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The Impacts of Gumuz – Oromo Cross Border Conflict on the Rural Society: Along the Border of Belo-jiganfo [Yie] and Sassiga Woreda

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Abstract:

The main purpose of this study is analyzing the impacts of Gumuz- Oromo cross border conflict on rural society along Belo-jiganfo(yie) woreda of Kamashi Zone and Sassiga woreda of East Wollega Zone. This study preferred to use qualitative research methodology which enabled the researcher to use different techniques to grasp the social interaction in a sensible way and purposeful sampling method was used. For the purpose of this study key informant in depth individual interview and focused group discussion were used as data gathering instrument and the gathered data were descriptively analyzed. In the post Dergue cross border and ethnic conflicts have become a persistent occurrence of Ethiopian federal state structure. Most of these conflicts are due to resource competition and threat of autonomy while others are because of fear loss of recognition of self-identification and sovereignty of regional status. This is the case of Gumuz and Oromo conflict that flared up in May, 2008 along the border of Belo-jiganfo [yie] and Sassiga wore das which inflicted serious impacts on the rural society. A majority of conflict studies have been carried out despite the studies at large focused on cause, actors and conflict management but neglect the impacts that it inflicted to the rural people who are the first line victims. Furthermore, rural areas are/ were the scene of the conflict but little investigation have been done in terms of all aspects. Hence the present study significantly contributes in revealing the impacts of cross border conflict on rural society. The study added alternative approach in understanding of territorial competitions and border problems between Gumuz and Oromo as well as enabling to realize the politics of peace in rural Ethiopia. The major impacts are economic, social and security related cases. It draws conclusions regarding the impacts of cross border conflict. As long as there is claim and counter claims on significant emblematic border lands sustains conflict.

Keywords: Cross-border, conflict, impact, Gumuz, Oromo

1. Introduction

Conflict is ever-present as long as human interaction exists. It happens whenever incompatible activities occur, in all human affairs and at every level of society. Conflict per se is not a negative aspect of man; but it is an expected manifestation of social difference and of humanity's continuous struggle for justice and self-determination. If managed non-violently, it can be positive, a source of immense creativity and progress. The challenge, yet, is to avoid the violent expression of conflict without addressing the root causes completely (Tsegaye, 2009).

The Horn of Africa is one of the most conflict-prone regions in Africa. The region is ethnically heterogeneous and politically unstable. In this part of Africa conflicting situations have been carried out under the pretext of state formation and regional integration. Fierce Conflicts in the region have caused suffering and extensive damages to life and property that affects the rural society persistently (Leenco, 2004). It also has had an adverse impact on the overall economic development of rural people above anyone else. The region has been closely associated with recurrent cycles of drought, famine and food insecurity and large scale population displacement, irresistible poverty, political instability and even state collapse in the case of Somalia. Conflicts within the Horn of Africa are frequent, complex, and occur at different levels. They can be inter-ethnic, intra-ethnic, or cross border in dimension (Teshome 2010).

Most of the conflicts in the region of the Horn of Africa mainly illustrate the characteristics of resource based, cross border and in turn immensely affects rural society. Major historical shifts in the political climate, as well as upheavals and migrations caused by civil conflict, have had a strong impact on rural people. With regard to the creation of new state structure and reiterate of cross border conflict, the Norwegian Refugee Council [NRC] (2004) in its annual report indicates that ill boundary demarcation has been become sources of dispute between regional states. In addition, NRC (Ibid: 21) discloses the causes of conflict along the borders of Somali National Regional State (SNRS) and Oromia Regional State are, for example, "... ethnic groups from both sides compete over the ownership and access, particularly to rich grazing land and pasture as well as strategically and historically vital water points along the regional border. [...], there are local conflicts [...] that are related to particular issues or commodities such as cattle raiding."

Alemayehu (2009) also observes that cross border conflict in Ethiopia is also exacerbated due to agricultural commercialization, since smallholders are more willing to change to cash crops as long as local food supplies are affordable and reliable (Lavers, 2012). Desalegn (2009) illustrates fundamental causes that increase conflicts across boundary of the ethnically drawn borders of Ethiopian Regional States. According to him, the EPRDF led government politically imposed the land policy and use land as attraction of the broad base peasant. Subsequently fails to clearly mark out boundary along the contested borders and issue of land become sources of conflict in Ethiopia. Following the ill demarcation of concrete boundaries along regional states cross border conflicts have become observable and immensely affect rural dwellers.

Rural areas are the main theater of conflicting parties and subsequently rural people are the first line victims of conflicts in various ways. Berhanu (2001) reviews the major impacts of conflict on rural society mentioning that violent conflicts weaken the rural economy and environment by destroying the potential of productivity. He goes on illustrating some of the negative impacts comprise: disruption of production, loss of local genetic resources, destructing rural infrastructure such as road, bridges, health care centers, schools and other service provision centers. This finally leads to impoverishment of the rural households by keeping them under recurrent famine. Forced conscription of young men into the army disrupts the productive capacities of rural households. Marijke and Serneels, (2012) in their study of the impacts of the 1994 Rwandan genocide find it's far reaching consequences on the rural household that remained up to seven years. Displacement of villagers was one of underpinning impact on rural village specially those which were the scene of conflict. It alienated rural households from their farm, village, produce and social network.

