



ETHIOPIA SOUTH OMO ZONE CONFLICT ASSESSMENT FINAL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This assessment explores conflict dynamics in the South Omo Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region (SNNPR) of Ethiopia, with a specific focus on Nyangatom and Dassanech *Woredas*. It builds upon an extensive review of existing research (see South Omo Conflict Assessment Desk Review, June 2021), fieldwork conducted in July 2021, and follows the methodology developed in the United States Agency for International Development’s Conflict Assessment Framework 2.0.

Historically, South Omo Zone was characterized as underdeveloped, inaccessible, and marginal. In recent decades, however, the availability of natural resources and promising investment opportunities increased the economic attractiveness of the area and consequently increased competition for power and control. This changed context both exacerbated existing conflicts while creating new sources of contention. Investments by the federal government created new roads, bridges, dams, airports, and a university and connected what was once a remote region to the national communications network. These development initiatives and investments transformed South Omo, in particular by ending the seasonal flooding of the Omo River in 2015. At the same time, however, little attention was paid to bottom-up development of local communities such as the Dassanech and Nyangatom who largely remained marginalized. Some in the Dassanech and Nyangatom communities viewed the federal government’s efforts to “modernize” their way of life with suspicion and hostility, as has been seen in the resistance to efforts to promote gender equality, girl’s education, and to end harmful traditional practices.

The overarching sources of grievances in South Omo Zone derive from the unprecedented demand for increasingly more scarce resources by multiple actors. The Dassanech and Nyangatom perceive the federal government in Addis Ababa as favoring commercial development rather than local priorities and the zonal and woreda officials have lacked the ability to influence these plans, at least until recently. Along with long-time agro-pastoralists groups such as the Dassanech and Nyangatom, there are new actors such as state agencies responsible for dams, irrigation, and sugar development, private investors, a growing (but still very small) number of local educated youths, and commercial raiders operating across borders in Kenya. These competitions often take the form of ethnic conflict, with groups mobilized around narratives of territorial attachment, historical enmities, and patterns of violence. Cultural factors such as bride-wealth payments, harmful traditional practices, and values relating to

masculinity and heroism link violence to sources of identity and status. While inter-ethnic raids are important the organization of these agro-pastoral communities, these raids generally resulted in limited casualties. Data collected for this assessment found that 5 Dassanech and 11 Nyangatom were killed in raids in 2020/21.

The agro-pastoral communities of South Omo demonstrate considerable resilience in dampening grievances to prevent conflict escalation and to avoid confrontation with the federal and local government. Elders often counsel restraint and urge youth to avoid conflict against better armed rivals or the government. Ties of marriage and inter-community trade relations also dampen violence and provide opportunities for women peacemakers. In recent years, a set of local conflict management institutions have worked with local government agencies to raise awareness around peaceful co-existence and to support local solutions to local conflicts.

These patterns of resilience at the community level, however, reinforce and sustain sources of grievance at a higher, structural level. The Dassanech and Nyangatom have well-developed intra-group patterns of resilience that may at the same time make inter-group or larger level political action more difficult. In other words, the very strength of micro-resilience makes it difficult to reform larger structures in ways that promote inclusion and sustainable development. Therefore, despite high levels of grievance, the potential for large-scale violence in South Omo is unlikely but the chances of continued marginalization remain high.

One set of possible trends suggests that South Omo Zone may face further marginalization in the coming years. The initial hopes for massive sugar development have stalled and become the source of frustrations rather than hopes. The loss of access to land and water following development projects and private investments along the Omo River may continue to drive impoverishment and reliance upon food assistance. On the other hand, the current government has approved a Pastoral Development Policy and Strategy that aims to support a pastoral community that is resilient and where peaceful and inclusive development is realized. The potential for new production through small-scale irrigation and promotion of markets for livestock that are now feasible given better infrastructure indicate some ways that livelihoods may be reformed in ways that can benefit local communities. These factors may contribute to a trend where South Omo Zone's importance increases and its historical marginalization lessens. Triggers, or moments that might indicate which of these trends may be more likely, include the extent to which the Dassanech and Nyangatom are able to benefit from irrigation and access to land and thereby transition from the flood retreat agriculture of the past to more viable livelihoods in the context of dams, major investments in irrigated production, and new private investors. If, however, private investors are prioritized over local agro-pastoralist communities, marginalization will increase.

