Peacebuilding or 'Development'? The Dynamics of Conflict and NGOs' Role in Borana, Oromia Region, Ethiopia[1]

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Abstract

This study explores the debates about the role of NGOs that have been involved in the Borana zone, Oromia Region, in Ethiopia. The study examines some of the major areas of their engagement in Borana with regards to peace building and 'development'. The interviews and focus group discussion and observations from the various reports indicate that there were several NGOs working in the area, which was also acknowledged by members of the community during the fieldwork. Information from the local government administration offices in Borana also show that they do recognize the wide ranging activities of NGOs. The study indicated that while NGOs continue to engage in the region in activities relating to natural resource management, community capacity building and humanitarian responses generally presented as 'development works', the involvement of most of them in peace building in the form of hosting conferences, meetings and facilitating peace agreements have been abandoned following the coming into being of what has been popularly termed as civil society legislation (Proclamation 621/2009). Consequently NGOs that were involved in direct forms of peace building at some level have now shifted their discourses to 'development'.

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Introduction

The Borana people have for a long been known for their traditions of conflict resolution, peace-making and peace building within the framework of the Gadaa system (Asmerom, 1973). However, problems and uncertainties exist regarding the conditions of peace in Borana or the Borana Peace - *Nagaa Boranaa*, an imperative to continue exploring and reflecting on the topic.

Although there are vast resources and rivers flowing in and around Borana traversing diverse agro-climatic and vegetation zones, the region was viewed in the past as dry and remote. This is because, as implied from arguments of observers of conflict in Borana (Befekadu 2005; Baxter 1978), the incorporation of Borana areas to the Ethiopian state around the last decade of the ninetieth century was more for its strategic importance as a buffer zone against intrusion of foreign powers - than for its economic value. Goodhand (2008) explains that borderlands are central to the political and economic security challenges of states. Consequently these areas considered marginal in the past are now in the spotlight. This is bolstered by the economic and political interests of the state in Ethiopia in the post 1991 period mediated by its discourses of 'development'.

Geographically Borana borders Kenya to the south and is closer to Somalia where internal and external actors' geopolitical and economic interests converge. In examining the literature one would come across frequent reference to the observation that there has been expansion and contraction in the size of the traditional 'Boranaland' (see Gufu 1996; Getachew 1985; Cassanelli 1973). There is no consensus among observers on the subject under investigation as to why conflicts in Borana and its neighboring communities have been happening frequently (Befekadu, 2005; Getachew 1998). In this regard for instance there are those who argue that the issue of expansion and contraction of Borana territory has been mirroring in Borana's relations with last three successive Ethiopian regimes - the imperial government, the Derg regime and the incumbent EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front).

The conflict between Borana and various groups some of whom claim Somali identity had also got regional political context. For example, while the pre 1991 government of Somalia had to present itself as sympathetic to the Somali communities in south eastern Ethiopia, the successive Ethiopian regimes have been perceived to have shown changing stances in their

relations with communities living side by side in Borana. As will be discussed at a later stage in this paper, exploring the conflict dynamics in the region, interrelationship among Borana communities and their relations with the state in Ethiopia in the aftermath of the 1991 state restructuring requires new perspectives based on empirical data.

The study gives due emphasis to the views and experiences of research participants with regards to the role of NGO's and their contribution to peace in Borana. In-depth interview of key informants, focus group discussions and review of reports and documents of the organizations studied were used in this study. Interviews were conducted with informants representing the communities, government organs and NGOs working in the study area as well as with resource persons in Addis Ababa. Group discussions were held with selected members of the community including community leaders in Yaballo, Moyale town and at Melbana. Overall, data and information gathered through the use of interviews with key informants and group discussions and consultation of reports of NGOs engaged in various activities in Borana form the basis for the analysis in this study.

The paper is organized into the following sections: introduction, conceptual clarification, the dynamics of conflict in Borana, description of NGOs' activities related to peace building and 'development works', analysis of the state - NGOs relations and the implications of these for the debates on peace and development, and a conclusion. List of references is included at the end of the paper.

Conceptual clarification

To begin with various actors - local community members, NGOs, state organs, have been initiating peace processes in Borona and other areas on various occasion. The result of these initiatives has been far from clear, however. In other words, there is difficulty to conceptualize and empirically demonstrate the level at which NGOs undertakings impact on issues affecting the society in their relationship with the state. Therefore the study is guided by a theoretical assumption that NGOs may play a more meaningful role in peace building under favorable conditions of state-society relationships. Here, the nature of state-society relations-whether that is antagonistic (confrontational) or harmonious (collaborative) directly impact the role of

actors including NGOs. This underscores the importance of understanding the conflict dynamics in the study area, the comparative roles of the actors involved (Wellard and Copestake, 1993) and the challenges of peace building and the pragmatic use of the discourse of 'development' in the study area. The study recognizes long standing societal experiences of peace making and peace building in Borana in addressing the problem of conflict within the Borana and neighboring communities. Before taking on further discussions and analysis of peace building and other roles of NGOs in Borana, it is necessary first to clarify certain pertinent terminologies.