In addition, De Walque (2004) discusses in what manner civil conflict in Cambodia had a lasting impact on public service attainment, mostly because of the collapse of the service provision system, and Shemyanika (2011) presents evidence of the negative impact of conflict on schooling in the case of Tajikistan. Chamarbagwala and Morán (2011) find a strong negative effect of the civil war in Guatemala on the education of Mayan men and women in rural areas, the most disadvantaged groups. These results, which are also summarized in a literature review by Justino (2007), asserts that conflict can have profound negative effects on human capital, thereby sustaining poverty and slowing down economic recovery and sustainable development.

2. Methods and Materials

In this study qualitative research methodology was used, which enabled the researcher to use different techniques to grasp the social interaction in a sensible way and to see the detailed trends of the impacts of cross border conflict on the rural society of the contested border from various perspective. According to Flick (2009) qualitative research has paramount importance in the study of social interaction and reflects diverse phenomena. This research design enable researcher to study diverse issues of cross border conflict and its impact from various contexts. In addition, this method helps researcher to analyze new emerging data on the impacts of conflict on the rural societies. Employing qualitative research is also very essential in the study of social realities at the micro level. The causes and nature of impacts of the inter-ethnic conflict are normally dynamic. It also gives freedom to informants to share their experiences and help the researcher to utilize broad scope of evidences.

2.1. Sampling Method

Purposeful sampling technique was employed since individuals who could succinctly articulate about the impacts of cross border conflict were few in number. Participants were selected whom the researcher trust to provide relevant information about the problem at hand. Purposive method of sampling is much helpful in this study. It enabled researcher to select impacts of conflict according to intensity with which varying features and experiences can be analyzed. Furthermore, purposive sampling is appropriate to focus on critical and politically sensitive cases. Therefore, the researcher purposely selected thirty key informants. These include informants from different government offices, such as police officers, high ranking political officials from regional level to kebele level and key informants from local communities from both Gumuz and Oromo. In order to understand cross cut issues of the conflict and its impacts interviews were also made with three managers of investment projects operating in the study areas. In addition, in the selected study villages, a total of five focus group discussions were conducted with the communities affected by the cross border conflict.

2.2. Source of Data and Instruments of data gathering

Various sources of data were used in this study. The most available sources which suit to this study are primary and secondary data. The primary sources were gathered through in depth key informant interview and focused group discussion. With regard to secondary sources, researcher used multiple secondary sources such as books, theses, journals and internet sources for background information of the study.

2.2.1. Interview

An in-depth individual interview was made with key informants, community members at the village level, and higher officials from region down to local level. In the in depth individual interview both unstructured and semi structured were used in order to investigate the major impacts of border conflict that erupted between Gumuz and Oromo ethnic groups as of May 2008 at Hora Wata village along the border of Belojiganfo[yie] and Sassiga districts. The in depth interviews were held with fifteen key Gumuz and fifteen key Oromo informants. In addition some selected investors and

NGO workers were communicated based on the relevance to generate additional data to enrich the study with appropriate evidence.

2.2.2. Focused Group Discussion

FGD has paramount importance in collecting qualitative data. Primarily FGD helps to generating empirical evidence using different forms of question (Flick, 2009). It also enables researcher to understand feeling and experiences of discussants about the impacts of cross border conflict. Focused group discussion was held at various study sites with both Gumuz and Oromo community members which consider gender and age. Two focus discussions were carried out at Bello Central (Handhura Baloo) separately with Gumuz and Oromo ethnic groups while the other two FGD were held at Hora Wata village comprising Gumuz and Oromo members distinctively. One FGD was made at Fuwfuwate combining both Oromo and Gumuz kebele officials. As far as number of focused group discussant is concerned in each of the five FGD eight to ten members were participated.

2.3. Description of the Study Site

- Belo jiganfo[yie] is one of the 20 woredas in the Benishangul-Gumuz Region of Ethiopia. Part of the Kamashi Zone, it is bordered on the west by the Didessa River, which separates it from Kamashi, on the north by the Anger River which separates it from Yaso, and by Oromia Region in the east and south; parts of the woreda are enclaves in the Oromia Region.
- The 2007 national census reported a total population for this woreda of 30,143, of whom 15,983 are men and 14,160 are women; 2,762 or 9.16% of its population are urban dwellers and preponderant majority lives in the rural areas, therefore, rural dwellers accounts 27,381, i.e 90.80%. The three largest ethnic groups reported in Belo jiganfo[yie] are the Gumuz (69.4%), the Berta (19.8%), and the Oromo (10%); all other ethnic groups made up 0.8% of the population. Gumuz is spoken as a first language by 69.6%, Berta by 19.8%, and Afaan Oromo by 9.8%; the remaining 0.8% speaks all other primary languages (CSA, 2007).
- Sasiga is one of the woredas in the Oromia Region and a part of the east Wallagga zone. Sasiga is bordered on the south by Diga Leka, on the west by the Benishangul-Gumuz Region, on the northeast by Limmu, on the north by an exclave of the Benishangul-Gumuz Region and on the east by Guto Wayu. The administrative center of this woreda is Galo. The 2007 national census reported the total population of Sasiga woreda to be 80,814, of whom 41,326 are men and 39,488 are women. 2,573 or 3.18% of its population are urban dwellers while the preponderant majority is rural resident (Ibid).

