

CONFLICT EARLY-WARNING SYSTEM IN THE HAMMER, NYANGATOM, AND DASSANECH PASTORALIST AND AGRO-PASTORALIST COMMUNITY OF SOUTH OMO ZONE, ETHIOPIA

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Abstract

In Ethiopia, the pattern and forms of the recent violent conflicts in pastoral areas indicate that they have been involved in resource control and utilisation competition. An in-depth investigation of natural resource-based conflict and its dynamics in the South Omo Zone in Ethiopia is the focus of this article. The resource based conflicts in the study area are continues to threaten community peace, economic development and their relationships. The root causes and signs of impending conflict in the area is identified as competition for scarce resources of water and pasture, land, poverty, culture of conflict, revenge, disputed territories of land, livestock raiding or theft, lacking state presence in local areas, availability of small weapons, and lack of working to develop culture of peace in the community. Conflict information sharing at the grassroots level and awareness creation by various NGOs, the local government, presence of frameworks for peace dialogue using tribal leaders and in coordination with government police office and the creation of water development plans are identified as the early warning mechanisms present in the study area. The conflict early warning and response system in the study area are not fully structured to prevent conflicts. Lack of coordination or synergy between early warning mechanisms, decision makers, and the inability to take action on the collected conflict information, lack of commitment on the part of the decision makers to implement needed responses, and lack of timeliness in response to the indicators of conflicts are the challenges. The governments should improve and establish workable conflict early warning and response system for averting conflicts. Working for peacebuilding, conflict transformation and livelihood diversification based mechanisms could be good in reducing the conflicts.

Keywords:

Conflict Early-Warning System, Hammer Community, Nyangatom Community, Dassanech Community, Pastoralist, South Omo Zone.

Introduction

Conflict refers to actual or perceived incompatibility of interests, goals, and actions in relationships between individuals or groups. It is a dynamic process where attitudes, behaviours, contexts and structures are constantly changing and influencing one another (Tim, 2008). Conflict in pastoral areas has long been linked to the need to gain control of scarce and strategic resources, particularly water and pasture. However, the key issues here are not merely scarcity, which, as highlighted above, has always been a determining feature of life in the rangelands, but also the increased inability to manage scarcity (Sara and, Simon, 2011). In the Horn of Africa, there are common factors contributing to conflict and violence within and between pastoralists, such as inappropriate government policies, socio-economic and political marginalisation, inadequate land tenure policies, insecurity, intensified cattle rustling, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, weakened traditional governance in pastoral areas, vulnerability to climatic variability, and competition with wildlife (IGAD,2022).

In Ethiopia, the pattern and forms of the recent violent conflicts in pastoral areas indicate that they have been involved in resource control and utilisation competition (EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (2016). Conflicts are a common phenomenon in the South Omo Zone pastoralist and agro-pastoral communities due mainly to resource competition (pasture and water-points) and negative perceptions (Asmare, 2023) However, conflict, by its nature, is dynamic; the drivers or causes and their nature are changeable through time due to many natural and human-made phenomena. Accordingly, an in-depth investigation of natural resource-based conflict and its dynamics in the South Omo Zone in Ethiopia is the focus of this article. This article is based on a study conducted in the Dassanech, Hammer and Nyangatom Woreda collective pastoralist community, and based on empirical primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, document analysis and focus group discussion (FGD).

Methods of the Study

In this Study the researcher used qualitative research approach with case study research design. According to King, Keohane and Verba (1994) the qualitative research approach enable a researcher to unearth an immense amount of information for a study. This study is conducted in Dassanech, hammer, Nyangatom Woreda, pastoralist community based on empirical primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through in-depth interview, and FGD. 98 participants were purposively selected and key informants comprised elders, public administrators, experts and community members. This study also used secondary sources of data such as from online sources, books, published journals, working papers and other unpublished written works. Data were analyzed qualitatively by organizing the data's in to contents.

