ethnic conflicts.

Even though, different studies (Abeje,2006; Abdulahi, 2005; Asnake, 2002, Getachew; 2001; Mkutu, 2001) have been conducted so far on the issue across different times and cultural settings, the nature, causes, consequences and resolution mechanisms of conflicts in pastoralists' area is dynamic along with time and culture of the communities. On the other hand, pastoralist conflicts have changing nature along with time. Apparently, the destructive consequence of pastoralist conflict continues yet. More importantly, as preliminary report of south western regional state police commission showed that there is destructive conflict between Dizzi and Surma pastoralist communities. Due to this reason, it is logical to conduct timely and culture specific research on the area.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the inter-ethnic pastoralist conflicts happened between Dizzi and Suri communities of South West Regional State since 2018 political reform. It specifically addresses the causes, consequences and efforts made to resolve the conflicts.

Study setting and methods

Study Site

The study was conducted in Surma and Bero Pastoralist woreda of West Omo Zone, found in the newly established South West Regional state. Officially the South West Ethiopia Peoples' Region is a regional state in southwestern Ethiopia. It was split off from the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) on 23 November 2021 after a successful referendum.

West Omo Zone is located in South West regional state of Ethiopia's southern margin bordering Kenya. The area is dominantly inhabited by the Dizi, and Suri and communities. The Suri community in Surma woreda is agro-pastoralist while the community in Bero woreda (Dizi and other ethnic communities) is predominantly agriculturalist The suri occupy the southwesterly outpost of the country numbering 20,572 people (Abeje, 2006). On the other hand, the Dizi occupy the South Westerly central plateau of the former Maji province, presently Bero wereda. The Bero wereda is bordered in the East by Omo River; in the West by Gambella, in the North by Me'ent wereda, in the South by Surma wereda, and South Omo zone. The first national population census in 1984 put the population of Dizi at 20,066, and ten years later the 1994 population and housing census came up with 22,346 persons (Center of Excellence International Consult, 2021). Three kebeles from each woredas namely Kibish, Anjo and Borka Kebeles from Surma Woreda and Jeba, Donta and Siri kebeles from Bero woreda were purposively selected for this study. The rationale of selecting these two woredas is due to the existence of frequent conflict between the two pastoralist communities.

Methods

The study employed a cross-sectional qualitative design where participants' lived experiences and knowledge regarding the frequent conflict happened between the Suri and Dizzi inter-ethnic pastoralist conflicts constituted the primary source of data. Data were collected using in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, and focused-group discussions. The qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews (11), key informant interviews (7), and 2 focused-group discussions (15). The participants for in-depth interviews and FGDs were selected using purposive qualitative sampling, where gender, age, ethnic representation, and lived experiences on the happened conflicts were considered. Women represented 27% of all the study participants. In terms of their ethnic representation, 55% were from Suri ethnic group and tribe and the remaining 45% were from Dizzi ethnic affiliation. In-depth and key informant interviews were held with clan and tribe leaders, elders, youths, police officers, and government officials of the two woredas, concerned regional and zonal officials. Focused-group

discussions were organized and conducted to get a sense of the community's shared feeling about the long lasting conflict of the two communities. In this way, diverse voices were expressed and reflected on the issue.

Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed and interpreted thematically to meet the study's objectives, considering the theoretical framework adopted in this study and also in line with the reviewed literature. Information obtained from IDIs, KIIs, and FGDs has been voice-recorded (with consent obtained from the study participants) and then organized into themes that emerged from the literature and during conversations with the study participants. These themes consist of words/concepts/phrases that helped us understand the causes, consequences and conflict resolution mechanisms of the conflict from the perspectives of the study participants. By applying a qualitative analysis, we can gain deeper insights into the study participants' diverse voices without preempting any predetermined answers.

Findings of the study

Causes of Dizzi-Suri Inter-ethnic Pastoralist Conflicts

The Dizzi-Suri inter-ethnic pastoralist conflicts happened in different times has multifaceted and interrelated causes. Some of the causes are found to be immediate and others are aggravating causes that trigger the existing conflicts. Commonly, the causes of conflicts are concomitant with internal and external factors. The internal causes are largely associated with resources competitions between the Dizzi and Suri pastoral ethnic groups. The external causes are rooted with the attacks of external forces in border areas where the Suri community shares large of amount of territories with South Sudan. In many case, the internal and external causes of conflict are found to be highly intertwined in which the external causes of are responsible to produce internal causes of conflict.

