Understanding protracted resource-based conflicts in the horn of africa:
The case of North Wollo Amhara and zone 4 of Afar in Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

Context and background:

Prolonged communal resource conflicts have undermined development and exacerbated poverty in North Wollo Amhara and neighboring Afar communities in Ethiopia for over two decades. Finding a permanent solution appears to elude all stakeholders mainly because of the inadequate understand of the underlying and proximate causes of these communal resource conflicts. To unpack the causes, the study employed in-depth interviews with three focus groups, 43 key informants and randomly selected 354 household heads.

Goal and Objectives

The objectives of this article are (i) to identify the underlying causes for the outbreak of violent conflicts between the neighboring Afar and North Wollo Amhara; (ii) to distinguish the triggering factors for the protracted conflicts between the two border communities; and (iii) to propose practical strategies to end the cycle of conflicts in the area.

Methodology:

This study follows a pragmatist research philosophy with a combination of survey, interview, and focus group discussion. A multi-staged sampling technique was employed for the survey.

Results:

The findings revealed that multi-factors explain the conflicts, such as loosely defined property rights which came weakly defined resource and regional boundaries, environmental security, and weak conflict resolution institutions. Political elite competition due to the current ethnic politics in the country, implementation of small-scale development project without public consultation in the contested land, violence culture, illegal small arms circulation are additional factors. The research recommends well defined resource and regional boundaries of the two people, creating strong conflict resolution institutions, and applying conflict transformation to the area.

Key words

   Conflict, conflict resolution, communal resource conflicts, Ethiopia, North Wollo Amhara

1. INTRODUCTION

Violent conflicts have negative implications for socio-economic development, political stability and even lead to environmental deterioration. According to the UNHCR (2017), around 40.3 million people were internally displaced and 22.5 million refugees were recorded around the world in 2017 as a result of violent conflicts in mainly in Africa. The International Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC, 2018) has shown that 5.2 million new internal displacements associated with conflicts and violence occurred during the first half of 2018 in ten worst affected countries in the world. Five of these are in Africa (Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia, Central African Republic, and South Sudan). Similarly, Oxfam International (2019) has indicated that across Africa, 7.6 million people were displaced by conflicts in 2019. These conflicts undermine human security and socio-economic development (World Bank, 2014).

In particular, Ethiopia has experienced a lot of violent conflicts for many years with devastating impact (Markakis, 2011, Marcus, 2002). These conflicts have centered on land ownership; pastoral versus agricultural uses of land, water resources, autonomy and political representation (Tesfay et al, 2012; Menbere, 2011; Daniel, 2009). Although it is difficult to accurately quantify human suffering attributed to conflicts (Olateju, 2013:1), according to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), 177,936 deaths were recorded from 1989 to 2018 in Ethiopia alone due to conflicts. Out of this, interstate conflicts led to 167,483 deaths, 7, 153 lives were lost from conflicts between communal groups, while 3,300 deaths were attributed to clashes between armed groups and civilians.

The North Wollo Amhara and Afar ethnic border communities in Ethiopia have greatly suffered from recurrent violent conflicts between sedentary agriculturalists, agro-pastoral and pastoral communities when their livestock damage the crops of farmers (Admasu,2016; Belay, 2020). The reverse is also common when sedentary agriculturalists have encroached on the grazing land of the pastoral communities (Admasu, 2016; Belay, 2020). The escalation, frequency, and magnitude of these conflicts have increased since 2010. For instance, in 2011, 2014 and 2017, four major conflicts occurred between sedentary agriculturalist groups of Afar and Amhara (Amhara Regional Agriculture Bureau Report, 2018).

2. THE STUDY CONTEXT

Under the current federal administrative structure of Ethiopia, there are ten ethno linguistically divided regional states and two chartered cities. The Afar and Amhara regions which are inhabited by the Afar ethnic groups and Amhara ethnic groups respectively are two of the state in the federation. These two neighbouring ethnic groups inhabit the North and North-eastern parts of the country (Figure, 1). North Wollo Amhara has been a close neighbour of Afar, with a long history of cooperation, interdependence, friendship, and conflicts. Their relationship ranges from sharing of large geographical boundaries with an opportunity to use shared natural resources especially land and water, common market, and shared religion and language and intermarriages. The use of these shared resources has created conflicts between them as the area is drought prone, water and grazing land is scarce for pastoralist, agro-pastoralist, and agriculturalist resulting in competition and conflicts.