Theory of Conflict

There are various types of conflict theories. From the conflict theories, the researcher selects Karl Marx's conflict theory which can be best explains the issue under study. Based on this conflict theory there are two basic groups of people within society. These groups of people are the wealthy and the poor. This theory looks at what happens when one group tries to rebel against the other group of people in the society and the various roles a group of people and even one individual has over another group of people or individual. The theory examines the social control that the rich groups of a society or individual have over the masses and over another individual. Marx believed that a society or an organization only functions in order to attempt and better their social situation, which can result in some type of social upheaval in the society. Marx's theory brings out different types of conflicts that include conflict regarding class, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and conflict regarding regions (Karl, 1971). His conflict theory can be applied to a number of social conflicts as it relates to how one group controls the rest in the society, the struggles within the oppressed, the economically poor group of people, and the way that the controlling group (the wealthy

class who control recourses and the means of production like land resources) maintains and have power.

According to Marx, the existence of different social classes in the human society is the continuous source of inevitable conflict, struggle and changes on the social structure occur through violent upheavals affecting class composition. He emphasizes the importance of interests over norms and values, and the ways in which the pursuit of interests generates various types of conflict as normal aspects of social life, rather than abnormal occurrences in the society. He sees the human society as a collection of various competing interest groups and individuals each with their own motives, goals and expectations.

Based on this conflict theory, members of the society have various values, interests or expectations. The values, interests or expectations vary according to one's position, privileges, ability, class, and wealth. Agreement tends to exist among those groups of people in society who share similar privileges, values, norms and interests. As a result, this is likely to encourage unequal distribution of the scarce but valuable resources and opportunities in the society and resulting in divisions in society that leads to hostility, opposition and conflict. Marx's theory helps the researcher to explain the nature of relations among pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities living in Hammer, Dassanech, Nyangatom and cross border resources based conflicts in resources like pasture, land, water, animal and fishing areas that they experience in their living and interaction. The conflict characterized by clashes over resources of pasture, water, land, fishing areas and cattle rustling can be viewed as part of the struggle by “the have” pastoralists, and “the have nots”. The theory best clarified and confirmed the community in the study area is in state of resource based protracted conflicts.

Discussions and findings

The sources of conflict

Conflict is the result of internal resource scarcity, shortage and competition for use in the Nyangatom, Dassanech and Hammer community of South Omo, Ethiopia. Violent conflicts are caused by struggles over access to and ownership of land, water or other renewable natural resources. Controlling access to resources, and thereby denying access to others, is often a cause of local conflicts. The conflicts between the Turkana community and the Dassanech, Hammer and Nyangatom community are principally caused by competition over resources like water and pasture, livestock raiding, and disagreements over boundary demarcations.

Animal raiding and conflict

Among East African pastoral communities, livestock raiding has been a common traditional practice (IGAD, 2022). In the Nyangatom, Dassanech and Hammer community, the participants in animal raiding are members of agro-pastoral ethnic groups and pastoral communities living there and in the neighbouring Kenyan community. Raided animals are sometimes returned to the rightful owners through the help of security forces of the government and elders through negotiations and reconciliations. According to FGD participants and key interview informants, mobilised non-pastoral individuals from the Kenyan side of the border area engaged in livestock raiding of the Ethiopian pastoralist and agro-pastoralists. Livestock raiding is done for economic purposes to get money from selling the cattle or their meat.

Land claims and conflict in the study area

There are also grievances around the absence of compensation for loss of land for government projects and private commercial agriculture and grievances over access to water and pasture. These grievances created new drivers of conflict. The resource competition often takes the form of protecting livelihood security and

ethnic conflict, with groups organised around narratives of land attachment based on ethnicity. In the study area, various unresolved historical land claims and grievances are the structural cause of violent conflicts between ethnic groups. Territorial land claims are the catalyst of the protracted conflict in the study area. The conflicts related to land claims remain unresolved.

