



Rift Valley Institute
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20-21 FEBRUARY 2023

THE KNOWLEDGE FOR PEACE REGIONAL FORUM SERIES

RELIGIOUS POLARIZATION IN ETHIOPIA & THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RESOURCES IN PERIPHERIES

JIGJIGA UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE HALL

RELIGIOUS POLARIZATION IN ETHIOPIA & THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RESOURCES IN PERIPHERIES



The Peace Research Facility (PRF) in partnership with Jigjiga University, held a two-day public forum on 20th and 21st February 2023 to discuss research findings on: The Knowledge for Peace Research Project. The project has two broad categories that explore social cohesion in Ethiopia—one under the thematic areas of Religious Polarization in Ethiopia and the other one being The Political Economy of Resources in the Peripheries. Researchers and scholars from regional universities also presented their preliminary findings from their ongoing research projects which fall under the themes mentioned above.



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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

On 20–21 February 2023, the Rift Valley Institute (RVI), in collaboration with Jigjiga University, held a research conference at Jigjiga University, Ethiopia. Its themes were [Religious Polarization in Ethiopia](#) and [The Political Economy of Resources in the Peripheries](#).

Abdirahman Ahmed—MC for the sessions—opened the conference with a welcome about Jigjiga University’s work and collaborative efforts with different institutions. He then invited Bashir Abdullahi and Elyas Abdullahi, President and Vice President for Research and Community Service at Jigjiga University respectively, to give their opening remarks.

Elyas Abdullahi, likewise, welcomed the guests. He briefly talked about the interests of Jigjiga University in conducting similar conferences under the office of the Vice president for Research and Community services. He stated that a number of conferences have been held at Jigjiga University to bring different country-related issue into academic discourse.

In his opening address, Bashir Abdullahi, President of Jigjiga University, highlighted the university’s collaborative efforts which this forum was part of. In this light, he observed that Jigjiga University’s efforts in peace-building processes in Ethiopia and the whole region of the



Bashir Abdullahi
President of Jigjiga University



Dr Elyas Abdullahi
Vice President for Research and
Community Service, Jigjiga University

Horn of Africa are decidedly extensive. Bashir expressed the hope that the presentations and discussions would lead to greater understanding.

After the president and vice president finished their speeches, Geoffrey Lugano, from RVI's team in Nairobi, Kenya, further briefed the participants about RVI. He explained that RVI is an independent, non-profit organization with presences in Hargeisa, Ethiopia, and South Sudan, as well as Nairobi. Lugano welcomed the conference attendees, guests of honour and presenters, explaining that out of twelve abstracts submitted, seven had been chosen to be presented at the forum. He also indicated the need to build research networks and attract research funds from across the region.



Fowsia Abdulkadir

Hankaal Institute, keynote speaker

This was followed by a keynote speech by Fowsia Abdulkadir from Hankaal Institute. Her address focused on the appropriate consumption of local knowledge and wisdom, as well as encouraging local researchers. She also emphasized that resource management in the peripheries should be seen from the perspective of local people, and that there needs to be a platform allowing communities to become partners in the management and consumption of resources, as well as the benefits they generate. In setting the agenda for the conference, Fowsia paid attention to issues surrounding the centre-periphery model of understanding resource extraction, including the case of Gas and Oil in Somali region, and gold in Guji and other areas. She also said that Ethiopia's diverse traditional conflict resolution mechanisms should be brought into discussions. At the same time, she stressed that care must be taken in using these mechanisms, as they can also have drawbacks. Hence, they must be used with some degree of contextualization. Finally, she stressed that the forced displacement of local communities in these areas needs research and specific policy recommendations.

