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Conflict Transformation in South Omo Zone Pastoralist and Agro-Pastoralist Community of Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study explores conflict transformation practices and actors through an analytical research approach. It reveals that various actors engaged in conflict and peace initiatives have primarily focused on activities cantered around conflict management, prevention, and resolution. This limited emphasis on conflict transformation is attributed to a lack of governmental attention to strategic planning in this regard. Sources of conflict identified include grievances, animal raiding, land disputes, fishing rights, and competition over water and pasture resources. Efforts aimed at conflict transformation encompass resilience-building, rangeland management, NGO interventions in peace dialogues, integration of pastoralism and agro-pastoralism with commercial agriculture, implementation of drought and conflict early warning systems, water resource management and development, range land rehabilitation, and provision of education to affected communities. While these activities have played a significant role in addressing conflicts and transforming relationships, they are deemed insufficient and inadequately executed for comprehensive conflict transformation. Nonetheless, they serve as vital drivers of peace. Although the current conflict transformation mechanisms in place have not resulted in significant changes in the conflict situation, the beginnings are promising and commendable. The government and other stakeholders are urged to engage in proactive conflict intervention mechanisms to effectuate conflict transformation and foster peace or mitigate its adverse impacts. Furthermore, the study advocates for the provision of informal peace education to all adult community members, with the possibility of formalizing this education as an existing conflict transformation option.

Keywords

Conflict transformation; Pastoralism; Conflict; Natural resources; Peace; Agro- pastoralism; Ethnic groups; Pastureland

1. Introduction

The origins of conflict transformation can be traced back to the 1980s. It encompasses perspectives on how conflicts arise, evolve, and influence personal, relational, structural, and cultural

dimensions, along with strategies aimed at fostering positive, peaceful relationships (Lederach, 1997). This approach advocates for altering conflicts through peaceful means, utilizing various options for peace rather than relying solely on military power, thereby promoting human security within communities (Rummel, 1994). Emphasizing systemic change, conflict transformation seeks to enhance and cultivate healthy social structures, relationships, and institutions within conflict-affected communities, such as the pastoralist communities facing resource-driven conflicts in the study area. Conflict transformation acknowledges the multifaceted nature of conflict and its evolution through different transformative phases, addressing both overt violence and underlying structural issues (Senghaas, 1973).

In contrast, conflict management falls short as it primarily aims at containing violence without addressing root causes, while conflict resolution focuses on resolving immediate issues without necessarily fostering sustainable relationships (Lederach, 1997; Mitchell, 2002). Particularly vital in complex conflicts, conflict transformation endeavours to reshape unjust social and resource utilization dynamics, addressing social and cultural drivers of conflict and violence (Miall, 2004). It perceives conflict as a constructive force capable of instigating positive change, with an emphasis on social justice (Bloomfield, 2006). By prioritizing community involvement and resources such as natural, cultural, and economic assets within the conflict context, conflict transformation aims at reshaping relationships and fostering sustainable peace (Mitchell, 2000; Curle, 1987).

To be effective, conflict transformation must be sensitive to the needs and dynamics of conflict-affected communities, acknowledging the significance of resources like livestock, water, grazing lands, and agricultural territories in sustaining livelihoods and often serving as flashpoints for inter- and intra-ethnic conflicts (USAID, 2021). Cultural factors further exacerbate tensions in these contexts. Despite this, there is a notable absence of studies on conflict transformation in the study area, highlighting a critical research gap. Consequently, this study aims to address this gap and contribute to the understanding of conflict transformation dynamics in the region.

The objective of the study is to examine the practices of inter and intra-ethnic pastoralist resource based conflict transformation to create peaceful relations among the ethnic groups of Nyangatom, Dassanech and Hammer ethnic groups.

2. Methodology

The analysis of this research is confined to the South Omo Zone, Ethiopia, where the community primarily engages in pastoralism and agro-pastoralism as their way of life. Employing an analysis of existing studies and review research approach, this study aims to investigate the dynamics of conflict and peacebuilding practices within the community. The case study approach was chosen for its ability to explore contemporary phenomena within the living context of the study area, utilizing an embedded design that incorporates multiple units of analysis (Yin, 1994). Specifically, this analytical research examines the interplay of various actors in addressing issues of conflict and promoting peacebuilding initiatives in the region.

