

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Internationalization of Post-1991 political reform-induced ethnic conflicts, cross-border contraband trade and human trafficking in eastern Ethiopia**

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The political changes in Ethiopia after 1991 created a context for the dynamics of ethnic conflicts, changes in local contraband trade to cross-border trade, and women trafficking, affecting social norms and leading to intersectional impacts on women and girls in eastern Ethiopia. Previous studies have primarily focused on dimensions of ethnic conflicts within a specific geographical location (territory) and their links to social exclusion, particularly examining the intersectional consequences of conflicts on gender inequality. The study assessed the dynamics of conflicts and political changes in post-1991 Ethiopia, and analyse the intersectional and transborder effects of these processes on women and girls, in Ethiopia, Djibouti and Somalia. The study used a document review, and key informant interviews with local elders, clan leaders, government officials, NGO workers and selected cases of women. The study found that the 1991 political changes in Ethiopia that was based on ethnic-federalism exacerbated inter-ethnic conflicts among the Somali, Afar and Oromo people in Ethiopia. Furthermore, the inter-ethnic conflicts expanded along the regions of Djibouti and Samalia bordering Ethiopia. The changing elite interests and social norms, and the expansion of contraband trade, gradually included trafficking in women and girls as lucrative source of incomes. Thus, the creation of human trafficking roots intertwined with inter-ethnic conflicts beyond the borders of Ethiopia. The study concluded that identity, social norms, conflicts and political changes in Ethiopia have brought intersectional consequences on women and girls. Thus, a rights and gender-based plus need assessment, a cross-border data and intervention is needed to understand the dynamics and address the intersectional impacts of conflicts and political changes on women and girls in East Africa.

**Key words:** Conflict dynamics, political change, contraband trade, women trafficking, social norms, Ethiopia, east Africa.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Ethiopia's political landscape immensely transformed after the 1991 political transition in the country, which gave rise

to the current Ethiopian Federations (Beyene et al., 2020). The 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic

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of Ethiopia (FDRE) (Abbink, 1993, 2000) built the foundations for the current socio-political administrative structure based on linguistic, ethnic and emerging 'New' identities of the peoples of Ethiopia (Debelo, 2012). This new political and administrative structure triggered boundary conflicts, and shook the historical and socio-economic ties of diverse ethnic groups in the country. The new reality challenged the long-lived cross-cultural relations of marriage, language, religion, and resources (Adugna, 2011; Kefale, 2013b; Sertse et al., 2021; Belay et al., 2013). This new structure and ethnic-language-based boundary challenged the interconnected and mobile, the largely pastoralist and agropastoralist livelihoods of the Afar, Oromo and Somali peoples (Adjei, 2018; Lober and Worm, 2015), and triggered diverse forms of resource and politically motivated conflicts (Beyene, 2008). In addition, customary and religious-based institution that shaped the relationships among the people was spoiled by the new ethnic-based identity politics and related elite interests in the regions, covering beyond the Ethiopian borders (Beyene et al., 2020; Kefale, 2013a). The new post-1991 political dynamics linked ethnicity, territory (resources), and administrative boundary, and crafted animosity among people, and this provided a fodder for the divisive media and narratives of the new emerging "Ethnonationalists" that feed the boundary narratives and benefits associated with it. Politically, the move for control of "territory", communal resources and privileges factors into more conflicts (Kefale, 2013b; Hussein et al., 2015; Beyene et al., 2020; Debelo, 2012; Belay et al., 2013; Kefale, 2013a). Besides the claims and counterclaims of the new boundaries, the dynamics challenged the pastoralist livelihoods, which were resilient and relatively accommodative in the past (Beyene et al., 2020; Mulugeta and Hagmann, 2008; Hendricks, 2017; Lober and Worm, 2015).

The trend also coincided with the growing demographic transition, and the expansion of mobile internet connections with opportunities for expanding new forms of narratives and counternarratives in the regions. The population growth (human and livestock) necessitated the expansion of grazing and farm lands, more people migrating from highlands and settling unlike the existing culture of open-grazing by pastoralists, and created more conflict incidence in the areas (Debelo, 2012; Everett, 2014; Lober and Worm, 2015; Rahmato, 2011; Beyene et al., 2020). Thus, the causes and consequences, and the actors in the dynamic conflicts unfolded. Studies show that ethnic-based political system/transition (Debelo, 2012), competition over territorial control and fear of losing the user-rights, and climate-change induced resource scarcity (water and pasture), all exacerbating the (extent of) conflicts (Adano and Daudi, 2012). The new trend in conflict that emerged in post-1991 conflict was the commercialized livestock raiding involving contrabands trade (Mulugeta and Hagmann, 2008; Kefale, 2013b), which gradually transformed into trafficking in persons, specifically women and girls (Lorentzen et al., 2019).