PLENARY SESSION 1: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RESOURCES IN THE PERIPHERIES

PRESENTATION 1: OIL AND GAS IN THE OGA DEN BASIN: A CASE STUDY REPORT

Presenter: Juweria Ali

Juweria provided an overview of an investigation into resources in the peripheries, explaining that she had applied the centre–periphery model to three research sites: Qorahay, Shabelle and Jarar. In doing so, she defined the term ‘periphery’ from the historical perspectives of successive Ethiopian regimes, pointing out that peripheries are those areas which provide the centre with a wealth of natural resources. The natural resources are, however, contested and dominated by the people in the centre, and this often results in a lack of investment or other development initiatives for communities in the peripheries. In addition to this, local people are being excluded from decision-making processes; and the imposition of particular identities and cultural values on communities is also common. In this case, the research revealed how gas and oil were politicized under Haile Selassie’s regime, and how this legacy of domination has continued in the existing regime. Constant changes in the modes of local people’s livelihoods is one manifestation of the centre’s impositions. Ethiopia’s state formation, argues, Juweria, has involved the country’s rulers constantly scrambling for these resources with foreign companies and governments. Haile Selassie’s diplomatic relationships with the British government was an example of this. Thus, oil and gas have offered a means to strengthen diplomatic ties between Ethiopia and other countries. Under this general overview, Juweria set out her key findings that, first, economic and political contestation shapes the past, present and future of resource governance; and second, centre–periphery relations are subject to inquiry and investigation in the context of shifting national and regional dynamics.

POLICY RELEVANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The presentation shed light on the role of strategic resources management in shaping conflict dynamics; entry points for peacebuilding and conflict mitigation; and the significance of oil and gas in shaping political arrangements between national elites, regional governors and local communities.

Recommendations included equitable benefit-sharing; inclusive practices in natural resource management; remedies for natural resource degradation and loss of

livelihoods; and transparent, accountable, and peaceful resource governance.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Juweria was asked several questions by participants, including what she meant by the ‘state reformation’, and if she agrees with the statement made by Ahmed Shide, state minister for finance, that, ‘everywhere is a centre’. Juweria responded by saying that the state has to be reconfigured to serve the interests of both local and wider communities, to which the resources in question belong. She also said that she cannot agree with Ahmed Shide’s statement as long as the Somali people’s century-long question of ownership remains unaddressed.

Juweria was also asked why she had to accept the views of an Ogaden National Liberation Front ex-combatant regarding the natural resource governance system. She responded that, since there is no legitimate representation of the local communities, she believed it is valid to discuss an ex-combatant’s ideas about natural resources.

In addition, questions regarding whether she had studied the negative impacts of oil and gas on Somali people were posed. The same participant asked her to provide an explanation on the identity of workers in gas and oil companies. She was also asked if there was any development plan, inclusion or benefit for local communities where resources are located. In response, Juweria indicated there has to be a legal contract between the local community and central government. Regarding impacts, she observed that there had been tremendous destruction and degradation of ecosystems in the region. She also made it clear that the workers in the oil and gas companies are all non-Somali. Finally, she pointed out that there is no development plan, and no apparent efforts to include local people in decisions-making process or benefits concerning oil and gas.

PRESENTATION 2: GOLD IN THE GUJI PERIPHERY: CASE STUDY, PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Presenter: Damena Abebe

Damena's paper focused on how local communities are excluded from the decision-making and benefit-sharing activities of gold extraction companies in Gugi Zone, West Oromia. The research employed a case study survey into the issue's historical background, as it applied to two major gold extraction companies: MIDROC Laga Dambi Gold and GODU Okkote Gold. The paper provided insight into the manner and systems of marginalization the local people face when it comes to extracting and benefitting from the gold. MIDROC—a century-old company—was shown to have marginalized local people, while in the case of GODU, alterations in its approach had been observed, especially after the 2018 popular resistance. Even so, the latter was so far not much better than the former, as benefits have been confined to local business elites and federal officials. Moreover, the paper revealed the persistence of existing extractive resource management practices, with the benefits of partnership limited to local elites and political actors at both the regional and national level. In the meantime, resistance is ongoing, with the potential for an eruption of popular disobedience.

Damena also discussed the difference in political approach of the EPDRF and PP when it comes to resource extraction and licensing. Damena noted, unlike the EPDRF period when the federal government was the absolute decisionmaker in licensing and managing gold extraction, the PP has relatively decentralised the approach by emboldening Oromia regionals state in influencing who gets access & who is excluded from extracting resources. Except some local elites and business individuals, ordinary local community members are still marginal to decision-making, benefit and accessing resources but they bear the burden of extractive industries in terms of human and environmental health problems.