2.1 Theoretical framework

John Paul Lederach (1997), a prominent figure in conflict transformation approaches, defines peacebuilding as the long-term process of transforming a conflict system into a system of peace. He delineates key temporal processes and dimensions—short, medium, and long term—along with personal, structural, relational, and cultural aspects of conflicts. Consequently, peacebuilding is conceptualized as a structured, multi-dimensional process unfolding over time (Lederach, 1997). Lederach's framework introduces the concept of pyramid decision-making, where elite leaders and decision-

makers occupy the apex, followed by leaders of social institutions, religious figures, and academics in the middle, and grassroots community leaders forming the base. He argues that comprehensive conflict transformation necessitates changes across all these levels to effectively transition from conflict and violence to peace.

The conflicts in the study area manifest various dimensions, including inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic tensions. According to Vayrynen (1991), conflict transformation requires attention to context, actors, and personal transformation. Achieving conflict transformation necessitates capacity-building, the development of strategies across different time frames, immediate conflict resolution, and the identification of complex causal factors underlying any conflict. This theoretical framework serves as a lens through which researchers can examine the practices of conflict transformation in the study area.

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1 Conflict and Grievances as Threats to Peace in the Community

Limited water and grazing resources, both within the community and at the border areas, serve as significant root causes of conflicts. In the study area, where communities are predominantly pastoralist, the migration of these groups to neighbouring communities in search of water and pasture exacerbates tensions, particularly amidst cycles of prolonged droughts. This scenario is mirrored in cross-border pastoralist communities. According to reports from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD, 2022), border areas have long been focal points for natural resource conflicts, further complicated by the economic and political dynamics inherent to such regions.

Grievances in the study area stem from the competition for scarce resources, notably water and pasture land, exacerbated by a lack of development initiatives. Traditional pastoralist and agro-pastoralist groups like the Hammer, Dassanech and Nyangatom now contend with new actors such as government development agencies involved in dam construction, irrigation projects, and sugar development, as well as private investors in commercial agriculture. These resource competitions often manifest as ethnic conflicts, with groups rallying around narratives of territorial land rights, historical grievances, and cultural norms surrounding conflict and violence. Cultural practices such as animal raiding and glorification of violence further contribute to conflict dynamics. Grievances also arise from the absence of compensation for land lost to government projects and private commercial agriculture, as well as challenges related to access to water and pasture. These grievances serve as potent drivers of conflict within the study area.

3.2 Animal Raiding and Conflict

Among East African pastoral communities, livestock raiding is a longstanding traditional practice (IGAD, 2022). In the study area, participants in animal raiding typically belong to resident agro-pastoral and pastoral communities. In some instances, raided animals are returned to their rightful owners with the assistance of government security forces, elders who facilitate negotiations, and reconciliation processes. According to focus group discussion (FGD) participants and key interview informants from the Hammer, Dassanech, and Nyangatom Woreda, non-pastoral individuals from the Kenyan side of the border region are often mobilized to engage in livestock raiding against Ethiopian pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities. Economic motives drive livestock raiding, with participants including individuals involved in livestock trade, meat selling, and students seeking funds for tuition fees. This practice exacerbates existing resource-based conflicts and violence in the border areas of Kenya and Ethiopia.

Picture 1: It shows the return of the looted cattle to Ethiopia and the owner through the help of the two states government police forces. *Source:* Government Communication Affairs office

3.3 Land Claims and Conflicts in the Study Area

In the study area various unresolved historical land claims and grievances continued to become the structural cause of violent conflicts between ethnic groups. Territorial land claims are the catalyst of conflict in the study area. Nowadays, the conflicts related to land clams are not resolved. The following land claims are the cause and driver of conflict in the study area:

3.3.1. Dassanech and Turkana Land Claim:

The Dassanech community shares borders with the Turkana in Kenya. According to key informants and participants in focus group discussions in Koro villages, they recount the loss of their land to the Turkana during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974) (USAID, 2021). The community still strives for the return of their land, but governmental efforts have been lacking in engaging with the Kenyan government on this matter. However, since June 2021, local peace initiatives have been underway, facilitated by community members aiming to foster peaceful relations. These initiatives primarily focus on the equitable sharing of resources such as pasture and water in Kibish. Furthermore, the local government has begun actively participating in these efforts, aiming to bolster the harmonious relationship within the community. Consequently, trade relations have also seen notable improvement.

