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What Role Should Civil Society Organizations Play to Address Ethnic Conflicts in Ethiopia?

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ABSTRACT

The Ethiopian people are ethnically heterogeneous, speaking multiplicity languages comprising of more than 100 groups. Hence, the country presents a mosaic of nationalities, each speaking a dialect of one of more than 70 languages and has a long history of rich culture and strong social values. Although there were some ethnic-conflicts, that go back a long way, among few of the ethnic groups (mainly for control over resources, such as grazing land, water points, cultivable land), people solved such conflicts using their own conflict resolution mechanism; for instance elders meeting and community tribunal system. The indigenous civil society groups have also played a great role in resolving and preventing violent ethnic conflict. However, since the current ruling party, the Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took power in May 1991; there have been a number of violent ethnic conflicts widespread throughout the country. Though accurate statistics are hard to come by, various reports and testimonials in all regional states been witness to frequent violent conflicts that have claimed the lives of thousands of people and accounted for the destruction of public properties.

The paper tries to show the overall feature of conflict in the country and forward some recommendations on roles CSOs should play in addressing ethnic conflicts. Hence, after describing some cases of ethnic conflicts happened recently, the paper first discussed the following main causes of ethnic conflicts:

- Historical factor: both the Imperial state (1930-1974) and the military regime (1974-1991) have been criticized for monopolizing state power and economic resources in "ethnocratic form" by few or one ethnic group and for excluding other ethnic groups access to state power;
- Ethno-Centric Federalism and Ethno-Centric Politics: ethnic based regional boundaries and non-clarity resulted in the separation of ethnic groups from their traditional resource bases.
- Economic Causes: competition for economic resources and asset building;
- Cultural and Traditional Causes: **defence mechanisms** of ethnic groups**; the Individual security mechanism;** the tradition of p**ayment of dowry (gift)** for marriage and **Prestige and Retaliatory acts** receive positive reactions and are often rewarded by
- Policies pursued by successive governments in the country have tended not only to neglect the needs of certain social groups mainly pastoralists but also often to run directly counter to these marginalized social groups when compared to other groups.
- Using ethnicity for political mobilization (Politicisation of Ethnicity): ethnicity becomes the most efficient base for political mobilization, and it gives enough ground for new local elites to compete for power on the basis of ethnicity;
- Dissatisfactions that exist in the country as a result of absence of public accountability and non-observance of the rule of law by government officials, result in grievances that eventually lead to conflict situations;

- Lack of security: a psychological fear of political uncertainty. Conflicts are the consequences of the fear of the future, lived through the past;
- Weakening and undermining of traditional system of conflict prevention and management;
- The unchecked proliferation of small arms and light weapons and the deliberate arming of certain communities without due regard to the security of others;

There are only very few legally recognised, modern formal CSOs that work in the area of conflict management. As these organisations are very few in number and have limited capacity to address the problem, they only reach limited parts of the county. Most of indigenous community based social institutions or self support systems that play greater role in conflict resolutions, communities' well-being, stability and security, are not fully functional and in some places they are becoming weak and withering away due to political, social, economic, etc. pressure.

In almost all cases of ethnic conflicts, the Government took a leading role in handling them. However, the government could not address such conflicts before they reached the level of violence. Government officials both at regional and federal level started to talk and take action on specific conflict cases when a conflict occurred and this resulted in the so called 'fire brigade approach'.

The writer argues that CSOs should play a proactive role in ethnic conflict management and bringing sustainable peace to the society. Hence, the paper suggested the following major role that CSOs should play in addressing ethnic conflict in Ethiopia:

- Promote, enhance and facilitate communities' traditional methods of conflict management so as to enable communities to handle their social problems by themselves through their own traditional mechanisms that have been practiced by them for years;
- Initiate conflict-sensitive development interventions, designed to improve food security and agricultural productivity and diversify livelihood options for people living in conflict areas, especially pastoralists who have lack of access to basic services and are being marginalized from development initiatives;
- Support or use existing public media especially radio programs to educate people for peace and promote peaceful solutions for conflicts;
- Education and training for peace that can comprise all activities which improve attitudes, knowledge and capabilities for conflict management;
- Improve the understanding of conflicts in light of a proper analysis and start to think about what might be helpful;
- Working in partnership with government, especially at local level, to promote democratic election procedures, reforms of legal system, the establishment of integrated education systems, appropriate language policies and human rights legislation;
- Initiating conflict handling strategies and advocating for policy implementation;

- Educating youth and children so as to enable them to recognise the societal value of peaceful coexistence and receive an education conducive to the realisation of their material and social desires;
- Training staff of governmental or CSOs on crisis prevention and conflict management in order to systematically handle conflicts and address ethnic conflicts before they reached the level of violence;
- Establish a dialogue centre and centre for tolerance to promote dialogue between conflicting parties and 'unity in diversity';
- Fighting harmful traditional practices fuelling conflict such as paying dowry and beliefs around heroism

1.   Introduction

The Ethiopian people are ethnically heterogeneous, speaking multiplicity languages comprising of more than 100 groups. Hence, the country presents a mosaic of nationalities, each speaking a dialect of one of more than 70 languages (Briggs, 1995). The existence of a large number of ethno-linguistic groups notwithstanding, Ethiopians are considered as culturally homogeneous people due to continuous interaction through intermarriages, trade, migration, war and other social activities for thousands of years thus creating unity in diversity, which has helped resist the pressure from internal disintegration and external aggression (Alemayehu, 2004).

Ethiopian has a long history of rich culture and strong social values. The various types of ritual ceremonies related to birth, wedding and death, principles of mutual co-operation and communal concerns that emanate from kinship, neighbourhood and other types of relationships, as well as traditional ways of social governance, traditional health care practices and many other related aspects attest to the richness in culture and strength of the social value system. It is due to this fact that Ethiopia has a long history of civil society groups. Civil society groups in the form of self-help system (traditional mutual-help associations) have long existed in Ethiopia. These systems were established with the main purpose of dealing with various social problems and their proclaimed aim is to enhance self-reliance of individuals, households and the society at large (GOM, 1998). Although there were some ethnic-conflicts, that go back a long way, among few of the ethnic groups (mainly for control over resources, such as grazing land, water points, cultivable land), people solved such conflicts using their own conflict resolution mechanism; for instance elders meeting and community tribunal system. The above mentioned indigenous civil society groups have also played a great role in resolving and preventing violent ethnic conflict.

After the downfall of the Communist Military regime – called the *Dergue,* in May 1991, the Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took power and raised the issue of ethnic, linguistic and cultural repression as it believed that these issues were some of the major causes for conflict in Ethiopia and that several ethnic communities had suffered under hitherto existing ethno-centralist governments (Hashim, 2003). Hence, they have given importance to the ethno-linguistic components of the society by the Constitution (Fasil, 1997) which states that all sovereign power resides in the Nations, Nationalities, and people of Ethiopia (Ethiopia, 1994). The Constitution also declares that Ethiopia's nations, nationalities and people have strongly committed, in full and free exercise of their right to self-determination, to build a political community founded on the rule of law and capable of ensuring lasting peace, guaranteeing a democratic order, and advancing their economic and social development (Ibid). Accordingly, the EPRDF government introduced ethic-based federalism with the aim to solve long-standing major ethnic based movements (conflicts), which were believed to bring about internal peace in the country (Teshome, 2003).

However, there have been a number of violent ethnic conflicts widespread throughout the country especially since 1991. The government could not address such conflicts before they reached the level of violence. Government officials both at regional and federal level started to talk and take action on specific conflict cases when a conflict occurred and this resulted in the so called 'fire brigade approach'. Whenever a conflict occurred a team of officials assigned by the government would be sent to that area and would use different mechanisms to calm the situation and then hold various discussions and meetings to settle the problems. They usually give politically biased solutions to address such problems.