POLICY RELEVANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The presenter forwarded the following recommendations

- The prevalence of a centre-periphery dichotomy, whereby those at the centre gain advantage, while the local residents who are supposed to be the primary beneficiaries are excluded, should be addressed by government action.
- The government's failure to translate promises into practice—leaders at various levels keep on pledging to better involve the local people but so far have been unable to translate their words into concrete efforts - needs to be looked at critically, and promises must be met.
- People are being forced to leave their areas of residence in order to allow

- companies to expand. If they resist, they face being flogged and incarcerated and these impacts need to be examined and better understood.
- Given the high potential for conflict, the government should design genuine, transparent, inclusive and participatory resource governance mechanisms for resource extraction.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Damena was asked whether it is possible to include local people in the process of extracting gold and minerals, and if local people can demand their rights when it comes to possessing and using natural resources. Damena said that current circumstances do not allow for communities to engage in extraction. Moreover, there is potential for instability and conflict between local residents and local officials who use their position to manipulate and benefit from extraction processes. While concession and coercion are the approaches used by the government at the moment, partnerships with local communities would be possible if the government were willing to pursue this.

PRESENTATION 3: DO RESOURCE WINDFALL EXPECTATIONS LEAD TO CONFLICT? EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM DOBO-WEYN OIL EXPLORATION (PRELIMINARY FINDINGS)

Presenter: Elyas Abdullahi

Elyas discussed the empirical and theoretical evidence for what counts as people's expectations. He also argued that local people's reactions to oil and gas exploration have gradually turned negative. Moreover, corruption and state 'secrecy' have been found to be common in this exploration area. Elyas pointed out that there is a legal contract. However, there is no psychological/social contract, which would have done justice to the demands of the local residents. The people should accept the resources can be used by any other, with involvement of local residents. There is also a high chance that the region's resources will end up becoming a curse, rather than a gift, for local communities. The paper's main finding was that the resources in question have negatively impacted local people, with the exploration process leading to villagers' eviction from their land with no compensation, property confiscation, and livelihoods deterioration. This led to resentment arising from unmet expectations, feelings of exclusion, poor communication, a failure to compensate, and failed corporate responsibility. According to Elyas, some of the intermittent attacks have been driven by such sentiments.

POLICY RELEVANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The hostile treatment of local people by the exploring company and the government should be reversed; expectations must be met; local communities must be included; lessons should be drawn from the past; and the failures of past regimes should be avoided in future.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Elyas was asked to give the total number of Ogaden National Liberation Front combatants killed in confrontations with the Ethiopian army. He said that this was beyond the scope of the study. Moreover, he made it clear that the combatants are Ethiopians and there is no need to count them separately. A question was raised as to whether Elyas had interviewed local people to get their insights. Elyas answered that he had extensively consulted them, and the data for his research was generated from interviews with local residents. It was in the course of these interviews that residents made it clear that their exclusion is not just something they feel but is a concrete reality for them.

Participants asked whether there has been any change regarding the forms of marginalization occurring. Elyas observed that improvements have been seen in response to the mistakes and inadequate approaches of past regimes. The current Ethiopian government, he argued, is far better in this area than those in the past, despite the fact that a substantial number of improvements are still required. As such, it is too early to judge the Prosperity Party on these grounds.

Issues regarding the current government were also discussed. Elyas argued that even if there are some problems, it is too early to blame Prosperity Party government. Participants also spoke of the gross human rights violations that took place in the aftermath of the 2007 confrontation. Some out-of-scope questions were also asked, such as whether the study's research has been conducted on the companies. Here, Elyas explained that the research had focused specifically on people's perceptions.

In response to the tendency among some participants to polarize Somali and Ethiopia, as if the Somali region was not part of Ethiopia, Elyas underscored that, 'We all are Ethiopians, and we have to take the middle ground'. Most importantly, participants asked Elyas whether he believed there had been any state violations on local people following the 2007 attack, to which he responded that he thought that people had been deprived of their constitutionally granted rights.

PRESENTATION 4: TRADITIONAL CONFLICT RESOLUTIONS AND BENEFITS IN SAVING HUMAN LIFE AND RESOURCES OF THREE SELECTED ETHIOPIAN COMMUNITIES: A REVIEW

Presenter: Ibsa Aliyi

Ibsa's paper touched on a range of issues, including the recurrence of conflicts in Ethiopia, the effects of conflict on the country's development initiatives, and political meddling in conflicts. In particular, Ibsa explained how the Gadaa constituency of the Oromo people, the Mada'a of the Afar people, and the Reeda of the Kambata people use their traditional conflict resolution mechanisms to help avoid devastating negative effects on resource wealth and human lives.