External Forces Attacks from the Border

The South west Ethiopia largely shares boarder line with south Sudan which is not even well demarcated. Due to this, there are massive external attacks targeted on the Suri and Dizzi pastoralist communities. Mostly, the attacks came from Toposa Bumi tribe of South Sudan. These forms of attacks produced many internal conflicts in the area in different times. Attacks from external forces are too complicated due to poorly demarcated border lines and external armed insurgents' uncontrolled movement. As it is illustrated by the informants, the Toposa Bumi tribe of South Sudan encroached and occupied up to 70 Kms of territories inside the Ethiopia boundary. An informant explained the case as:

…Historically, the capital of Surma woreda was Mardure. However, this historical place is occupied by South Sudan. Due to this reason, Surma woreda shift its center from Mardure to Kibish (the current capital of

surma woreda). Historically, kibish was the land of Dizzi community. Not only kibish but also the areas like coka were lands of the Dizzi community but currently occupied by suri community. These shifts caused land ownership claims and gradually lead to conflicts between Dizzi and Suri pastoralist communities.

The invasion of Suri land by Toposa Bumi is found to be the major cause for many internal conflicts occurred between the Dizzi and Suri communities. Another informant during FGD also illustrated the case as:

…Because of the enormousness violence of Toposa Bumi, every member of Suri community is eager to retaliation and fight. Each and every Suri child is grew up thru hearing and internalizing the description Toposa Bumi is our enemy so that you have to brave to fight against it. There is also a communal permissive that every adult of Suri community should not sleep at night because enemy Toposa Bumi may attack during the sleeping time. You see? How much sense of enemy is developed in the minds of Suri community?

Therefore, according to the diverse responses of informants, the external attack that mainly arisen from South Sudan Toposa tribe is the primary cause for different conflicts out broke between Dizzi and Suri pastoralist communities. In other words, the external pressures and attacks from the South Sudanse armed forces twisted different internal causes of conflicts among the neighboring Dizzi and Suri pastoralist communities. The Suri community forcefully left its own territories due to Toposa Bumi attacks and in turn occupied the territories of the Dizzi Community. The shifts produce quarrelling interest on land ownership and gradually turned to conflicts between the two local communities. In connection with this, the Dizzi community faced a problem of cattle robbing and killing robbing of cattle and killing by the Suri community. This leads to frequent conflict between Dizzi and Suri communities and yet unsolved.

Internal Causes of Conflict

Established Traditions of the Local Communities

There are socially constructed and deep rooted traditions among the Suri community that expose the members to conflict. Among the others, there is huge amount of dowry in terms of livestock and guns during marriage arrangement. For instance, among the Suri community, to marry a girl a man need to give dowry of 80 cattle and one firearm or weapon to the bride family. To this end, the groom have to collect the cattle from his family's otherwise, if the groom couldn't afford these amounts of cattle and firearm, He couldn't find mate and forced to robe the cattle of others around. An informant from Dizzi community explained the case as:

…The Suri community has established tradition of providing large amount of dowry of cattle and guns to form marriage. To this end, the Suri grooms have two options. He should rear and own many cattle or should rob the cattle of the Dizzi community to afford for the dowry. As long as high amount of dowry has

deep rooted tradition among the Suri community, cattle robing are normal and continue to the future. The situation is the major cause for the existing conflict. The low awareness and absent of exposure to urban life of the Suri community aggravate the existing conflict of the area. (42 years old male informant from Suri community)

In addition to the delivery of high amount of Dowry, the culture of ASHA is the other deep rooted cultural tradition practiced among the Suri comunity. This is a type of compensation to revenge. Based on this tradition, if an individual kills a person, He should give 20 cattle to the family of the dead individual. If the killer doesn't give cattle for the Asha, there is counter revenge of killing. To this end, individuals who could not afford the expected amount of cattle involve in the robbing of cattle.