As conflict analysts (Galtung 1996; Wher 1999; Nordson 1995) argue, there are as many typologies of conflict and conflict-resolution related activities. Terminologies like conflict resolution, settlement of conflict, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace building are often confusing in the literature on conflict studies. Hence, clarifying the more relevant terminologies-conflict resolution, peace building, NGOs and development as used in this study is found to be helpful.

By *conflict resolution* it is generally meant resolving a conflict by addressing its root causes. The concept implies that the parties to the conflict no longer use force, attitudes are no longer hostile. *Peace building* underpins the work of peacemaking and peacekeeping by addressing structural issues and the long-term relationships between immediate parties to conflict. This means as Galtung (1996:112) argues, peace builders undertake processes which can transform the social and political relations in order to overcome the underlying causes of conflict. Wher (1979: 64) puts that 'peace building measures are intended to achieve a fresh level of social harmony and healthier relationship between antagonists'. For Nordson (1995: 106) the process of peace building is 'continually re-solving conflicts instead of developing a solution that will not reappear again in other time or place to demand solutions or resolutions that did not work the first time'.

Others (Pugh *et.al*, 2008) suggest the need to differentiate between the notions of peace building and *peace process.* They argue that 'while the peace building processes are stage-managed by international [governmental] organizations and liberal westerners, agents of peace processes are local elites shaped sharply by power politics, realist elites who want to both have their cake and eat it at the same time' (Pugh *et.al* 2008: 13). This line of argument brings us to a fundamental challenge as to which approach is adequate in

bringing about lasting end to the conflict. This is a challenge because peace processes in most cases remained top-down owing to the fact that they tend to be undertaken under a heavy influence of those in power or powerful elites considering themselves stakeholders. In terms of their dispositions the elites involved in peace building operations are 'liberal westerners' serving as a push factor from behind the scene, the local elites who occupy the center stage, though closer to the local communities and thus, in contrast the former', are legitimate, at least seem to be, as they are the immediate parties to the conflict (Pugh *et.al*, 2008: 13).

The other conceptual issue raised in this study is development, and as such it is one of the most contested terminologies widely in use in recent times. One can at least identify three major perspectives on the concept of development. The first is the conventional view which understands development largely in economic terms. Second, there is a perspective of those who propagate what is now termed as 'international development', which is largely informed by the political economy of receiving and disbursing donor funding. Thirdly there is a view that development should be holistic by focusing on respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, the full development and the security of the human person. One could arguably state that the discourse of development in Ethiopia today is fundamentally statist underscoring the perspectives of the state authorities as well as the proponents of 'international development' including the NGOs most of which are highly pragmatic in deploying terminologies which enable them to 'stay in the business'. The perspective that development has to be people-centered and insure human rights and human security is yet to create its own social forces at the local, regional and global level (Bellu, 2011).

Given that the focus of this study is NGOs and their activities related to peace building and 'development' it is helpful to conceptualize these actors and contextualize their activities in the study areas. First and foremost the role of these organizations do not take place in a vacuum. They assume their roles in a particular form of state-society relationships in Ethiopia in which the state's power and interest expresses itself in various forms greatly influencing the outcomes. It is necessary to understand how the nature of the relations between the state and society impacts the peace of the community and the role of the non-governmental actors and their contribution to peace building. For the purpose of this study, NGOs refers to 'the wide array of

non-governmental…, expressing the interests and values of their members or others...[2] NGOs have been recognized as non-state actors carrying out certain activities independently, implementing policies on behalf of governments and other actors in the society. However NGOs differ from each other on the ways they define their overarching objectives, the type and scope of activities. Their mandate and the contexts of their engagement have certainly been affected by the transnational political, economic and technological dynamics. As it will be discussed at later stage, the context of the emergence and the workings of NGOs in Ethiopia during the last two decades is worth consideration.

Conflict dynamics in Borana

Data from the fieldwork indicate conflicts that have been experienced in the Borana region during the last few decades could be categorized into three. The identification and categorization of the three elements explaining the dynamics of conflict are based on the analysis of the data gathered during the field work in Borana in 2013. These are territoriality, politicization and instrumentalization of identity, and pressures due to the changing modes of life of the communities.