POLICY RELEVANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ibsa expressed that government should work hand-in-hand with local elders. In other words, leaders and elders should cooperate. He also recommended that traditional cultural systems should be integrated into formal legal procedures. The importance of these institutions in saving human lives and resource from damage must not be undermined or underestimated.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Ibsa was asked whether the Oromo people fully trust the Gadaa system, given the current tendency of political interference in it. He replied that although there is political infiltration, people are attempting to fight it by giving the system respect. According to Ibsa, political encroachment into the Gadaa system is reflected in the election of the Aba Gada. A participant from the Hankaal Institute asked whether Ethiopia is really known for being a peaceful country. Ibsa asserted that while there are no difficult issues with the country's people, its political entrepreneurs are provoking discontent. He added that there has never been ethnic animosity, but attempts have been made to give an ethnic colour to small-scale conflicts in the country.

Questions relating to the incorporation and mainstreaming of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms were also forwarded. In particular, it was asked whether there are similarities between the different mechanisms. Ibsa replied that there are remarkable similarities between them. The democratic nature of the Gadaa system was also interrogated by participants. Likewise, he was asked whether the Gadaa system is hereditary, Ibsa explained this was not the case. He also pointed out that the social function of the Gadaa system is multifaceted and that, overall, it is fully democratic. He also emphasized that the system takes account of the role and dignity

of women, which is hard to find in other cultures of the country.

In addition, the role of customary conflict resolution mechanisms compared to formal means of dispensing justice was discussed. On this issue, Ibsa asserted that customary methods are effective compared to formal structures, because the formal ways of justice are punctuated by corruption and other shortfalls. The question of how the Gadaa might help the Oromo people amid the current political turmoil was also posed. Here, Ibsa stressed the role of political elites in disturbances.

It was also asked whether customary institutions truly address women-related issues, to which the Ateetee was offered as a good example of a traditional institution meant to solve women-related issues.

PRESENTATION 5: EXAMINING THE CHOICE OF LAND CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISMS: THE CASE BETWEEN HARSHIN AND YOCAALE WOREDA OF THE SOMALI REGION, ETHIOPIA

Presenter: Muna Ahmed Hassen

Muna explained about *xeer*, the traditional conflict resolution mechanism used in Somali culture. The major finding of the study was that there is a preference for and greater trust in customary conflict resolution mechanisms among communities in the research site. This is not universally the case, however, and there are instances where the intervention of a formal procedure is required. Preferences between customary and informal mechanisms are governed by a variety of determinants, including age, education, household occupation, private land size, livestock herd size, family size, income and gender. In addition, it is argued by the presenter that formal mechanisms pose a threat to identity.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Muna was asked one question. This was referred to the author, who Muna was presenting on behalf of. which she was unable to respond to as she had presented the paper on behalf of someone who was absent from the session.

WRAP-UP AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

The wrapping up was conducted by Fowsia Abdulkadir, with the followings key takeaways offered:

- There is a need for dialogue and debate regarding resource management in the periphery. Here, political economic analysis is a good framework for studying the (mis)management of resources in the periphery.
- The presentations point to the series of problems in resource governance and associated political issues.
- The (mis)management of resources has the potential to trigger various forms of conflict.
- Federalism is a reality that cannot be changed. As such, commentary, debates and dialogue on issues of federalism are important to achieve common consensus.
- Ethnic injustices suffered by communities in the periphery should not be overlooked. Instead, they need to be addressed and brought to the attention of researchers and the public.
- Being mindful of local people when extracting resources from the areas they reside in is important given that they may be subject to severe economic, social and health consequences.
- In attempting to correct historical injustices, we should not rely solely on office holders.
- Relying on officials who are supposed to represent the people is not ideal, as sometimes the level of representation can be questioned. The involvement of regional officials in federal institutions doesn't mean people's quest for inclusion is addressed.

PLENARY SESSION 2: RELIGIOUS POLARIZATION IN ETHIOPIA

The session was opened with a recap and keynote speech by Hallelujah Lulie.