Cattle robbing in turn lead to another counter cattle robbing as revenge. This form of tradition is evident among the Dizzi and Suri communities. An informant from the Suri Community affirmed the issues during the FGD as:

In our community, the thoughts and practices of revenge are very harmful. There is a strongly believed normative tradition that those who robbed their cattle should do the same thing as revenge. If an individual could not rob cattle as a means of revenge, he is considered as impotent or frightened. Due to this reason counter cattle robbing is thought as mandatory which produced vicious circle conflict between Dizzi and Suri pastoralist communities. (51 years old clan leader male informant from Dizzi community)

Furthermore, accumulating and owning large amount of livestock is also a firmly believed tradition among the Dizzi and Suri communities. The means to own the large amount of livestock could be either legal or illegal. The members of the community are not concerned about the means of own livestock instead they have high value for the expected high amount of livestock. In these communities accumulating and owning large amount of livestock is considered as a sign of high social status, prestige and honored. Thus, people involve in livestock robbing of other so as to achieve the socially constructed status of the community. This in turn steered to inter-ethnic pastoralist conflicts between the Dizzi and Suri communities. An informant from Dizzi community stated the situation as:

… Among the Dizzi and Suri communities, livestock is a matter of prestige, proud and life. They accumulate large amount of livestock in cattle pen to show their social status. Because of this social expectation, they sometimes involved in robbing livestock of others so as to increase number of livestock. Especially, among the Suri community, cattle have high value than individual's life. In this community, it is preferred to kill three or four persons than killing one cattle. We have seen that this type of thought and aspiration caused many conflicts between Dizzi and Suri communities. (57 years old male informant from Dizzi community)

Therefore, according to the diverse views of informants, the existing social fabric of the community contributed a lot for inter-ethnic pastoralist conflicts in South West Ethiopia. This is particularly rampant among the Dizzi and Suri communities. The established tradition of providing high amount of dowry in one way and the tradition of Asha alongside with the unforgiving revenge produced many conflicts in

these communities. The established social expectation of the communities towards the accumulation of large amount of livestock also embolden the community members to robbing and ultimately to conflicts.

Competitions over Resources

The Dizzi and Suri pastoralist communities have diverse and untapped natural resources. In these areas, there are fertile grazing lands, water resources, forests and mining. However, starting from the last two decades, these communities are engaged in competitions which frequently lead to conflicts. The two communities have claims different lands by tracing historical ownership backgrounds.

On one hand, the Suri community has robust questions on lands occupied external South Sudanse forces like Tirma, Tide and Mardure. On the other hand, the Dizzi community has also claims on the current lands occupied by the Suri community like Kibish (the current capital of Surma woreda).

… Bumi tribe of South Soudan occupied more than 70 kms of Ethiopian territory. For instance, the Tomposa Bumi tribe named the Suri land by the name of their tribe leader. This in turn led the Suri to occupy the legitimate lands of the Dizzi community. This problem produced many awful conflicts inside usually between Suri and Dizzi communities. (58 years old, male informant, from Dizzi community)

Therefore, as indicated above, many conflicts are happened due to competitions on resources like grazing lands, water resources and gold mining. Both the Dizzi and Suri communities are unanswered questions of resources ownership which are responsible causes for the existing conflicts of the area.

Illegal Trading

The areas where the Dizzi and Suri pastoralist communities lived are consecrated with natural resources of mining. There are vast resources of gold mining sites in the area. However, the production and exchange processes of gold mining are undertaken in illegal ways. There are contrabandists who are beneficial from the illegal trading. Because of this reason, there are frequent conflicts in the area.

There are organized groups or actors who run the illegal trade of gold. These actors want the conflict and produce it constantly. The actors live in Maji, Tum and Dimma and work day and night without rest to fabricate the conflict. There is killing in the mining area. Devised arrangement of prices is the main strategy for these groups. These actors sold product items like local alcohols, soap and salt to the local community as means of handling the community. Their ultimate objective is to make unstable mining exchange thru fabricating conflict. If the market is stable, they could not access the gold mining and cattle in a cheap cost. Thus, they catch up the local community through the distribution of cheap product for daily consumption and in turn benefit themselves from the mining and cattle exchange. Contrabandist who is engaged in the area form such types of linkage and prevents free movement. They did not lose their life but others loss their life from the conflict. A concerned official from SW regional state explained the issue as:

…For example for the suri community, if they access/buying one litter local alcohol (Areqi), they can sell their gold with very cheap cost. On the other hand, if there is stable market, they can buy the Areqi in a normal cost and the amount they want. If market stability is ensured, the contrabandists who produce conflict couldn't be beneficial. That is why these people are busy to fabricate conflict in the area. (46 years old male informant from SW regional state)

Illegal fire arming

Illegal fire arm exchange and distribution is another factor for apparent conflict of the area. There is massive exchange of fire arm in the border area. These situations aggravate the conflict and make it unresolved. There is market opened for this purpose. There are great pivot state actors in the exchange. Murele, Ngangatom and Tomposa tribes of South Sudan are the larger firearm sources and exchangers in the area. These tribes have too similar culture with Suri and Dizzi communities of Ethiopia. This cultural similarity makes the exchange of firearm easy. In return, the Suri and Dizzi communities highly armed with firearms.