DASSANECH AND TURKANA LAND CLAIM : The Dassanech share borders with the Turkana in Kenya. Key informants and Focus group discussion participants uncover that they lost their land to the Turkana during the government of Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974). The government during that time lacks the commitment to control the area. Peoples still needs their land to be returned but the current government is negligent to deal with the Kenyan government to control their lost land. But starting from June 2021 peace initiatives are started by the local people to create peaceful relation between the two communities. The peace initiative is created for resources sharing of pasture and water in Kibish area. Now also the local government of the two sides involved to strengthen the healthy relationship of the community in utilizing necessary resources together. Moreover, trade relations are also improved; however, the conflict still needs the interventions of the government to settle the land conflict and to engage in development based peacebuilding.

NYANGATOM AND TURKANA LAND CLAIMS: The Nyangatom community shared border with the Turkana, and claim that their traditional home and pasture land on the western side of the Kibish River is now occupied by the Turkana community (Gebre, 2016b). During Key informant interview and focus group discussion, Ethiopians in the study area stated as they have lost their territory from the Kibish River to the east to the Mount Tepes to the west to the Turkana area due to arbitrary colonial demarcation of the border area without the consent of the community and the continued northward expansion of the Turkana area. The local narrative about the northward expansion of the Turkana is consistent with the reports of de Waal (1991) and Mburu (2003) that the boundary of Turkana grazing land areas and the limits of Kenyan administration moved north over the years in it (Cited in USID, 2021). The Nyangatom communities feel that they lost land to the Turkana during the colonial period and in the 1980s. Informants stated that they did not recognize the colonially demarcated boundary.

Nyangatom and Hamer land claims: The overall relationship between the Hamer and the Nyangatom community is more of conflictual. The root causes of the conflict between the two communities are territorial land disputes and on livestock raiding, they claim over a territory that belonged to the Murle people, who are found in Nyangatom Woreda. According to (USAID, 2021) study the Nyangatom community and the Murle community as an affiliated entity, challenge the Hamer ethnic group’s alleged recent land claim over the former Murle territory, especially the fertile Kiso and Kuma land areas, which became attractive to investors and the community. FGD participants exposed that, the land ownership conflict is unresolved and they need the land for livelihood. The interview informant stated as “There is no life without land for us”. This indicated the community strongly questions ownership of their land.

DASSANECH AND NYANGATOM LAND CLAIM: The Dassanech and Nyangatom land conflicts are explained as of territorial conflict. There are also conflicts related to it on competition over resources of land for cultivation, pasture and on water points. In this area there are two resourceful or rich areas that are Kare and Kuraz mountain areas found along the border of the two ethnic groups. The Dassanech Key informants stated as that they are the original occupants of the Kare area land with undefined period of years which is now controlled by the Nyangatom ethnic group. The Nyangatom ethnic group controlled the area through in search for pasture land for their livestock. This land and related conflicts are also not settled by the government. The government tries to make discussions with the community to manage the conflicts. Here, the land claim conflict will be exacerbated by environmental change and population increases. The current government ethnic based administration system will also one of the driver of conflict in the area.

Dassanech and Gabra Conflicts

The Dassanech community of Ethiopia shared border with the Gabra community of Kenya and they are pastoralists and agro-pastoralists. The Dassanech communities are predominantly practiced agro-pastoralism for their living. The relationship between the Dassanech community and the Gabra Kenya community are mostly conflictual. The main causes of the conflict between them are land claim. According to Gebre, (2012) the Dassanech on the Gabra side are working in defiance of the international colonially demarcated boundary that divides their ancestral homeland into Ethiopian and Kenyan territories, they continue to use their traditional grazing lands located up to 200 km deep inside the legal territory of Kenya area.

The informants stated, the Gabra are opposed to the Dassanech community access to grazing land in Kenyan territory and conflicts are the common phenomenon in this area. Community based conflict resolution mechanisms are used to reduce conflict violence.