In his remarks, Hallelujah focused on religion's role as a driver of political interests in Ethiopia, and how issues of secularism have so far been overlooked. Given the delicacy surrounding issues of religion in Ethiopia, he underlined the problematic ways in which media is being used for coverage of events. Likewise, the non-secular elements of the state are also reflected, as in the case of Ethio telecom mass texting on different holidays with different content. The telecoms provider, as argued by Hallelujah, sends mass message for Christian holidays. It doesn't do the same on Muslim holidays, or if it does so with different intentions. Such activity relies on an 'us and them' dichotomy. In this light, Hallelujah indicated how the pursuit of visibility in public infrastructures has been growing among different faiths in Ethiopia. The contestation to demonstrate on Meskel Square is a good example of this. Hallelujah emphasized those historical injustices in Ethiopia need to be researched and better understood. With this in mind, he explained how past Ethiopian governments have attempted to manage the country's religious plurality. The Haile Selassie government had an open agenda in belittling Islam, while at the same time designating the Orthodox Church as Ethiopia's state religion. The Derg's attempt at achieving a social secularism ultimately failed, as the state under the regime's governance was not secular.

PRESENTATION 1: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PASTORAL LAND GOVERNANCE AND PEACEBUILDING: THE CASE OF SOMALI REGION, ETHIOPIA

Presenter: Biniyam Bogale

Biniyam's paper looked at the role played by women in pastoral communities, and how this has transformed over time following changes in livelihoods and lifestyles in Somali Regional State. Biniyam also argued that, even if women are considered by members of the society and researchers to be wise and knowledgeable, they are nevertheless subject to traditional patriarchal norms. The paper's findings revealed the impacts wrought by shifts in land tenure, including the privatization of communal land; empowerment of women following the deterioration of pastoral livelihoods; interference of formal legal systems; and urbanization.

POLICY RELEVANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper suggested there should be legislative measures for customary, Shari'a and

other mechanisms to operate in parallel and become integrated.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Biniyam was asked about the role of women in ethnic and land conflict. The point was also made that the formal proclamation and traditional provisions are incompatible, and in light of this he was asked how they might be negotiated. One participant questioned Biniyam regarding his experience of Somali culture and the study of it. There was also a question on where the incompatibility lies between legislation and culture. Biniyam explained that inter-ethnic conflicts resulting from land claims are usually resolved with the help and intervention of women. He also argued that there are possibilities for using the formal proclamation and traditional rules and regulations in parallel. He said that he had 15 years' experience of researching Somali culture and sociology.

PRESENTATION 2: THE EFFECT OF GROWING INTER-ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS RIVALRY ON ASYMMETRIC PATTERNS OF ATTACHMENT IN ETHIOPIA

Presenter: Yechale Degu

Yechale explained the century-long disagreement over whether to focus on ethnic identity or 'wider Ethiopian identity.' Ethno-nationalism and ethio-nationalism are presented as a complete antithesis to each other. He went on to classify, the ethnic groups that would like to identify themselves by ethnicity and, on the other, those that don't like to reveal their ethnic identity. He explained that the Oromo, Amhara, Tigray and Somali emphasize their ethnic identity while overlooking their Ethiopian identity.

POLICY RELEVANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Yechale indicated that Ethiopia must change the way its politics are understood. Several languages should be added to the official languages used by federal institutions. Inter-culturalism should be adopted instead of multiculturalism. Finally, he said that the conflict between the two approaches must be addressed by arriving at a middle ground.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Questions included whether Yechale could comment on the Christian element of

the Ethiopian constitution, and whether Ethiopia is a nation-state or nation-less state. The historical influence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the country's governance was also mentioned. In addition, Yechale was asked to elaborate regarding inter-culturalism and multi-culturalism, and whether Ethiopia is a nation or nation of nations. The issue of flags and symbols was also brought up. Yechale responded by saying that the various cultures should interact and intermix rather than pretending to be self-contained. His understanding that the Ethiopian ethnic groups have their preference for symbols and flags that are not based on the country's national symbol has generated refutations from the discussants. Discussants said that there is no unifying symbol that can represent various ethnic groups. According to discussants, rulers of the country used to impose the symbol and flag that represent the ethnic groups, mainly the Ahmara and Tigray ethnic groups. Discussants also disagreed with Yechale's argument regarding Ethiopia's ethnic groups having a preference for flags and symbols, indicating instead that successive Ethiopian regimes have attempted to impose their symbol and flag preferences on other ethnic groups living in the country.