There are a few modern formal Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) that work on conflict management, but they cannot bring impact. Besides, since the issue of ethnic conflict is politically sensitive, they refrain from fully involving in politically related conflicts.

This paper tries to show the overall feature of conflict in the country and forward some recommendations as to what role CSOs should play in addressing ethnic conflicts. The writer believes that conflict handling is the duty of everyone within the society and it cannot be delegated to few individuals. It should be a concern of all groupings, political parties, private sector actors, CSOs, religious groups, higher government officials, etc. (Patz, 2003). However, even more than the other groups CSOs should play a greater role in conflict management. But the question, which is tried to be addressed by the paper is, "What specific roles should CSOs play and what strategy should they use?"

2.   Definitions of Terms

2.1   Conflict

Different definitions and description on conflict are given by different authors depending on contexts they consider. The majority of writers describe conflicts with terms such as civil war, civil strife, hostility, war and political instability. Abdalla Bujra, for example, defines conflict in Africa as a violent and armed confrontation and struggle between groups, between the state and one or more group, and between two or more states (Bujra, 2002). However, Tom Pätz argues that conflict has to be seen as an inevitable feature of all social relations, and that it is one of the most powerful positive factor for change and development (Pätz, 2003). Hence, he discussed that the ubiquity of conflict can be seen by describing as a relationship in which each party perceives the other's goals, values, interests or behaviours as antithetical to its own. Similarly, Teshome Mekonnen wrote that conflict is a natural phenomenon and occurs as a result of incompatible goals of human beings (Teshome, 2003). He further explained that conflicts can be driven by the unfulfilled needs and fears of the society expressed in different situations and forms: the sense of justice, autonomy, identity, basic needs, rights of the individual, rights of property and land (Ibid.).

Pätz also discussed that if conflicts are not properly handled they could easily turned into violence and become serious obstacle for socio-economic development (Pätz, 2003). For

him conflicts have a beginning before violence occurs and they can then escalate into violence and worsen over time, and eventually they abate.

Conflict can be categorised in various ways depending on the type of criteria one uses. For example Bujra classifies African conflicts on the bases of actors involved in a conflict as follow (Bujra, 2002):

- Inter-state conflict: caused by claims over borders.
- Internal conflicts: under this category Bujra listed down the following types. While States are actors in some of these conflicts, other groups within the countries involve in the rest.
  - A Rebellion to overthrow a government: such as a rebellions, by group outside the military establishment of a country and which aim to overthrow a government, are the most common type of political conflict in African countries;
  - Secessionist Rebellion: often driven by their perceived political, economic and cultural oppression.
  - Coup d'Etat: violent and undemocratic change of government by military forces,
  - Cold-war sustained conflicts: the 1970s and 1980s vicious competitions between the super powers in Africa was an important factors, if not in starting conflicts certainly in sustaining them.
  - Many-sided conflicts to seize state power: where several rebellions emerge independently, each of which is trying to capture the capital and take over the power.
  - Rural conflict over resources: these are conflicts over grazing land, over cattle, over water points and over cultivable land.
  - Urban violence and conflict: most politicians mobilise their supporters and organise political activism, which often results in conflicts between these supporters who are mostly ethnically based.

2.2. Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict

Though there are various forms of conflicts, as described above, this paper only deals with ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia. But there is a need to define the terms 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic conflict' so as to give clear understanding of the concepts to the readers. Ethnicity can be looked at through both the **primordialist and constructive** approach. While **primordialists** view ethnicity as natural and innate to human identity based on fixed deep primordial attachments to a group or culture, **constructivists** view ethnicity not as objectively 'given', but rather as fluid, situationally defined, and strategically manipulated subjective and rational socio-cultural constructions (Wolde-Selassie, 2004, citing Shils, Geertz, Issacs, Van den Berghe, Grosby, Barth, Ronald Cohen, Eller and Coughlan, and Jenkins).

Ethnic conflicts are clashes among two or more ethnic groups due to demand for power, resources, identity, social status and the like. It refers to situations where people mobilize against others on the basis of ethnic identity. Conflicts increasingly present themselves as ethnic conflicts with ethnic identity serving and instrumentalised as the rallying point or the mobilisation agent for the manifestation of the conflicts (Ibid. 22). In Ethiopia, ethnicity is an enormously complex issue of concern. Inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts over issues of identity, governance, and competition over resources (mainly over grazing land, over cattle, over water points and over cultivable land) are common phenomenon.

3. Conflict Situations In Ethiopia: The Case of Some Few Ethnic Conflicts in Ethiopia

There have been quite a number of ethnic conflicts in various parts of Ethiopia and for generations violent conflicts have been serious threat for development and stability in various communities in Ethiopia. Though accurate statistics are hard to come by, various reports and testimonials in all regional states been witness to frequent violent conflicts that have claimed the lives of thousands of people and accounted for the destruction of public properties. For example, reports issued by the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), which is the only CSO in Ethiopia that monitors and reports human rights situation in the country, and reports by other international human rights monitoring organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have proven that quite a number of ethnic conflicts that have been flaring up in the country have negative effects on human lives, properties, natural environment, political conditions, culture, social life of the society, etc.

Conflicts involving various ethnic, religious and/or political groups over land, water and other resources or power issues, have become widespread and increasingly severe in many parts of Ethiopia. The nature and trends of such recurrent violent conflict within and between tribal, clan, religious and other groups of different communities vary depending on the contributing social, economic and political and linguistic factors.

Brief analyses of a few of the ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia will help us to see the extent of the problem and understand the nature of ethnic conflicts. It also will help to look at what CSOs roles should be, in addressing the problem – which is the main theme of this paper.

3.1 Ethnic Conflict between Shekacho and Sheko-Meczenger-Manja in Sheka Zone, Southern, Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR)[1]

In March 2002, a violent ethnic conflict erupted in Yeki Woreda (Tepi town and the surrounding) of Sheka Zone which claimed several human lives and destroyed massive property. The Shekacho ethnic group members have been administering the Yeki

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[1] Adopted from the case study by Wolde-Selassie Abbute (2004).

Woreda since 1992. However, the other two ethnic groups (Sheko and Meczenger ethnic groups) resisting Shekacho's dominance and demanded to pull out of the Sheka Zone and that Yeki Woreda be included in Gambella Regional State. Their demand was not welcomed by the regional state and in a referendum held in 1993, it was agreed that the Sheka Zone should remain in the SNNPR and Yeki to stay within the same zone. However, members of Sheko and Meczenger ethnic group were dissatisfied with the decision and continued to resist the alleged dominance of Shekacho Ethnic group over them by establishing a joint political party. They also got support from Manja, the most marginalized and segregated social groups among the Shekacho. Their demand to merge Yeki Woreda with neighbouring region did not get a positive response from the region and as they lost in election, the National Election Board rejected their claims. Thus the problem that had been simmering since 1993 in Yeki, coupled with the discontent of the stated election results, as well as the age-old brutal segregation of minorities, were the primary cause of violent ethnic conflict.

On 10th March 2002, a significant number of the members of the Sheko-Meczenger ethnic groups and the Manja marched to the Yeki Woreda Administration Office at Tepi with spears, machetes and with rifles and surrounded the council office and asked for those council members who had allegedly blocked their earlier demands to surrender. Fierce clashes erupted between the police force and the Sheko-Meczenger groups and the incident resulted in reported deaths of four police officer, one official and 18 Sheko-Meczenger members. The clashes continued causing heavy damages to both human life and property. Special military force was called from within the Woreda and from the surrounding Woredas to end the clash. But from 12 – 17 March, a retaliatory action took place that resulted in more than 128 deaths and damages on property with estimated value of over six million Ethiopian Birr (about US $ 705,882). A total of 64,211 people residing in 14 Kebeles were victims of the conflict.

Although the major clash was over, the conflict remained unsolved. People on both sides are now hesitant and suspicious to express publicly the detailed reasons of the conflict. Tension and mistrust still prevails among the conflicting parties. Sources pointed out that there is a plan to facilitate reconciliation measures.