Fishing rights and conflict

There is conflict in the Dassanech-Turkana area over access to fish products from the natural lake. According to key informants and FGD participants, the fish are highly concentrated in the northern tip of Lake Turkana, where the Omo River enters the lake. The high quantity of fish in the area attracted Kenyan fishermen using modern motorboats armed with machine guns. The Ethiopian fishermen use light motorboats and wooden canoes equipped with light weapons for self-protection. The fishermen are part of the conflict, as they intend to control the fishing area. The Dassanech Woreda are also facing competition for fisheries in Lake Turkana from Ethiopians who have official business licenses to engage in fishing for a living. In the past, the Dassanech ethnic group depended on livestock production and crop cultivation and occasionally, they fished for food and as a source of income. Due to this, there was no competition in fishing. However, as a result of the loss of income from livestock and crop production, the Dassanech have resorted to fishing. This has increased the competition for fishing business. The Dassanech claims rights to control the area and the fish resources. The power imbalance between fishers of the two countries needs intervention to reduce the probability of violence.

Water-point conflict

The provision of water supplies in Ethiopia is among the lowest in Africa. The strong bias toward urban development historically meant that the provision of water supplies in rural areas is particularly low (Flintan, and Tamrat, 2002). Therefore, access to water is one of the causes of conflict in South Omo (Yohannes, etal., 2005). The interview respondents and FGD discussants also confirm the continuity of the problem and the competition to use the existing natural water-points resulted in conflict among the community. The Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) cluster programme and various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like Christian Aid constructed water schemes to reduce the shortage of water (Humanitarian Response, 2023). However, the shortage of water for humans and their livestock is still not resolved. People try to gain access to and control of water-points, which often results in conflict and violence. Conflict in pastoral and agro-pastoral communities can be regarded as disputes and struggles over inadequate resources of water and pasture, which could result in violence and destruction.

Actors of the Conflicts in the Study Area

- a. The Youths are promoted by elders for fighting enemies. The youth in each territorial area community are responsible for the protection of territorial borders grazing land, livestock, and they revenge against external offender enemies.

- b. The other actor of conflict is elders need to continue the legacy of killing for bravery, respect for their ethnicity, leading a life without boundary to pasture land, and other cultural activities like making decision on conflict and peace.
- c. The third actor of conflict is women in the community encourage fearlessness, selflessness, heroism, sacrifice for honor, and restoration of pride. They have role in triggering conflict and violence. They are not only the victims but they are also triggers and part of solutions to conflict.
- d. Magicians: They have role in predicting conflict and war. The communities believe in them in the phenomena of conflict. E.g, in hammer community getting a shoe in public places like roads are taken as indicating the event of conflict in the near future.
- e. Government development agencies and private commercial farm owners: According to informants, these institutions controlled land without compensation for the community. There is grievance in the absence of compensation for the pasture land.

The Derivers of Conflict in the Study Area

There are different drivers of the conflict in pastoralist community of the study area. They are identified in various categories such as social drivers, economic and the legal drivers of conflict. The social derivers of pastoralist conflict are lack of education on peacebuilding and the absence of peacebuilding activities among the community and across borders, low level of education, killings for heroism and revenge, violation of marriage rules of the pastoralist community by the educated individuals are identified as the social drivers of conflict. It impedes the peaceful social interaction of the people.

The other drivers of conflict are legal issue in related to be taken in conflicts. The local legal and justice system is identified as the driving force of conflict. The weak coordination of the local legal justice system and the traditional justice system provides a playing field for the unresolved conflicts for violence. Weak local government control on cattle raiding within in the community and across borders is taken as the legal drivers of conflict. In addition, the weakly structured conflict early warning and response system leaves the conflict to further escalation and violence. The system in the area did not contain all of the important functional structures of conflict early warning and early response system which important to take pro action measures.