A vast majority of Afars practice both short-distance and long-distance movements which is fundamental to pastoralists' strategies of coping with unpredictable rainfall, livestock diseases, and use of scarce natural resources (Van den Akker et al., 2015). The North Wollo Amhara are agriculturalists and stationed at one place.

Fig 1. Study area
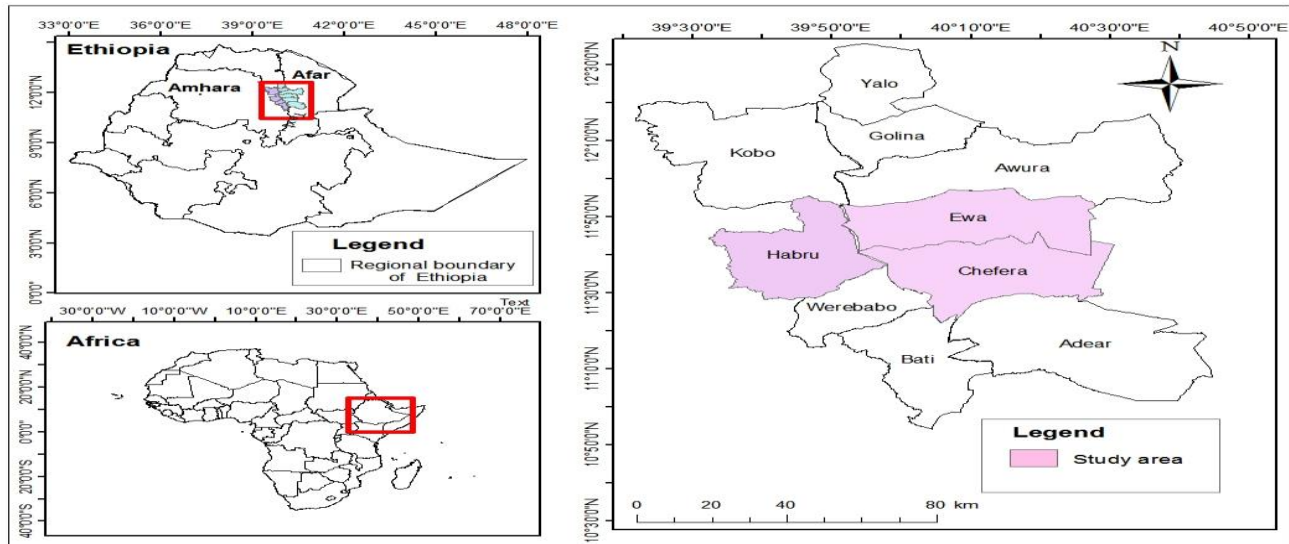
Due to these conflicts, the area has suffered immeasurable damage and this has stifled national development efforts. Most of these conflicts have been small - scale armed clashes but the likelihood of solving these conflicts before they escalate has been decreasing. The reports of the two Regional Government Peace Building Forums (2020) state that violent conflict is the key societal problem that undermines the integration of the two regional ethnic groups (Discussion Forum Report, 2020). The reports underline the fact that violent conflicts have manifested in the forms of inter-ethnic homicides, vandalism, cattle raiding and resource destruction which frequently affect social interactions between the groups. Despite the seriousness and extent of the problem; research on the causes, the institutional setup, the extent of the conflict and the social interrelationships in the area have been sketchy.

Recent research suggests that a multitude of contextual factors such as environmental resource scarcity, institutional failure, loosely defined property rights have impacted on the likelihood of conflicts. For the North Wollo Amhara and neighboring Afar regions, we know that the conflicts are centered on land resource, competition on land resource, land tenure insecurity, and institutional failure. What is unclear are the underlying causes and the triggering factors producing the conflicts. The understanding of the underlying and triggering factors will require the use of ideas of Eriksen and Lind (2009) which suggest that in order to understand and effectively manage conflicts a holistic view of conflict studies which integrates the broader social and institutional angles is required. On this basis, this paper employs analytical approach of political ecology. The objective of this paper are (i) to identify the underlying causes for the outbreak of violent conflicts between the neighboring Afar and North Wollo Amhara; (ii) the triggering factors for the protracted conflicts between the two border communities; and (iii) to propose practical strategies to end the cycle of conflicts in the area. The paper organizes into five sections. Section one is on introduction; section two covers the study