3.2   Ethnic Conflicts between the Gumuz and the Resettlers of the 1980s in Metekel Zone, Benishangul, Gumuz Nations Regional State (BGNRS)[2]

In 1980s the *Dergue* Regime undertook resettlement program in various parts of the country. The aim was to resettle people, mainly the highlanders from densely populated and unproductive areas, to sparsely populated and fertile lands in order to address problems of drought and famine. One of the areas that was selected to resettle highlanders was Metekel Zone where the Gumuz used to live. However, due to the resettlement's severe adverse consequences on their life and livelihood, the Gumuz showed hostile attitude towards the Pawe Resettlement Scheme. Nonetheless, it was

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[2] Adapted from the case study by Wolde-Selassie Abbute (2004).

implemented without the knowledge and consent of the autochthonous Gumuz. They were pushed to the peripheries of the resettlement scheme area, being marginalized and evicted from their ancestral land. Due to the loss of their traditional land resources, , the Gumuz began expressing their grievances by attacking resettlers located in those villages bordering them. Low-scale frequent casualty occurred until such time that the Gumuz and the resettlers burst out into an open ethnic conflict that ended in bloodshed, claiming considerable human lives on both sides, immediately after the 1991 political change in the country. For instance, in September 1993 the Gumuz gunmen attacked the L4 village market causing the death of an estimated eight people and wounding 26. Some informants estimated the casualty to be around 20 dead and 19 wounded. The relations between the Gumuz and state-sponsored resettlers were characterized by mistrust and polarization, throughout the period of *Dergue* regime up to its downfall.

The horrifying situation was put under control with strong involvement of the forces of the Central Government. Then the state authorities recruited members from all ethnic groups for cadre training, in the meantime facilitating the efforts of a multi-ethnic elders' peace constituency (civil society assembly) attempting to settle the conflict.

3.3. Conflict on Frontiers Between Borena (Oromo) and Gerri (Somali)[3]

Borena and Gerri who live in the area called Moyale Woreda (located 771 Kms southward of Addis Ababa) have a long history of interaction and a mix of cultural features. They have lived together for a long period of time and have had, strong customary law according to which they would deal with disputes – either to prevent conflicts altogether or to settle them peacefully. However, during the Dergue Regime and especially after the Ethio-Somali War in 1977/78, a sense of suspicion developed between the two groups. One of the reasons was that the Gerris were considered as the supporters of the Somali government during the war. Hence, when the war ended, some of the Gerri members become refugees ino Kenya and Somalia.

After the overthrow of the Dergue Regime in 1991, the Gerri returned to Ethiopia as returnees and settled in and around Moyale Woreda. Again, during the transitional period, fighting started between the two groups. According to the Borena version of the story, the Geri, with the assistance of some government officials – reoccupied areas like Ela Ley, Ela Gof, Dhoksu, Igal, Badde and the like and thereafter, the area under question were confined to Somali regional state. But the Gerris argue that the land they settled on belongs to them. They claimed that they had been pushed away from that area during the Dergue regime and that they had only repossessed their own land that they lost to the Dergue.

The argument over the ownership of land between Gerri and Borena is not limited to grazing land but also deals with land for watering and traditional gold mining, and furthermore the right to administer Moyale town. Hence, the claim and counter claim

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[3] Adapted from the case study by Teshome Mekonnen (2003)

over Moyale Town resulted in the formation of double administration for one and the same town. This invited both regions local administrative and local ethnic-based elites to get involved directly and indirectly but further aggravating the conflict by doing so.

3.4. Ethnic Conflict In Babile Woreda[4]

Babile is located in the eastern part of the country 35 km southeast from Harar Town. The major tribes that reside in Babile Woreda include Hawiya, Maaya, Gerri, Madigaan, Maaru and Ogaden. The long period of interaction between these tribes has resulted in harmonious relations and inter marriage among them. There was no history of rivalry and conflict among tribes except for conflict between Hawiya and Ogaden over grazing and water resources that took place three decades ago.

However, after 1991, change in the system of government led to competition between the two local administrations – Somali and Oromia, and the relations between these clans deteriorated and conflict emerged between the members of the clans who used to work for both Woreda administrations. The state administrations have conflicting views on the identity of the ethnic group that reside in the woreda. Hence, there was an incident of a killing that took place between the Hawiya and Maaya clans. The involvement of the opposition forces in both regional governments caused further damage to the relationship between the community and the two regional administrations.   The Prime Minister's Office intervened and sent a team simultaneously in both areas along the Oromia-Somali boundaries after the confrontation escalated. Based on the team's report, the PM Office decided on the status of Babile and on the demarcation of the disputed boundary between the states. Accordingly, eight Kebeles, all in the lower part adjacent to Fik, were given to the Somali region, while the northern part including Babile town, comprising altogether 34 Kebeles, was given to the Oromia Region. Both regions complained that the decision had not been based on the will of the community. There had been conflict between the two police forces in 1999 over the administration of the Woreda.

There is still continued competition and conflicting claim over who control Babile Woreda, and it has become a source of conflict between the communities and the regional states. The intensity of violent confrontation between the two local authorities was high, and this has created competition amongst the local communities and strives and even within the same tribes. As a result of this long standing conflict and confrontation between the regional states, people are suffering from lawlessness in the Woreda which resulting from the biased application and enforcement of the law as well as from human rights violations by law-enforcing local authorities.

3.5. Ethnic Conflict in Bench-Maji Zone[5]

The Dizzi, Menit and Surma tribes live in Maji, Jebba, Toom and Surma weredas. The Menit and Dizzi tribes live in Maji, Toom and Jebba weredas, whereas the Surmas live in Surma wereda. The Surmas used to live near the Sudanese border in areas called Tirmatid

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[4] Adapted from the case study by Ahmed Shide (2003).
[5] EHRCO, 2003: 29th Special Report: Conflict Between Dizzi and Surma Nationalities

and Mardur. However, as they are pastoralists, they do not live in a fixed place. They live in pastor in different areas in Surma Woreda. In March 2003, the Surmas encroached the areas that are known to belong to the Dizzi and Menit tribes. The main cause for this encroachment is the absence of government soldiers that used to guard the boarder along the Sudan and Kenya during the *Derg* regime. This made the Surmas vulnerable to attacks and looting from heavily armed Sudanese pastoralists who overstepped the Ethiopian border and forced them to leave their localities and migrate to Jebba and Toom Weredas.

The Surmas, who migrated to these weredas and took over villages of Dizzis and Menits were attacked by the Dizzis and the Menits. This has caused repeated clashes between the Dizzis and the Surmas. Though local government authorities repeatedly asked the Surmas to evacuate the areas they took over from the Dizzis and the Menits, the Surmas persistently refused to do so. The reason for their refusal was that they had been exposed to attacks by the *Bume* tribes from the Sudan. The Surmas repeatedly appealed to the government to give them a guarantee that it would stop the attacks from external forces, If the guarantee was given they would evacuate the areas belonging to the Dizzis and the Menits and move back to their former villages. However, as there were no measures taken by both the regional and the Federal governments, the situation tuned from bad to worse.

As a result of this conflict 40 people were killed and a considerable amount of property was looted and destroyed. The residents of the locality in the zone were in serious anxiety because of the clashes. Other clashes were also reported by EHRCO in the same zone in July 2001, which reported that 31 people were killed five were wounded, 152 homes were burnt down, 1,300 people were displaced from their homes and 166 heads of cattle were looted.

It was also learned that the tradition of the Surmas is another cause of conflict between the
Surmas on the one hand and the Dizzis and the Menits on the other. According to Surma culture, a Surma man has to give more than 10 heads of cattle, two guns and other goods to the parents of his fiancé as a dowry. So, a Surma man who wants to get married would go and raid cattle from the Dizzi and Menit villages. In the process, one or two people of the Dizzi or Menit tribes are usually killed. And in retaliation, the families of the victims would kill any member of the Surma tribe. This has long been the situation between the tribes.