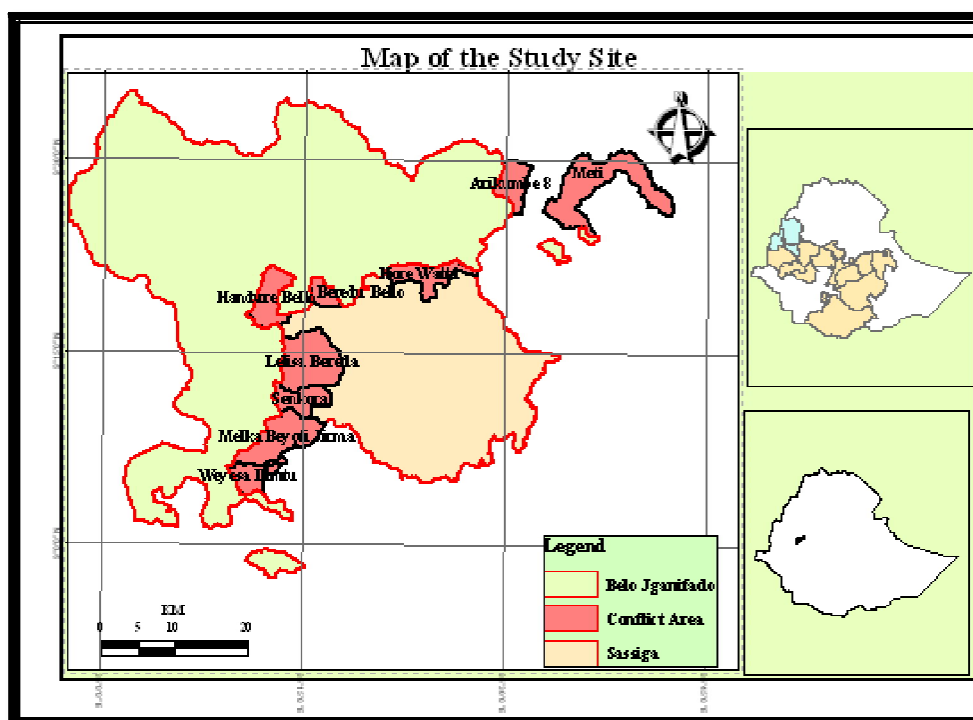


Figure 1: Map of Study Site. Source: Ethio-GIS Data

2.4. People of the Study Area

2.4.1. The Gumuz

Linguistically the Gumuz belongs to the Nilo-Saharan family which inhabits bordering Ethio-Sudanese lowland (Ahland, 2012). The Gumuz constitutes one of such early inhabitants of Ethiopia and they were living in the northwest highland before the arrival of Agaw who pushed them into inhospitable lowland which the Gumuz has occupied today (Abdusamed, 1995 and Alemayehu, 2015). In addition Tsegaye (n-d) contends that the Gumuz people have been lived in

Metekel and Kamashi over longer period of time. Therefore, today Gumuz settlement convincingly locates between Qwara lowland in the north and Dhidhessa valley in the south. As far as Gumuz settlement is concerned Abdusamed (1995) succinctly presents that Gumuz ethnic groups dispersed in Ethiopia, as far as Qwara in Bagemidir up to Matamma- Gallabat on the Ethio-Sudanese border. Some segments of the Gumuz survive farther south in Dabus, the Diddessa, Angar and Abbay valleys in Wallaga. Furthermore, regarding the settlement of Gumuz in Ethiopia some pocket of them settled in south west Shoa (Ahland, 2012 and Alemayehu, 2015). According to Alemayehu (2015) the arrival of Gumuz people to this area was related with massive enslavement by the then official of the imperial regime. Alemayehu (ibid) also observes the Gumuz massive trek set out to Wollega since 1930s in order to keep them away from protracted enslavement policy of Ras Hailu of Gojjam.