context; section three on research methodology; section four is about result and discussion and the last section gives research recommendations.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study follows a pragmatist research philosophy with a combination of survey, interview and focus group discussion. The study employs both quantitative and qualitative data. A multi-staged sampling technique was employed for the survey. The districts were split into three clusters. These were Raya kobo- Ewera cluster, Habru-Ewa-Chifra cluster, and Raya Kobo-Golina cluster. Through random selection, the Habru-Ewa-Chifra cluster emerged. Three *Kebeles* were purposively chosen from Habru-Ewa-Chifra cluster. One from each *Woredas.* The reason for the purposive selection of *Kebeles* (wards) were geographic proximity to neighbouring ethnic groups and high exposure to conflicts. The sampling frame consists of household heads in the *Kebeles* who have information about the communal conflict, and the causes of conflicts. The 2017 population projection data (Central Statistics, 2013) was used to obtain the population and household heads of the study area. It shows that the total population of the three *kebeles* was 17,500. Out of this 3450 were household heads (961 in Chifra district, 1346 in Habru district, and 1144 in Ewa district). Using Yemane (1967) formula with 5% margin of error, 359 household heads were selected.

The questionnaire captured data on socio-economic characteristics of the household such as education, age, livelihood and gender, questions around their understanding of community resource conflict were also asked using the Likert scale to measure their agreement with the questions. They were asked to prioritize the possible sources of community resource violent conflicts. The rates were then ranked based on the five scale Likert scale. Respondents were asked to rate factors that can trigger violent conflicts as most important (5), important (4), neutral (3), less important (2) and not important (1).

Qualitative data was collected through focus group discussions and key informant interviews. Three group discussions were held in each of the three districts. Each focus group had between 5-10 people (Krueger & Casey, 2002). Participants were drawn from community leaders, conflict resolution committees, teachers, religious leaders, elders, youth and nurses. Key informant interviews were held with Judiciary officers, development agents, natural resource management officers, land administration officers, local government leaders, those who participated in communal conflict resolution, NGO personnel, development agents, and community leaders.

The data obtained were analysed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Descriptive analysis was used for the quantitative data. This type of data analysis is common to eco-violence related research (see Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). The analysis of the frequencies, percentages, rating of significant variables to conflict, and other quantitative values paid special attention to determining the extent of the conflicts, and their perception within the community.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 demographic characteristics of the survey participants

The data in Table 1 shows that 60% and 40% of the respondents were from Afar and North Wollo Amhara respectively. Majority (74%) of the respondents were above the age of 35 years, the likely age group to participate in the conflicts. Most of the respondents (78.5%) have no formal education, such high illiteracy levels have implications for conflict escalation. Those who practise Islamic

religion hold a higher percentage of 97%. As majority of the population are the members of the same religion, it has a tendency to create a culture of integration and a sense of unity. About 44% and 46% of the respondents have a family size of 2-5 and 6-10 respectively. Large family sizes is one characteristic of the North Wollo Amhara and Afar border communities which has a consequence for resource competition.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of respondents

Attributes	Category	Number
Ethnicity	Amhara	140
	Afar	214
Religion	Islam	345
	Christian	9
Education status	Illiterate	277
	Primary school	76
	Secondary school	1
Age Category	< 20	12
	21-34	170
	35-65	230
	65 and above	30
Marriage Status	Married	307
	Single	34
	Divorced	13

Source – Author's Field work, 2020

4.2 means of livelihood of the respondents

According to the data in Table 2, 61% of the respondents depends on crop farming and pastoral way of life. The remaining 39% of them rely on petty trading and mixed livelihoods such as crop farming, petty trading, herding and small trading. The table reveals that land is the base of economic activities for most of the people.