There have also been occasional conflicts between the Surmas and the Agnwaks who live in the neighbouring Gambella Regional State. In a conflict that flared up between the Surmas and the Agnwaks in August 2003, 21 people were killed, scores of others were wounded and property was looted.

IV.   Causes of Ethnic Conflicts in Ethiopia

The causes of ethnic conflict in Ethiopia are multiple. They include historical, political, economic, social and cultural causes. According to Dr. Zerihun Ambaye, Director of the Ethiopian Pastoralist Research and Development Association (EPaRDA), there are root causes and major causes of ethnic conflicts that are related with cultural/traditional and economic factors. Likewise, different researchers categorise the causes in different ways. In order to avoid confusion, the writer prefers to present all the causes without making any division. Identifying these causes will help CSOs to design appropriate strategies to address violent conflicts.

4.1   Historical factors

Many authors on Ethiopian history such as Markakis and Clampham argue that the cause of ethnic conflicts were over centralization of power and economic resources by the dominant and elite groups, principally people from the central parts of the country: Amharans group (Showans), which despite genealogical mixtures – defined itself and the nation along a narrow perspective, plus the subsequent marginalization of other ethnic groups (Assefa, 2003, citing Markakis, 1998 and Clapham, 1994). The response of the Imperial regime to the various resistance against its centralisation drive and the conflicts it provoked was basically advancing the project of 'nation-building, whose central agenda had been perpetuation of the hegemony of the ruling elite, the imperial regime subjected the vanquished ethnic groups to politico-economic domination, linguistic and cultural suppression: and more fundamentally the forceful alienation of land from the indigenous population of the South. Needless to add, state-sponsored nationalism was advanced aggressively by the hegemonic elite to ensure the continuity of its dominance and the centrality of the monarchy who legitimated such dominance in the name of tradition (Merara, 1999).

The military regime neither solved the country's chronic problem of underdevelopment nor the demands of various forces, especially those of the marginalized ethnic groups constituting Ethiopia. The face of serious challenges from various directions, the military, which contending forces for the control of the state, never hesitated to use its comparative advantage (Merara, citing Dawit Woldegiorgis, 1986).

Hence, both the Imperial state (1930-1974) and the military regime (1974-1991) have been criticized for monopolizing state power and economic resources in "ethnocratic form" by few or one ethnic group and for excluding other ethnic groups access to state power (Assefa, 2003, citing Markakis, 1998 and Clapham, 1994). Jon Abbink equally argues that ethnic revival is primarily a result of failing state policy, which exclude certain ethno-regional groups, and of a political strategy of aspiring but locked elite groups (1997). According to them these circumstances encourage the politicisation of ethnicity and lead to ethnic conflicts.

4.2   Ethno-Centric Federalism and Ethno-Centric Politics

When the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in 1991, its main agenda was empowering the ethnic groups and decentralizing of power as a solution for the above stated historical problem. According to EPRDF's perspective, the crisis is primarily a result of ethnic domination not only in political power but also in all other aspects of public life, not to mention the cultural hegemony. It considers both regimes that defined the much broader nation of Ethiopian nationalism narrowly, structured the state accordingly and left the others at their mercy. The centralisation of power and economic resources at the centre is simply a consequence, not the primary cause of this ethnocratic state. Based on this premise, the ruling party, EPRDF, defined its struggle not on the basis of class or national party but along ethnic lines (Assefa, 2003). To this end, in order to build unity from diversity, EPRDF introduced <u>federalism</u> as an ideology (promoting shared rule for some purposes and self rule for others) and <u>federation</u> as a political institution (reflecting the unity and diversity in multicultural societies challenge the traditional nation-state on some counts) (Ibid.). Federalism has also been resorted to as a conflict management device for inter-ethnic or inter-communal conflicts in deeply divide society. It can be used to diffuse ethnic, conflicts arising from historical experiences (Hashim, 2003 citing Daniel J. 1979).

Hence, ethnocentric federalism state was established by the Constitution, which affirms a commitment to the ultimate sovereignty of the nations, nationalities and people of Ethiopia. The Constitution gives them the right to self-government through their elected representatives or through their direct democratic participation and unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession.

However, ethnic federalism did not bring solutions to ethnic conflicts, it rather became a cause for resent conflicts. According to Teshome, one of the major causes for ethnic conflict between Oromia and Somali ethnic groups, is the formation of ethnic based regional boundaries and non-clarity resulted in the separation of ethnic groups from their traditional resource bases. Another major cause, which changes the nature of conflict from competition over the use of the natural resources to that of claim for land ownership, was found to be the physical demarcation of boundaries based on ethnic regionalism (Teshome, 2003).

Likewise, there has been ethnic biased thinking among politicians or elites which is being reflected on other ordinary citizen. People start to raise the issue of ethnicity in their routine life and this has been creating stereotyped thinking among people. Such thinking aggravated or became the cause for some ethnic conflicts. There has also been contradictory visions of the elite of Ethiopia's varied ethic groupings. More concretely, in the context of today's Ethiopia, by and large, the aspiration of the Tigrayan elite is to ensure the continuity of its existing hegemony and the Oromo elite's ambition is to create the independent republic of Oromo. Elites of some of other ethnic groups have still other contradictory vision.   These contradictory visions of the various elite have easily fragmented both the political and civil societies in Ethiopia, which can have detrimental

effects both on the chance for durable peace and the fortune of the democratic transformation in the county (Merara, 1999).

4.3. Economic Causes: Competition for economic resources and Asset building

Competition for economic resources is an important factor in ethnic conflict and it lies at the heart of such conflicts. Conflict among ethnic groups, particularly in the border predominantly by pastoralists, is not a new phenomenon. It arises mainly due to competition over grazing land and/or water resources, especially in times of drought. However, conflict took new forms when the 'modern' states emerged, and boundaries that led to the apportionment of the land between different states, were delimited and impeded the freedom of movement of the pastoralists (Ahmed, 2002). Though there are indigenous resource-management system that formulates rules and regulations concerning the environmental issues in many parts of the countries especially among pastoralists, local political elites politicise the system and produce their own rules and regulations that usually create conflict.

Asset building is another major economic factor that causes ethnic conflict. When boys of an extended family members reached their manhood stage and leave their parents' home, they are required to build asset for their future home. Their family hardly share their asset with their sons. Hence, to get the required resources, they have to go outside of their ethnic group to raid cattle. In retaliation, the other ethnic member unite themselves and raid cattle from this ethnic group. Such actions usually trigger ethnic conflict and this can be considered as another economic factor of conflict.

4.4. Cultural and Traditional Causes

According to Dr. Zerihun, **defence mechanisms** of ethnic groups are one of the root causes of ethnic conflict. Each ethnic group resides in a certain geographical area and they have their traditional mechanisms through which they commonly share their resources not allowing or permitting other ethnic group to use it. Hence to protect their property and to protect themselves from other ethnic groups they use a defence mechanism which can easily trigger conflict.

The Individual security mechanism is the other cultural and traditional cause of conflict that is related to the defence mechanism. The defence mechanism is established in such a way that it considers other ethnic group as enemy. When two people of different ethnic groups meet, they consider each other as enemy and in most cases they fight. Members of each ethnic group have their own identification mark and because of this people from different ethnic background can easily identify each other and they usually fight whenever they meet.

The tradition of **Payment of dowry (gift)** for marriage, which is paid in kind (cattle or shoats), is also another factor for ethnic conflict. According to the tradition of most ethnic groups, a young man is require to pay high amount of dowry to the bride's parents. As

young men hardly own resources that can be given as dowry, they have to own something from other places. Hence, they raid cattle from other ethnic groups. This is a common phenomena in most parts of the country, especially in the south. This act is enforced by a youth developing system within the ethnic system. For instance, some ethnic groups decorate men as heroes when that person makes victorious cattle raid over another ethnic group.