Following the Amhara expansion to the Gumuz land north of the Blue Nile since the reign of King Yisshaq Gumuz people suffered heavy enslavement from Amhara and their (Amhara) appointed Agaw governor called Qagnazamach Zelleqe Liku after 1898. Thus some pocket of Gumuz clan moved south ward and settled in Dhidhessa valley in need of defense from Oromo king of Leqaa Naqamtee Moroda Bakare (emphasize is added) (Ahland, 2012; Alemayehu , 2015; Taressa, 2011 and Tsega, 2006). The king of Leqaa Naqamtee allowed them to settle in the entire low of Dhidhessa valley as far as the western vicinity of Naqamtee and held traditional pact of kakuu with Oromo so as warranting them the provision of security (Tsega, 2006). Abdusamed (1995) argues the intensity of Gumuz trek to southward across the Blue Nile valley was after Fitawrari Zallage had bought office of governorship from the lord of Gojjam in 1911. However, their exodus in small group was already started in the early days of 1880s from the direction of Mettekel negating taxation to Christian lords and established permanent abode in Dhidhessa valley. This was so, due to inaccessibility of the valley to the high landers raiding to the region and collecting tributes. In addition the Christian war lords north of the Blue Nile were not in peace with the Oromo war lords. The antagonistic relationship between the warlords had given an antagonistic opportunity to the Gumuz in seeking protection among the Oromo south of the Blue Nile. Consequently Gumuz occupying region has been divided into north and south of Blue Nile (As James, 1977, Dame, 1980 and Tessema, 2009 cited in Gemed, 2010). Asnake (2009) argues even if their settlement is adjoining, it is feasible to divide the Gumuz country into Metekel in the Blue Nile valley of northwest Ethiopia and Dhidhessa valley in the former Wollega province. The majority of Gumuz south of the Blue Nile have been living in a dense Bamboo cover in the Dhidhessa river valley which they claim it as their ancestral land. This has brought the neighbouring ethnic groups into atrocious conflict.

2.4.2. The Oromo

Oromo people are the largest ethno-linguistic groups who have been living in the north eastern part of Africa since the time immemorial. Their settlement extends in the north from Ethiopian highlands to northeastern central part of Kenya. In Ethiopia alone, the Oromo people constitute forty percent of the country's total population (Bartles,1983;Baxter, 1983; Lewis, 1984a; Mohammed, 1990;Aguilar, 1994; Baxter,HultinandTriulzi,1996;Hamdessa,2000;Wolyie, 2006). The recent population census of 2007 also attests that the Oromo people represent 36.6%ofthecountry's population. With regard to land, they occupy nearly thirty-five percent of country's land. The majority of the Oromo people are living in Oromia regional state (Wolyie, 2006). Assefa (2005) also reports that about eighty- five percent of the Oromo are permanently living in Oromia regional state.

There are different theses and antitheses about the Oromo presence in the areas where living today particularly Wollega. According to the emerging findings, Oromo people are early dwellers of the land they have occupied today. A multitude of international and domestic scholars have written voluminous works on the history of Oromo origin and present settlement pattern. Majority of these scholars do not agree with the Oromo early inhabitants of the region today they occupy. However, some enthusiastic scholars, for instance, Eshetu (2009) contends that the Oromo people are one of the earliest dwellers of Ethiopia and specifically they have been living where they are today. He extends his assertion, when the Maccaa Oromo led their expansion to Wollega and Gojjam they found some Oromo clans who speak Oromo language. According to him the Maccaa Oromo met with Amumma Subbu, Dangro, Guto, Illu and others in their reoccupation of former land. In addition Tabor (2006 E.C) in his recent scholarly writing asserts the Oromo struggle for reoccupation of their lost autonomy of the former residential which they missed since the fourteenth century by the expansionist Christian kings.

Alemayehu et al (2006) mention the same Oromo clans who occupy the two adjacent provinces of Wollega and Gojjam in a very remote past. In the same token Tsega (2006) in his study of inter-ethnic relation in the Matakkaal rightly present that the Oromo have already been living in the parts of eastern Gojjam after devastating the area during the heyday of their expansion in 1570s. In addition, he contends that Oromo crossed over the Gumuz inhabited areas of Matakkaal and Guba. Major Oromo clans moved to Matakkaal and Guba from the direction of Dhidhessa and Blue Nile rivers converging environs like Wasti and largely northwestern part of present Hebanu district.

3. Result and discussion

3.1. Major Impacts of the Inter Ethnic Conflict

3.1.1. Insecurity

Security becomes the epicenter for a society to live in a peaceful manner along a border of given neighboring political jurisdiction. Free movement of people has become doubtful particularly seasonal migrant laborers and Oromo farmers who temporarily going to the lowland of Gumuz ruling kebeles for farming and collecting crops as daily laborers.

These seasonally migrating farmers and laborers are strictly feel insecurity. They emphasized that fearful to the extent that they felt unable to go on foot from the places of border conflict area located to nearby towns. According to these informants (seasonal laborers), many residents were killed by the local communities while they were trying to go back to their home areas on foot. Reacting to these allegations, the Gumuz officials contended that the incidents have nothing to do with them. Rather, they explained how Oromo farmers exerted challenges to them when they come to the areaⁱ.