Besides, the interventions of formal institutions and government authorities in curbing these new trends of conflicts and consequences were ineffective (Beyene, 2017).

As the ineffective interventions prevailed, social media and interest-based elites that benefit from trafficking in persons and contraband-based livestock raiding and trading further entrenched narratives of victimization, and promoted the need for more conflicts and control of territories beyond their respective borders, thus to expand benefits (Abbink, 1993, 2000; Beyene, 2013; 2017; Lorentzen et al., 2019). This process further diminished the power of the formal laws in the areas and informal groups prevailed in the benefit networks and compelling decisions (Beyene, 2017; Lorentzen et al., 2019). Because of the dynamics and the ineffective interventions, solutions were not sustainable (Beyene et al., 2020).

Also, the consultations were not inclusive, participatory, demand-driven, taking the broader dimensions of the changes in conflicts in the area (UN-OCHA, 2020; Beyene et al., 2020). Also, the new ethnic-based regional boundaries, and the cross-border ethnic configuration of the Afar (in Djibouti) and the Somali (in Somalia) created a hide-out and a camouflage for traffickers, contraband traders (Lorentzen et al., 2019; Rahmato, 2011), and the opening of the new Train Line between Ethiopia and Djibouti further fuelled the demand to control Ethiopia-Djibouti trade line of the territory (Beyene et al., 2020). Because of the persisting conflicts, the prevention, protection, and recovery efforts, as well as responding to intersectional consequences of the conflict was little or did not bear adequate results (Porter, 2010).

According to Tadesse et al. (2015), besides the dynamics of events and conflicts, the patriarchal societal fabric in Ethiopia excluded the participation of women, indigenous minorities and institutions, and exposed them to intersectional consequences of the process. As known in studies, participatory and inclusive efforts increase the likelihood of success in peace building by 24% (Beyene et al., 2020; Development and Peace, 2017). Besides the participatory and inclusive efforts, an integration of bottom-up, horizontal and top-down approaches prove effective in interventions related to the violation of rights such as trafficking in persons (Beyene, 2008) and expand starting points for entry (Tadesse et al., 2015). Based on the empirical findings above, the study questioned the causes and consequences of conflicts, mechanisms of building inclusive peace, and the linkage of the trends to the changes in post-1991 political landscape of Ethiopia (Kefale, 2013a). Figure 1 show analytical framework designed to interpret the data sets.

The study argues that undermining strong cultural, livelihood, and political ties due to changing contexts has created divisions, doubts, mistrust, and fears among the people living in the border areas of the three regions. The differing political groups, elites, private beneficiaries, social media/activists, and cross-border traffickers benefit from the conflicts (as contrabandists), and compounded by

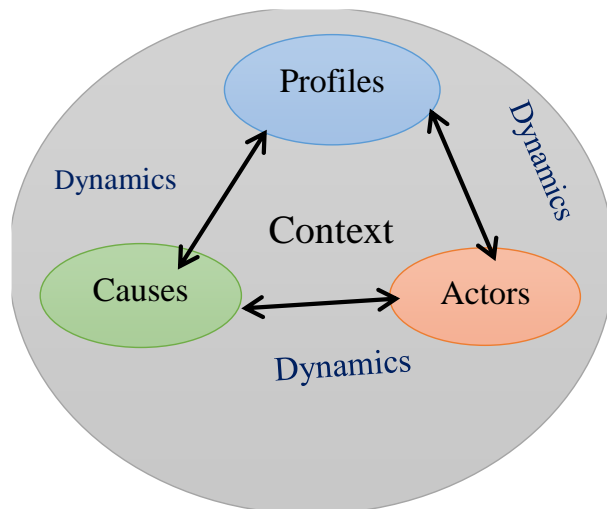


Figure 1. Analytical framework of the study.