The first and the major form of conflict in the study area refers to conflicts induced by the dynamics of territorial reorganization of the state in Ethiopia in the post 1991- hence territoriality conflict. The analysis of the data collected through fieldwork has confirmed that conflicts as result of territorial claims across the borders of the regional states have come to feature prominently in the region. The conflict across the Oromiya and Somali regional states which includes claims over Moyale remained one of the most protracted conflicts in Borana and its environs. The 2012 Moyale conflict served as an example of territoriality conflict broadly situated in the federal-regional and local relations in Ethiopia in the post 1991 period. While it has often been presented as one between Garre and the Borana, the problem has become part of much broader dynamics including mobilizations from far

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[2] 'Defining Civil Society'
(http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/CSO/0,contentMDK:20101499, accessed Nov. 27 2012)

distant places and the involvement of actors other than the two groups living in those specific localities.[3]

A referendum on contested woredas across the border between the two regional states was conducted in 2004. While the referendum was supposed to put an end to the claims and counter claims between the authorities and members of the society in the two regional states, the central government remained undecided and kept the Moyale case pending. Claims and counter claims continued and certain Kebeles remained a flash point of tensions. Subsequently a conflict broke out on 25 July 2012. This conflict is said to have displaced tens of thousands of people initially. In describing the scale and the intensity of the conflict, informants who were contacted for the purpose of this research in 2013 mentioned that the weapons used were 'unusual and shocking' indicating the intensity of the conflict.[4] Even though it was difficult to confirm the exact level of casualties, it was reported that lives may have been lost, and the estimate of the displaced was put around thirty to fifty thousand, most of whom were believed to have returned at the time of conducting the study in 2013.

The central government force intervened, and said to have disarmed the police on both sides and was reported to have taken control of the local government offices. Some of the local government officials suspected of involvement in the incident were arrested. While there was no ongoing or open conflict at the time of fieldwork in January 2013, tensions remained high, and there were misgivings that adequate effort were not taken in bringing together the parties to the conflict, and the understanding from members of the local population was that they feared that conflict could erupt any time.[5]

The second category of conflict emerging from the analysis in this study revolves around those that have been experienced in the central Borana regions, referring to those at Surupa-Arero-Hudet- areas where Borana, Gabra and Guji communities live side by side. Central to this form of conflict is the politicization of identity and its instrumentalization having enormous impact on the relationships between and among these communities. Interviews with the leaders of the communities, and reports of various

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[3] Interview with informants in Moyale, January 2013
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

organizations indicated mistrust and lack of confidence characterizing relationships among the three major communities- the Borana, the Guji and the Gabra. In an atmosphere of continuing politicization and instrumentation of identities in the post 1991 period one could see a situation where some of the communities have been perceived dominant while others consider themselves as being marginalized. Coupled with the previously mentioned dynamics of territoriality, group identity has come to feature negatively, fueling misperceptions and defining the political positions of group members in their relationships with perceived others.[6] Informants from among the three groups maintain that in the past the three communities were able resolve matters per the principles of the Gadaa system.[7] In the post 1991 period, among other things, community members see the situation where such an institution having a central place in their relationship is increasingly unable to help resolve the conflicts. During the 14th Pastoralist Day in January 2013 held in Yaballo, it was observed that the Borana, the Gabra and the Guji were made to rally in a regimented manner, where they were observed staging their cultural shows separately. There were groups who felt that the cultural shows they staged during the 2013 pastoralist day in Yaballo was not adequately aired on the Ethiopian Television[8] for example.

Members of each of the groups frequently mentioned that the politicization of identity was increasingly playing the role of dividing the communities. From the perspective of the Gabra community leaders, for example the dominant position of the 'Boranas' in the region is perceived as the source of the problem. The community leaders at the same time argued that this does not necessarily mean ordinary 'Boranas', but those in positions of state power, accusing them of using their power as an instrument to favor some and exclude others. From the perspective of the 'Borana' the problems in their relations with members of the Gabra community has mainly to do with the practices of resettlement of members of the other groups without consulting them. Perception that one of the groups do ally with others in times of conflict could also be the source of the problem. Therefore this is another key element in the dynamics, i.e. the politicization of identity and the instrumentalization of the same, especially by forces in command of state

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[6] Interview with Gabra community leaders, Yaballo, January 2013
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.

power at various levels in the post 1991 period. These actors on occasions vowed to put in place a particular form of political economy presented in the rubrics of 'the developmental state' the reach of which was supposed to include historically marginalized regions such as the Borana region in Ethiopia.[9]

The third form of conflict dynamics relates to the changing condition of living of the Borana and communities living adjacent to them. Pastoralism as a way of life has been subjected to pressures and has led to the dislocation of individuals and communities. The study area has been under stress due to the recurring nature of the conflicts, environmental factors, and complex humanitarian emergencies. This also takes into account the situation in which land as key economic resource is inviting a host of actors some of whom were accused of land grabbing. It is this type of conflict in Borana which has traditionally been presented as conflict due to conflicting modes of life involving pastoralist and farming communities. This has been taken for granted. Such a perception arises from the understanding that the communities who recently involved in conflict can be distinctly divided into those that are predominantly pastoral communities and others as permanently agriculturalists. While this may be valid partially, the fieldwork experience suggests the existence of a much broader dynamics in this regard. The 'Borana-Konso' conflict of 2008 is used as an example in this context.