3.3.2. Nyangatom and Turkana Land Claims:

The Nyangatom community shares a border with the Turkana and asserts that their ancestral homeland and grazing land on the western side of the Kibish River are currently occupied by the Turkana (Yntiso, 2016). Through key informant interviews and focus group discussions, they express the loss of their territory stretching from the Kibish River to the east to Mount Tepes in the west, attributing it to arbitrary colonial border demarcations and the ongoing northward expansion of the Turkana. This local narrative aligns with the findings of de Waal (1991) and Mburu (2003), indicating that over the years, the boundaries of Turkana grazing lands and the extent of Kenyan

administration have shifted northward (as cited in USAID, 2021). The Nyangatom communities perceive that they have lost land to the Turkana during both the colonial period and the 1980s.

3.3.3. Nyangatom and Hamer Land Claims:

The relationship between the Hamer and the Nyangatom communities is primarily characterized by conflict. The underlying causes of this conflict stem from issues such as livestock raiding and competing claims over territory previously inhabited by the Murle people, who are now associated with the Nyangatom community. As noted by USAID (2021) also, the Nyangatom community, along with the Murle community as their affiliate, contest the recent claims made by the Hamer ethnic group regarding the former Murle territory. Of particular concern are the fertile Kiso and Kuma areas, which have garnered attention from investors, intensifying tensions between the two groups.

3.3.4. Dassanech and Nyangatom Land Claim:

The Dassanech-Nyangatom land disputes arise primarily from territorial claims and competition for limited resources, including land for farming, pasture, and access to water sources. Within this region, two particularly resource-abundant areas, the Kare and Kuraz mountain regions situated along the border of the two ethnic communities, play a central role (USAID, 2021). According to Dassanech key informants, they assert that they were the indigenous inhabitants of the Kare area, which is currently under the control of the Nyangatom ethnic group.

3.3.5. Dassanech and Gabra

The Gabra people of Kenya, who share a border with the Dassanech community, are primarily pastoralists and agro-pastoralists. The relationship between the Dassanech and Gabra communities is predominantly marked by conflict (USAID, 2021). The main sources of tension between the two groups include disputes over land ownership, livestock raiding, isolated incidents of violence, and competition for grazing areas. Yntiso (2012) highlights that despite the international boundary dividing their ancestral homeland into Ethiopian and Kenyan territories, the Dassanech persist in utilizing their traditional grazing lands located as far as 200 km inside Kenya's legal borders on the Gabra side. This situation is contested by the Gabra, who oppose the Dassanech's continued access to grazing lands within Kenyan territory. Conflicts are a recurring issue in this region.

3.4 Fishing Rights and Conflicts

Ethiopia and Kenya are embroiled in a border dispute concerning maritime boundaries, access to fishing grounds, and other natural resource rights (CEWARN, 2021). A particular hotspot is the Turkana delta-Dassanech-Turkana region, where tensions rise over access to fish. According to key informants and participants in focus group discussions, the northern tip of Lake Turkana, where the Omo River flows in, boasts a high concentration of fish. This attractive feature has drawn Kenyan fishermen utilizing modern motorboats equipped with machine guns, while Ethiopian fishermen employ lighter motorboats and wooden canoes armed with light weapons for self-defense. Conflict arises as both parties vie for control over the fishing area, often triggered by incidents of fishing-net thefts attributed to unidentified perpetrators, leading to mutual suspicion. Additionally, Dassanech Woreda contends with competition for fisheries in Lake Turkana from Ethiopian individuals holding official fishing licenses. Traditionally, the Dassanech ethnic group relied on livestock and crop cultivation, occasionally supplementing their diet and income with fishing. However, with dwindling returns from traditional livelihoods, many Dassanech have turned to fishing, intensifying competition in the sector. Consequently, tensions escalate as the

Dassanech assert their rights to control the fishing area and its resources. Overall, competition in the fishing industry is fraught with conflict, exacerbated by a power imbalance between the fishers of the two nations, necessitating intervention to mitigate the risk of violence.