Table 2 Livelihood dependence of the respondents

Respondents Resource Control	Frequency	Percentage
Absence of any land property	19	5.4
Own private land	33	9.3
Common grazing land	2	0.6
Private land and Common Forest land	7	2
private land and Common grazing land	36	10.1
Private land and Common water point	17	4.8
Common Grazing land and Common Forest land	4	1.1
Common grazing land and Common water point	75	21.2
Private land, Common grazing land, Common Forest, and Common water point	161	45.5
Respondents main economic activities	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
crop- farming	87	24.6
Pastoralist	129	36.4
semi-pastoralist	58	16.4
small trade	17	4.8
Crop farming and trade	25	7.1
Pastoralist and small trade	38	10

Source – Field survey, January 2020

4.3 perceived underlying causes of North Wollo Amhara and Afar communities' resource conflicts

It was found that the protracted communal conflicts between North Wollo Amhara and neighbouring Afar people cannot be explained by a single factor but with multiple factors including the use of shared boundary resources as water, pasture land, and forest land. In addition to these, social, economic, institutional, and environmental factors were found to be the important factors.

Table 3 Ratings and Rankings on the possible sources of conflict in the area

Perceptions	Likert Rate						
Harbu district	**SA**	**A**	**N**	**DA**	**SDA**	**Avg**	**R**
The boundary of the two ethnic groups is not clearly defined and property claim	67	51	15	7	0	4.2	1
Land, human and cattle population pressure	38	50	16	30	6	3.6	3
Conflict resolution mechanism	38	56	27	19	0	3.89	2
Ethnic politics and ethnic federalism which implemented in Ethiopia since 1991	9	27	47	42	42	2.8	4
Climate change (rainfall variability, drought)	11	21	55	32	21	2.79	5
Historical ethnic relationships	4	8	30	57	41	2.12	6
Ewa District	**SA**	**A**	**N**	**DA**	**SDA**	**Avg**	**R**
The boundary of the two ethnic groups is not clearly defined and property claim	26	69	5	11	3	3.91	1
Land, human and cattle population pressure	13	51	38	11	2	3.58	4
Conflict resolution mechanism	24	61	23	7	2	3.93	2
Ethnic politics and ethnic federalism which implemented in Ethiopia since 1991	0	14	20	65	14	2.40	5
Climate change (rainfall variability, drought)	40	35	2	28	9	3.60	3
Historical ethnic relationships	1	10	15	62	26	2.11	6
Chiffra District	**SA**	**A**	**N**	**DA**	**SDA**	**Avg**	**R**
The boundary of the two ethnic groups is not clearly defined and property claim	31	47	22	0	0	4.09	1
Land, human and cattle population pressure	19	31	26	24	0	3.45	3
Conflict resolution mechanism	19	52	21	6	1	3.79	2
Ethnic politics and ethnic federalism which implemented in Ethiopia since 1991	6	10	18	40	26	2.3	5
Climate change (rainfall variability, drought)	5	25	23	30	12	2.91	4
Historical ethnic relationships	0	5	32	42	21	2.21	6

SA= strongly Agree, A=Agree, N=Neutral, DA=Disagree, SDA=Strongly Disagree, Avg= Average, R=Rank

The competition over scarce natural resources particularly water and pasture land was found to be one of the important causes for most Afar- Amhara community resource conflicts (see table 3). There is a serious water scarcity problem due to prolonged dry seasons and drought years in most of the study areas, particularly the Afar communities which is in the dry part of Ethiopia. The findings support, Tesfay et al (2012), that resource scarcity as a result of population pressure, poverty, and rangeland degradation cause violent conflicts between Afar and Wajerat people of Tigray in the Northern part of the Afar region. Such conflicts become more, frequent, and violent when the competing groups differ in their ethnic groupings and when there are no clearly defined property

rights between the groups (see table 3). Ratner et al (2007:4) noted that local resource disputes on land, water, forest, and fisheries can contribute to broader social conflicts.

In spite of the fact that each of the districts ranked and weighted different causes for the conflicts, all the three districts share contested-unclear boundaries which the land resource ownership on the borders are not formally assigned and not yet clearly delineated and demarcated to a specific group. The competition for new land, searching of dry season grassland for pasture and access to water resources rights, distribution of forests for firewood collection and charcoal production for market emerged as the primary factors of communal conflicts. All the key informants and participants in the FGDs agreed that during drought seasons, water points, including surface water such as Milla and Akika Rivers, the vessel of the Afar communities' flows from the highland of Habru and Ambassel district of Amhara region, shrinks and decreases in volume. A spring by name Zemzem, located on the border between the two communities which is also a source of human and animal drinking water decreases in volume in the dry season and is a factor of resource competition and violence.