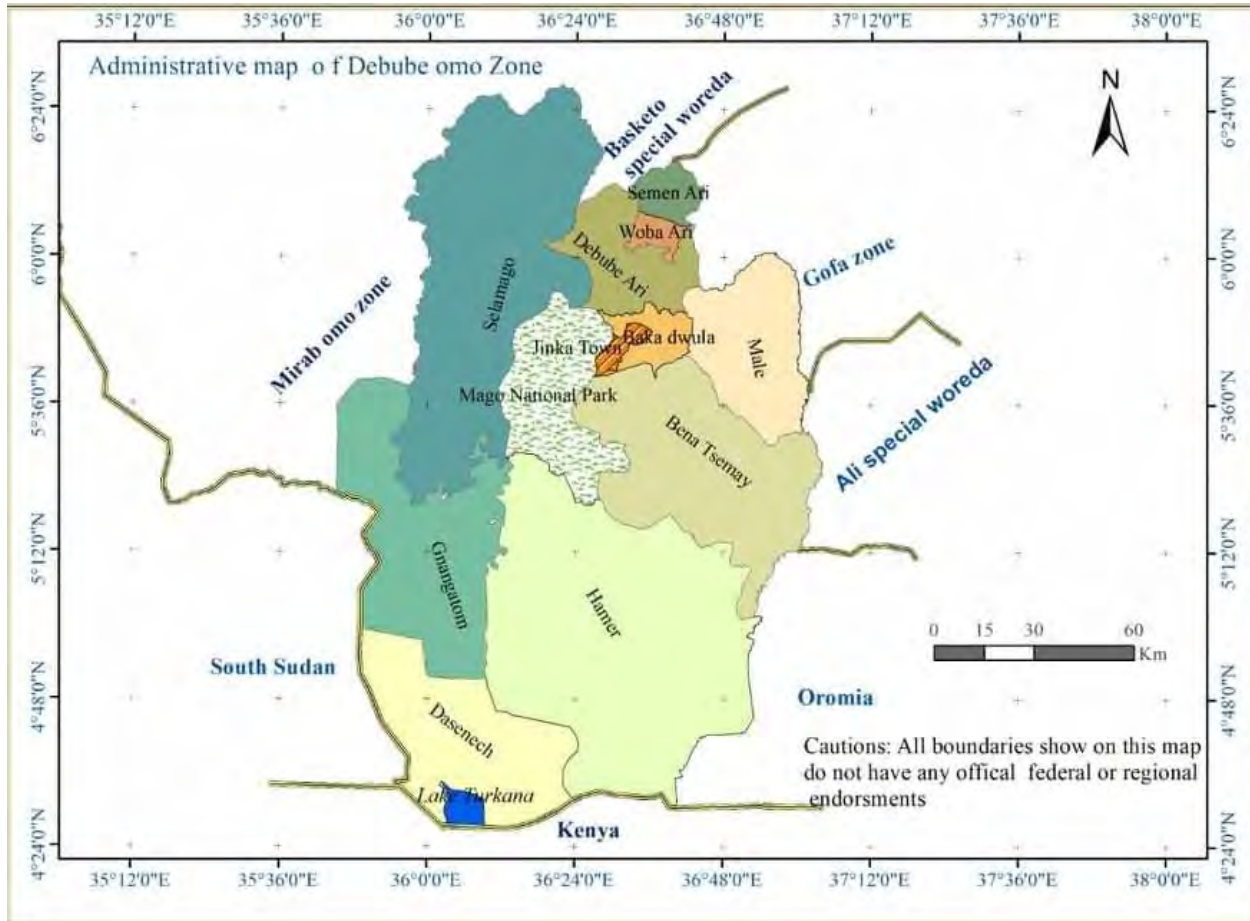
This report concludes with a set of recommendations that we believe are within USAID's actionable interests and that are directly linked to the grievances that drive conflict in the South Omo Zone (see Table 4 for a summary). The demand for scarce resources by multiple actors may be ameliorated by efforts to revive agriculture to replace flood retreat cultivation and by improving rangeland management. Projects to turn contested lands into joint development areas and initiatives to improve local community access to urban land will contribute to managing grievances over contested land claims, a perennial source of conflict in South Omo Zone. Investing in infrastructure for peace and programs to revive social capital can play important roles in expanding local capacities to manage conflict. This last

recommendation in particular has the potential to serve as a mechanism to promote inclusion of women in positions of authority.