The key issue of the May 2008 conflict around the town of Teltele was considered a dispute over a farm land involving members of the Borana and the Konso communities. While it was difficult to find any well documented report on the conflict, informants mentioned that a piece of arable land at a place called Cabbi, near Teltele town, became the center of the dispute. The story has it that while the disputed land was considered traditionally and communally owned by the Borana, however members of the Konso community perceived as farmers acquired some of the available plots of land through informal purchasing, perhaps from members of the Borana community in the locality. It was mentioned that members of the local government in the area wanted members of the Konso community to vacate the land. Members of the Konso community would refuse to do so. It was alleged, in an ensuing dispute, members of the local administration went on to mobilize support and decided to occupy the land by force, leading to the

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[9] Ibid.

eruption of conflict, causing the death of several people, and several others had to take refuge in the neighboring areas.[10]It was not also clear if the conflict was resolved successfully, although it was mentioned that a peace process was undertaken through the intervention of the Borana Aba Gadaa.[11]

One can argue that such a conflict that was said to have involved the Borana and the Konso communities around the town of Teltele served as an instance where the interests of various factors such as members of local administration featured prominently. This is while such conflicts have conventionally been presented as one arising from a clashing of mode of life of pastoralists and agriculturalist or sedentary farmers. It also appears that little has been said about this conflict which could perhaps be a reflection of the involvement of actors other than members of the communities on both sides. This also broadly relates to the continuation of enclosures of potential farm land where land management issues could arise. Regarding the cost of conflict, it was reported that life was lost, and to what extent the intervention of state authorities helped the restoration of justice, has not been easy to understand[12].

Overall, territoriality, politicization of identity, and pressures and changes affecting the ways of life of communities, emerged as critical factors in understanding the conflict dynamics in the study area. In all the three cases, conflicts took place in a particular form of political economy being pursued by the major actors including official members of state authorities. This in turn served as the basis on or the context in which to describe and explain the recent past and current activities of NGOs working in Borana. It is also important to note that the three types of conflict dynamic outlined are interdependent and they reinforce each other. Territoriality conflict could express itself in the form of identity conflict so long as members of identity groups have interest in articulating their claims through the lens of identity and distinctiveness and give it a concrete meaning that can be expressed territorially. The attempts by various actors to mobilize support to occupy land and other economic resources further reinforce the relationships among

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[10] Interview, Teltele and Yaballo, January 2013

[11] Ibid.

[12] The only official reference to the 2008 conflict around the town of Teltele was the March 2012 Report of Goal Ethiopia. It was observed that informants were uncertain and very careful in discussing that particular conflict.

these issues. This is in an attempt to identify the key issue of the dynamics and it is within this context that the peace building and lately the 'development' roles of NGOs needs to be understood as described below in detail.

NGOs' Peace building and 'development' activities in Borana

Available reports, data and observations from the fieldwork suggest that several NGOs working in Borana were running different programs and activities. And a good number of them have field offices in Borana, especially in Yaballo. Given the dynamics in their more recent relationships with state authorities in Ethiopia, it was observed that the NGOs discussed were in the process of changing their approach. The changes started with being politically correct in using politically correct terminologies. Perhaps with the exception of a few[13], most of them purged from their program and descriptions of their activities, the words- 'peace' or 'conflict'. This was also evident from the language used in conversations by most NGO personnel during the Pastoralist Day in 2013. Most individuals from the organizations contacted were generally reluctant to discuss issues on conflict or peace, and a good number of the personnel interviewed emphasized that they were no more working on conflict resolution and related advocacy works. It was difficult to come across direct forms of NGOs involvement in peace building and therefore the assessment here is mainly based on reports on previous activities of some of them contacted for the purpose of this study. The experiences of a few NGOs such as CARE and Mercy Corps which previously involved in direct forms of peace building efforts are highlighted. The discussion on the 'development works' of other NGOs is based on their ongoing activities at the time of field work.