Key informants and focus group discussants from both sides blamed each other for the unrestricted territorial expansion to get farm land, pasture and other land resources. A member of the focus group in Chiffra district of Afar explained that:

> "The Amhara want to encroach on our land. They always move into our land whenever we go to other areas to look for pasture. When we return, they refuse to leave. Due to this, we have lost large tracts of land" (Focus Group Discussant at Chiffar, December, 2020)

In a similar way a key informant from Deri- Roka KebeAle of Habru district claimed the contested territory is their ancestral property from ancient times. He explained by stating that a man known as Wosen from Mahal Amba in North Wollo cultivated this area in the time of Emperor Hailesilas I (1924-1974). Due to this, they have always had this territory as their resource.

The interest in such common resource leads each community to point their fingers at others for accusing territorial expansion and action in search of scarce arable land, grazing land and water points. Accusations and counter-accusations as well as claims and counter-claims around the use of border land resources like forest, water and pasture land between the two communities are the main factors for tension and violent conflicts. Negussie (1997) showed that since the 1950s, Afar people in most part of the region have increasingly been involved in protracted conflicts over access, use and tenure rights to land resources; this is partly due to encroachment of land by outsiders. Such arguments were also highlighted by Thiemo and Samuel (2016), Mwangi (2005) and Renee et al (2005) that there is a high probability of violence among different individuals or communities if there is no well-defined rules on the utilization and management of resources. Conflict over resources may take place when people are competing for the same resources, when there is a dispute over who has the right to certain resources and when people want to take someone else's resources or prevent someone from getting needed resources (Ostrom, 1994).

The two rival groups of North Wollo Amhara and neighbouring Afar have historical grievances on the use and ownership claim of resources. Discussion with key informants, household heads and FGD members revealed that the use and ownership rights for access to resources at Zemzem and Akika water points in Sodomma area along the border of Habru district of Amhara region and Chifra and Ewa of Afar are sources of tension between the two groups. In addition, 'Seletu-gora' and 'Hajo plain

at Jarra' a place along the district of Harbu of North Wollo and Chifra of Afar is another pasture and forest land area that is also a disputed territory.

A key informant from Semera University believes that the new ethnic regional boundary which has been implemented since 1991 did not consider the traditional land use practices of the Afar people as a cause of Afar- Amhara protracted conflicts. According to him, the new regional ethnic boundaries deny basin lands and river water access points to the Afar people and their traditional seasonal livestock migrations. His view harmonizes with the work of Abdulahi (2004), who noted that the ethnic-based government structure of Ethiopia has a power to separate different ethnic groups "who were in the past living within the same administration borders, into different regional states and limited their access to common resources like pasture lands".

Respondents also prioritized early response and crisis management systems as another factor of conflict for Ewa and Habru districts. For the Chifra district, weak early warning systems are important underlying source of community conflicts. Key informants confirm that rival communities avoid patronising common market, rusting of cattle, giving warning shots, killing of innocent people, and decreasing social communication were the main symptoms for the start of tensions and conflicts and give an alarm for the onset of some violent conflicts. As Haider (2014) points out, almost all natural or man-made disasters show some signs before causing mass damage.

The ability to read warning signs of trouble and indicators of increased tension or disturbance, early warning is very important (Lund, 2009; Rohuwerder, 2015; Haider, 2014). Immediately or within a short time after these signs, the groups will enter into devastating acts like burning house, infrastructure, mass killing and crop destruction. Sometimes there is no appropriate reaction to manage and control the conflicts before it reaches the stage of confrontation and crisis (Key informants at Habru district, January, 2021). Affa'a-Mindzie (2012) emphasizes political will and adequate resources as prerequisites for a timely and appropriate early warning and early response to conflicts.

Austin (2004) puts the three foundational questions that remain at the base of any early warning and early response situation as effectively identifying the causes of conflict, predicting the outbreak of conflict, and, mitigating the conflict. So, in practice early warning follows information gathering (data collection), processing and analysis (detection) the data, and translating and signalling the warning data. On the basis of these arguments, lack of early warning and early response tools in the North Wollo Amhara- Afar border area is one factor for violent conflicts.