> E.g. According to Surma culture, a Surma man has to give more than 10 heads of cattle, two guns and other goods to the parents of his fiancé as a dowry. So, a Surma man who wants to get married would go and raid cattle from the Dizzi and Menit villages. In the process, one or two people of the Dizzi or Menit tribes are usually killed. And in retaliation, the families of the victims would kill any member of the Surma tribe. This has long been the situation between the tribes (EHRCO, 2003).

Prestige and Retaliation: The longstanding culture of retaliation has a compounding effect and sustains conflict cycles. Pastoralists in the Southern Omo Zone feel profoundly humiliated if an attack on a family is not revenged. Retaliatory acts receive positive reactions and are often rewarded by the community. The feeling of humiliation and the subsequent retaliatory measures are usually perceived as collective responsibilities of the entire ethnic group concerned.

4.5. Biased Development Policies of Governments

Policies pursued by successive governments in the country have tended not only to neglect the needs of certain social groups mainly pastoralists but also often to run directly counter to these marginalized social groups when compared to other groups. Added to this, scarcity and insecure access to resources such as, water and pasture has led pastoralists to constant friction with ranchers, farmers and horticulturalists, which in turn has led to violent conflict.

> E.g. one of the underlying causes of the conflict between Borena and Gerri (see 3.3 above) was the claim over land ownership as well as the attempt to implement a policy that does not fit the area. The tenure arrangement does not consider the specific situation and life style of the conflicting parties.

4.6. Using Ethnicity for Political Mobilization (Politicisation of Ethnicity)

When resource competition takes place in a political and not in an economic realm, ethnicity becomes the most efficient base for political mobilization, and it gives enough ground for new local elites to compete on the basis of ethnicity. Ethnicity is also a political construct, manipulated and created by local political elites (entrepreneurship) to select and reinterpret aspects of culture and history that fit into the legitimisation of a particular power base (Ahmed, 2002). Due to the poverty situation in the country, there are disparities among regional administrations, especially in the provision of basic social services.

Frequency of drought further exacerbates poverty, and the use of grain for political struggle by local authorities increases the vulnerability to drought. In such situations, exclusive local government elites emerge, and the decision-making power concentrates within a small tribal elite. These groups involve themselves in power struggles which happen between 'the local authorities of both regions, which will lead to the formation of factions between the communities, because of the politicisation of ethnicity as a factor for boundary demarcation. They use ethnicity as a pretext to fulfil their own interests and they sensitise members of the public against each other (ibid.).

4.7. Lack of Good Governance

There has been problem of public administration and there is lack of downward accountability among concerned bodies. Government officials, especially those at regional and local level are promoting the ruling party's political agenda and misuse their political power, rather than addressing their communities' needs and focusing on development agenda. Dissatisfactions that exist in the country as a result of absence of public accountability and non-observance of the rule of law by government officials, result in grievances that eventually lead to conflict situations.

4.8. Lack of Security

Adebayo Adedeji argues that universally conflicts are the result of lack of security – a psychological fear of political uncertainty. Conflicts are the consequences of the fear of the future, lived through the past. It is the collective fear of the future based on a history of social uncertainty, due to the failure of the State to arbitrate justly between or provide a credible guarantee of protection for a group, resulting in emerging anarchy and social fractures (Adedeji, 1991). The lack of security is the root causes for some of the causes mentioned above as it has direct relationship with them. For instance, it is due to lack of security that pastoralists build their own defensive mechanisms through which they commonly share their resources not allowing or permitting other ethnic group to use it. The same is true with individual defensive mechanisms of these people.

4.9. Weakening and Undermining of Traditional System of Conflict Prevention and Management

Traditionally elders and clan/tribe leaders have dominant power over administering their community, including maintaining peace and security. Pastoralist communities for example had customary structures for conflict prevention, management and resolution through councils of elders; traditional courts pear or age group supervision, where each individual or groups had to meet certain social obligations and expectations. But these traditional structures of governance, while still substantial have generally been weakened, reducing the capacity of communities to prevent and manage conflicts.

E.g. one of the causes of conflict between Borena and Gerri (see 3.3 above) was the introduction of new rules and regulations for land management by local government

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that contradicts with the indigenous management system, which has its own rules and regulations.

4.10. Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons

The unchecked proliferation of small arms and light weapons and the deliberate arming of certain communities without due regard to the security of others is a major threat to peace in most of the Ethiopian pastoralist areas (IAG, 2003) and it is an aggravating cause of conflict. Pastoralist communities now provide the largest market for illicit arms from local circulation and from neighbouring countries in the Horn (Kenya, Somalia, The Sudan, Djibouti and Eritrea). Easy availability and circulation of small arms and light weapons in these communities have been exacerbating prolonged violent conflicts and social breakdown within the pastoralists and other social groups for control of resources and power.

5. The Role of CSOs in Conflict Management in Ethiopia

There are only very few legally recognised, modern formal CSOs that work in the area of conflict management. As these organisations are very few in number and have limited capacity to address the problem, they only reach limited parts of the county. In the following paragraphs, we will try to see what roles these CSOs play in the area of conflict management. Some of their activities on conflict management, are incorporated in the next chapter.

Various indigenous community based social institutions or self support systems that play greater role in conflict resolutions, communities' well-being, stability and security, are considered as civil society organisations. Most of these indigenous institutions are not fully functional and in some places they are becoming weak and withering away due to political, social, economic, etc. pressure. As they are very useful as conflict management mechanisms, the paper presents some of such institutions in order to give recommendations as to how to use these community based CSOs in conflict management.

Though there are some international NGOs and bilateral and multilateral organisations that work in the area of conflict management and peace building activities, the study only focuses on local and indigenous CSOs. In the area of conflict management and peace building, while most of the international organisations are donors that support different projects of local CSOs and government institutions, few of the international NGOs are implementing their own projects. For instance, Mercy Corps, the US based NGO implements conflict prevention and resolution projects in the SNNPR to build the capacity of institutions critical to resolving differences peacefully and to facilitate collaboration between government and CSOs.

5.1 Adopting indigenous traditional systems of conflict management

There have been some initiatives by CSOs to adopt traditional system of conflict resolutions or linking/using indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in their conflict management programs. When compared to the non-indigenous ones, indigenous mechanisms for the resolution and prevention of conflicts are less complex, more time saving – and give a chance to parties in conflict to actively participate in solving their own problems and handling their own affairs in their own way (Tirsit, 2003).

The Wolaita people (about 2million) who live in Wolaita Zone in the SNNPR, have a strong traditional social institution called *Gutara* which may be translated as a 'village assembly' or 'social political forum or public place'. It is a forum where important issues are debated to arrive at consensual decisions. This can be described as the democratic assembly of Wolaita. In physical terms *Gutara* is an open space, usually located at the centre of certain neighbourhood. Major annual celebrations such as the celebration of *Mesquel* Festival[6], major funerals, conflict resolution meetings, even political meeting, used to take place in *Gurara* (Data, 2004). The **Yakima Ome Gutara Association**, a CSO which is legally registered with SNNPR in September 2004, claims to have drawn its basic inspiration from the 'age old' Wolaita cultural institution of *Gutara*. It aspires to rejuvenate some aspects of earlier practices of *Gutara* institution.   This is a grassroots institution based on and controlled by the villagers. The objectives of the Association include: i) To contribute to the rejuvenation of cultural intuitions which forms the basis of morality, economic and social security, ii) to contribute to the revival of communal practices; iii) to contribute to the revival of cultural tradition of caring for nature and wise use of environment; iv) to fight collectively against poverty and contribute towards establishing a firm socio-cultural foundation for a just and sustainable society.