ethnicization and politicization of boundaries and ethnicities, this has led to intersectional consequences and impacts on women and girls (Mulugeta and Hagmann, 2008; Hendricks, 2017; Lober and Worm, 2015). Thus, this study analysed the trends as to how ethnic-based conflicts lead to internationalization trafficking networks in Eastern Ethiopia.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The assessment employed a qualitative approach. It used a state-of-the-art literature review, unpublished document review, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. The desk review informed the analysis lens (framework inquiries) and secondary data. The KII participants were selected from both the local community and government organizations that have a direct role in managing conflicts and peace building. Representatives of three government sector offices at zonal and district levels, namely Women's and Children's Affairs Offices, Peace and Security Offices, and Disaster Risk Management Offices, were purposively included as KIIs. Moreover, Kebele local administrators were also interviewed as key informants. Additional key informants were also selected from among community members. These included various forms of rulers of customary institutions in each of the 14 districts of the three regions, including elders, clan leaders, and religious leaders. These KII participants were selected based on their socio-political affiliation. In this regard, kebele level formal and informal institution leaders, as well as leaders and experts from district level formal institutions assumed to be relevant to the study themes, have participated as KIIs. A total of 63 KIIs and their profiles were compiled from the selected regions.

The FGD participants included separate groups of adult women and men; adolescent boys and girls; and mixed community groups (elders, clan leaders, and kebele administrators). Also, various aspects of minorities (ethnic, religious, and disability) were included in the field interviews. While selecting the FGD participants, age (adult/young), gender (male/female), disability, and ethnic/religious belongingness were used as a yardstick. Moreover, conflict-induced internally displaced people and returnees have participated. A total of 20 FGDs were conducted with various members of the community

in the regions. The profiles of the FGDs participants and their views were compiled as data sets along the selected variables. The FGD information was analysed using thematic narratives. In order to categorise the narratives into analysable themes, a diversity theory was used. The diverse perspectives based on gender, age, location, etc. were used.

The respondent selection criteria were: (1) representation and inclusion (gender, age, disability, religious or ethnic minority), and (2) institutional (from informal institutions (clan/religious leaders, elders) and formal institutions (district and kebele level leaders). Thematically, the types of institutions (formal/informal), conflict hotspots/tension, types of conflict such as resources (water and pasture) (Belay et al., 2013), boundary, clan (inter/intra) and kebeles with IDPs were selected. The instruments used by the study include thematic unstructured guides. The data analysis was made based on the thematic narration of diverse voices of respondents. The field-note summaries, audio recordings, text transcriptions, and images were transcribed for interpretation and analysis. The texts, themes, and emerging patterns supported the findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The themes and contents were transformed into a qualitative narration of findings and recommendations.

## DATA RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Ethnicity/identity and cross-border interactions in eastern Ethiopia

The study was conducted in Afar, Oromia and Somali regions of Ethiopia. Demographically, the majority of the receptive regions are inhabited by ethnic Afar, Oromo and Somali people, although the regions are homes to other diverse ethnic groups (Beyene et al., 2020). The three regions together make near 40% of the people of Ethiopia, and the eastern part of the country relatively constitute around 15% of the people of Ethiopia (CSA, 2017). The regions have international boundaries with South Sudan, Sudan, Kenya, Somalia, Djibouti and Eritrea; the ethnic groups in these regions have their counterparts in the

neighbouring countries (Dansa and Musa, 2021).

Cross-border interactions among the peoples of the region gave opportunities for both sides of the region living at the border to transact cross-cultural relations like marriage, language, religion, and resource use (Beyene et al., 2020). The close interactions sometimes become sources of contentious interests among the people living in the bordering districts of the two regions, leading to conflicts and instabilities across the borders. The people have longstanding cultural, economic, and political relations, historically, though contested, strong ties between the groups manifested during the 16th Century mass population movements in the Horn of Africa (Baxter, 1978; Lober and Worm, 2015).

The people residing along the borders were competing in their borderlands for water, grazing, and agricultural land (Lober and Worm, 2015). The people from the three ethnic groups were able to respond to emerging and existing conflicts through their customary institutions (Beyene et al., 2020). The traditional practice of making a livelihood along the border was based on cross-border mobility in search for pasture and water. Resources were shared commonly and managed by the local customary authorities – clan leaders and elders (Beyene, 2008). Recent phenomena such as climate change, commercial investment, farmland expansion, and population pressure have increasingly influenced land use patterns and called into question long-established grazing land and water resource capacities, as well as institutional arrangements for resource sharing across borders (Beyene, 2008; Beyene et al., 2020).

