

# THE ROLE OF NGOS IN PEACEBUILDING IN PASTORALIST AND AGRO-PASTORALIST COMMUNITY OF NYANGATOM, HAMMER, AND DASSANECH COMMUNITY OF SOUTH OMO, ETHIOPIA

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## Abstract

The South OMO zone is conflict-ridden, and efforts are being made to build Peace. This paper indicated that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) play great roles in peacebuilding and encouraging grassroots peacebuilding initiatives. This study examines the role of NGOs in promoting peacebuilding among Hammer, Dassanech and Nyangatom communities in the south Omo zone using a case study research design to get the experience and beliefs of nongovernmental organizations who engaged in peacebuilding activities to reduce destructive or violent conflicts in the study area. The conflict affected the communities' harmonious relationships and traumatized the residents. NGOs have contributed to peacebuilding activities such as promoting conflict resolution and psycho-social healing through peace education and by participating in conflict reduction programs. The study recommended that NGOs develop conflict intervention mechanisms for peacebuilding, such as participating in economic empowerment and livelihood diversification programmes. In addition, the government peace apparatus should work with Nongovernmental organizations at the local level to take action on the spoiler of Peace.

**Keywords:** Peacebuilding, Conflict, Pastoralism, Agro-Pastoralism, Pastureland

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## 1. Introduction

Local and international NGOs or civil society organizations are pervasive in contemporary peacebuilding. They continue to play important roles in protecting people from violence, providing services, monitoring human rights abuses, and advocating for an end to wars or authoritarian rule. In addition, they are a mirror of the encompassing society, supporting peace in some cases and obstructing peace processes by preaching hate and polarizing adversary groups in conflict situations (Paffenholz, 2015). Conflict is when two or more individuals, groups, and communities consciously oppose each other and pursue incompatible goals or interests. The conflict may be tribal, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, socio-economic, or political. It also includes the struggle over values and claims in relation to scarce resources, power, and status (Coser, 1956). Hence, these types of conflicts need peace-building to reduce their destructive effects and to sustain Peace in the community.

Peacebuilding is the process of achieving Peace in conflict situations and promoting a culture of Peace. It aims to achieve positive Peace, addresses the underlying causes of conflict and prevents its transformation into violence. Furthermore, peacebuilding includes conflict, preventive actions, management, and resolution mechanisms to reach long-term sustainable Peace. It focuses on rebuilding the social capital and trust within society and helping all members of society live peacefully (Paffenholz, 2010). Mohammed and Yalwa(2018) also stated that peacebuilding is the process that facilitates the establishment of durable Peace and tries to prevent the reoccurrence of conflict by addressing the root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building and politics as well as economic transformation (Mohammed and Yalwa, 2018).

Peace and conflict scholars extend the concept of NGOs as a significant component of peacebuilding in conflict-ridden areas. According to (Jeong, 2005), international and local NGOs play an important role in conflict transformation and

peacebuilding because they look at the root causes of the problem. It involves an analysis of structural factors that are the source of a conflict. Failure of such initiatives results in the recurrence of conflicts and the absence of durable Peace. In addition, Galtung (1998), the founder of peace and conflict discipline, also wrote that NGOs' role in peacebuilding at the grassroots level is essential. Understanding the participation of NGOs in conflict management, transformation, social reconstruction, rehabilitation, peacebuilding, and reconciliation is part of the indispensable elements that make any peace process sustainable. Galtung also added that peacebuilding is contextual. Kiplagat (2018) explained that in Africa, NGOs focus on long, durable Peace through transformational efforts, especially in African countries where conflicts result from poor governance, plenty or scarcity of resources, and disputes manifested through negative ethnicity.

In Ethiopia, different aid and development NGOs have made important changes to their goals to work on the issue of conflict in society. In addition to relief and rehabilitation activities, these NGOs have encouraged local communities to participate in peacebuilding and work to promote the culture of peace (Rahmato et al., 2008). In the south Omo zone, NGOs are working in peacebuilding. For example, a USAID-funded project is strengthening institutions for Peace and development. The elders' traditional structures, reinforced by the Ethiopian Pastoralist Research and Development Association (EPaRDA), are now leading actors in mediating inter-ethnic conflicts. An NGO known as Pact Ethiopia, under a project called Stability for Ethiopia Lowland Marginalized Communities (SELAM- C), employed a participatory, bottom-up approach and built on traditional pastoral conflict mediation and prevention mechanisms and practices to foster Peace more effectively in the community (EUTF, 2016 and Wondimu, 2014).

In The South Omo Zone, 24 NGOs are recorded as actively working at the start of the 2016/17 fiscal year and work on peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution by strengthening peace institutions at the Woreda and kebele levels (EUTF, 2016). As the study area is conflict-prone, NGOs have continued to play a substantial role in the peacebuilding process between and among the pastoral and agro-pastoral communities. Though conflict is a common phenomenon in the study area, it has frequently been observed and has resulted in instability, loss of life, and property destruction. In these circumstances, NGOs participate in peacebuilding and contribute their parts to attain lasting peace. Thus, the main purpose of this proposal is to investigate the role and challenges of NGOs in the study area.

“Conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in a human life and has a complex cause” (Burton, 1990, p. 13). Conflicts in Ethiopia's pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities are primarily caused by economic marginalization, economic inequality and deterioration of their livelihoods rather than by ethnic diversity (Pavanello, 2009). NGOs play an important role in the peacebuilding process of conflict-affected areas in Ethiopia. They can bring sustainable Peace to the community through conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and transformation at the grassroots level (Wondimu, 2014). As (Mohammud, 2005, P.17) indicated, “NGOs can directly or indirectly contribute to the settlements of the conflicts and long-term peacebuilding process” in Ethiopia. They can support conflict-sensitive development intervention that addresses the factors that cause conflicts. They can also support local government administrations that lack the capacity and skills to manage, resolve and transform conflicts.

NGOs have the potential to understand the cause and sources of conflict, and they can find solutions for it in collaboration with the community and the government to minimize the adverse effects of

conflict on the social and economic life of the community of south Omo zone (EUTF, 2016). In addition, EPaRDA (2001-2007) revealed that peacebuilding activities over the last decades have demonstrated that it is possible to significantly reduce incidents of violent conflict between the different ethnic groups in south Omo zone pastoral and agro-pastoral communities.

Most previous studies focus on cross-border and inter-ethnic conflicts in the south Omo zone community. Gebre (2011) analyzes understanding the dynamics of pastoral conflict and how the conflict affects the Peace of the community. EPaRDA (2001-2007) discusses conflict mitigation, which deals with conflict in the community, its impact and management mechanisms. Teshome (2010) covers cross-border pastoral conflict, its causes, and conflicts arising from shared resources in other areas. However, local and international NGOs' roles in peacebuilding activities, including conflict resolution, management, and transformation, are not assessed. In addition, the challenges NGOs face in peacebuilding are not evaluated. Furthermore, the activities of NGOs to promote Peace in the study area and the approaches of NGOs working in peacebuilding have not been comprehensively studied. Therefore, this research aimed to fill the identified gap in the study area by taking Dassanech and Nyangatom, Woredas of the South Omo zone as a case study.

## 2. Research Methods

This research employed a qualitative approach that allows for an in-depth investigation of the role of NGOs in peacebuilding. Qualitative methods can be based on an interpretative research paradigm that assumes social reality to be dynamic, constructed and evolving (Marsh & Stoker, 2002) and primarily seek explanation of causes from individual cases (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006). From the interpretive perspective, qualitative research aims to investigate the role of NGOs in peacebuilding. The researcher

used a case study research design and collected data through FGD, interviews, non-participatory observation and documents. A case study design is used to obtain comprehensive and in-depth information (Kothari, 2004) and argues that the case study aims to understand the case in-depth and in its natural setting, recognizing its complexity and context. Therefore, a case study was employed to get in-depth information on the role of NGOs in peacebuilding in the study area. The purposive sampling method recruits participants with experience and knowledge about the research problem. The participants were Community members, local administrators, conflict prevention and early warning workers, zonal Peace and militia leaders and NGOs. To analyze the qualitative data, the researcher makes data reduction, coding of words and texts, and verifies data. Finally, the data is displayed for reporting. The researcher used the content analysis method to analyze the collected data. A content analysis of the components of verbal discussions with respondents is carried out. The recorded dialogue data are arranged into units of information and themes for analysis.

## 3. Discussions and Findings of the Study

### 3.1. Main Causes of Conflict in the Study Area

- Competition over resources like pasture and water to use
- Cultural factors, e.g. Animal raiding for dowry
- Drought
- Revenge
- Increased and uncontrolled use of illicit firearms
- Inter-ethnic land claims
- Conflict over access to fishing rights

### 3.2. Activities of NGOs in the Study Area

Nongovernmental (NGOs) attempt to promote greater resource sharing to reduce conflict. International organizations have supported various peace efforts such as training, forums, peace clubs, peace radios, and peace committees, as noted by

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (2015). Except for peace committees and training in the study area, others are nonexistent (Interview with Woreda Conflict Prevention and Early Response Office, 2023). Nongovernmental organizations like FBOs, Riam Riam Peace network, IOM, Mercy Corps, Oxfam GB, EpaRDA, and SAPCONE that commit the communities' peace help in the dissemination of information providing training and participating in reconciliations (Cross-border analysis and mapping final report, 2016). They provide education through training to develop a culture of Peace in the community (FGD 4). Based on the theory of culture of Peace, the conflicting parties create an attitude of nonviolence and fierce determination to defend human rights, justice, and human dignity, and the existence of Peace in a community is expected from all members of a community. Peace will be a permanent feature of all social institutions, especially the economy and the political scene (Nota, 2000).