Beyond these specific recommendations, we hope that this assessment and its findings will be useful to USAID promote a more conflict sensitive approach to overall programing and intervention in Dassanech and Nyangatom weredas. Conflict dynamics should be incorporated into the design and implementation of all activities in South Omo Zone.

INTRODUCTION

Figure 1. Map of South Omo Zone



Source: Prosperity Party, South Omo Zone

The purpose of this conflict assessment is to understand specific conflict dynamics in the South Omo Zone (SOZ) of Ethiopia and use that information to inform the design and implementation of United States Agency for International Development (USAID) activities in selected woredas. This is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis for all of Ethiopia, but a more contextualized, specific, and actionable examination of South Omo with a specific focus on Nyangatom and Dassanech woredas using the Conflict Assessment Framework 2.0 to support resilience activities. Given the complex links among regions, the assessment also paid attention to how conflicts in these woredas are linked to conflicts in Hamer and other communities in South Omo Zone, neighboring areas of Ethiopia, as well as Kenya and South Sudan.

METHODOLOGY

The assessment methodology of this report adheres to USAID's revised Conflict Assessment Framework (CAF 2.0) and CAF 2.0 Application Guide. Insecurity in Ethiopia in the lead up to elections (eventually held on June 21, 2021) and the COVID-19 pandemic required a creative "hybrid" approach to data collection, as detailed below. The team did not begin its research until it received a letter of support from the Ministry of Peace, which was received on July 5, 2021.

Democracy International (DI) contracted with a team of international and local experts to conduct the assessment. Professor Terrence Lyons has over 30 years of experience in Ethiopia and has conducted democracy and conflict assessments for USAID in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, and Jordan. Professor Gebre Yntiso Deko has a doctoral degree in anthropology, has decades of experience conducting research in South Omo, and recently served as the president of Jinka University. Ms. Lealem Mersha, has engaged in consultancies and research on a wide range of politics and development topics in Ethiopia. In addition, the team included Esayas Gizalew, a data collector to assist in South Omo, a logistician, translators, and drivers. This group was joined virtually at various times by Julia Drude and Zach Wehrli from USAID's Center for Conflict and Violence Prevention (CVP), Carrie Gruenloh from USAID's Africa Bureau, and a number of members of the USAID mission in Addis Ababa, notably Dubale Admasu, Benyam Akalu Getaneh, Temesgen Berisso, and Dr. Zemen Haddis.

The team produced a *South Omo Conflict Assessment: Desk Review* that was submitted to USAID's CVP in June 2021. The Desk Review emphasized how the historically marginalized zone, long dependent on agro-pastoral livelihoods, has in recent years been the site of major investments in dams, irrigation, plantation agriculture, and factories to refine agricultural products. In addition, recent changes in the nature of the SNNPR as new regional states are established have generated considerable uncertainty regarding how the South Omo Zone will be governed. These changes in the political and economic context, and the related transformation of identities and social relationships, will undoubtedly transform old conflicts, create new ones, and generate opportunities to empower existing conflict resolution mechanisms as well as to construct new institutions. These themes shaped the lines of inquiry and questions asked during fieldwork by the assessment team.

To prepare the team for fieldwork, DI organized a CAF 2.0 training on July 12, 2021. With the assistance of Julia Drude (CVP) and Carrie Gruenloh (Africa Bureau), the training included all DI team members as well as a number of USAID personnel based in Addis Ababa. After introductions the group discussed the rationale behind doing a South Omo conflict assessment and how this assessment would inform USAID's ongoing and anticipated work in the region, an overview of CAF 2.0 led by Drude and Gruenloh, a discussion of the hybrid data collection fieldwork plan and process of synthesis, and a presentation on preliminary themes that drew upon the *Desk Review*.