Conflict Aggravating Role of Government Bodies officials

In principle, the government officials assigned at different levels have official mandates to prevent and resolve conflicts. However, government officials in South West Ethiopia regional state play an aggravating role of existing conflicts of the area as shown in different conflict incidents. This is especially true among officials who born and grew up among the Dizzi and Suri communities. Many conflict cases were produced and escalated in this regard. The circumstance is described by the informant as:

…Officials of Suri and Dizzi weredas are administered and appointed by similar parties. Both of them have given authorized mandates of handling conflicts. However, they are standing on the side of conflict actors. Instead of enforcing the law, they favor to criminal groups because of their ethnic and tribal affiliation. In this type of mindset, it is difficult to prevent and resolve conflict. (49 years male official from West Omo Zone)

Not only the local woreda officials, but also officials who are appointed at zonal, regional and federal levels are found to involve in conflict cases. An informant described the situation as:

…Not only the local woreda level officials but also higher officials working at Regional and federal level are reluctant and sometimes support the conflict via esteeming their community. This problem is more pronounced among the Suri officials. For instance, once upon a time a Suri representative at federal parliament was accused when he tried to systematically organize the Suri warrior group for conflict. (46 years old male official at South West Ethiopia regional state)

The following direct account of the informant also strengthens the above claims as:

"… In 2020, the suri warrior group robbed cattle from Dizzi community members. A suri official working at zonal level was sent to mediate and resolve the problem. However, instead of mediating and resolving the problem, he joined the robber group and not come back yet. (44 Years old Male official from SW regional state)

Therefore, as to the lived experiences and views of the above informants, in many cases, government officials at different levels favored their community during conflict incidents. According to them, the ways they support the conflict is different. Some of them intentionally and systematically support the actors of the conflict whom they believed is from their ethnic group. Some others are victims of the existing harmful social traditions of the community and hence are very reluctant to change these harmful traditional practices that lead to conflict. They accept revenge as normal culture of the community. If they oppose such types of criminal activities, they will be targets of attack. Thus, they stand in favor of the criminals and their acts due to either the fearing of attack from criminals in their community or inherently support the established cultural tradition of their community. Some others support the conflict because of their involvement in contraband trades of gold mining. To this end, they thought that conflict is a strategy to hide their illegal activity.

Conflict Aggravating Roles of Security Forces

The security sector forces that are operating in the area have played different role for the long lasting conflict. The regional security forces and federal police play positive contributions to manage and resolve the existing conflicts. However, the local security forces including the woreda polices and militias have a negative contribution to handle and resolve conflicts. These groups have deep rooted cultural attachments with their community. Furthermore, some members of the local security forces participate in the conflict using the guns of the government they are given for crime prevention. They also share their gun for their community members. Some others become a bandit by themselves. An informant disclosed the following account on the issue:

… There are handled cases that showed that polices hired at woreda working in contradiction with the responsibility they are assigned for. Thus, preserving peace and security by the deployment of local security forces like police and militias is too difficult. They ignore their responsibility of preventing and resolving crime and stand in favor of their community during different crime incidents. For instance once up one a time, a suri police is arrested while he robbed cattle with his warrior group. (A 39 years old male security sector head from West Omo Zone)

Supporting the above points, another informant also revealed the following idea.

…Instead of preventing and ensuring rule of law, the local security forces participate and aggravate the conflict. For instance, militias of the two woredas were arrested after they are involved in cattle robbing. Also, in 2020, 25 polices of Surma woreda were arrested for cattle robbing. Others share gun for the warrior groups robbing purpose. (A 41 years old male informant from West Omo Zone)

In connection with the above arguments, there are three problems. On one hand, the local security forces have very low understanding and skill towards the problem. On the other hand, these forces are victims of the established harmful traditions of the community forced to go in line with the criminals. In other words they internalize the traditions of their community so that they do or support the acts of the criminals. Finally, if they hesitate to support the traditions of the local community that lead to conflict, they will face different problems including killing in return. Due to these problems, in contradiction with the role of enforcing rule of law, the local security forces are negative actors of the conflict. In nutshell, the conflict between Dizzi and Suri communities become long lasting and headache.