There are also economic drivers in the pastoralist conflicts of the area. Land and land related resources like pasture, and water are the main economic drivers of conflicts in the pastoralist community of the study area. Based on the FDRE social assessment report, pastoralism is the predominant livelihood strategy in the study area. Out of the total community, 70% are riverine pastoralists found along the Omo valley, and the remaining 30% are pure pastoralist. The only exception is the Dassanech community which practiced farming in addition to the livestock production for their living (FDRE social assessment report, 2013).

Land is the most important natural resources of the pastoral and agro-pastoral communities in the study area community. The prevailing land tenure system in the study area is communal land tenure system. Access to communal land is based on ethnic membership, but access to private land is determined by kinship relationship. However, patriarchy is the most cultural system that determines access to private tenure system. Access to land and land based resources among the community and across state borders are identified as the economic drivers of conflict as land and land based recourses like rangelands, pasture, water points, a lake for fishing is the sources of the livelihood of the community.

The changing circumstances of conflict and conflict actors in the study area

The pastoral conflict dynamics in the Nyangatom, Dassanech, and Hammer community are not improving (IGAD (2022)). As explained above, resource-based grievances in the study area are the main sources of violence. The parties in these conflicts are internal – in the Dassanech, Hammer and Nyangatom community – and external – cross-border actors, including elders, youths and the political actors from Ethiopia and Kenya concerned with protecting the interests of their communities. Conflict in pastoral and agro-pastoral communities can be regarded as disputes and struggles over inadequate resources of water and pasture, which could result in violence and destruction. The dominant pastoral livelihood and, to some level, the agro-pastoralist way of life are characterised by livestock keeping and crop production with sessional movement in search of pasture and water. The government institutions appear ineffective in the governance of the problem and they do not seem to have taken action to bring about sustainable change in resource-based conflict contexts.

There are also problems associated with drought and environmental degradation, which contribute to increased incidents of pastoral and agro-pastoral conflicts. The loss of cattle due to a lack of water and pasture severely affects the continued existence of the pastoralist and agro-pastoralists, as their livelihoods depend on this. The climatic conditions and resource degradation make the conflict in the study area protracted. As Galtung asserts, conflicts become dynamic and protracted if not adequately dealt with during the initial stages in which underlying conflict will manifest, as has been the case in the study area (Galtung, 1996). The pastoral groups become radicalised with hostile attitudes and aggressive behaviours against each other due to competition for resources. The other form of conflict among pastoralists includes cattle-raiding, which is linked to commercial and cultural practices among the communities. To end the protracted conflict, it is critical to change the perceptions of the pastoralists and agro-pastoralists through peacebuilding interventions like providing peace education.

Conflict prevention mechanisms in the study area

The study findings revealed the presence of various conflict prevention mechanisms in the study area, including peace dialogues among the community, awareness-raising on the importance of peaceful relations, and taking lawful action against conflict parties, including using conflict early-warning and response systems of the government. Governments can build collaboration between affected communities and strengthen their systems by using community members as channels of communication and sources of information, specifically cattle keepers.

Early-warning actions in the study area

The study indicated that the systems of information on impending conflict in the area and the awareness of conflict workers on the existing systems can be enabled to prevent conflicts in the area. This finding is in line with the assertion of the conflict prevention theory that an early-warning mechanism can be useful in identifying and forestalling impending conflicts and handling the drivers of conflict. Conflict information sharing at the grassroots level, awareness creation by various NGOs, the presence of frameworks for peace dialogues using traditional leaders, the coordination with government security systems, and the creation of water development plans are identified as early-warning mechanisms present in the area. Sharing information with concerned bodies and creating awareness are found to be the most significant conflict early-warning mechanisms in the area. Cattle keepers, peace committees, women, and government conflict workers play a central role in the implementation of early-warning mechanisms because they are within the community. The existing early-warning systems are weak and ineffective at facilitating a peaceful coexistence in the community as they do not build trust among the communities.