Oromo farmers who are living in Gumuz governing kebeles insist that they face intimidation from the local communities and leaders every day. Similar attitudes towards the Gumuz was reflected during focus group discussions I held in some selected villages of Belojiganfo [yie] woreda of the Benishangul Gumuz region, with seasonal migrant laborersⁱⁱ. The participants stressed that threats from the Gumuz is the major risk factor that they consider when deciding whether to move to the Gumuz inhabited areas. According to the participants, there were cases in which these people were attacked and killed by the Gumuz while they were travelling. Equally Gumuz informants who are living in the Oromo governing areas feel insecurity and preferred to leave their former domicile. According to the official report released by investigative committee about 12062 people were displaced from both communities in fear of possible attack that could be exerted.

However, it should be noted here such allegations could also be related to the stereotypical views prevalent in the highlands which characterize the Gumuz as hostile. Nevertheless, one local official from Belojiganfo [yie] woreda administration council admitted that there were a number of such incidents in the woreda but they did not know who was behind the intimidation. Whoever is to blame, and whichever group, the Gumuz or the migrants, are right, it is understandable from both individual interviews and group discussions with the Gumuz that they have unambiguous, negative attitudes towards both the migrant Oromo workers as well as those who are living in the Gumuz ruling kebeles. It is also evident that similarly Gumuz communities who are living under Oromo ruling kebeles do not feel secure. As far as security is concerned focus group discussant and key informants of both ethnic groups living along the contested border assure that they have become unsecured. Therefore, insecurity prevails among the rural societies who live under the jurisdiction of others and they are discouraged to produce, accumulate as well as invest capital. The adverse effect of the problem of insecurity triggered the contending groups into immortal hostility and hampered free movement of people.

At the climax of Gumuz-Oromo conflict in May 2008 triggered men of the conflicting group boycotting from going to market of antagonist group crossing the border. Only few Gumuz female going to market of Fawu-Fawute located along the border of Belojiganfo [yie] and Sasigga woreda. Even female marketers particularly of Gumuz took with them male gun holders as escort. On the contrary Oromo marketers too do the same thing even though they did not openly hold gun due to two basic realities. First, unlike of the Gumuz men among the Oromo holding gun is not common and such action is politically contentious. Second, Oromo men along the border were disarmed long before the conflict of May 2008. Regarding this Oromo and Gumuz elites observe differently. According to Gumuz top political officials the culture of purchasing and using rifles have been a long time practice. The late president of BGNRSⁱⁱⁱ concluded that Gumuz male holds weapons as part of their life and easy access to small and light weapons also encouraged them to do so. In contrast to this one of none Gumuz key informant civil servant working for regional bureau of peace and security claimed that BGNRS council failed to endorse legal frame work on controlling the transaction of SALW^{iv} across the region. In addition the same key informant argues that the transaction of small and light weapons has been carried out by ex- Tigary liberation front fighters. In line with this Oromo key informants and focus group discussant hotly contended as the ex- fighters of liberation front facilitated and participated in transaction of arms which contributed to increase the casualty of the cross border violent conflict. On the other, East Wallaga officials complained Gumuz high ranking officials who were dedicated their time and energy in the provision of ammunition using government vehicles packed in three barrels. The then BGNRS with vice president rank and head of agriculture and rural development bureau caught red handed while transporting. Indeed he also did the same thing during the Gumuz of Yasso woreda in conflict with Limmu woreda Oromo in May 2007. However, focused group discussants of Kamashi zone officials deny the argument forwarded by none Gumuz key informants. According to the officials who participated in group discussion Gumuz men most of the time preferred to use traditional weapons than modern weapons and only small number of Gumuz have been armed with modern weapon. This argument contradicts with the existing fact that what majority of the informants agreed upon.

Therefore, illegal and unchecked small arms and light weapons transaction complicated security of rural society. Since security has become risk factor for their survival the rural communities of both contending ethnic group of the study area invest much of their wealth on security. According to the late president of Benishangul Gumuz regional state Gumuz men have earmarked huge sum of money for purchase of arms. Indeed, Gumuz community customarily used to purchase a rifle of any type whenever a baby boy born to a family. Nevertheless, the situation during and after May, 2008 conflict was different in terms of money invested on arms and need of it. The price of fully automatic machine gun (Kalashnikovs) increased in two folds following the border conflict. This implies issue of security got priority than other sphere of life among the rural communities living in conflict prone area.

3.1.2. Economic Impact

Having once entered in to conflicting relationship along the border both Oromo and Gumuz rural households have become food insecure. Before their peaceful coexistence deteriorated the Gumuz peasants used Qanja system i.e., 'sharecropping'. Qanja system involves the establishment of a sharecropping arrangement with Oromo farmers who would come to live and cultivate Gumuz land. The sharecropping arrangement recognizes the right of the Gumuz over their land determines the relationships between the two groups. The Gumuz who have abundant fertile land and little experience in plough agriculture lease their land to the Oromo farmers who increasingly face shortage of farm land in the degraded and crowded highlands. The Gumuz in most cases have been living upon the agricultural products of

the Oromo farmers. This is due to the fact that the Gumuz communities though they have large hectares of fertile land are not active enough to cultivate much but they prefer to lease their land either to the Amhara settler or the Oromo neighbors (mostly to the Oromo before the coming of the Amhara). However, the arrival of the Amhara settlers affects the relation between the two neighboring communities.