NGOs' support for dialogue, peace conferences and peace agreements in Borana

CARE, an international NGO with a long time experience in Ethiopia has been actively engaged in running projects or programs in Borana. From the

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[13] During the field work, these terms were mentioned in the NGOs' program description in few instances- CIFA, GOAL Ethiopia, and Mercy Corps.

perspective of CARE, peace, security and stability were central to its peace building objectives. In other words, while resource management and development issues featured prominently in CARE's activities, reports and information obtained during the fieldwork indicate that there were cases where it took a more direct role in conflict resolution activities in Borana. CARE's report makes an insightful observation that starting from early 2000 'the zonal and district administrations were increasingly willing to accept the role for NGOs and customary institutions in responding to conflict. Peace initiatives in pastoral areas also began attracting more donors funding and growing numbers of NGOs became involved' (CARE Report 2007: p1.).

As CARE embarked on support for peace conferences conducted on a number of occasions, the 2006 Surupha and the 2008 Yaballo peace conferences (supported by CARE) are found to be useful. In both cases the peace conferences were on conflict between the Borana, Guji, Gabra communities living in Yaballo, Arero, Surupha and the adjacent areas of Borana. It was mentioned, CARE's peace building strategy were deployed in a manner 'that balance the traditional and formal conflict resolution and peace building mechanisms' (CARE Report 2007 p.2). The reports further indicated that such conferences allowed the participation of different local stakeholders with a view to addressing a number of interrelated issues through discussions and deliberations on the sources of conflicts, trends in conflicts, and the role of various actors in conflict resolution[14].

CARE in support of its direct peace building activities undertook various interrelated activities. Training on traditional and formal resource based conflict management skills to government staff, conducting activities focused on conflict management and resolution, organizing joint problem solving conference between neighboring communities, advocating for the integration of peace building and conflict resolution in planning and implementing development programs were some of the major peacebuilding activities it carried out. The report indicates that the December 2006 conference it facilitated allowed the groups to discuss and identify the most vulnerable members of the community in times of conflict, the impacts of conflict on

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[14]'Peace Building Conference between the Borana, Guji and Gabra Communities-ELCE/Enhanced Livelihoods in Southern Ethiopia Project', Care International Ethiopia, Yabello, December 2008, at www.elmt-relpa.org/aesito/hoapn?id_cms_doc=58...file, accessed Nov. 24. 2012

overall development of the communities and identification of possible solutions to the problems. It also mentioned that the conference ended with issuing of a Resolution of the meeting (Ibid. Pp. 3-6).

The other report examined was on the 2008 Conference in Yaballo, which shows the application of more or less the same approach used for the 2006 Conference. It was initiated by Yaballo district Administration office, and financed collaboratively by CARE Borana and other NGOs such as Action for Development (AFD). It was mentioned that the conference was in response to incidents such as 2007, conflict between the Borana, Guji, and Gabra affecting the population in a number of districts. From the report on the 2008 Conference and its rationales, it appears that previous efforts towards peace building in the area did not succeed (CARE Report, 2008).

In addition to CARE there were other NGOs that were directly involved in attempts to resolve the protracted conflicts involving the Borana and the Garre and other communities along the border of Somali and Oromia regional states. One of the widely publicised example found relevant for this study was what was termed as the Negele Peace Accord sponsored by the Mercy Corps in 2011. Mercy Corps is an international NGO that was actively involved in various conflict resolution and 'development' activities in the study area including serving as the sponsor and organizer of the Negele Peace Accord of 2011[15]. It was mentioned that the peace agreement or the Accord was the outcome of about two years efforts involving 'peace-building training, consultative meeting, dialogues, strengthening the collaboration of government (federal, state and local) and community actors in mitigating and preventing future episodes of violent conflict'[16].

The peace agreement was meant to bring an end to the conflict between or among the Garre, Guji and Borana believed to have been fighting for scarce resources along the boundary between the Somali and Oromiya regional states. The report mentioned a 2009 conflict as a 'particularly devastating conflict over access to key resources among these communities resulted in many deaths and large-scale displacement'. It argued that since

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[15]Janifer Westerbelt's report on 'Peace Brokers', Ethiopia, May/June 2013 at http://transition.usaid.gov/press/frontlines/fl_may12/FL_may12_ETH_PEACE.html, accessed April 2013).
[16] Ibid

2011, after the conference, the tensions and the conflicts 'were no longer apparent'.

From the perspective of Mercy Corps, the Negele Peace Accord helped the shift in perceptions. It was maintained that over 800 people came to the signing ceremony in Negele Borana. The report mentioned the positive outcome of the peace agreement where following a period of drought, the Somali communities for example received help from the Borana during the subsequent seasons. However conflicts which continued to involve the communities such as the July 2012 conflict in Moyale discussed earlier overshadowed Mercy Corps' optimism surrounding what it termed the Negele Peace Accord.