Consequences of Dizzi-Suri Inter-ethnic Pastoralist Conflicts

Conflicts

happened between Dizzi and Suri communities resulted in more devastating and look harsh. These conflicts are resulted in social, economic and political crisis of the nation in general and communities lived in the nation in particular. The Dizzi and Suri pastoralist communities of SW Ethiopia suffered a lot in this regard.

Social Crisis

Due to the ongoing conflicts, many social crisis are resulted in the South west Ethiopia. Accordingly, the neighboring Dizzi and Suri pastoralist communities faced a lot from the enduring conflicts. Many people lost their life and many other became physically impaired. Displacement and erosion of social bonds of the community were also foremost impacts of the conflicts. Likewise, the conflicts have ensued in dysfunctional of basic public institutions like schools and health centers. Finally, negative social traditions like feeling of enemy, marginalization and revenge have been developed gradually.

Loss of Human Life

Internally, many people lost their life with in the last five years. Both the Suri and Dizzi Community members lost their life in different times. The figurative report compiled by the SW Ethiopia regional state peace and security bureau clearly showed the severity of the problem. The bureau has undertaken a benchmark assessment in 2020 to know the number of people died due to the Dizzi-Suri internal conflicts taking 452 consecutive days. According to this assessment, within 452 days benchmarking from September 2020 to December 2021, the death rate recorded due to the conflict was one person per two days. According to this assessment result, the magnitude of the problem resulted from the conflict is too devastative. Besides, many people became physically impaired. In addition to this, an official from concerned regional bureau disclosed his information as:

The frequent conflicts happened among pastoralist communities of West Omo zone of our region resulted in the loss of life of many people. The Dizzi-Suri conflict took the highest share in terms of death of life as compared with other pastoralist communities of the zone. We have different evidences for this. For instance, from 2018 – 202, 500 people were died from whom majority of them were young and children that leads to the loss of productive age groups. (46 years old male official from SW Ethiopia regional state)

For some informants, the unmanaged, long-lasting and blood shading Suri-Dizzi conflict made the community members hopeless. An informant from South West Ethiopia Police Commission extends his account as:

…For the last 30 years, I had been working in the area in different police positions. I have tried to manage the conflicts happened between Dizzi and Suri communities but it were not effective. The actors and causes of conflict in the area are very complicated. I saw while people died and wounded due to the conflict. Umm… do you know what? I am very happy to die after solving this everlasting and bloody conflict. This is my dream in my life. (A 46 years old male higher police leader from South West Ethiopia regional state)

Therefore, according to the above informants account, both the internal and external conflict happened in the area ended up with loss of human life. As the figure revealed by the informants' speaks loudly, many people lost their life due to the incident. Many others became physically impaired. Thus, it can be said that the conflict happened among the Dizzi-Suri pastoralist communities caused sophisticated humanitarian crisis.

Erosion and Disruption of Social Interaction

In the past, the Dizzi and Suri pastoralist communities had close social interaction. The communities were unified with inter-marriage. They had celebrated different cultural rituals together. However, for the last 30 years in general and for the last 5 years in particular, the escalated conflict affected this good social interaction of the two communities. In other words, the social interaction between Dizzi and Suri community is highly eroded due to the extended conflict happened between them. Today, they are seen as enemies of one another and the community members are skeptical to each other. The case is narrated by the informant as:

…The former social solidarity of Dizzi and Suri communities are highly eroded due to the frequent conflicts occurred between them. The social bond is highly broken. Social interaction in common market places is disrupted. They are seen as enemies of one another. (46 years old male official from SW Ethiopia regional state)

In addition with the collected primary data, the secondary data collected from concerned government offices also asserted the magnitude of the effect. As indicated by Bench Maji zone peace command post in 2021, 998 people from Suri community lost their life due to the Toposa Bumi tribe attacks of South

Sudan from 1991 to 2021 E.C. Besides, 548 people are injured due to the external forces attack with in the mentioned time frames.

Displacement

Among the Dizzi and Suri communities, there is massive community displacement from their own original territory due to the conflicts broke out in different times. The Suri community displaced from Mardur and its surrounding due to forceful attack from Toposa Bumi. As to the informants, the Dizzi community members also displaced from 14 kebeles of their own due to Suri community seizure. The Dizzi community also evacuated from productive mining areas.