PRESENTATION 3: THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN INTER-COMMUNAL CONFLICT AND PEACE-BUILDING IN DIRE DAWA

Presenter: Kedir Jamal

Kedir's paper highlighted that there have been waves of religious and ethnic conflict in Dire Dawa. Moreover, the paper's findings indicated that the conflict in Dire Dawa is dynamic in nature as most of the religious conflicts have some elements of ethnic conflicts as the religious conflicts in this city are the expression of ethnic conflicts and vice versa.

POLICY RELEVANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Kedir observed that there is need to make the community in Dire Dawa resilient to conflict shock by strengthening social capital; the international community is doing well in contributing to peacebuilding processes but there is need for working towards sustainable peace and peace in Dire Dawa is dependent on national cohesion and peace.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Audience members forwarded issues such as the reliability of the demographic data presented. Kedir was also asked to expand on the root causes of the Oromo-Somali

conflict. In addition, questions related to compensation for Somali people by the Oromo, and the nature of the conflicts between them, were raised. Finally, it was asked if the increase in religious conflict has been due to policy or structural change. Kedir explained that the demographic data presented had been obtained from the government's statistical office and that it is valid and authorised data which can be used. He also expressed his opinion that the Oromo–Somali conflict in Dire Dawa has been caused by political entrepreneurs, with its root causes including common interests, ownership of the city, boundary issues and politics.

PRESENTATION 4: DYNAMICS ON THE CONTENTS OF IN-GROUP PERCEPTION AND CHALLENGES TO NATION-BUILDING

Presenter: Ahmed Mohammed

Ahmed's paper began with a survey of the nation-building projects of successive Ethiopian regimes, and the models of unification they have employed in their efforts to build a nation state. The model of analysis used in this research was based on psychosocial perspectives of nation-building strategies.

POLICY RELEVANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In attempting to learn from past mistakes, the paper recommended no blame should be attached to ethnic groups. In addition, Ahmed recommended that low-status culture, cultures that don't have the chance to be mainstream or are repressed by the dominant cultural groups, should not be relegated, moreover, attempts should not be made to assimilate other identities. Finally, there must be constant dialogue between various groups that have different understanding of their pasts.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Ahmed was asked to explain how Ethiopia's nation-building project might be improved, and to elaborate on the available mechanisms for bringing together the previously disadvantaged and privileged groups. Ahmed responded that improving the state-building process requires genuine dialogue, and it is through this that the privileged and disadvantaged can come together. Moreover, the objective of nation-building is to achieve a common national identity, as noted by Ahmed.

PRESENTATION 5: THE ROLES OF RELIGION IN INTER-COMMUNAL CONFLICT AND PEACE-BUILDING IN HIGHLY DIVERSIFIED SOCIETY: INSIGHTS FROM JIMMA TOWN, OROMIA REGION, ETHIOPIA

Presenter: Girma Defere

Inter-religious conflicts that have occurred in Jimma town and surrounding areas might be labelled as religious conflict, but they are politically orchestrated. Recently in Jimma, the instrumentalisation of religion for political gains have affected inter-religious coexistence. Ultra-ethno- religious identities have become sources of fear and intimidation for the cultural minority groups in the town during religious tension. Religion by itself cannot be a source of conflict but it can be instrumentalized to drive conflict. However, religion can also be used as a tool for national integration and peace building initiatives among the diversified communities of Ethiopian people at large, and Jimma town in particular.

POLICY RELEVANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper recommended that the local government should strictly observe secularism and freedom of religion as enshrined in the federal and regional constitutions; offer reserve seats for cultural minority groups in the local council and beyond; inter-faith council should be strengthened and institutionalized; and there should be synergy between the religious councils and local government bodies to harness them to contribute for national integration, peace and development.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Questions were asked about religious dominance over the media; the possibility of religious institutions and government working together; and generalizations made about religious identity in Jimma town. In response, Girma said that he would have to investigate which religions are growing and increasing their dominance over the media. He also asserted that religious institutions could work with local government in building peace, and local leaders can remain secular after such cooperation. Lastly, he explained that his conclusions were drawn from key informant interviews, and that there had been no hasty generalizations regarding the prevalence of religious identity over ethnic identity in Jimma town.