In a nutshell, the above discussions on the experiences of CARE ad Mercy Corps shows the two organizations were making attempts towards conflict resolution or building peace in Borana by conducting training programs, peace conferences and supporting and organizing peace agreements. Such activities were indicative of the efforts made by NGOs in supporting peace processes which in some cases appeared to have been positive. However as discussed previously, the development in state laws in Ethiopia aiming to regulate the works of NGOs has constrained their activities. This made many such organizations purge the languages of peace or conflict from the descriptions of their programs. The abandoning or suspension of activities directly relating to peace building discussed in this section for reasons stated have casted doubt on the sustainability of the initiatives. As it will be discussed in the next section, NGOs whose activities have been explored in this study were later on focusing on natural resource management, capacity building, livelihood improvement initiatives and humanitarian emergency responses generally viewed as 'development works' as discussed below in some detail.

'Development works' of NGOs in Borana

Natural resource management, capacity building and humanitarian assistance are being viewed as falling within 'the development works' of the NGOs. Some of these are briefly described below to indicate the activities of NGOS who argued that they are no longer involved in direct forms of peace building, and yet they believe that their ongoing activities contribute to peacebuilding in Borana.

To begin with Action for Development (AFD) in its annual report of 2011 for instance maintained that the organization was working in 'peripheral dry land' in Borana. AFD was engaged in 'livelihood and resilience building' which became a key terminology of NGOs working in the region. These include the construction of water supply schemes, strengthening water management capacities, rehabilitation of rangeland and supporting local communities in natural resource management. The report indicated that about 18,327 people and 48,380 livestock benefited from the water and natural resource management activities during the year 2011. Citing one of the beneficiaries, AFD's report indicate that, the quality of the rangeland was improving and more grass was available for their cattle in different seasons. The reports indicated productivity increased in some cases, in the form of increased milk production and the increase in the physical conditions of the herds (the 2011 Report, p14). In addition to information from the written report materials obtained from AFD's field office in Yaballo, interviews with some of the beneficiaries indicated the organization was widely known for its works especially in the Arero area in Borana.[17]

Another positive contribution of AFD was on gender related works. Even though it could not work on gender following the CSO laws, AFD continued to have strong and widely recognized programs relating to the promotion of gender equality. Organizing women into self-help association such as resource centers for women groups producing marketable traditional handcraft items,[18] alternative education such as evening programs for girls in rural areas were among the key activities of AFD focusing on gender and education.[19]

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[17] Interview with informant from Arero, Yabalo, January, 2013
.[18] Interview with three women beneficiaries of AFD's support, Yaballo, January 2013
[19]Interview with gender officer of AFD in Yaballo, January 2013.v

Gayo Pastoralist Development Initiative (GPDI) was another NGO working actively in Borana areas during the field work. It was established in 2003 of which the 'overall organizational goal is to improve socio-economic conditions and promote sustainable livelihoods of pastoral communities in Ethiopia' (GPDI Report, November 2010). During the fieldwork the researcher was able to visit Gayo water resource development, bush clearing and rangeland management activities in Sereti area in Teltele.[20] Informants indicated that the organization became successful by forging close connections with the community.[21]

Observations during the fieldwork in Moyale indicate that NGOs such as ACORD (The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes) that has been working in other African countries was attempting to expand its activities to Ethiopia through its 'development' programs. ACORD made the observation that most food insecure countries in Africa were also the most conflict affected. According to ACORD, the rural population in conflict prone regions were those who faced severe effects of internal conflicts, violence, internal displacements, abductions and rape, torture and refugee movements. As stated in one of its reports, 'ACORD works to enable communities to address the underlying causes of violence and to build meaningful peace at a grassroots level'.[22]

Observation of women association's project supported by ACORD and focus group discussion with members of the community provided an example on some of its project activities in Borana. This in particular refers to the case of women's association at locality called Melbana, supported by ACORD and were locally producing washing soap. During the focus group discussions, the women group clearly described how ACORD initiated a discussion at community level, and how that process led to a further consolidation of the discussions which later developed into concrete plans leading to the launching of the project.[23] The focus group discussants confirmed that with the financial and technical support from ACORD, which also helped in the supply of the raw materials, were producing soap and manage the whole process by themselves including in the marketing of their produces, albeit on

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[20] Interview with informants at Seriti, Teltele, January 2013

[21] Interview and discussion with informants in Moyale, January 2013

[22] http://www.acordinternational.org/index.php/base/ethiopia, accessed February 2013

[23] Focus group discussion, Melbana, January 2013

small scale. Information from male community members interviewed at the same locality was also consistent with the focus group discussions.[24]