Economic Crisis

The conflicts happened in different times negatively affect the livelihood strategies of the local communities. It damaged the basic economic assets of the two communities. Livestock are robbed; economic gains from mining of the area are subjected for misuse and corruption; important grazing lands and water resources are took by external forces in unlawful manner. An informant expressed his view as:

Cattle which are considered as lives of the Dizzi and Suri pastoralist communities are robbed and killed due to the conflict. The community in particular and the government in general lost economic gains due to the established illegal gold mining exchange of contrabandists operating in the conflicting setting. (36 years male informant from Surma woreda)

In line with the primary data, a report from surma wereda police station had also indicated that in 2021 two thatched grass houses were burned, 58 cattle are robed by Toposa Bumi external forces. In this attack, atotal estimated values of 25,670 dollar properties were damaged in the same year. Also, as indicated by Bench Maji zone peace command post in 2021, a total of 40,334 livestock of the Suri community are robbed by these forces. Many houses were looted and large members of the community were displaced due to the attacks in 2021.

Political Crisis

As indicated earlier, Because of the absence of border security; the pastoral community of South Sudan called Toposa Bumi crossed the Ethiopian border and looted the Suri community's livestock. The federal government could not protect the south western border of Ethiopia. Unlike the other border areas of the country, there are not military camps and military forces in the Southern western border. Due to these reasons, the people living in the area are denying the existence of Federal government. They thought that "if the federal government couldn't protect its territory in the border area, its existence is questionable."

Such type of feeling is very common among the majority of the Dizzi and Suri community. An informant disclosed his idea on this issue as:

…Protecting the border is the mandate of the federal government. Who gave the mandate of protecting the border area to the Suri community? The federal government is reluctant to protect the South West Ethiopia border. The local government reported the case for the federal government in different times but unanswered. Now a days, the conflict happened in the area took political implications. Due to this reason, the local community lost hope towards the federal government (44 years old male informant from Surma Woreda)

In connection with this, the local communities are feeling as if they are politically marginalized by the federal government. Because, there is a commonly agreed belief among the local community that the federal government is intentionally left the border without military protection for the last 30 years. They further questioned that "why the Suri and Dizzi communities are struggled with external enemies in the border area?" An informant further reflected the communities view as:

…The official mandate of protecting the border clearly belongs to the federal government. The government has military camps in other border area but ignored the South Western border. Why? Who gave the mandate to Suri and Dizzi pastoralist communities to protect the South Western border? They are always fighting with external forces unlawfully. (A 39 years old male informant from West Omo zone)

Therefore, based on the above informants' accounts, significant portion of the local communities land is occupied by the invaders illegally. The Suri and Dizzi communities accused the Federal government as if the border is intentionally ignored for external invasion. Due to these reasons, both the Dizzi and Suri communities have sense of political marginalization and develop distrust towards the Federal government. Not only the communities but also government officials at regional, zonal and woreda who are administrating the area have grievances towards the federal government reluctant reaction on the border problem of South West Ethiopia.

Conflict Resolution Mechanisms of Dizzi-Suri Inter-ethnic Pastoralist Conflicts

Starting from 2022, serious and multidimensional conflict prevention and resolution efforts have been applied to manage the potential conflict causes and actual conflict cases happened between Suri and Dizzi pastoral communities.

Peace Campaigns through Peace Committees

For the last two years, peace campaign is taken as important conflict resolution tool. There were mass peace campaigns with a motto "let us make a single day peace" so as to avoid a single death per a day.

The campaign stayed for about two years and still it is ongoing. To this end, peace committees are formed at Kebele, woreda, zonal and regional levels. Using this mechanism, awareness raising and community consultation sessions were held with the different community members of Dizzi and Suri.

Reconciliation

So far, many reconciliation activities were took place to resolve both the internal and external conflicts. Reconciliation attempts were made with external forces with the assumption if the conflicts or attacks that caused internal conflicts are solved, internal conflicts and their causes could be easily managed. Having this assumption, the regional and local administrations of the area arranged many reconciliation sessions with external forces specifically between the Suri and Toposa Bumi tribes around the border area and outside the border areas. Similar reconciliation attempts were made between Suri and Dizzi communities so as to return robbed cattle. In fact, some cattle were returned through the effort. Different efforts have been made to rebuild the social solidarity of the community through establishment of mutual market center, celebration of cultural rituals and cultural exchange. However, it was not effective and sustainable.