5.2. Indigenous Social Institutions for Conflict Resolutions

Ethiopia has a strong cultural heritage and various indigenous community based social institutions or self support systems that play a greater role in conflict resolutions, communities' well-being, stability and security. These indigenous institutions are very useful for conflict management mechanisms as they allow communities to handle their problems in their own way.   Some writers describe such traditional methods of conflict resolution and peace building mechanisms as civil society institutions (Wolde-Selassie, 2004), while others consider them as indigenous mechanisms of conflict resolutions (Tirsit, 2003). Some of such institutions are described below.

5.2.1. *Shimgilinna*

The literal meaning of *Shimgilinna* is 'arbitration or reconciliation by elders'. The name implies that elders are the main people involved in resolving conflicts. This indigenous mechanism is widely used in many parts of the country, although the term has different

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[6] A National Festival that is celebrated every year on 27th September, to commemorate the findings of the true cross on which Christ was crucified, by Queen Elena.

name among different ethnic groups. For instance, among *Gumuz* ethnic group it is called *Mangima.* It is the most important traditional institution for preventing, resolving and managing ethnic conflicts of different scales and levels in different parts of the country. On a lower scale, *shimgilina* is applied to manage inter-clan conflicts on lineage level, whereas at a higher scale *shimglina* is convened to resolve severe intra-ethnic conflicts as well as to manage inter-ethnic conflicts (Woldeselassie, 2004).

Through the application of the *mangima* institution, the inter-ethnic conflict between the *Gumuz* and the resettlers in Metekel (see section 3.2) was somehow settled. The traditional practices of the *Gumiz* were adopted in order to improve communication with the autochthonous group. Resettlers stressed the *mangima* institution of the *Gumuz* as the most binding, learning from the experiences of long-standing neighbours' relations with earlier immigrants to the area.

5.2.2 Gada System

The Oromos are known for their *Gada*-System, which is the complex political and social system that affects the whole life of Oromo people. *Gada* is defined as a system of classes (*Luba*) that succeeds every eight years in assuming military, economic and ritual responsibilities (Trsit, 2003, citing Asmerom, 1973). Each Gada class remains in power for a specific term (*Gada*). The *Gada*-system has various institutional functions like political, administrative and ritual ones. One of the *Gada* institutions that could be mentioned as a conflict resolution mechanism are traditional judges who adjudicate under a big tree, locally called *Dhaddacha*. During the adjudication, the traditional judges sit according to their seniority of age and knowledge of customary laws of the Oromo. The term of office for traditional judges is one *Gada*: eight years.

However, the *Gada* system does not fully work among most parts of the Oromo ethnic group due to various reasons such as political (e.g. the *Dergue* regime deliberately suppressed the system), and social (e.g. when they started to assimilate themselves with other ethnic group the practice of the system decreased). *Borena* is one of the Oromo ethnic group where *Gada* System still works. *Borenas* are pastoralists and their livelihood is entirely dependent upon livestock. The territorial area - that lies between *Dawwa* and *Gannale* rivers - extends up to the border between Ethiopia and Kenya. *Borenas* have mechanisms to prevent violent conflict, and also to resolve it at a grassroots level, if a violent conflict occurs. These traditional conflict resolution methods of *Borenas* are therefore applicable to various conflicts, whether these might be economic related conflicts, claim-over border conflicts or conflicts that arise over customs, property and money (Tirsit, 2003)

5.2.3 Yajoka

Yajoka is one of the most important indigenous and traditional institution of the Gurage people, who inhabit an area located 155 Kms South-west of Addis Ababa, bounded by Awash river, Hadiya, Lake Zeway and Gibe river. *Yajoka*'s task is to provide a traditional system of conflict prevention and resolution and ensure social stability and maintenance

of good social relations among the people. The Gurage customary law, known as Kitcha, provides legal frame of the *Yajoka*. The *Kitcha* is a customary legal system that governs all aspects of human relations among the Gurage people. (Trsit, 2003, citing Getnet, 1999).

The Gurage ethnic groups have an individual tribal leader who administers their respective tribal groups which are based on the clanship system. However, there is a tribal-wide judicial institution, called the *Yajoka*-council, in which the clan-chief and the titled veterans of the seven tribal groups (*Sebat-Bet Gurage*) were agents. The council's main function was dealing with political relations between various tribes. In addition, it was an appeal court for inter-clan disputes (Worku, 1999). The laws of *Yajoka* thus regulate the political, economic, social and cultural relations among persons in the society.

5.2.4. Mada

The *Afar* people who inhabit the vast northeast ranges of the county, administer themselves through their traditional administrative system, which effectively handles all economic, social and political issues at the local level. *Mada* is the traditional legal system for the Afar, which is considered as a base for other administrative system and a constitution for *Afars*. They believe that their traditional conflict management is effective.

Most commonly recognised mechanisms like *Shimglena* or reconciliation by elders and arbitration by tribal leader (including the Sultan) and religious leaders are used in preventing and resolving conflicts. Elders from the same tribe generally handle conflicts within the tribe. However, if it is an inter-tribe case, elders and tribe leaders of the conflicting parities are involved. If the situation is serious enough, elders and leaders from other neutral tribes intervene.

5.3. Peace making activities using traditional peace-making procedure

The best model organisation in peace making activities using traditional procedure is Pastoralist Research and Development Association (EPaRDA). It is a local NGO established in 1999 and it works in close association with other organisation to improve the lives of pastoralists in Ethiopia. As one of its programs, EPaRDA has been working in south Omo since 2001 on integrated pastoral development. Within this framework EPaRDA has conducted a series of peace-making activities first among the Arbore, Hamer and Borena, then among the Mursi, Ari, and Bodi, and finally among the Hamer, Daseenech, Nyagatom, Karo, Muguji, Mursi and Bodi. These processes took some time as they were implemented according to the traditional peace-making procedures. Through these processes, the community established a peace committee that met every month and created a common militia made up of people from each ethnic group. The running costs of these structures were covered by cattle contributions. Today for the most part, the conflict among these ethnic groups have been stopped and agreement has

been reached over the use of common resources, making development interventions possible.

5.4. Conflict, prevention, resolution and peace building

There are few organisations, which are involved in preventing and resolving conflicts; and contributing to bringing peace and stability in the country. Such organisations believe that peace and development go hand in hand and that stability and progress are closely intertwined.

Peace and Development Committee (PDC), a local NGO working in different parts of the country plays a proactive and reactive role in preventing and/or resolving conflicts, promoting cooperation and understanding between different social, religious, ethnic and political groups in Ethiopia and the rest of the Horn of Africa . In order to carry out its objectives, among a lot of other activities, the office has set up a team of elders in a few selected towns whose main duties and responsibilities are identifying problems of peace, human rights and democracy and attempting to alleviate these. The office provides training on traditional and modern methods of resolving conflicts and promoting peace and stability.

Tridimensional View is a local NGO that was established in July 1999 is working in the area of democratic development, good governance and human rights. One of its program components is conflict prevention, resolution and management in various areas of SNNPR. Some of the activities of this program include: i) Providing training and organizing forums on conflict prevention and peace building for community representatives; ii) Setting up and supporting Council of Elders whose responsibility is resolving conflict by mediating conflicting parties and work towards sustainable peace. The Council members are made up of influential people, religious leaders, representatives of minorities, government representatives, etc. The Councils have been achieving good result especially in preventing and resolving conflicts.

Inter Africa Group (IAG) sees poverty and related denial of economic and social human rights as a major underlying cause of tensions and conflict in the Horn of Africa, and the need for enhanced efforts to address them through dialogue and search for common ground. IAG is also work to establish an early warning system to prevent conflicts or address them at early stages.

5.5. Monitoring democratic process, rule of law and violations of rights

Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) is the only organisation in the country that monitors and reports on human rights violations such as extra-judicial killings, arbitrary detention, torture, forced disappearances, unlawful and arbitrary confiscation of property, violation of privacy, unlawful dismissal of employees, denial of the freedom of conscience, religion, expression and association, etc.