Given the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic and concerns regarding insecurity in Ethiopia, DI designed a hybrid data collection methodology that entailed one team doing interviews and focus group discussions in Jinka, Dassanech, and Nyagatom, a second team conducting a series of virtual roundtables with officials and key informants in Addis Ababa, and a regular set of synthesis meetings to compare findings and identify areas where further research was needed and to engage with team members from USAID.

Prof. Gebre travelled to Jinka on July 8 to begin fieldwork and proceeded to Omorate, Dassanech, on July 18 and where he met up with Esayas Gizalew, the data collector, and their translators. In Dassanech Prof. Gebre interviewed woreda officials, elders, women and youth, private investors, representatives of NGOs, and a wide-range of individuals with diverse perspectives on conflict in the woreda. Documents from a range of officials were collected. On July 25, Prof. Gebre and Esayas travelled to Nyangatom for another full week of interviews, focus group meetings, and document collection, again with a diverse set of officials, members of local communities, and a wide-range of individuals knowledgeable about conflict in Nyangatom. In both woredas, the research team stopped in small towns and villages to interview and engage in focus group meetings with agro-pastoralists, and business people to understand their perspectives on conflict issues and dynamics (see list of interview participants in Appendix).

Lealem and Lyons organized and participated in Roundtables with members of the USAID RiPA team, South Omo based non-governmental organizations, implementing partners, academics, and donors (see list of virtual roundtable participants in Appendix). Beyond these roundtables, Lyons and Lealem participated in other virtual and face-to-face interviews with Ethiopian officials, civil society leaders, and academics. These discussions updated, complemented, and expanded the data gathered by reviewing publications for the desk study. Furthermore, they provided data to inform recommendations and elicited views that were consistent with the field data.

The COVID pandemic prevented the kind of fieldwork that generally supports a conflict assessment. Within these constraints, however, the South Omo Zone research team found ways to collect significant data from a broad range of sources. We are confident that we had sufficient and reliable information to reach findings and to draw conclusions relevant for USAID as it engages in and plans future programming in South Omo.

CONTEXT

DEMOGRAPHY AND RESOURCES

South Omo Zone is characterized by a high degree of cultural and linguistic diversity. Compared to most other zones in Ethiopia, it has a large land area and sparsely distributed agro-pastoral communities in the lowlands (while the highland areas are densely populated). The zone's population was projected to be 1,131,654 and is overwhelmingly rural. The zone has eleven woredas: Selamago, Dubub (South) Ari, Semen (North) Ari, Woba Ari, Baka Dawla Ari, Hamar, Banna Tsemay, Dassanech, Male, and Nyangatom. This assessment focused on the Dassanech and Nyangatom woredas in the far southwest of the zone.

Table 1. The population South Omo Zone by Woreda and by ethnicity

Woreda/Town	Population Size	Capital	Major Ethnic Groups
Selamago	53,889	Hana	Bodi, Dime, Mursi and Bacha
Debub Ari	238,991	Gazer	Ari
Woba Ari,	61,058	Boyka	Ari
Bako Dawla Ari	55,211	Kaysa	Ari
Semen Ari	129,740	Gelila	Ari
Hamar	115,812	Dimeka	Hamar, Erbore, and Kara
Benna Tsemay	102,234	Keyafer	Benna, Tsemay and Brayle
Dassanech	101,961	Omorate	Dassanech
Maale	160,803	Lemo Gento	Maale
Nyangatom	33,292	Kangaten	Nyangatom, Koegu and Murle
Jinka	78,663	Jinka	Ari and migrants
Total	1,131,654		

Source: Prosperity Party, South Omo Zone, SNNPR, 2021

The increase in human population and livestock size has contributed to environmental scarcity and caused competition over dwindling resources. According to the 2007 census, the total population of South Omo Zone was 573,435 while the Central Statistics Agency's 2019 projection puts the total at 755,767. There exists evidence that human and livestock populations in South Omo Zone have experienced significant increase as well. For example, according to the national census reports of Ethiopia, the population of the Dassanech increased from 32,629 in 1984 (CSA 1984:44) to 48,067 in 2007 (CSA 2007:84) to 69,831 in 2020/21. Given the overall patterns of population growth in the zone, it can be suggested that the area witnessed an unprecedented rise in human and livestock population (Gebre 2016a). The 2014/15 CSA agricultural sample survey, for example, estimates the number of cattle was 1,673,434 while the 2020/21 survey puts the number at 2,733,147.