Despite the interconnections between the peoples in the borders, however, after Ethiopia's political transitions in 1991, which linked ethnicity, territory (resources), and administrative boundary, strong incidences of violent conflicts began among the people, including of the same ethnic groups. This trend has been a cause of conflict in Ethiopia, especially in southern Ethiopia region (Verjee, 2021). The politically-driven, interest-oriented and benefit-focused conflicts causes often intertwined with narratives and counter-narratives related to ethnicity, territory (resources), and administrative boundary, and thus, "political entrepreneurs" emerged from time to time further creating divisions, counter interpretations and usurpation of dynamic scenarios along the boundaries.

### **The causes and consequences of conflicts in eastern Ethiopia**

The consequences of conflicts on men, women, girls, youth, elderly and disabled people are sometimes supported by formal and informal institutional mechanisms rooted in ethnically-based political narratives and counternarratives. These contexts created the foundations for the expansion of political entrepreneurs, and diverse interest groups from two sides of the borders of Djibouti,

Somalia and Eritrea. Besides, according to the data collected from the regions, the main causes of conflict are dynamic, overlapping, complicated and transect each other. The main causes of the conflict were identified as competition over communal grazing land, and water resources (Belay et al., 2013); informal economic network through cattle raiding and black-market trading, and contraband; political interests to mobilize support and claim authority through using ethnic and clan lineage (political entrepreneurs or political calculus). Beyond the conflict and competition over resources, history (clan-based and revenge-driven conflicts) and the political reform (ethnic based boundaries, the socio-economic and institutional dynamics as structural causes of the conflicts in the area). The perceived boundaries and the post-1991 demarcation among regions and borders become also causes of conflict. The long historical conflict scenario along the boundaries and borders were documented by scholars such as Dansa and Musa (2021) and Sugule and Walker (1998), the post-1991 dynamics in causes of conflict were documented by Beyene (2008; 2009; 2013; 2017) and Kefale (2013a). The desk review, interview and focus group data are presented schematically in Figure 2.

The intensity and complexity of the conflict, according to the key informants and focus group participants, changed and took cross-border scenario in the post-1991 political reform in Ethiopia (Kefale, 2013b). This reform, apart from resource-based local conflict, triggered the emergence of political elites, political entrepreneurs, and an informal economic, political, ethnic and media network beyond Ethiopian borders – mainly in Djibouti and Somalia. The trade routes, the geographical locations and resource availability gave a strategic relevance for conflicts. Settlements over communal grazing land often found to disturb the resource use pattern. These informal networks, according to informants, are based on contraband trade, organized and trained armed groups involved in cattle raiding, black-market trading (including foreign currency transactions), and business elite networks. According to the informants, the dynamics in informal economic networks were enhanced by arms, information technology (mobile and internet penetration into rural pastoralist areas), and narratives and counter narratives fueled by the media (both social and mainstream media outlets) in Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia. The opening of the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway opened new horizons of competition and control over major trade routes (for trading arms, foreign currency, garments, electronics, cattle, etc.). These new opportunities created more political and business elites (entrepreneurs) benefiting from smuggling bypassing checkpoints, and further expanded conflict sponsors from contrabandists. The community level key informants underlined that the benefit from cattle raids relates also to export of live animals by contrabandists including to neighbouring countries and in return contraband in electronics, small arms, garment, etc. This trans-boundary flow of benefits and the informal export