EHRCO has been monitoring and reporting various ethnic conflicts flaring in the different parts of the country. Besides reporting on the seriousness of ethnic conflicts and their impact on the lives of hundreds and thousands of people and properties valued billions of Birr to concerned government officials, embassies and other international organization, it gave press releases to journalist in different occasions. Whenever EHRCO issues a report, it becomes a hot issue in the media

6.   What Role Should CSOs Play In Conflict Management?

The aforementioned chapters show that there are only very few local CSOs imply that CSOs should play a leading role in addressing ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia. In almost all cases of ethnic conflicts, the Government took a leading role in handling them. However, the Government has not been able to bring about lasting solutions as conflicts are not handled in a systematic manner and as mentioned in the beginning of this paper, they use a 'fire fighter approach'.

The writer believes that CSOs should play a major role in addressing problems of ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia. But the problem is that Ethiopia has very few CSOs that work in the area of conflict and their role is very limited. Hence, there is a need to create vibrant CSOs and a strong network among the sector.   It is through such arrangements that they can challenge the government and make a possible impact on the problem. Though it is challenging to establish such institutions and work in the area[7], there are a lot of opportunities which would allow or facilitate the formation of vibrant CSOs.   The following could be mentioned as examples:
- Conflict is being a priority for most of bilateral and multilateral organisations working in the country. Quite a number of donor organizations such as the European Commission, German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), Oxfam, Save the Children USA and the World Bank showed great interest to support such initiative and they put aside good amount of fund for this purpose; e.g. the Cotonou Agreement that was signed by 25 EU and 66 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries in 2000, presents an important opportunity to enhance conflict prevention and peace building strategies through its specific provisions on prioritising these issues. Article 11 focuses on peace building policies, conflict prevention and conflict resolution (EU, 2000)
- The Ministry of Federal Affairs in collaboration with GTZ, has been initiating various projects on conflict management and peace building. In this program both parties give importance to the participation of CSOs in the area of conflict management and peace building. Ethiopia's national poverty reduction strategy includes a strong emphasis on administrative decentralisation, civil service reform and capacity-building at the woreda level. This includes efforts to build the administrative capacity of local authorities and to improve transparency, accountability and civil society participation in local government structure. This is a good opportunity for CSOs to intervene in conflict prone area;

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[7] Some of the possible challenges are discussed in the next chapter of this paper.

- Few CSOs such as Ethiopian Pastoralist Research and Development Association (EPaRDA) has been closely work with concerned government sector offices and they have established healthy relationship with the offices, though they are working on politically very sensitive area. This organisation could be taken as a model organisation among those that work in the area of conflict management.

The following are some of the major role CSOs could play in addressing ethnic conflict in Ethiopia.

6.1. Promote, enhance and facilitate communities' traditional methods of conflict management

Ethiopians have strong social capital i.e there is strong self support system among the communities, there are strong social values that help people to respect one another and to build trust among one another. Promoting such self supporting systems and indigenous civil societies help communities to handle their social problems by themselves through their own traditional mechanisms that have been practiced by them for years. In relation to conflict management, such traditional mechanisms could play a significant role in managing conflicts and bring long lasting peace and development among ethnic groups. However, the traditional mechanism should be used in combination with internationally known modern conflict handling mechanism. In this regard, CSOs need to undertake studies on various indigenous civil societies in the country and design strategies based on the studies' outcomes. One of the strategies could be identifying 'best' social institutions that could possibly work in collaboration with formal modern CSOs, by building their capacity (to promote their strengths and address their weaknesses) and involving them in development initiatives and addressing conflict.

This role of CSOs is in line with the current development approach: Rights Based Approach to Development, as it enables or empowers communities, especially disadvantaged and marginalized parts of the society to gain control over their own lives and their social relationships. This concept is based on the insight that well-being depends essentially on the existence and accessibility of social resources (networks, support systems). One should consider that increase in power of disadvantaged could disturb the existing social system, thus creating fresh conflicts that may even lead to violence. Hence, for managing conflict and peace building, CSOs need to consider a process through which the parties to the conflict and their representatives reach a clearer awareness of their own goal and needs.

6.2. Initiate Conflict-Sensitive Development

People living in conflict areas, especially pastoralists have lack of access to basic services and are being marginalized from development initiative. For this reason lack of economic resources are being one of the major causes of conflict in these area. Hence, CSOs can initiate conflict-sensitive development interventions, in collaboration with Community Based Organisations (CBOs) or government sector offices, designed to improve food security and agricultural productivity and diversify livelihood options for

these people. It is crucial that these interventions are designed through dialogue with local communities to ensure that they reflect community needs and priorities and that they do not exacerbate conflict or mistrust between communities by fuelling perceptions of unfair advantage to some groups.

As CSOs could not address all development needs of people in conflict prone areas, they can initiate establishment of CBOs and empower communities to claim their basic needs and basic rights. CSOs in collaboration with these CBOs can also advocating for policy implementation and service delivery so as to minimise serious conflict in the long run.

CSOs can also involve in capacity building program to strengthen capacities of local government offices and CBOs so as to enable them play a better role in preventing and resolving conflicts in their respective areas. CSOs can for instance provide training to local government officials and CBOs' members on analysing and handling conflict in systematic way.

6.3. Support media for peace building

Media can play a great role in changing public opinion on conflict, either negatively or positively. CSOs can support or use existing public media especially radio programs to educate people for peace and promote peaceful solutions for conflicts. For instance, they can train government media staff to avoid stereotyping and polarise representation in the media. Enabling journalists to comply with standards of professionalism in reporting sensitive issues could be another strategy.

Using Community Radio can be taken as a good strategy here. International NGOs like OXFAM Canada initiate community radio projects in very remote areas of the county, so that people have access to the basic information, which is especially important for them. This program can also be linked with conflict management activities.

6.4. Education and training for peace

The education program can comprise all activities which improve attitudes, knowledge and capabilities for conflict management. People of all ages should be shown how to alter their conflict related behaviour, how to counteract escalation of violence and how to promote conflict resolution. Thus, of peace education is a measure which creates the social preconditions for peaceful co-existence (Mahler and Ribaux, 2000).

6.5. Exploring and Understanding Conflict

Conflicts are not understood as needed for development of the state and society, to come to satisfactory terms for the future. Therefore, conflicts are very often not acknowledged. They are only seen as destructive, but not with the great potential to be constrictive for the state and the society. Very seldom are conflicts addressed in the stage of confrontations and nearly nobody is doing reconciliation work after violence had

happened. This happened because there was no systematic knowledge about conflicts, there are often no proper reports at hand, the role of responsible bodies is unclear and nearly nobody sees a connection between the knowledge and the handling of conflict (Hoehl, 2003).

Hence, CSOs have to improve the understanding of conflicts in light of a proper analysis and start to think about what might be helpful, something basic for the exploration of conflicts, something practical for a first understanding to recognise how complex the situation is, a kind of practical guideline for officials, to get ideas as to what has to be taken into consideration, while working on conflicts. There is a need to develop proper tool of analysis based on international modern standard tools, by taking the Ethiopian contexts into consideration. CSOs have to train people in the method of using the analysis tool.

6.6. Working in Partnership with the Local Government Bodies

The PRSP of Ethiopia gives strong emphasis on administrative decentralisation, civil service reform and capacity-building at the woreda level and it encourage participation of CSOs in local government structure. Hence, CSOs can work in partnership with government, especially at local level, to promote democratic election procedures, reforms of legal system, the establishment of integrated education systems, appropriate language policies and human rights legislation. Both government and CSOs should also help raise awareness and building capacity of local leaders and pastoralist communities on good governance, laws and regulations as well as constitutional issues-including their constitutional rights as pastoralists. This would encourage dialogue and understanding of the differences between modern and traditional systems and enable communities to be more strategic in addressing their problems (Yohannes, Kassaye and Zerihun 2005) .