Physical factors such as climate change and bush encroachment contributed to the scarcity of vital resources in the pastoral areas. Global climate change is associated with frequent droughts and erratic rainfall that led to water and pasture scarcity (Asmelash et. al, 2015; Asnake and Fana 2012; Gebre 2016a). The Nyangatom experienced severe drought in 2000, 2003, 2005, and 2008 (Gebre 2011). While groups such as the Dassanech and Nyangatom have long-established coping mechanisms to variable rainfall, such as migration, herd diversification, herd splitting, income diversification,

restocking, and local alliances, these responses struggle to meet the scale and severity of the challenges in recent times (Kefale and Gebresenbet 2012).

Competition over resources – particularly land and water – has been one of the defining characteristics of SOZ. Agro-pastoralism has been the dominant mode of production for generations and historically there have been few alternative livelihoods in the region. As detailed later in this report, while new development initiatives and investments have transformed the region and introduced new actors and opportunities, competition over land and water remain at the core of contentious competition and violence in South Omo.

SOUTH OMO ZONE AND THE CENTER

Much of the area currently called South Omo Zone was incorporated into the Ethiopian empire through military conquest in 1894. The zone, however, remained on the far periphery of the state. As Markakis remarked: “Until the second half of the twentieth century, high- and lowlands coexisted autonomously with tenuous contact and did not impinge on each other, save superficially” (Markakis 2021: 124). The South Omo area lacked government attention during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie or by the military administration known as the Derg that ousted Haile Selassie in 1974. In 1991, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) won a prolonged armed struggle and replaced the Derg. The liberation war, however, was fought in the north and South Omo remained outside of the principal war zones.¹

Until recently, South Omo Zone had been one of areas in Ethiopia with limited business activities, development initiatives, infrastructure, and social services. Historically, the Lower Omo valley area was viewed by central authorities as remote, inhospitable, inaccessible, and marginal. Successive Ethiopian governments failed to articulate pastoralist issues in national strategy. In fact, central authorities generally saw pastoralists as “backward” and as contributing little to national development. In recent decades, however, availability of natural resources (vast arable land, irrigation potential, hydropower, potential oil, etc.) and promising investment opportunities increased the economic attractiveness of the area, raised the competition for power and control, increased the number of stakeholders, and both exacerbated existing tensions while creating new sources of conflict.

As indicated by the current government’s adaptation of its 2020 Pastoral Development Policy and Strategy, past federal government patterns toward pastoralist communities may be changing. It is important to highlight that the current government, with the help of development partners, has developed a comprehensive policy and strategy that recognizes the pastoral way of life, the potential to build resilient livelihoods in the lowlands, and that recognizes the importance of ecological and governance systems appropriate for the pastoral areas. Efforts are underway to support the implementation of this policy.

In 2021, the South Omo Zone, like other parts of Ethiopia, is undergoing a significant and interlinked process of political and economic transitions. Politically, the Southern Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement (SEPDM), a wing of the ruling EPRDF, dominated politics in SNNPR and South Omo Zone

¹ This was true throughout SNNPR, with the exception of the Sidama zone where the Sidama Liberation Front was active. For conditions in southern Ethiopia at the time of the EPRDF victory, see Dessalegn 1994.

from 1992 until it was replaced by the Prosperity Party (PP) in 2019. In the June 2021 elections, the PP won all seats in South Omo Zone. Institutionally, the future of the SNNPR is in transition, as the Sidama Zone held a referendum to form its own regional state in 2019, South West Regional State will hold its referendum on September 30, 2021, and other zones are making claims for their own referendums to become regional states. Economically, the PP's new national policies of Homegrown Economic Reform with its increased emphasis on private investment has replaced the EPRDF's "Developmental State" policies but the implications of these changes for South Omo's economic transition remain unclear. Finally, the transition from EPRDF to PP remains in its early stages and at the time this assessment took place in summer 2021, violent crises in Tigray, western Oromia, Metekel Zone, and elsewhere have placed enormous strains on the central government and the national economy (Lyons 2021). South Omo Zone has not been at the center of these crises but, at the same time, is part of a state that is facing its most significant challenges in generations.