The Oromo peasant leased Gumuz land with less prices but the arrival of Amhara together with the skyrocketing price of sesame (selit) have changed their good relation. The size of land to be cultivated and amount of yield collected from the Gumuz owned land heavily trickled down in the post interethnic conflict of May 2008 along the border kebeles of Saye-Daslecha (Belojiganfo[yie]) and Biqiltu-shankora or village two (Sassiga woreda). This has subjected both Gumuz and Oromo rural households to severe food insecurity. With regard to the destruction of cereals 357 Quintals (sacks) of Sorghum, 350 Quintals (sacks) of Maize, 4 Quintals (sack) of Millet and 19 huts were burnt down and looted by the contending parties. On Oromo side 440 cattle, 39 pack animals, 17 goats, 210 chickens, 44 sacks of cereals were looted. Consequently the rural societies of the conflict scene were starved and impoverished. A starved and impoverished rural family and threaten in the manner that unable to cultivate for the next year and the only fate of the rural people of the conflict prone area left them to live in a state of poverty.

Rural society of the contested border lost their service provision centers. To this end, for example, in the Gumuz ruling kebele of Tankara one human clinic, one animal clinic and one kebele office were destroyed by fire. The destruction of health service provision center put in danger the rural people living in hot low land to various seasonally erupting human and animal diseases such as malaria. The time when the ethnic skirmish occurred was the season at which the prevalence of malaria befallen and affect large number of the rural people living in the hot low land on both side. Both FGD discussant and key informant of Gumuz and Oromo strongly criticized that they were remained under serious threat of health risk of hot lowland infections. In the post conflict period the conflict prone localities which lost health care centers for animals and human had suffered a lot from animal losses due to infectious diseases and human death particularly the productive age. Among the Gumuz responsibility of household support falls in the hand of female head of the family hence this whenever she gets sick survival of the house hold came to be endangered. This is a common observable problem in the selected study sites. As far as economic impacts of the cross border conflict are concerned, the conflict heavily affected Gumuz community than the Oromo. In spite rural societies from both Gumuz and Oromo engaged in the cross border conflict, Gumuz rural people mostly during the summer season borrow grains from their Oromo neighbors. Nonetheless, in the aftermath of the conflict their creditor (Oromo) lost confidence to lend either in kind or in cash. Oromo peasants who remained their domicile in the Gumuz jurisdiction complained the Gumuz officials who failed to deliver fair justice if Gumuz debtors refuse paying back.

With regard to the destruction of private property close to 1508 private houses were set on fire which is estimated to 10,000 birr. This led rural community of the study site into long lasting path of destitute life and seeking aid and dependent on the government. The other impact of interethnic conflict between the Gumuz- Oromo of May 2008 peasants on both sides have severely been suffering from losing potential of production. This is due to the fact that they are unable to be sure about their personal and property security. In resultant peasants felt as they should produce and store only for immediate consumption than producing for sale and later use. Particularly ethnically Oromo farmers who rented or producing on basis of share cropping on Gumuz land due to the fear for crop destruction by their Gumuz competitor abstain from surplus production. The conflict prone borders of Belojiganfo [yie] and Sassiga have a potential for the production of sesame (selit) which is very sellable at national market and exportable. Since the conflict that torn apart the neighboring friendly society hold back them from working on the untapped resource. The conflict also impoverished both conflicting groups by creating suspicion and enmity to each other. The May, 2008 conflict and subsequent conflicts persisted to date in different forms and worsened the economic interdependence of the two neighbouring societies.

3.2. Displacement, Deaths and Imprisonment

The displacement of local communities from their homes and lands leading to a loss of access to their basic resources has emerged as a result of the increasing cross border conflict between Gumuz and Oromo. The rural community of the conflict area subjected to internal displacement. As the field investigation suggests the threats of displacement have been escalating in the region. Oromo local officials have evicted Gumuz peasants from their residence in Biqiltu Shankora and Handhura Belo (Belo-Central) of Sassiga woreda and Gumuz kebele officials did the same to Oromo living in Saye- Dalecha, Anger-Meti, Anger- Shankora. Of course, on both sides most of the residents left their fiefs and homes not only due to the direct violence but in fear of structural violence. At the climax of conflict close to 12062 Gumuz fled their homes from five kebeles and resettled at Soge primary school while 1344 Oromo displaced and wounded taken to Nekemte. In the course of the conflict there were also disappearances of both adult and children. In Saye Dalacha, for example, children under fifteen have been disappeared and whose where about is not known still today. This left incurable traumatic impact on the local people and create feeling of immortal hatred between the two antagonistic ethnic groups.