In pre and post-conflict contexts, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, or NGOs engaging in Peace and peace-related activities are the important drivers for peacebuilding (Lederach, 1997). The NGOs play an important role in advocacy to help the Woreda or districts ensure peace and reduce conflict. NGOs are at the cutting edge of people-centred structural peacebuilding diplomacy practices between the two communities. In Ethiopia, international and national Civil Society Organizations have been crucial in establishing local peace committees. CSOs have roles in supporting the continuity of peace dialogues between conflicting parties. They provide the skill of peacebuilding to leaders to enhance community-based peacebuilding (Interview with Zonal and Woreda Peace, Conflict Prevention and Early Response Office of Nyangatom, Hammer and Dassanech, 2023).

There are many NGOs engaged in various activities. Specifically, 44 NGOs are working on cross-border issues. The 24 NGOs are on the Ethiopian side and 20 on the Kenya side (Cross-border analysis and mapping final report, 2016). Most of Ethiopia's activities focus on livelihoods and resilience, including interventions such as rangeland management, agriculture and water. It indirectly contributes to Peace and stability in the society. Projects dealing directly with conflict and instability are less common, perhaps due to the Charities and Societies Proclamation (No.621/2009), which has severely restricted NGO activities in these thematic areas.

On Kenya's side, international donors and the Government of Kenya are collaborating on a number of large-scale projects designed to strengthen and diversify livelihoods, promote resilience and develop local markets, which indirectly contributes to conflict prevention, management and peacebuilding in general (interview with south Omo zone peace and militia office, 2022). NGOs provide peace education activities to help community leaders and youth groups understand the cause of conflicts and develop conflict problem-solving skills to bring about behavior change and prevent conflict and violence, funding for poverty reduction, resource governance, advocating the right to Peace and creating awareness on conflict prevention to mitigate internal and cross-border conflicts.

### **3.2. Challenges of Peacebuilding in the Study Area**

Peacebuilding in the study area continues to face significant challenges in the current government of Ethiopia. Some of the challenges in the study area are stated below:

- The governments of Ethiopia have not come up with an appropriate strategy to eliminate the causes of conflicts

- The reluctance of leaders, especially politicians, to work for conflict prevention
- Misinformation to take Preventive Measures and lack of solid communication among leaders
- Lack of proactive initiative to mitigate conflicts
- The culture of the community: Individual behavior is shaped by community culture. In almost all ethnic groups, heroism and a culture of killing an enemy are highly praised and blessed. Those who are killed are decorated on their chest based on the tradition of the community.
- The absence of a functional government peace apparatus at the local level: The government peace apparatus does not work in all rural areas, and its services are limited around the kebeles near the Woreda or districts. According to the informants, the kebeles, which are far from the center of the district, did not get the complete security services of the government. Because of this, they are exposed to insecurity.

### **3.3. THE OPPORTUNITIES OF PEACEBUILDING IN THE STUDY AREA**

There are opportunities for peacebuilding in the study area. The following are the identified opportunities based on the collected data:

- Formal and informal education is also seen as an opportunity to contribute to the erosion of interest in conflict among pastoralists, especially among the youth. There is little change in behaviors among the youth pastoralist community. Over time, people have developed a culture of peace because of the influence of education.
- Diversification of livelihoods and pastoralism in some areas of the study area were observed to reduce conflict on pasture and water. Engaging in rain food agriculture and using irrigation for crop production is

the best way to change the conflict in the study area.

- The existence of peace and militia offices for the promotion of Peace and security in conflict-ridden areas is another opportunity for peacebuilding. The local and zonal offices are working with the conflict early warning and response offices to prevent conflicts.
- The political development of self-administration is also an excellent opportunity to govern how they participate in the government's decisions and policy-making process concerning the state's peacebuilding strategy.
- Strengthening the Indigenous conflict resolution system in each ethnic group of the study area community plays a significant role in peacebuilding practices, even if it never solves Peace. It creates a pathway for peacebuilding intervention.
- The last but not the least opportunity identified by the researcher is the indirect conflict intervention made by Governmental, NGOs, and intergovernmental organizations. They contribute a lot to education and development, directly and indirectly creating a peaceful way of life in the community.

### **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study established that NGOs actively promoted peacebuilding activities by offering peace education, promoting peacebuilding, advocating for the right to Peace, participating in conflict reduction programs, and identifying the sources of conflicts. The conflict in the community has not been reduced, and creative peace initiatives are needed. The mechanisms of positive Peace or creating social justice have not been tried based on the context of the conflict in the area. The challenges of peacebuilding and the sources of

conflict in the area are the culture of the community and the absence of government peace apparatus in local areas. The study recommended that NGOs develop conflict intervention mechanisms for peacebuilding, such as participating in economic empowerment and livelihood diversification programmes. In addition, the government peace apparatus should work with Nongovernmental organizations at the local level to take action on the spoiler of Peace or the causes of conflicts.

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