Community Initiative Facilitation and Assistance (CIFA) was another NGO that mentioned that it started its activities in Kenya and was operating in southern Borana especially in the Moyale area. CIFA-Ethiopia emerged from the deliberations of 'concerned professionals from pastoral origin registered to address the challenges of pastoralist concern across the Ethio-Kenyan boundary through linkages'[25] in the cross border context. During the field visit to Moyale, some CIFA's projects such as rain water harvesting equipment installed was observed.[26] It was also observed that some of its activities were affected by the July 2012 conflict in Moyale. The case in point was the office of Odaa Union Cattle marketing association supported by CIFA. The office was looted during the July conflict, and it was not operational at the time of fieldwork.[27]

There were more organizations providing humanitarian support and engage in wide-ranging activities. Save the Children - a global humanitarian organization primarily concerned with the wellbeing of children was actively engaged in the region. Given its experiences worldwide, in Ethiopia, and especially in Borana, the organization broadened the scope of its operation. Discussions with informants, local state officials and the NGOs staff indicated the popularity of its programs in Borana. It has been engaging in health, nutrition, education, child protection, water sanitation, and health, food security and livelihoods and emergency responses in Borana. Information collected indicate that it 'works in close collaboration and partnership with federal, regional and local government authorities, NGOs and communities' (Booklet, January 2013). Information from interview sources concerning Save the Children's activities in Borana were positive. Informants cited that it helped them with construction of new schools, supporting and contributing towards strengthening the existing ones. Natural resource management programs of SC such as rangeland management and water wells were frequently mentioned as its contributions[28]. Local

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[24] Interview with ACORD personell, January 2013

[25] http://cifaethiopia.org/, accessed February 2013

[26] Ibid

[27] Ibid

[28] Interview with Male informants from Arero, Yaballo, January 2013

government officials also mentioned that the organization has been positively engaged in 'development' activities in Borana including in supporting government led projects and programs.[29]

There were others such as GOAL Ethiopia, primarily a humanitarian organization that has been involved in Ethiopia for more than two decades. Goal's activities in Borana include health, water, sanitation and hygiene termed as WASH.[30] GOAL staff members interviewed at the 14th Pastoralist Day in Yaballo described that its programs responded to drought, disease and flood control and provision of relief food aid. They indicated that GOAL's Borana program started in 2000 with provision of supplementary and emergency health support in Yaballo and Teltele woredas. GOAL maintained that mainstreaming gender, HIV/AIDS, child protection and environmental protection. During the May 2008 conflict in Teltele discussed earlier, GOAL provided humanitarian relief for those affected (GOAL Ethiopia Report, March 2012).

Overall, looking into NGOs involvement in 'development works' in Borana, one can raise a number of things. For one thing their works have made them widely known among the communities. The fact of observing their billboards now and then, usually more than one at one place, indicated their wider presence. Most importantly the engagement of such a large number of NGOs with communities in remote places such as Borana, the discussion and deliberation on issues, agendas and programs with members of the community, the perception by most community members that NGOs are neutral actors in conflict situations have earned them recognition among the communities. It is also a learning experience for the NGOs themselves working in a society with rich culture of discussion and dialogue.

However the NGOs discussed while preferring to call their activities 'development', they were consciously avoiding the use of terms such as conflict or conflict resolution or peace building although their ongoing activities such as natural resource management contribute to the same, they contended. NGOs working in Borana clearly indicated that the 2009 legislation contributed to curtailing of their role in direct forms of peace building. Local government officials emphatically indicate that it was no more in the mandate of NGOs to work on issues of conflict and peace. And

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[29] Interview with Yaballo Woreda administrator, Yaballo, January 2013

[30] Interview with GOAL staff members, Yaballo, January 2013

members of the local communities in the region understand that the various kinds of conflicts discussed previously were beyond the capacity of NGOs to resolve. The source of the challenges for the NGOs that no longer involve in conflict resolution and peace building is explained in the next section.

Peace building or develomment? the dynamics of State-NGO relations

Following the fall of the Derg regime and the coming to power of the EPRDF in 1991, Ethiopia witnessed the awaking of the discourse of civil society and proliferation of NGOs (see Rahmato, 2002). Before the 1990s there were some NGOs working in the country, and their major preoccupation were humanitarian relief operations. In the immediate post 1991 period, the proliferation of NGOs originating in Ethiopia took shape in the context of changing political strategy of the forces in command of state power underlying the emerging political economy perused by the post 1991 EPRDF government. The political economy of donors' aid in particular was instrumental in boosting support for the EPRDF government; NGOs-local and international, were encouraged to operate. Subsequently, NGO actors gradually assumed various roles which included wide-ranging advocacy works in Ethiopia.