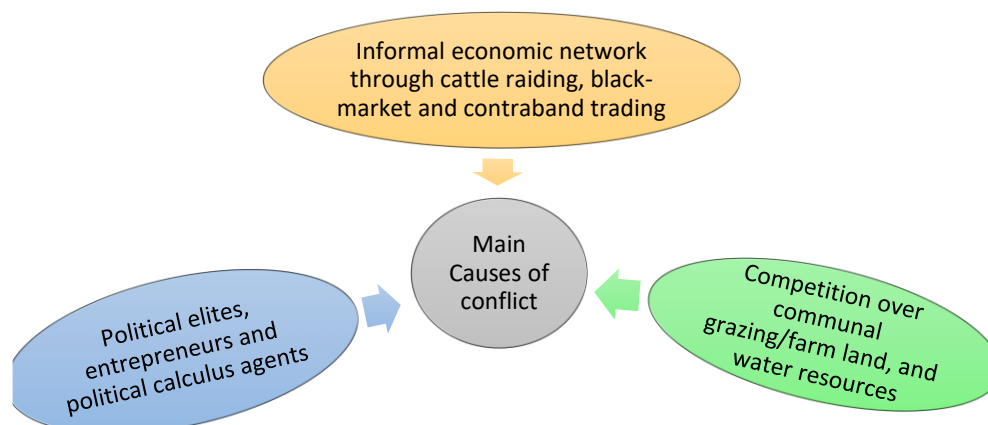


Figure 2. The main causes of conflicts (Summary of Data, 2023).



Figure 3. Continuum of conflict actors.

arrangement expand cattle raids leading to violent conflicts (Beyene et al., 2020).

A growing political interest, what Beyene et al. (2020) coin as “*political entrepreneurs*” (or “*calculus of politics*”) as related to a growing use of ethnicity and border narratives as political agenda for getting people’s support and agitate the youth and clan members towards violent conflicts. According to community level informants, the elites in the political “*calculus*” incite divisions, weaken adverse groups and empower their interest groups and work towards enclaving strategic areas under their regional or clan control and get hide-outs. The growing political interests often infuse ethnicity and affinity along clan lines as an advantage to organize people, activists and ethno-nationalist narratives. As time-passed and the formal solutions failed (ineffective) to stop business and political elites, gradually, the trafficking in persons, and transitioning illegal migrants to gulf regions become part of the illicit and contraband trade. In this respect, trafficking of women and girls, to bordering countries, increased and trafficked women and girls are used in the informal sex and hospitality industry, labour exploitation and sometimes, trade in body parts.

The causes of conflicts and the emerging trends in cross-border illegal trading, trafficking in persons, and facilitating illegal migration to gulf states is triggered further by persisting draughts, climate and ecological changes, growing transformation of settlements into conflict and contraband trade routes, livestock raiding-induced poverty (Eshete et al., 1993), and growing impacts of these trends in the study areas in spatial, economic, social and related dimensions (Hajat and Tabar, 2023). Also, the ineffective referendums conducted in the areas to demarcate

boundaries among the three regions (Afar, Oromia and Somali) did not solve the boundary disagreements and become source (fodder) for inflammatory and negative narratives by the media, elites and activities.

### Actors of peace and conflicts in eastern Ethiopia

The violent conflicts at the border areas have passed through tests of history across diverse geopolitical, ecological, and sociological dynamics shaping the forms and intensity of the conflicts. The actors are diverse, and the conflicts are sometimes invisible and other times predictable, according to key informants. The conflict actors are not visible to law enforcement institutions, hiding in their respective ethnic group and newly established territory, play as many different roles as possible in igniting conflict and making peace. While tracing conflict and peace actors is difficult, the interests attached to the conflicts vary. Actors involve in the conflict with diverse interests, and dynamic processes and tends complicate the continuum of the conflict both across the borders of Ethiopia, and in neighbouring countries.

Figure 3 shows the conflict, actors and peace continuum. The actors of conflict thus include youths, clan leaders, religious leaders, local elites (political and business), media activists, local rich and companies including foreign entities, which paly on both sides (as enablers of peace and drivers of the conflicts depending on the context). They extend different alliances to connect themselves on either side of the conflicting parties to pass messages on them and maximize their interests; these include inter-clan and interethnic marriages, security persons on ethnic

**Table 1.** Needs-Fears Mapping (NFM) of actors.

Actors	Issues	Interest/Needs	Fears	Means	Options
Customary authorities	Protect resource governance/use pattern	Protect customary rights from threats	Real/perceived loss of rights	Lobby, activism, form narratives	Dialogue process, encourage force.
Pastoralists	Access to water, pasture	Livelihood source and survival means	Livestock loss, migration	Push herds into farms, fighting	Water and grazing zones, corridors
Government authorities	Security, economic growth, social order	Maintain support, popularity, power	Social unrest, regional crisis	Financial, legal, political means	Influence dialogues, communal rights
Contrabandists	Reduce adverse effects of informal businesses	Use disorders, a business options	Security, social order, laws	Plan and finance conflicts, trade	Influence formal businesses, peace
Male youth groups	Increasing participation in conflicts and raids	Identity, resource scarcity, lack job	Limited job, livelihoods	Conflict, activism,	Dialogues, youth employment

Source: Compiled from key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions (2023).

affiliations and political elites as sources of information. The diaspora and the media activists also plan, guide and raise funds, design narratives and discourses to fuel the conflicts. The nature of conflict actors in the targeted districts depends on the level and types of conflicts discussed above. Table 1 presents the Needs-Fears Mapping of the local and broader conflicts in the study area.