Efforts Made to Change the Established Harmful Traditions of the Community

Efforts were made to change the established harmful traditional practices of the communities through different mechanisms like education, urbanization and Cultural Revolution. Accordingly, different initiatives were implemented to reduce the established cultural traditions of giving huge amount of dowry during marriage arrangement. However, due to the embedded nature of the established traditions, the intervention was not as such effective.

Resettlement

To improve the living way of the community, resettlement in villages was taken as a mechanism to handle the conflict. However, it was not successful due to the unwillingness of the community. The following informant's account strengthened the issue as:

…At Regional level, we had built the house and tried to resettle the Suri community into the village, but they have lived for a while and backed to their nomadic life because South Sudan tribe of Toposa Bumi has attacked and killed children and women. Toposa Bumi attackers also looted the properties of the Suri. Due to these reasons, they had demolished the camp. (44 years old male official from SW Ethiopia regional state)

Efforts to solve the border Conflict

Though the issue of the border is the official mandate of the federal government of Ethiopia, different efforts has been made to solve the problems of the area at regional, zonal and woreda levels. Accordingly, Strengthen social cohesion between the communities of Ethiopia and South Sudan in the border area was taken as a conflict resolution mechanism in the area.

Discussion

The finding of this study is in accordance with the existing empirical findings and theoretical arguments of the area. Concerning the causes of conflict, the findings of this study are supported by the findings of previous researchers. In this regard, for Center of Excellence International Consult (2021), Conflict drivers are seasonal and primarily related to territorial rights and competition over critical grazing areas, exacerbated by livestock raids and revenge killings.

Abdulahi (2005) also found that competitions over pasture and water and livestock raiding have been ongoing causes of pastoralist conflicts. In addition to resources competition, pastoral conflicts are driven by cultural traditions of their communities. According to Yohannes et al. (2005), killers were culturally decorated as a prestige and/or ‘hero’ in the Hammer community. This cultural practice is accepted by the community but remains one of the principal factors that trigger inter-ethnic conflicts in the zone

Supporting the current finding, for UNOWAS (2018) the increased use of firearms contributed a lot for inter-ethnic pastoralist conflicts. Also, according to Center of Excellence International Consult (2021), firearms are highly smuggled in South West Ethiopia where people want to buy rifles for security reasons as the government security forces are unable to protect the people from attacks.

Moreover, the causes of inter-ethnic conflicts between the Dizzi and Suri communities are guided by the central arguments of instrumentalism theory. Instrumentalists argue that given that members of an ethnic group (people who share a common history, language, and customs) feel a strong cohesion to other members of their in-group, ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs can mobilize their own ethnic groups to commit violence by convincing them that they are under a threat from another ethnic group (Comaroff, John & Paul, 1994). According to Comaroff & Paul (1994), nationalism, nationalism alongside other forms of identity-in particular, ethnicity and race-and interrogate the relations among them. In this ensemble of essays and commentaries, the term is used to embrace a double connotation: (i) the authoritative claim of a nation-state to expressions of common sentiment and exclusive commitment, of loyal attachment and joint responsibility, on the part of its citizens; and (ii) the assertion of a right to sovereignty, autonomy, and territory by any group that defines itself by virtue of an affective connection to a shared history and culture.

In line with this theory, the Dizzi and Suri community government officials, police and militia are tending to involve in smuggling and aggravate the existing conflicts.

Despite the interrelated causes of inter-ethnic conflicts, the consequences are found to be negative. According to Dagne (2009), the adverse effects of violent ethnic conflict and classifies into three categories. Ethnic conflict could be resulted in political, economic and socio-cultural effects. The political effect of ethnic conflict could be the weakening, disintegrate and possible collapse of the central government. Ethnic conflict leads, to the breakdown of law, order and stability. From economic angle, ethnic conflict destroys the very bases of development: environmental resources, economic infrastructure, deter long run investment and the productive labor force will be drained, hence production and productivity decline. The Social upshot of inter-ethnic conflict concerns loss of social services, displacement of people as refugees, humanitarian crisis, vulnerable groups Women, children, and the old as well as the disabled who often seriously affecting.