Focus group discussants at Kul-Bayina *Kebele* of Habru district emphasised the ineffectiveness of the conflict resolution mechanism to manage the violence. The government did not give attention to the root cause of the problem but rather was inclined to immediate solution as fire brigade work. Mohammed and Beyene (2015) argue that conflict management in Ethiopia tends to be reactive and crisis-driven rather than being proactive. Additionally, the mobile life of pastoral and agro- pastoral communities of Afar in order to cope with drought, as a strategy of efficient resource utilization and as a means of information exchange leads to pressure and tension which sometimes leads to violent conflict to the host communities of the nearby Amhara population. As discussants highlighted, many times, weak preparations and weak information exchange between host communities and the Afar pastoralists on the direction of animal movement, time to stay to graze their animals at host areas as

the immediate cause of violent conflicts. This implies that the early warning and early response conflict management mechanisms was poor and non-functional in the conflict prone areas.

Supporting the arguments of Odote (2016) findings from this study have shown that resource scarcity is a deep-rooted cause of volatility, instability and greater losses of human lives in Africa, especially in the Horn of Africa. Similarly, the findings agree with Hendrix and Salehyan (2012:3) that "grievances and competition over water resources can generate into significant social conflicts in ways that do not require the level of organization and funding needed for sustaining an insurgency in Africa". The findings also support the arguments by Maxwell and Reuveny (2000) that resource scarcity and conflicts lead to four scenarios. First, the conflicting parties expose productivity decline due to the decline in the quality and quantity of natural resource, which causes tension over claims of shrinking natural resources. Secondly due to environmental scarcity, people migrate to other areas to save life and then eventually confrontation will happen with natives at the destination for resource utilization. Thirdly weakening of state institutions due to prolonged conflicts erodes people's confidence in their government, and finally the establishment of an unstable region.

4.4 triggering factors of community violence

In addition to the main factors leading for causing communal resource conflict between neighboring North Wollo Amhara and Afar communities, there are triggers. The household head interviews, focus group discussions, and key informants identified and prioritized these triggers of violent clashes. For all the three districts, frequent drought and easy access to illegal small arms were the major instigating factors of violent communal resource conflicts in the area.

4.4.1 Frequent Drought

Looking for pasture and water in their territory in times of drought was a challenging task for the pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities of Afar. In the same way drought affects the life of farming communities of North Wollo Amhara who are living adjacent to Afar. The major effects of drought on the farming communities are decreasing availability of water which has a great implication for cattle and crop production. In such seasons, the farming communities are exposed to crop damage by neighboring Afar communities with their cattle (see Table 4). A participant in the focus group discussion at Deri-Roka *Kebele* noted that "during the peak of the drought season, in our pre-harvest period, the Afar always come with their cattle to our lands and destroys our ripened crops even at night without any care." Farmers and host communities in Habru district become aggressive whenever the livestock of the Afar agro pastoralists destroy their farmlands and eat up their crops. A key informant at Ewa *woreda* of Afar region stated the challenge of drought as follows:

> "Historically in times of drought, we go to neighboring North Wollo Amhara with our cattle. They accept and invite us to use their land and water for a short time. However, in recent times, after Ethiopia implemented ethnic federalism, we are often not welcomed. We are therefore practicing our old traditions to go to neighboring North Wollo Amhara with our animals to search for pasture and water, even if they oppose us and give us no permission. Due to this, we are exposed to conflict with them (Key informant; December, 2020)."

The work of Homer- Dixon (1994) underscores environmental scarcity as a cause for conflict which is demand induced or supply induced and from structural factors. As Homer- Dixon indicated that

environmental change such as frequent drought characterized by rainfall variability both in terms of time and intensity is contributing to the occurrence of violent conflicts. In the same manner, the supply of grazing land is shrinking because of degradation of range, increasing desertification in all of the agro-pastoral and pastoral communities. This is an incentive to trigger and escalate conflicts supporting Burke et al. (2009: 17) prediction that climate change related conflict will increase by 54% in 2030 in Africa.