4. Actors of the Conflicts in the Study Area

a. Within the community, elders play a pivotal role in endorsing the involvement of the younger generation in combat scenarios, particularly against external threats. They bestow upon the youths the responsibility of defending territorial borders, grazing lands, and livestock, while also instilling in them the imperative of seeking retribution against those who pose a threat to the community's interests.

b. Conflict dynamics are perpetuated by the entrenched beliefs and practices of the elders, who are driven by a desire to uphold a legacy characterized by notions of bravery, ethnic pride, and unimpeded access to crucial resources like grazing lands. These elders wield considerable influence over cultural norms, including those related to conflict resolution and the maintenance of peace within the community.

c. Women within the community occupy a complex role in the context of conflict dynamics. On one hand, they serve as proponents of virtues such as fearlessness, selflessness, and heroism, which can inadvertently contribute to the escalation of conflicts. Yet, on the other hand, they also possess the agency to facilitate conflict resolution efforts, functioning both as victims of conflict and as active agents of peacebuilding within their social sphere.

d. The community's reliance on magicians adds another layer of complexity to conflict dynamics. These individuals are believed to possess the ability to foresee impending conflicts and wars, with their predictions often shaping community responses and actions. For instance, in the Hammer community, specific omens, such as the discovery of a shoe in public places, are interpreted as harbingers of imminent conflict, further influencing the community's perceptions and behaviours.

e. Tensions also arise from the actions of government development agencies and private commercial farm owners, who are accused of engaging in land grabbing activities without adequately compensating local communities. This perceived injustice leads to widespread grievances among community members, particularly concerning the loss of pasture lands and territorial control, thus exacerbating existing conflicts.

f. The nomadic lifestyle of pastoralists perpetuates conflicts as they navigate the perpetual search for suitable grazing lands and water sources for their livestock. This lifestyle brings them into frequent contact with territories controlled by other groups, leading to disputes over communal ownership of resources and territorial control. Consequently, competition for access and control over these vital resources often escalates into conflicts within and between communities.

g. Gun and light weapon traders have become a significant concern for both the governments of Kenya and Ethiopia, prompting the implementation of disarmament programs alongside cross-border peace initiatives. However, despite these efforts, the effectiveness of disarmament campaigns has been hindered by various factors. Incidents of coercion and violence against civilians during disarmament operations, coupled with the lack of sufficient security measures to protect disarmed communities, have eroded public confidence in these programs (Leff, 2009). Data collected from zonal militia and security offices reveal that gun and light weapon traders operating along the national borders between Kenya and Ethiopia, particularly in the South Omo zone, pose not only a threat to local peace and stability but also to the national security

of Ethiopia. Their unchecked activities contribute to the proliferation of arms and ammunition, fuelling conflicts and undermining efforts to promote security and development in the region.

5. The Practices of Conflict Transformation in the Study Area

5.1 Resilience

Resilience-based approaches to peacebuilding prioritize the process through which societies collectively and peacefully transform their relationships to address the underlying factors that precipitated conflict. Communities that are well-organized often possess robust solidarity networks, enabling them to effectively navigate hardship or conflict (Interpeace, 2016). Within these communities, social systems harbor various resources conducive to peacebuilding. Leveraging community knowledge to address issues within pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities represents one such mechanism for fostering peace. Moreover, tapping into indigenous knowledge for conflict resolution and other systems serves as a pathway to peace. Notably, ethnic groups in the study area have developed their own resilience mechanisms against conflict. Therefore, enhancing the cultural practices of communities in managing, preventing, and resolving conflicts emerges as a paramount strategy in bolstering conflict resilience.

5.2 The involvement of NGOs

The engagement of NGOs in peace dialogues and reconciliation efforts significantly contributes to the stability of communities in the study area. Organizations such as Raim Raim and EPaRDA have been actively involved in peace dialogue forums within the Dassenech and Turkana communities. Additionally, Farm Africa has undertaken initiatives aimed at conflict management and resolution. While these efforts strive to foster cooperative and peaceful relationships between the two ethnic groups, their outcomes have not always been as successful as hoped. The Catholic Church also plays a pivotal role in peacebuilding and conflict management within the study area. Both the Ethiopian and Kenyan Catholic Churches have collaborated along the border region, convening meetings and discussions to cultivate a culture of peace among border communities. Such peace initiatives hold the potential to foster tranquillity in border areas and cultivate interdependence and cooperation within community life. Notably, peace initiatives have demonstrated efficacy within the Dassenech and Hammer communities, where they align with local peace cultures, contributing to tangible progress towards peace and reconciliation.