Except a few, many of the Ethiopian NGOs were working closely with government agencies, 'helping' the new EPRDF government in fostering its 'democracy, peace and development' rhetoric of its early years of rule. The NGO-government relations thus appeared to have been collaborative. Such relations created a seemingly political atmosphere of collaboration and autonomy of the former. Nonetheless, the autonomy of NGOs could not survive the dynamics of Ethiopian politics of later years. Local NGO actors began to lose their independence in subsequent years, when the authorities began to perceive some of them as harboring the desires and interests of antithetical forces. NGOs that came from overseas operating in Ethiopia were suspected as agents questioning the EPRDF government's democratic credentials. In the aftermath of the 2005 elections crisis, the government subsequently began enacting 'restrictive' regulatory regimes with regards to the manner of operation and source of funding of NGOs in Ethiopia (see Tsehai 2008). Also Markakis (2011: 251) has the following to say,

> *Intolerance of competition extends well beyond the political arena to a budding civil society that made a timid appearance after 1991. Freedom of association is enshrined in the 1995 Constitution (Art. 31) [...]. Early on the EPRDF was justly praised for opening space for civil society to function, yet it remained wary of institutions aspiring to play a public role but not affiliated or accountable to it.*

In short, these observations show that the nature of the relations between the NGOs sometimes termed as civil society organizations (CSOs), as intermediary actors between the state and the society in Ethiopia has been strained on matters which deemed political. As one study on 'Civil Society and the State in Africa' notes,

> *For one thing, [civil society] associations and their quest for independence and autonomy, especially in the African context, are confronted by the hegemonic ambitions (or protestations) of the state and regime; for another, civil associations themselves may lack the disposition or ability to maintain their autonomy... (Gyimah-Boadi, 1994: 12)*

Consequently, it appears that NGOs working in Ethiopia made a pragmatic change of discourse from conflict resolution to 'development'. Capacity building, resilience and livelihood are catchwords of NGOs 'development works' in Borana. Given the dynamics of state-society relations having the capacity to constrain their role, they pragmatically changed their discourses. While these seem to have enabled them to survive in unfavourable political environment, the 'development' they espouse could not be sustainable without having a hope for the resolution of the most enduring forms of conflicts besetting the region and yet being understood to be beyond the capacity of these NGOs to deal with.

Therefore, it may be concluded that ongoing programs of NGOs pertaining to natural resource management and capacity building and humanitarian assistance programs appeared to have continued so far as they fall within the rubrics of 'development' relentlessly propagated by those in command of state power in Ethiopia and the NGOs and their 'international development' partners. This is at a time when the sustainability of NGOs

conflict resolution and peace building activities have been brought to halt. One of CARE's reports has to say the following in this regard.

> *There are clear limits to current peace initiatives in their ability to address the political and administrative factors underlying violent conflict in the areas. These conflicts require high-level political engagement. In particular, addressing the political and administrative drivers of conflict requires national-level government commitment and will (CARE Report, 2007).*

Viewed as a whole the visible presence of NGOs in Borana was noted while the sustainability of their peace building activities have been severely affected. It would remain difficult to empirically demonstrate how their 'development works' tangibly contribute to peacebuilding in the region in the present context.

Conclusion

As explored in detail, the relations between the state and NGOs especially in matters relating to advocacy including conflict resolution have become political, and hence issues outside the scope and mandate of NGOs. In the past it appeared their relationship with the state was working and some of them enthusiastically undertook their activities in a relatively permissive political environment. The dynamics of politics in Ethiopia, especially in the aftermath of the 2005 elections made state authorities to 'reclaim' the space opened for NGOs to operate. Therefore, ever since NGOs have been made to work within the parameters defined for them by the state.[31] In this connection, the local population in Borana having long time experiences in interaction with the central state in Ethiopia, and now in contact with a number of NGOs are well aware of the interests of the former and the contribution as well as the limits of the latter. While they recognize the contribution of NGOs in helping alleviate some of the problems they faced, they were also aware that these organizations could only be working on issues as defined for them by the state.

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[31] Interview with the Deputy Administrator of Borana Zone during the field work in January is found to be representative of the perspective of the government on this issue

Finally, from an academic point of view, the observation of the situation and analyses of information gathered suggest that there is a need to go beyond the current discourses of peace building or 'development' driven by particular forms of political economies of the state and other actors. This researcher is of the opinion that understanding conflicts by identifying ' known causes' and attempting to resolve them as such contributed little to peace building in practice. Similarly, the propagation and instrumentalization of 'development' by those in command of state power and their 'international development' partners are found to be inadequate in the face of the challenges on the ground. There are compelling reasons to recognize the research participants' concern that conflicts in Borana have become more and more frequent. There is a need to thoroughly reflect on this state of affairs and assess their broader implications for the future of peace in Borana and beyond.

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