Setting up independent arbitration councils: in partnership with government offices, CSOs can also work towards setting up independent arbitration councils which could be made up of wise individuals, elderly people and other influential people at local and national level.

6.7. Initiating conflict handling strategies and advocating for policy implementation

There is neither clear policy or strategy of how to handle conflict nor a clear concept of responsibilities in the country (Hoehl, 2003). This shows that government uses fragile systems which have coincidental results in managing violent conflict. Conflicts are not understood as complex, as processes with different stages of intensity, with different possibilities to respond and intervene. In this regards, CSOs can influence and lobby the government to have national and local strategy for conflict handling and to address the problem of conflict in systematic ways. If handled systematically and carefully, conflicts will be instruments for positive change.

In order to design, implement and evaluate conflict-sensitive development strategies, CSOs need to initiate and improve dialogue between donors, government and CSOs. Forums and processes to encourage dialogue and enable civil society to participate in development frameworks such as PRSPs and CSPs at the national, regional and district level should be established and strengthened.

6.8. Educating Youth and children for peace

Young people and children are the future of any society, and in most societies in developing countries the under 16s make up a majority of the population. The following strategies and activities could be undertaken by CSOs to educate youth and children so as to enable them to recognise the societal value of peaceful coexistence and receive an education conducive to the realisation of their material and social desires (Mahler and Ribaux, 2000).

- Helping and motivating young people to engage in joint activities, such as youth camps, youth groups, sports, recreation programs. This breaks down old cultural barriers. At the same time recreational activities are designed to replace the culture of violence which can be attractive to young people in the absence of alternative options;
- Training for community leaders (especially for those who are highly respected by young people) on all aspects of education for peace and crisis prevention;
- Development of courses and teaching materials which explicitly address the problems of children and young people,
- Primary basic education should be made available for all children;
- Teachers should be trained especially in developmental psychology and general education theory;
- New curricula should incorporate conflict-specific themes such as communication, cooperation, reconciliation and problem-solving (including the methods needed for their introduction: role play, music stories etc.),
- New textbooks should draw attention to the underlying causes of poverty and prompt processes of reflection on them;

6.9. Training for Crisis Prevention and Conflict Management

Work in conflict, crisis or post-conflict situations places high demands on personnel. It requires a broad spectrum of technical, social and personal expertise. However, studies show that in the concerned government offices of Ethiopia, there is no systematic knowledge about conflicts, there are no proper reports at hand, the role of responsible bodies is unclear and nearly nobody sees a connection between knowledge and handling of conflict. On the other hand, there are no people trained in handling conflicts. Conflicts are handled without proper knowledge i.e. more or less coincidentally (Hoehl, 2003).

Hence, CSOs need to provide training at varies level to their own staff and staff of other governmental or non-governmental organisations that work in collaboration. Having

trained staff would help to systematically analyse conflicts: i.e. understand the dynamics, gaining deeper insight into root causes, etc., and thereby help to design appropriate strategies in order to systematically handle conflicts. Training concerned staff would help to address ethnic conflicts before they reached the level of violence.

6.10. Dialogue Centre and Centre for Tolerance Education

CSOs, in collaboration with concerned government offices, can establish a dialogue centre and centre for tolerance. With such an organisation the idea of promoting 'unity in diversity' could also be met. The centre could work on concepts for dialogue. It should initiate and conduct public 'Dialogue Forums' to promote dialogue between conflicting parties and to prevent violent conflicts. Taking up important issues e.g. religious conflicts, youth problems, ethnic diversity, values for the society, etc. (Hoehl, 2003)

The other main area that CSOs should focus on is tolerance education, which includes reconciliation (trauma-work, psychological help, reconstruction, economic help for victims, trust and confidence building, truth and justice) (ibid.)

6.11. Fighting harmful traditional practices fuelling conflict

CSOs should facilitate discussions with communities to discuss cultural practices such as paying dowry and beliefs around heroism that are fuelling conflict and to devise solutions, to raise awareness of the benefits of peace and development for pastoral communities and to encourage peaceful resource sharing.

7. Possible Challenges that CSOs Would Face in Conflict Management

7.1. Wrong Perception of Government towards CSOs that work on Democratisation processes

Programs and projects in areas of conflict management, are highly sensitive and mostly related to political issues. Government usually considers CSOs, that are working on democratisation processes and other political issues, as opposition forces or political manoeuvrers rather than as partners to be consulted and supported. The case of the May 2005 election can be taken as a good example. For the first time in the history of Ethiopian CSOs, quite a number of them were involved in the May 2005 National election process. They mainly involved in voters education, election observation and election monitoring processes. Through their collaborative and coordinated efforts, they reached millions of people in different parts of the county, using different methods such as print and electronics media, discussion forums, public debates, etc. They have also observed and monitored the election processes in various election zones. Their move towards democratization processes of the country, could be consider as a good sign that

CSOs are making a paradigm shift – moving from a needs based to a rights based approach.

However, the Government did not welcome this move towards right based approach. It still believes that NGOs that have involved in provision of social services, should continue to do the same activities. Very few CSOs tried to engage in peace building and reconciliation for the conflict that arouse between opposition parties and the government/ ruling party following the May 2005 election which was believed to be rigged. The conflict was aggravated by public uprising and brutal measures were taken by military forces against civilians in order to stop the public uprising. Hundreds of people were wounded and killed by the Government force and thousands of people, especially young students were unlawfully detained without bail. When CSOs tryed to involve in peace and reconciliation processes, the Government discourages them. This has been proved by the Government's press release issued against an umbrella organisation, Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA), when the later issued a statement with regards to finding peaceful solutions for the political problems.

In addition to the threat and warning from Government officials on some CSOs' staff, two NGO staff have been jailed since November 2005 together with other opposition political party leaders, for allegedly instigating riots and supporting oppositions for treason. Their case is on the trial processes and they are denied bail.

7.2. High staff turnover of government officials and technical staff

There is usually very high turnover of Government officials and other technical staff in Government offices and this affects CSOs project initiatives. After taking the necessary trainings on conflict related issues they may leave their organisation, transfer to other offices or change their positions. In such cases CSOs need to start their project as new or train new staff.

7.3. Limits to indigenous approaches

Many of the traditional approaches to managing conflicts and social differences reinforces undemocratic patron-client relationships, and have perhaps contributed to the emergence and spread of conflict. Most indigenous institutions are dominated by men and as they are gender insensitive, mostly they reach decisions that are against the interests of women. Some of the traditional institutions also exclude minorities and therefore, there is limit to their being democratic institutions (Data, 2004). The fashionable embrace of traditional approaches should always be critically questioned, though by no means generally avoided.

8. Conclusions

Violent ethnic conflicts have became critical political, economic and social issue that should be the concern of all groupings, political parties, private sector actors, NGOs,

churches and political decision-making bodies; and within the public sector it must be part of all layers of administrations. Due to these conflicts tens and thousands of people have been displaced from their homes; wounded or killed and the rights of millions of peoples have been violated. Conflict not only creates human misery but also suppresses economic activity.

The writer believes that CSOs should play a proactive role in ethnic conflict management and bringing sustainable peace to the society. But these CSOs should give greater emphasis to community priorities and work through existing indigenous local institutions. Modern conflict management methods would give good results, if they are combined with the traditional ones.   Studies show that some of the indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms consider basic principles that are used by the modern conflict management mechanisms. Though CSOs should play a proactive role, community groups at grass root level should actively participate in the projects and directly own and manage their own projects.

But before handling conflicts, there must be an understanding of conflicts and their complexities and for that there is a need to use appropriate mechanism of systematic conflict analysis. Varieties of methods should be used for various stages of conflicts (pre-conflict, confrontation and post conflict stages) depending on the situations. Because conflict management is a very sensitive issue, CSOs should take all the necessary precautions not to create disturbance on the socio-cultural environment and damage the indigenous traditional conflict handling mechanisms of the communities.

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