5.3 Conflict and Drought Early Warning system

The rural development program in Ethiopia, as implemented by the state, has notably overlooked the needs of pastoralist and agro-pastoralist regions, leaving these areas marginalized from development initiatives. In these regions, conflict and drought are frequent occurrences, serving as primary sources of vulnerability for the local populace. Residents consistently bear the brunt of these challenges. Regrettably, the existing early warning and response system for conflict and drought is severely deficient. Establishing a robust system for early warning and response would significantly mitigate the adverse effects on the community. The adoption of such a system would be particularly beneficial for pastoralists and agro-pastoralists, aiding in conflict resolution and management. However, the current system in these regions remains dysfunctional. The presence of an effective early warning and response system holds substantial long-term significance for livelihood transformation and diversification. Additionally, it plays a vital role in facilitating adaptation to drought and water resource development.

Conflict early warning and response mechanisms are established within governmental frameworks. However, the system under study is deficient, lacking the necessary institutionalization to fulfill its intended purpose. Crucially, there is a dearth of professionals specializing in conflict analysis and interpretation within this mechanism. It is imperative that conflict early warning information gathering be conducted by trained professionals. Utilizing field monitors and conflict data gatherers, essential conflict data is collected for thorough analysis and informed decision-making, aiming to preempt conflicts before they escalate. This process aligns with conflict transformation strategies, as outlined by Lederach (1997), which emphasize the comprehensive study of conflict structures, contexts, and actors. Drawing from study findings, both state and non-state actors can collaborate with communities to address resource scarcity and foster interdependence or resource sharing among them.

According to key informants, the strengthening of institutions for peace and development in the study area suffers from a lack of involvement from both state and non-state actors. Efforts from organizations like IGAD and USAID aim to enhance the effectiveness of the peace architecture at national, regional, and Woreda levels. IGAD's CEWARN, for instance, collects and analyzes early warning information, focusing particularly on Dassanech and Nyangatom Woredas, as well as the Turkana area. The Ethiopian Peace and Development Centre (PDC) recently concluded a project titled "Strengthening Local Cross-Border Conflict Management in Lake Turkana-South Omo Cross Border Area," targeting the management of conflicts related to cross-border resources. However, due to security concerns, the project primarily operates on the Ethiopian side. Additionally, PACT Ethiopia is actively engaged in promoting peace within the community in the area. Despite these efforts, the number of potential implementing agencies on the Ethiopian side remains limited, indicating a lack of sufficient emphasis on conflict transformation in the study area.

5.4 Water Resources Development and Management

According to key informants, the study area boasts abundant ground and river waters, yet the challenge lies in their development and management for utilization. Effective management of water resources development holds significant potential in mitigating water-related conflicts. However, the Ministry of Water, Pastoral Affairs, Irrigation, and Energy has yet to undertake activities aimed at conflict transformation in this regard. Given the vital importance and scarcity of water in the area, much of the conflict and tension, both locally and across borders, revolves around water access and distribution. Locally, the presence of development projects such as sugar cane and cotton farms, as well as the Gibe III dam, has exacerbated water availability issues for downstream communities like the Dassenech, Erbore, and Turkana communities, while others continue to lack access to water. Consequently, addressing water management and development necessitates national and international cooperation to address internal and cross-border water-related conflicts. Cooperative interventions between states such as Ethiopia and Kenya can facilitate fair and sustainable access to water sources, thereby strengthening livelihoods and reducing instability. Over the long term, such initiatives have the potential to transform cross-border conflicts. However, governmental attention to these critical issues appears lacking, if not entirely neglected.

5.5 Development Projects

Peace and development must not only be integrated but also approached and executed as interconnected endeavors. While development often conjures images of infrastructure, peacebuilding or conflict transformation is frequently viewed as initiatives or interventions, often perceived as urgent, ad-hoc measures, and sometimes seen merely as tools rather than comprehensive approaches or systems. Investing in peace infrastructures is paramount (Giessmann, 2016). Development projects aimed at enhancing livelihoods and economic growth serve as essential