There were mass imprisonments of peasants from the Gumuz and Oromo sides who were suspected to be organizers and killed the civilians indiscriminately. Among the suspected Gumuz 260 of them were arrested and went through police investigation. The police investigation set free 149 suspects and 111 of them were found guilty of the crime while 11 of these accused of crime of genocide and sentenced to death penalty. Indeed the intention of this research is not to narrate about the process of adjudication but analyzing the impact of imprisonment on rural society in various aspects. Hence this, taking the actors of the conflict to prison has multiple pitfalls on the rural households. The main actors who

participated in the interethnic cross border conflict were the most productive class of the society. The imprisonment of the productive forces of the society leads to the decrease of production and consequently results in impoverishment of the households. Besides the rural females of the study site become helpless and hold the responsibility of supporting the whole family.

As police report shows about 113 Gumuz were killed out of which 64 of them were men while 17 were women including babies under age five years above all in Anger Meti, Saye Dalecha, Kuta Muri and Tankara of Gumuz rural kebeles. It is also reported that the size of deaths have been increasing since the two ethnic groups involved in a conflict relation. This conflict had claimed the lives of many people and made the rest wounded and incapacitated. The corpse of the murdered people left on the ground without being buried properly and most bodies were eaten by vultures and hyenas. This left psychological impacts and traumatized the relatives.

3.3. Social Impact

As far as social impact of the cross border conflict is concerned members of the contending ethnic groups have developed mistrust and sense of enmity towards each other. Prior to the heightened inter-ethnic conflict both Gumuz and Oromo were living in peace as good neighbors. Although some members of the conflicting groups stereotyped their counterpart as an unforgettable enemy, still older members of both ethnic groups tried to keep their friendship and visit each other as they did before. However, the impact of the cross border conflict transcends this relation and in resultant torn apart them. In my in-depth interview with Gumuz and Oromo key informants delineated their separation discontentedly. Particularly the Gumuz elders cursed the day that their youths and politicians entered a socially destructive conflict. The Oromo elders who were interviewed share the same view with the Gumuz. This is because the elders have had developed a long time proven social, cultural and economic ties. Their culture and economies of communities along the longest frontier are strongly intertwined.

The other social impact of the conflict was that many families had been displaced; many children were separated from their parents and experienced much traumatic experience. The interruption of transport, school, and medical services especially different markets made the social problems aggravated. One of Gumuz key informants at Hora Dimtu stated that Gumuz were not only directly killed by Oromos but also failed prey to predators in the thick forest since most of the victims took shelter in the forests. This was because after once the Gumuz armed militias exerted first assault early in the morning at camp two (Mander Hulet), Gumuz who were living adjacent to the attacked village felt that the aggrieved Oromo might have unprecedentedly retaliate the blood feud. Therefore, Gumuz villagers move off to the nearby forest in order to take refuge there but faced silent killers in the sanctuary they took protection.

Destruction of service provision posts along with the interruption of services made the life of rural societies miserable. According to the data obtained from FGD discussant at Saye Dalacha and Tankara kebele two human clinics, one kebele office and three grain mills were burnt. Therefore, the people living in these two localities unable to get health care for themselves and their animals.

In the conflict between Gumuz of Belojiganfo [yie] and Oromo of Sassiga woreda created far reaching effects by producing stereotype and prejudices on the people of the conflict prone areas. Particularly Gumuz political elites sensed scornfulness towards their contender Oromo elites. Expression they used in defining their relation with each other created hatreds and this has been easily defused to civilians in the rural areas. On the part of Oromo the same feeling has been reflected since the early Gumuz assault of Hora Wata at ManderHulet. Even the Oromo generalized the Gumuz armed militias as a beast that had no human sense. This is due to the fact that the way Gumuz armed militias attacked Oromo villagers indiscriminately. Gumuz militias amputated arms of the Oromo youth and used the bones for beating drums. In the same manner Gumuz villagers were victimized by Oromo militias and security personnel and found buried in common grave. These multiple consequences of the cross border conflict produced hatreds and stereotypical relation between the Gumuz and Oromo. In addition to the cutting of the fore limbs of Oromo male mainly youths left a scare in the mind of Oromo people of Sassiga woreda. This unforgettable memory drives the victims' family and relatives at any place strive to avenge the blood of fellowmen. According to many elderly Oromo informants the deeds of Gumuz armed militias antagonized them with all ordinary and longtime Gumuz elderly friends. Though the older ones have tried to make all efforts to maintain and continued their social interaction, but political elites and youths refused to continue an interaction with each other. Gumuz FGD participants seriously complained the way their Oromo neighbours treats them is not good and in resultant they wanted to be isolated. In my in depth interview with the late BSGNRS president remarked on unwell thought appeal. Consequently Gumuz of Belojiganfo [yie] and Yasso woredas requesting regional and federal governments to construct roads without touching Oromo land. This shows the scope of the conflict and Gumuz dissatisfaction with the Oromo.