Key informants who are living in Chifra *woreda* in Afar region confirm that drought also aggravates animals rustling. As Markakis (2011) stated 'Animal rustling" is a situation in which a group of people carry out armed attacks against rival groups for the sake of stealing livestock and not necessarily for controlling new territories. FGD discussants also correlate drought with animal rustling. The time after drought would show an increase in animal looting and raids. Many livestock deaths expected during drought would lead to a greater motivation to the youth to restock through raiding animals of other communities which exacerbates tensions.

4.4.2 illegal small arms circulation

The proliferation of illegal small arms was also reported as a trigger of conflicts in the area. The FGD discussants at Habru district emphasized the easy access to illegal small arms in the area. Discussions with elders in Chifra district of Afar and Habru districts of Amhara revealed that they value the possession of small arms for the purpose of protecting themselves and resources. According to them, they have lost trust in the government security system to protect them. One of them explained that "there is a keen interest in the ownership of automatic rifles such as Kalashnikovs (AK47) as we consider it as a guarantee to save ourselves from the attacks of other groups and to keep our resources from other forceful claims." This finding supports the claims by Kehinde (2019: 38) that "Insecurity and violence have led many populations to create self-defense forces and ethnic and tribal militias, which have triggered many conflicts."   The views of a participant in the focus group discussion at Kule- Bayine *Kebele* of Habru district further explains this point:

> "Almost all of our communities are equipped with light weapons either legally or illegally just as our neighbors. We go to our farm armed with weapons for defense in case of attack. We also support this directly or indirectly to counter-balance the power of the neighboring Afar communities. Our ammunitions are the only protection we have. Really, we are reluctant to believe the local security to keep our safety. That is why we are armed." (Focus group Discussion, December, 2020)

Table 4. Proximate and triggering factors of conflict in the study area

Perceptions	Likert Rate						
Harbu district	**SA**	**A**	**N**	**DA**	**SDA**	**Avg**	**R**
Frequent drought	57	80	0	3	0	4.35	1
Illegal modern light weapons movement	35	67	22	16	0	3.86	2
Ethnicization of conflicts by the political elite	11	64	10	32	24	3.07	5
Blood revenge	5	53	47	27	8	3.13	4
Cattle rustling	21	56	11	35	17	3.2	3
Ewa District	**SA**	**A N**	**N**	**DA**	**SDA**	**Avg**	**R**
Frequent drought	9	59	30	16	0	3.53	1
Illegal modern light weapons movement	19	69	17	7	2	3.84	2
Ethnicization of conflicts by the political elite	12	50	32	18	2	3.46	3
Blood revenge	4	26	22	61	11	2.83	5
Cattle rustling	10	40	31	26	5	3.15	4
Chiffra District SA	**SA**	**A**	**N**	**DA**	**SDA**	**Avg**	**R**
Frequent drought	17	61	4	18	0	3.77	2
Illegal modern light weapons movement	20	66	9	5	0	4.1	1
Ethnicization of conflicts by the political elite	4	29	21	36	0	2.74	4
Blood revenge	3	22	20	52	0	2.67	5
Cattle rustling	12	25	35	21	2	3.09	3

SA= strongly Agree, A=Agree, N=Neutral, DA=Disagree, SDA=Strongly Disagree, Avg= Average, R=Rank

What has complicated the small arm problem is that small illegal arms traders and dealers also have a keen interest in the continuation of violent conflict as well as delaying the peace dialogue process. These arms traders have profitable business when there are violent of conflicts. According to the key informants, there is a long chain and network from ammunition manufacturers to regional and local dealers and traders. A key informant at Woldia city, the center of North Wollo zone, argues that the weak implementation of laws on the possession and utilization of illegal small arms and light weapons in both regions allows everyone to access and use it inappropriate ways. Key informants from Semera University also highlighted the dangers of illegal arms trade for Ethiopia. They also show that the easy circulation of firearms is facilitated by the long and porous boundaries and weak administration in the country. Kassa Tekleberehan, one-time was a spokesman of House of Federation of Ethiopia spoke about the dangers of illegal trade in ammunition to the country as follows "Huge number of arms are being smuggled into the country in many directions and it is already posing a serious security threat to the nation." As Kwaja et al (2020) noted, illegal small arms and light weapons circulation and resultant policy deficiency to control this illicit trade is playing a central role in perpetuating and sustaining the protracted conflicts between farmers and herder in the Sahel and Lake Chad region areas. This argument is also supported by Homer Dixon (1994) that local conflicts sometimes have national or global cause.