components of peace infrastructure when approached with a conflict-sensitive perspective. In the study area, food insecurity resulting from water, land, and pasture scarcity exacerbates instability and conflicts. Transforming these conflicts and instabilities necessitates development projects. However, such projects, capable of directly improving the living conditions and livelihoods of the community, are scarce in the study area, aside from the construction of irrigation canals. State-led initiatives such as the establishment of sugar industries and private commercial agricultural investments have had limited impact on the pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities' lives. Engaging both state and non-state actors in diversifying pastoralist livelihoods and offering alternative livelihood activities is crucial for altering the conflict landscape in the area. According to informants, the area teems with opportunities and resources for the economic development of the people, yet these remain largely untapped for the benefit of pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities. Peace remains the foremost agenda, acting as both a precondition and an outcome of socioeconomic advancement within the community. In essence, bolstering the resilience of community socioeconomic systems directly contributes to the transformation of resource-based conflicts and violence into peace.

5.6 Support Pastoralism through Rehabilitation of Rangelands

By leveraging local community institutions and rangeland management practices, the Hammer community has implemented communal enclosures in degraded environments. This initiative has facilitated the regeneration of rangelands, resulting in increased vegetation cover and a reversal of environmental degradation. Consequently, this endeavour has reduced the incidence of conflicts related to pasture scarcity in the area.

The availability and accessibility of quality rangelands are paramount for the stability and functionality of agro-pastoral and pastoral systems (IGAD, 2022). The degradation of rangelands throughout the study area exacerbates pressure on the community's livelihoods and often triggers conflicts over access to pasture, bushes, and water. The decline of rangelands can be attributed to various factors, including the expansion of pastoral households and their herds, climate change, the conversion of rangelands to commercial agricultural use, and the construction of dams upstream. This poses a significant threat to communities in Nyangatom and Turkana.

Local pastoral and agro-pastoral community institutions possess valuable knowledge regarding rangelands and their rehabilitation for sustainable use. However, this indigenous knowledge is not adequately promoted by state and non-state actors to address the limited availability of pasture and mitigate conflicts arising from pasture scarcity. Drawing lessons from initiatives such as the Pastoral Community Development Program (PCDP), which focused on sustainable livelihood enhancement and pastoral risk management, could provide valuable insights for the study area. PCDP activities cantered on range management, support for pastoral livelihoods, and the establishment of water facilities in existing villages. NGOs like AFD, Farm Africa, VITA, DRSL, and RPLR have also been involved in rangeland rehabilitation efforts (Cardenas, 2016). Sustained interventions of this nature have the potential to significantly mitigate conflicts in the region.

5 .7 Integrate Commercial Agriculture and Pastoralism and Agro-Pastoralism

The government has not taken any action to enhance the income-generating capacity of the community's livelihoods. Addressing poverty-related conflicts requires initiatives that engage pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in market exchanges, thereby benefiting the community and reducing conflicts over fishing as a source of income. The lack of integration with commercial agriculture, particularly the development projects led by the sugar corporation, has been a source of grievance due to inadequate compensation for pastoralist landowners (USAID, 2021). Additionally, as revealed by

informants, commercial agriculture siphons essential resources away from pastoralism and agro-pastoralism, diminishing the resilience and coping capacity of these communities. However, there is potential for integration between these economic activities to reduce conflicts and foster interdependence, yielding mutual benefits for both parties. Creating job opportunities in commercial agriculture areas and ensuring access to water are key mechanisms for achieving integration.

6. Education

Strengthening both formal and informal education systems is essential for reshaping conflict attitudes and behaviors within pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities (USAID, 2020). The provision of education, whether formal or informal, plays a pivotal role in transforming conflicts within these communities. Given that youth often play central roles in both peacebuilding and conflict, educating them can foster peaceful environments by raising awareness about the impacts of conflict and introducing coping mechanisms beyond traditional methods. As noted by Mwanzia (2015), any form of peace education has the potential to alter community conflict dynamics, contexts, attitudes, and behaviors. Collaborating with the government, initiatives such as the Ethiopian Institute of Peace and the Ethiopian Pastoralist Research and Development Association, alongside projects like the Ethiopian Catholic Church's Livelihoods and Peace Transformation of Pastoralists and Christian Aid's PACIDA projects, are actively engaged in promoting community peace. These efforts include providing peace education for youth and offering support to enhance livelihoods in the area. In addressing cross-border conflicts, local governments have initiated peace dialogues aimed at resolving disputes related to pasturelands and cattle raiding. However, despite these efforts, the issues persist, continuing to disrupt community peace. Creative peace initiatives are imperative for fostering sustainable peace in the region.