The then conflict destroyed all the traditional institutions of the two communities which could hold back the destructive conflict. The processes of intervention look down the roles of locally well-established institutions such as Jaarsumma and Magnma. The institutions have irreversible role in containing, managing, transforming and resolving the conflictual relationship. The Oromo and indigenous people of Benishangul Gumuz regional state have had maintained other mechanisms for sustaining peaceful coexistence. Particularly following the population movement of Gumuz to the south of Blue Nile and Oromo to the north of the Blue Nile various mechanism were employed for peace making and sustaining peaceful coexistence. Mogasa (naming), Gudifacha (adoption), lubabasa (liberation) and Harma Hodha (breast sucking), for example, were methods of maintaining and building peace between them^{vi}. Furthermore, these institutions strengthened the primordial ties between the two people. Previously indigenous institutions would have sorted out any form of conflictual relation at their localities. Institutions belong to Gumuz or Oromo were well established in ruling out

tensions and soften conflicts. The conflict that flared up under the banner of boundary violation has been full of false claims by the contending parties to the conflict. The government based means of conflict mitigation lacked mechanism of checking the plausibility of the fact. However, the erosion these institutions have been led the inter-ethnic conflict into intractable type for three to five years after 2008 conflict without being checked. The political measure was unable to restore the previous friendship of the conflicting neighboring ethnic groups as before since the role of the indigenous mechanisms of conflict management was overlooked. Gumuz and Oromo key informants specially the older ones soberly blame political elites for undermining their time proven mechanism of conflict handling.

4. Conclusion

Conflict between Gumuz with their neighboring Oromo tends to be a new experience since their early contact. Their long time interaction under any condition was characterized by peaceful coexistence. The peaceful relation in the post Derg time began to face challenges in multiple ways. The first of its kind was born in localized dispute among the rural communities along the border of the Benishangul Gumuz and Oromia regional states. Benishangul Gumuz shares the longest border with its neighbor Oromia region. This is a good opportunity for people of both regions in all aspects. But this is not seen as an advantage rather they engaged in a violent conflict since the commencement of the early skirmish in 1993 along their border.

The conflict that erupted in May 2008 was instigated by multiple factors. For many researchers and external parties seemingly ill demarcated boundary and other related factors caused the conflict. However, the present study find out with other veiled facts legacy of memory of the past regimes partly played a significant role in creating mistrust and suspicion. In addition Gumuz and Oromo along the common borders faced problem of unequal treatment. The conflict was highly politicized on both sides for political gains particularly elites at the local level participated full heartedly. This finally led to unending cross border conflict which left inerascable scar.

Rural residents in many standards have heavily been troubled with conflict and conflict related factors. Rural areas are remote from government seats, badly accessed to all possible infrastructures and isolated one that deteriorates the lives of the rural residents. Many adverse processes tend to threaten the integrity of rural communities in many aspects hampering peaceful relationship. Local people, for instance, perceive current trends as intimidation in the destruction of their traditional economic ties. The conflict that broke out in May 2008 affected the rural community in various means. The present study reveals multiple impacts that the cross border conflict inflicted on the rural societies.

The study illustrates economic, social, and security related cases as the major impacts of the conflict. Economically the scene of the conflict was deeply suffered from shortage of food, looting and animal raids. A group of armed men have been organized into banditry robbing people even long time after the conflict ended. This discouraged rural people from producing and preserving for the future. Above all people living along the common border have had much economic interaction but in the post conflict period every means of economic interdependence were deteriorated. With regard to social impact of Gumuz-Oromo conflict though they were living as good neighbors in the aftermath of the conflict their social relation is weakened and they are torn apart. Gumuz and Oromo ethnic groups lost their inter-ethnic cooperation and relations due to misperception that created as the repercussion of the cross border conflict.

Therefore, the political elites on both sides interpret the people of the other side in terms of a mortal enemy to each other, though the entire community might have not understood in that way. Relation between Gumuz and Oromo are critical for the communities living along common border. Their long and tangled history makes this inevitable. The culture and economies of the communities on the longest frontier are naturally intertwined. They lived and traded each other for centuries before any boundary was drawn. The cross border conflict between Oromo and Gumuz destroyed all the social fabrics of the two ethnic groups and accelerated rate of rural poverty. An appropriate option to reinstate the broken social economic and cultural interdependence of societies of conflict ridden areas is empowering community leaders. Gumuz and Oromo elders of the conflict areas demonstrate positive gesture towards each other. They accept the conflict that erupted between them as common but worried about their being excluded from handling the conflict through their time proven institutions. Therefore, involving indigenous institutions in the process of peace building becomes the last alternative.

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ⁱInterview with key informants at Saye Dalecha, 21 February 2016

ⁱⁱFocused group discussions at Fuafuate, 29 August 2016

ⁱⁱⁱBGNRS- Benishangul Gumuz National Regional State

^{iv}SALW- small arms and light weapons

^vReport from Belojiganfo[yie] Woreda police office and East Wallaga Zone Security administration office report

^{vi}These mechanisms have crucial place among Oromo in the day to day interaction with non-Oromo. (See Tsega Endalew ,2006)