### Gender and intersectional causes and consequences of conflicts in eastern Ethiopia

The study also assessed the intersectional impacts of conflicts on women and girls in the study areas (Olofsson, 2018). First, conflicts, according to women discussants and key informants, increases, their work burdens in conflict and post-conflict contexts, such as intensity of collecting firewood and water, stress from scarcities to provide children, etc. As conflicts prolong, males' roles to provide basic household necessities deteriorate and fail, and women's role reshapes including to serving as bride-winner of the family. The women and girls also are required to encourage fights in the conflicts, trat and evacuate the wondered, household equipment and livestock, as well as provide food and water for the combatants. In these processes, women and girl face rape, abduction, trauma and physical injury, including death in the cross-fire. Also, girls are forced to marry (early marriage) for dowry to replenish livestock, as source family incomes, including the practice female genital mutilation. In the internally displaced peoples' camps, the key informants, widows, and returnees noted that post-conflict problems of phycological trauma related to the physical violence, loss of property, sexual abuse, loss of family members, and forced displacement and dislocation of family members have been rarely addressed for mainly lack of institutions which are able to provide recovery services. Women and girls who suffered from sexual violence during the conflicts

rarely report their problems because of social taboos and fear of being targeted and identified by the members of the society. The underlying socio-cultural views deprive women and girls of their fundamental human rights and reduce them to 'objects' of family provision, often leaving them unprotected from abuses in both conflict and peaceful times. Women and girls typically receive half of what males and boys receive, according to customary ratings and compensation for damages, in both conflict and peaceful settings.

### The Post-1991 political dynamics and conflicts in eastern Ethiopia

Pastoral areas in the bordering areas live in dynamics of protracted conflict. Many agree that the historical marginalization of pastoralist areas from the modern Ethiopian state formation counts somehow to their less participation in the centre politics (Sugule and Walker, 1998; Shide, 2005). The community in these peripheral areas had no option except relying on their own customary systems of, and that of decentralized governance for their security and socio-economic matters (Hussein et al., 2015; Gebre-Egziabher and Berhanu, 2004). In other words, these are places where the Ethiopian state laws and protections of citizen's rights fail to properly fulfil their functions (Sugule and Walker, 1998; Shide, 2005). These, conflict and force are culturally seen as self-defence in the absence of proper policing, and service from the state, and this context is a decreasing incentive to discourage actors from applying institutionalization of violence (Korf, 2004). Tgese trends coincided with the dynamism of changes such as: (1) territories under the control of customary institution are now accessible; (2) formal administration systems increasingly consolidated powers based on land and resources making customary systems less important; and (3) socioeconomic dynamics such as market expansion, land use changes, rights, weekend customary



systems. These trends are not supported by formal and organized transformation, and has become opportunities for political/business elites, entrepreneurs and activist to thrive based on specific zones of benefits. The combined effect of all these factors and challenges has led to continuous deterioration of customary systems, increased tenure insecurity and inaccessibility of larger portions of the main resources- rangeland and water due to population pressure, investment expansion and threat of conflicts (revenge). Thus, local capacities for peace, and protection of rights diminished, and the conflicting interests among actors diminished the prospects for joint peace initiatives. Rather widened gaps, negative narratives and counternarratives that gave opportunity to diverse interest groups. In these contextual transformations, the diverse media and activist groups perpetuate this status quo in the study area (Gagliardone and Stremlau, 2011), and reduced the use of the power of media and philanthropists for peace building (Wilson et al., 2021). According to key informants from government offices, and non-state actors in the study area, the above trends are further complicated by lack of effective early warning, information sharing and feedback mechanisms