Picture 2: Indicated the celebration of international day of peace for the purpose of inculcating the value of peace for youths. *Source:* Government Communications affairs office

7. Putting the Community at the Heart of the Conflict Transformation

"The people who live and suffer through the consequences of violence ultimately deserve to be the architects of the changes required to improve their lives on the ground" (Berghof Foundation, 2006). Enhancing community awareness regarding conflict and its transformation stands as a paramount objective. Offering informal peace education to all adult community members, and ideally formalizing it where feasible, represents a viable avenue for conflict transformation. Peace advocates must actively promote this approach, tailored to the specific context of the conflict, to realize transformation goals. The socio-cultural milieu of the Nyangatom, Dassanech, and

Hammer communities renders them particularly conducive to implementing this mechanism for conflict transformation.

8. Conclusion

This study investigated conflict transformation practices within the pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities of the Hammer, Dassanech, and Nyangatom Woredas in the South Omo Zone. The study scrutinized the sources of conflict within these communities and assessed the efforts undertaken by various actors to address conflict by altering the attitudes and behaviours of conflicting parties. Primarily, these efforts have been focused on conflict management, resolution, and prevention, with limited emphasis on genuine conflict transformation. Despite some observable changes in conflict dynamics, including the prevention of further escalation and destructive violence, the underlying structures, actors, and issues have not undergone comprehensive transformation. Conflicts in the region, often seasonal, driven by shortages of pasture and water resources, as well as disputes over land claims and fishing rights, persist without resolution or transformation.

Efforts to address natural resource-based conflicts, particularly those related to water and pasture, have involved resilient activities but have not achieved transformative outcomes. Nonetheless, these initiatives represent commendable beginnings and underscore the need for continued engagement in future conflict transformation activities to realize the desired changes. The researcher recommends that the conflict transformation activities examined in this study be more vigorously pursued by all stakeholders to address the conflict situation in the study area. Additionally, collaboration between the government and research universities is crucial to advancing these efforts effectively.

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Author's Declarations and Essential Ethical Compliances

Author's Contributions (in accordance with ICMJE criteria for authorship)
This article is 100% contributed by the sole author. He conceived and designed the research or analysis, collected the data, contributed to data analysis & interpretation, wrote the article, performed critical revision of the article/paper, edited the article, and supervised and administered the field work.

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Research involving human bodies or organs or tissues (Helsinki Declaration)
The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved any human subject (body or organs) for experimentation. It was not a clinical research. The contexts of human population/participation were only indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) or ethical obligation of Helsinki Declaration does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

Research involving animals (ARRIVE Checklist)
The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved any animal subject (body or organs) for experimentation. The research was not based on laboratory experiment involving any kind of animal. Some contexts of animals are also indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) does not apply in cases of this study or written work. It is because I believe it is also not necessary as I did not 'conduct research on animal bodies or organs'. As clearly mentioned in the description of methodology, no animal was touched or directly affected by my research in anyway. I asked questions to herders, and that's all.

Research on Indigenous Peoples and/or Traditional Knowledge
The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved Indigenous Peoples as participants or respondents, with the documentation of their Indigenous Knowledge. Some other contexts of Indigenous Peoples or Indigenous Knowledge are only indirectly covered through literature review. An Ethical Clearance 'to conduct research on indigenous peoples' Indigenous knowledge is also not relevant. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) or prior informed consent (PIC) of the respondents or Self-Declaration in this regard does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

Research involving Plants
The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved the plants for experiment or field studies. The contexts of plants were only indirectly covered through literature review. Thus, during this research the author(s) obeyed the principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on the Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

(Optional) Research Involving Local Community Participants (Non-Indigenous)
The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has involved local community participants or respondents belonging to non-Indigenous peoples. Yet, this study did not involve any child in any form directly. The contexts of different humans, people, populations, men/women/children and ethnic people are also indirectly covered through literature review. Besides, my research focussed on herders' perception and practices, without resulting in any information of value for marketing purposes.

Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) or prior informed consent (PIC) of the respondents or Self-Declaration in this regard does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

(Optional) PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses)
The author(s) has/have NOT complied with PRISMA standards. It is not relevant in case of this study or written work.

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