PRESENTATION 6: INTER-RELIGIOUS COMPETITION, INTRA-RELIGION DIVISIONS AND POLITICS AS SOURCES OF CONFLICT IN GONDAR TOWN, ETHIOPIA

Presenters: Yihenew Alemu and Fasika Gedif

Yihenew and Fasika's paper explained that ethnic and religious conflicts have been common in Ethiopia after the current government assumed power in 2018. Ethnographic in its design, the paper's findings revealed that ethnicity, religion and politics all play a role in the development of conflicts in Gondar. Moreover, there is inter-religious competition among the Muslim and the Orthodox Tewahido religion followers.

POLICY RELEVANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper asserted that Gondar's existing tradition of peaceful coexistence needs to be cultivated as an important peace-building resource; utilize indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms especially during post conflict mediations; genuine commitment of national and local political leaders, and less political interventions in religious institutions, inter-religious councils and inter-religious dialogues; operationalization of locally organized inter-religious dialogues run by religious leaders and elders who have high acceptance; and utilize religious forums for moral instructions via daily/weekly preaching in churches and mosques.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Yihenew and Fasika were asked if there really is intra-religious competition, and if the Qimant have their own religion. Some participants also queried whether there is any Muslim extremism in Ethiopia. Yihenew and Fasika answered that there is a blurred line as to whether or not the Qimant have their own religion, but they do have their own traditional practices.

WRAP-UP AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

The wrapping up for the second session was conducted by Hallelujah Lulie, who offered a number of key points and lessons drawn from the sessions. Referring to Ethiopia's history of religious confrontation, he detailed how religious conflicts have evolved, how the battle of Shimbrakure in 1929 and the defeat of Libnedingi had long-lasting effects on how Muslims have been understood in the country. This historical incident led to Muslims being seen as the antithesis of civilization and Ethiopian development. The continued legacy of this misunderstanding has seen Muslims as detractors of the state. This legacy of misrepresentation and marginalization was intensified under different regimes.

Parallel to this, there has been a tendency to portray Ethiopia as 'a Christian Island', which acts as a mechanism to segregate others from the political and social landscape. More generally, the state's approach reflects a broad fear of Islam. In order to address these issues:

- Muslims should not be considered non-native to Ethiopia, as this may cause believers to be alienated from their country.
- The media in Ethiopia should be objective in its coverage. Currently, there is often unbalanced media reporting on matters concerning religion, with little or no coverage given to issues related to Islam. Therefore, supposed misdeeds committed by Muslims are magnified, with equivalent behaviour committed by Christians not reported at all, it was suggested.
- There should be a clear definition of Ethiopia as a territorial entity. This is because in many ways Ethiopia and being an Ethiopian are inter linked.
- Historical injustices and existing inequalities should be discussed, and where necessary justice applied.
- Radicalism should not be ascribed to any one religion.
- The failures and achievements of federalism should be properly approached and discussed.

This led to the end of the sessions, with closing remarks by RVI Executive Director Mark Bradbury and Elyas Abdullahi from JJU.

PRESENTERS' BIOGRAPHIES

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RESOURCES IN ETHIOPIA'S PERIPHERIES

Damena Abebe is a lecturer at Wollega University, and he is currently pursuing his PhD in business administration in a joint program run by Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, and Jönköping University, Sweden. Damena's dissertation focuses on stakeholder response to corporate social responsibility based on empirical evidence from extractive industries, with special emphasis on local community mobilization in response to a mining company's practices in Ethiopia. His research interests include local community-company relations, social identity and collective decisions, strategy-as-practice, and emotion and sense-making in crowd movements.

Elyas Abdulahi has worked as a senior lecturer and assistant professor in resource and environmental economics at Jigjiga University for the last 16 years. He has a Ph.D. in economics and is greatly interested in the areas of natural resources, energy, environment, development, policy, and institutional economics. He is an active researcher and has published in a number of reputable journals in the last few years. He is currently JJU's vice president for research and community services.

Ibsa Aliyi is a PhD candidate in Haramaya University. He is also a researcher and lecturer at Haramaya's School of Rural Development and Agricultural Innovation. Ibsa is a graduate of MSc and a BSc in rural development and agricultural extension from Haramaya University. He has experience in rural development policies and strategies, rural institutions and development innovations, conducting research, and publishing results.

Juweria Ali is a researcher and practitioner who recently obtained her doctorate in politics and international relations, her research interest areas are in energy and geopolitics, armed conflict, and nationalism and resistance studies. She serves as a research associate on London School of Economics (LSE) 'Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform' (PeaceREP). Juweria is also a consultant researcher on the Peace Research Facility (PRF) project titled 'Political Economy of Resources in Ethiopia's Peripheries' (PEREP).