Different conflict resolution mechanisms efforts have been shown to resolve the existing pastoralist inter-ethnic conflicts that happened in different times. According to Bekele (2010), these mechanisms can broadly be categorized into two, formal and informal. The formal mechanisms are mechanisms related to formal legal institutions. Litigation is the dominant method of resolving disputes in formal mechanisms. Litigation is a process of conflict resolution in a court. Bekele (2010) states the formal mechanisms, the court can be a national court created by national legislation as part of the justice system of the country or, an international one created by the law of international or multilateral institutions. Such mechanisms are useful in handling individual conflicts but constraining in addressing the multiple effects that may arise as a result of the original cause of dispute.

According to Abdullahi (2005), since 1992, local government officials have been directly involved in the Boran/Digodi conflicts, by employing government (public) resources and force. As to this finding, between 1991 and 1998, interventions by the regional administrations and the federal army had not been very successful in resolving the conflicts and bringing lasting solutions..

The informal ones are mechanisms that range from the traditional mechanisms with lots of variations to the broader areas of preventive diplomacy, mediation, cooperation and other related activities. Because of the limitations of the judicial system in providing comprehensive solutions to disputes, alternative methods of dispute resolution have developed in varying forms (Abdulahi, 2005). Alternative dispute resolution methods may be less adversarial, less formal and more flexible process. Some of the forms of alternative informal dispute resolution mechanisms include arbitration, negotiation and mediation (Ibid). Also, as to Tirist (2005), it is important to illustrate significance of the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, when compared to the modern mechanisms it is less complex, more time saving and gives a chance to parties in conflict to participate in solving their own problems and handling their own affairs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the finding of this study showed that there were frequent and devastative inter-ethnic conflicts between the Dizzi and Suri communities since 2018 political reform. The causes and consequences of these conflicts are too complex, multiple, and interrelated. The conflict resolutions

mechanisms targeted to manage and resolve these conflicts are not effective due to different reasons. In nutshell, the study found that the nature of conflict is found to be long lasting; its causes and actors are multidimensional; its consequences are complicated and devastative. However, the resolution mechanisms in place to manage and end the conflict are found to be very limited and not effective.

Recommendation

This study delivered several recommendations to effectively address and manage the causes of conflict and minimize its impact and resolve the problem. To resolve the external causes of conflict, the Federal government of Ethiopia should take the mandate of protecting the South West Ethiopia from external attacks. Thus, opening of the closed military camps around the border area should be an important mechanism to resolve the existing conflict. To make the local government bodies' impartial, **s**trong intervention should be in place. Serious measurements should be taken towards government bodies who favor their social categories. To change harmful traditions of the communities, extensive awareness creation activities should be given by the government and NGOs. In addition, the rigged tradition of revenge should be addressed and changed through different mechanisms like community consultation. Besides, to divert the negative feeling and social interaction, consideration of genuine reconciliation is too paramount to resolve the conflict and associated feeling from its sources. Thus, elders, tribe leaders and iconic individuals of the two communities should be consulted to resolve the inter-ethnic pastoralist conflict of Dizzi and Suri communities. To change the life style of the community members, resettling the community in villages and benefiting those from the services of basic social institution can alter their way of life and confrontation to conflicting causes. Thus, Resettlement should be taken as a resolution mechanism so as to educate the community and it could pave the way for the pastoral communities to modernization and urbanization.

Declarations

Data Availability Declaration

The authors confirm that all data (transcription of the raw qualitative data) analyzed during this study will be provided upon the request of the publisher. However, for the sake of data privacy, it will not be available in an open repository.

Ethical Declaration

With regard to this study an effort was made to avoid bias and objectivity was considered as much as possible. The researcher considered and respected the rights, dignity, privilege and personality of the research participants. More importantly, Informants were from two different conflicting parties called Dizzi and Suri pastoralist ethnic groups. Due to this reason, their responses on the causes, consequences and resolution mechanisms of the inter-ethnic pastoralist conflicts were different and sometimes full of contradictions and blaming of each other. Thus, as far as neutrality as research ethics

is concerned, efforts have been made to balance and triangulate the conflicting and contradicting views of informants on the subject understudy. In addition, to this preserve the anonymity of the informants, privacy was respected and the collected information was carefully kept. Generally, the researchers tried to conduct the research through the application of sound ethical considerations.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests that could influence the study's results.

Author Contribution

Fikadu is the principal investigator of this research work. he engaged in the overall process of the work such as during proposal writing, data collection, analysis, discussion and manuscript writing. Gosa also participated in the work as co-researcher.

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