4.4.3 Infrastructure development in the contested area without public consultation
Key informants and focus group discussants also confirmed that many tensions and conflicts happen while infrastructure developments are planned and implemented in the area. A good example is the Akika unfinished irrigation and livestock watering development project at Jarra in the border of Deri-Roka *Kebele* of Amhara region and Chiffra of the Afar region. This project shows the clear manifestation of development as a catalyst for conflicts and how conflicts hindered development.

This project is the unfinished development project started by the Amhara region state with a budget of 3.5 million Birr the equivalent of around 167 thousand Dollar without public consultation. When the project is completed, the dam will have the capacity to contain 200,000-meter cube water and serve for the purpose of agriculture and livestock watering. The main reason behind the conflict of the irrigation and livestock watering development of the Akika project was the unresolved claim of use and ownership of the land and water between the two communities, lack of public consultation and suspicion of grazing land loss of the Afar community after the project completed (key informant at Chiffra district and North Wollo zone, January, 2021).

4.4.4 The culture of violence

There are many indicators of the existence of the culture violence in the area. Oral tradition, revenge, folklore, music and poetry, bravery, warrior tradition, un-forgiveness, kidnapping, revenge-seeking ventures practiced in the area often shows the use of force to achieve group's own cherished goals. Local singers often sing songs of praise to heroes who defeat on their rival groups. Additionally, key informants and focus group discussants from both sides highlighted the violence cultures for sustaining conflicts and also undermining cooperation between the Afar – Amhara communities. As Durojaye et al (2013), Avruch (1998) and Paul (2003) have revealed societies express their own culture in a unique manner; while some have the culture of violence, others have the culture of peace, and others also have a culture of poverty, the culture of corruption, and culture of support. Butera and Leroy (2008) assert that conflicts escalate from a complex sequence of events in which cultural and other social factors always exist. Paul (2003) also noted that culture has a potential impact on conflict creation, conflict escalation, conflict de-escalation, conflict resolution and peace building.

The focus group discussants from both sides stated that the communities consider a boy showing to the public as a killer of wild animals, theft and raiding of cattle to acquire assets, revenging and killing people from rival groups as a hero. The communities will praise such a boy by wearing decorations on his wrist, neck and ears. On the other hand, those who do not do this are considered as cowards and verbally harassed. This finding supports the work of Tesfay et al (2012), culture of violence as one of the aggravating factors of the protracted conflict of Afar- Wajerat people in the North-eastern part of Ethiopia. Such community thinking and societal cherished has the power to ignite further conflict and aggravate existing ones. Growing involvement of the youth in violence is one outcome of the violence culture. All these proximate and triggering causes sustains the vicious cycle of destruction in the area even though the root cause of the conflict comes from structural factors which relate with weak property rights.

5. Recommendations

Defining of the resource ownership and contested regional boundaries through the active involvement of stakeholders such as the federal government, the two regional governments, local government, and local resource users is needed. It is important to give more attention to the delineation and demarcation of the two community borders based on the principle of equity of resource sharing and historical resource sharing culture.

The need to apply conflict sensitive development approaches at all times. It is recommended that an assessment of the impact of development projects on peace and conflict needs to be done before the implementation of any development project.

The need for a strong policy, legal and implementation framework to control illegal arm trade in all parts of Ethiopia and in the Afar- Amhara border area in particular. To reduce conflicts related to frequent drought there is the needs for strong early warning system to maintain the planned mobility of guest communities in this case pastoralists.

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Key terms and Definitions

Afar, Amhara, and Oromo: - Ethnic groups in Ethiopia.

Kebele: - The smallest administrative unit in the Ethiopian Federal Government structure as a ward, a neighborhood, which has at least 1000 families of about 4500 to 6000 people.

*Woreda***:** - an Amharic word (Ethiopian language) which refers to the smaller administrative unit, greater than *Kebele*, in the Ethiopian Federal government structure, it is like a district.

Zone - The medium administrative unit in the Ethiopian Federal Government structure below a region and above a *Woredas.*