## Conclusions

The study was aimed at analyzing and providing in-depth information on the causes, nature, and consequences, drivers of conflicts, enablers, and local capacities for peace in the study area. Beyond that, the study was also aimed at examining the dynamics of conflicts and their consequences in the context of expansion from the local level to cross-border levels. In this analysis, the intersection consequences of the expansion of conflicts on trafficking in persons (women and girls) and the facilitation of illegal migration, trading, money transactions and emerging trends of business and political entrepreneurship in post-1991 political reform in Ethiopia (Kefale, 2013a). The study employed a participatory methodological approach and a concurrent triangulation qualitative design. A desk review was employed to collect secondary evidence. Focus group discussion with diverse groups and key informant interview with individuals were conducted to generate primary information. The data collected from a total, 20 focus group discussions and 63 key informant interviews revealed that the main causes conflicts in the study areas relate to competition over resources (Belay et al., 2013), clan-based historical grudges, land and water (farm and herding), contraband trading, livestock raiding and looting. The conflicts, in line with the post-1991 federal political reform (Kefale, 2013b), took historical, social, political, economic, environmental and new cross-border ethnic configurations, as fuelling factors. The media, diaspora, activists and business/ political elites and entrepreneurs curved new forms of benefits, and used ethnicity as hide-outs at home and abroad, yet planning, organizing, and funding conflict along regional and

international boundaries of the regions. Sometimes, individual level conflicts easily transform to clan, community and ethnic level conflicts. Thus, the interlinkages of clan, history, administrative boundary, resource-territory-based and political reform-based narratives and activism are causing conflict not only in the study regions but also across the bordering countries.

As concluding remarks, the conflict overtime took diverse forms and manifestation such as involving in resource raiding for contraband trading, creation of economic and business networks across international borders, based on ethnic affiliations, trafficking in persons, facilitating illegal migration and use of political and business narratives aimed at claims over territorial control, trading routes, and expansion of administrative boundary for expanding constituency. In this process, the resource competition-driven conflicts have changed from claims of user right-questions to property right and ownership questions. This has further complicated solutions and enhanced the political and historical questions over control of the process by “political and business entrepreneurs” and shows a clear institutional failure to secure property rights and resolve the problems. The cattle raids and contraband trading, though the manifestations are not uniform across the regions and cross-border actors, engage elites from both sides, and promote the ‘otherness’ narratives and counter narratives relating the affected groups.

As the conflict prolonged and changed in context, the mistrust in both sides of the actors increased. The economic interests and benefits of the business and political elites widened, from mainstream local level interests to cross-border trading and informal economic and business networks. The consequences of the conflicts were intersectional for women, girls, and persons from minority groups, people with disability and those from conflict-prone locations. Women and girls survived diverse forms gender-based violence, physical and psychological harm, sexual and labour exploitation, and trafficking including labour burden and domestic provision (care) responsibilities. In active-conflict locations were the hard hit, and the trauma and the consequences of the conflicts was huge and may require years to recover from and needs more interventions.

## Limitations and areas of future research

The limitations of this research included a lack of quantitative (numerical) information and a primary focus on theoretical secondary data. While the research successfully achieved its objectives and the findings and conclusions were based on reliable evidence, it's important to note that the generalizability of these findings is specifically applicable to Eastern Ethiopia.

The proliferation of armed groups, frequent violence and attempt to reclaim land (territory) by force, trafficking in persons, facilitation of illegal migration and money

transaction increasingly complicated the causes of conflicts in the study area. Therefore, broader research on each of the above thematic areas is needed.

The 1991 political reform fuelled the conflicts, bet encouraging ethnic based boundaries, hideouts for criminals and cross-border ethnic linkages, which are further reinforced by failure of state institutions and laws at local levels.

However, the emerging dynamics in Ethiopia, such as the disintegration of the SNNP region, the rise of Amhara nationalism, the conflicts in Northern Ethiopia, etc. shaped conflicts and humanitarian crisis. These new and currently emerging trends need more research in Ethiopia.

In the future, in terms of addressing the problems of ethnic-based and cross-border conflicts and their intersectional impacts, concerned bodies, (1) work to changing the conflict behaviour at local level, (2) create awareness, trust-building and accountability mechanisms, information sharing, early warning and feedback handling platforms, and (3) improve the capacity of existing local institutions and citizens by addressing institutional gaps, disciplining media and activists are required. The study thus concludes that the conflicts in Eastern Ethiopia is internationalized and needs cross-border initiatives focusing on curving trafficking in persons, cross-border illegal trading, circulation of illegal money and arms, and trafficking women/girls for the illicit sex, labour and hospitality industry in Djibouti, Somalia and the broader gulf region.

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## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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