THE CHALLENGES OF EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

The Deficiencies in Scenario Building

Conflict in the pastoral areas is common in their day to day life because of the scarcity of natural resources that lead them to unwanted and destructive violence (Bamlaku, 2017). Scenarios are important primarily for planning and decision-making. Scenario planning is normally used to explore possible future conditions given a set of assumptions. Each scenario represents a distinct, plausible picture of a segment of the future. Because it is impossible to know the future precisely, the solution is to create several scenarios. Conflict scenario is important to predict and prevent the future conflicts but such predictions are not done by the local government in the area. Conflict workers fear to assess conflict risks at the local.

Warning and Response Gap

Early warning mechanisms operate on the assumption of a forthright link between warning and response action (Stepka, 2016). In the study area, lack of coordination or synergy between early warning mechanisms, decision makers, and the inability to take action on the collected conflict information is one of the challenges. However, the theoretical assumption that early warning analysis and risk indicators necessarily translate into practical action does not always hold. Generally, successful prevention has been linked to identification of potential conflict situations, proper analysis of risk indicators,

Lack of Commitment

Despite the prevalence of the foregoing in undermining synergy between early warning and response, more importantly the lack of commitment on the part of the decision makers to implement needed responses is observed in the study area. The practical application of early warning mechanisms is pegged on the commitment of decision makers to implement needed responses. Understanding the strong relationship between early warning information reporting and taking appropriate action needs commitment of conflict decision makers

Timeliness

Timeliness of early warnings and response is one of the conditions necessary for preventive action. According to (Zartman, 2010) as he argues that the right preventive action should be accompanied by right timing. Early warning risk assessors and conflict prevention policy decision maker's needs to take actions on the indicators of conflict on time based on the collected data but such types of activities are not done by the government in the study area.

Inability to Transform Warning Information In to Response

The biggest challenge for conflict early warning systems is that they have not yet been effectively transformed into a preventive response (Arnado, 2012, p. 4). In the study area, the collected conflict warning information is not transformed to response based on their plan to preventive responses for resource based conflicts and the taken actions are failed to address the root cause of the conflicts. Preventative conflict intervention is taking to reduce the potential of conflict violence and for peacebuilding even if the root causes of the problem is not resolved.

Conflict Management

According department head of south Omo zonal peace and militia office and Woreda conflict early warning officer, the land, pasture and related conflicts are managed by the following mechanisms

- **Using indigenous institutions:** In these institution tribe leaders, particularly elders play good role in managing internal and cross border conflicts.
- **Cattle keepers:** They have roles in information sharing for government bodies on conflict happened.
- **The conflict early warning and response system:** The Woreda/local level officers are engaged in collecting information on issues that causes conflict and try to indicate the solution like livelihood diversification, resource sharing and taking legal actions on peace spoilers.
- **The formed local peace committees:** It includes elders, cattle keepers, and women. The committee tries to settle conflicts together with government bodies. The Zonal and Woreda government focused on administering conflict rather than finding lasting solutions because of the protracted nature of conflict in pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities.

Conclusions

The conflict in Nyangatom, Hammer and Dassanech community of South Omo, Ethiopia, is complex and encompasses social, legal and economic issues. The violent conflict is seasonal, occurring in dry seasons as resource scarcity increases. Conflicts over pasture, water, animal raiding, fishing areas, and land claims are the major causes of violence. Conflict early-warning mechanisms, such as information sharing, peace dialogues, and negotiation have played a vital role in the forestalling and resolution of conflict in the study area. The findings affirm the early detection of the drivers of conflict and the application of preventive responses, such as peace dialogue and negotiations, are good practices in the study area. In addition, the weaknesses in the channels for the sharing of gathered early-warning information with the government on time undermine achievements to date in preventing destructive conflicts. The government and other bodies need to create conflict intervention mechanisms to reduce the negative impacts of conflict. Taking nonviolent action on time to the impending conflict is also the most important option.

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