Muna Ahmed Hassan is a lecturer at Jigjiga University in the department of rural development and agricultural extension. She has an MSc in rural development, her research was in land use conflict and its customary resolution mechanisms. She worked as a child protection officer at Save the Children International.

RELIGIOUS POLARIZATION IN ETHIOPIA

Ahmed Mohammed is an assistant professor at Jigjiga University's department of psychology. His research interest focuses on the social psychological issues contributing to intergroup conflicts and mechanisms to ensure peace and stability. He is a leading expert in curriculum development for the department of psychology of peace and conflict studies at Jigjiga University.

Biniyam Bogale (PhD) is a senior assistant professor at Jigjiga University at the school of post-graduate studies. He is a sociologist with expertise and experience in migration, conflict, land, gender, pastoralism, health and society. He is also a consultant and is involved in undertaking research in the pastoral areas of Ethiopia on the themes mentioned above. He has taken the lead in establishing the Institute of Migration Studies and postgraduate programme in disaster risk management and sustainable development in Jigjiga University. Currently, he is serving as the research and community service, monitoring, and evaluation officer at Jigjiga University.

Fasika Gedif is a lecturer at Bahir Dar University in the department of social anthropology. He holds his BA degree in anthropology and MA degree in sociology from the University of Gondar. He has been serving as the chair of the department for two years. He has participated in research projects for the European Institute of Peace (EIP). In addition to his engagement in teaching at BDU, he has been engaged in community services and capacity-building training for different government officers and local association leaders.

Kedir Jemal (PhD) is an assistant professor in agro-economics currently working at Haramaya University. He has more than 14 years of experience in academia and research in Ethiopia and Somaliland. He has managed and participated in several projects, among them being, 'The direct values of pastoralism in Somali Regional State' funded by USAID. He has also worked on a project entitled 'Inter-communal tensions, violence and conflicts in the time of a pandemic in Ethiopia' funded by the European Institute of Peace (EIP). He also served in different administrative positions.

Girma Defere received his BA degree in political science and international relations, MA in rural development, and MSC in public management. Currently, he is affiliated with the department of governance and development studies at Jimma University, Ethiopia. Some of his publications include democratic developmental state, pastoral mobility, ombudsman institution, federalism, democratic developmentalism and citizenship education, and globalization.

Yechale Degu has a BA in political science and international relationships and accounting and finance, received Masters in regional and local development studies and accounting and finance from Addis Ababa University. He has defended his PHD dissertation to receive PhD in political science and international relations at Addis Ababa University, a PhD candidate of urban governance and development at AAU. He has lectured at different public universities including JJU, coordinated different projects on issues of human rights, democracy and peacebuilding and worked as a consultant for some CSOs.

Yihenew Alemu holds a PhD in applied anthropology, emphasis in bio-cultural medical anthropology, from Oregon State University, USA. Currently, Yihenew works as an assistant professor of anthropology (in the U.S. Ambassador's Distinguished Scholars Program) at Bahir Dar University and a visiting assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Gondar, Ethiopia. Yihenew has been engaged in several multidisciplinary research projects and has co-authored well over twenty-five journal articles and a few book chapters. Yihenew has several research interests including anthropology, food and water insecurity, political economy, inter-ethnic and religious conflicts and inter-communal conflicts.

FEEDBACK FROM FORUM PARTICIPANTS

What was your experience of the forum?

I found the forum interesting in bringing different views on political economy and religious polarization issue. My experience is this forum is there are different views which demand alternative ways of handling coexistence.

How did the forum compare to other forums or workshops?

It was really special in terms of moderating, panel discussions and time keeping. I highly appreciated how the presentation was precise to the point and created ample time for audience discussions and raising questions. This forum mentioned very sensitive issue that need urgent interventions to reduce conflict communities.

What are your own key takeaways or action points from the forum?

My takeaways are religious polarisation in Ethiopia needs attention, there is a development gap between the dominant regions and regions in the borderlands and there are good experiences that could be borderland regions and the use of indigenous knowledge.

As a youth activist who already is involved with peace building, I would like to implement the knowledge into action.



Group photo taken at the end of the forum