THE IMPACT OF RECENT DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES AND NEW SOCIAL PATTERNS

The EPRDF's Developmental State policies, as outlined in the Growth and Transformation Plans of the 2010s, emphasized massive government investments in infrastructure and top-down "high modernism" in the form of dams, transportation infrastructure, irrigated plantations, new universities, and industrial development. These policies had a major impact on South Omo Zone. New bridges across the Omo River, airports, paved roads that dramatically reduced transportation times and opened new markets, the extension of the national telecommunications network, and the building of a new federal university in Jinka changed daily life in the SOZ. However, state interventions in the zone rarely focused on poverty reduction or the bottom-up development of local communities. As detailed below, a historical change to the fundamental hydrological cycle that was the core of the Lower Omo Valley's system of livelihoods took place in 2015 when Gibe III hydroelectric dam transformed the flood plains ecology and the flood recession cultivation that was a key part of mixed agro-pastoral sustainability (Avery 2013; Gabbert et al. 2021).

These development initiatives added new actors and new pressures on limited resources in SOZ. The plans for massive Omo-Kuraz Sugar Development Project sugar development have not produced the forecast results and, as a consequence, have generated considerable resentment. The huge debts accumulated by the Ethiopian Sugar Corporation and the project's insufficient production fail to justify the massive investment in factories that suffered enormous cost overruns (Kamski 2016; Stevenson and Kamski 2021). In addition, Ethiopia's over-all struggle to attract foreign investment may make additional investments in sugar production less likely. One academic expert suggested that Kuraz was a "white elephant" and that the level of sugarcane production is far below levels that would attract international investors. As Yonas wrote in *The Reporter*, Kuraz and the other mega sugar projects "are clear examples of failure and monuments marking a disappointing result in state-led sugar industrialization" (Yonas 2021).

Furthermore, the new job opportunities generated by the irrigation schemes, factories, and plantation agriculture generally have been filled by people who originate from outside the region. Levels of illiteracy among pastoral communities in South Omo Zone are extremely high and there is little experience in wage labor or in the kinds of skills required for employment on the plantations and factories. Questions of which communities are local, which are migrants, and how power and resources should be distributed among them are contentious and sometimes escalate into violent conflict. Many Dassanech

and Nyangatom interviewed for this research express a sense that, as a consequence of these development projects, they are losing control of their land and resources to groups who they identify as migrants who originate outside of the zone.

In other parts of the South Omo Zone, investments by the Ethiopian Sugar Corporation and private investors have displaced many communities who have responded with violence. In Selamago woreda, where most Bodi and Mursi ethnic groups live, the sugar projects have already transformed local livelihoods, while in Dassanech and Nyangatom the impact has been largely a result of the dam ending the seasonal flooding cycle, although a fourth factory is under construction in Nyangatom. In Selamago, land alienation and unmet promises relating to employment in the new development projects has resulted in high levels of grievance, community leaders mobilized portions of the population, and triggers such as hit-and-run accidents along the road often escalated. Violence involving the Bodi and Mursi has often targeted new settlers such as the Konso, sugar project workers, and people travelling on the Hana-Jinka road. Local authorities forcefully disarmed the Bodi and to an extent the Mursi. Fieldwork conducted for this assessment did not uncover evidence of similar patterns of violence between the Dassanech and Nyangatom and police or other security forces.

Sugar development remains aspirational in Dassanech and Nyangatom weredas, although conflicts between private investors using the Omo river for irrigated production and local communities are growing. Some few members of South Omo's pastoral communities have been able to take advantage of new opportunities and shift from agro-pastoralism to more market-oriented production. The use of water pumps and generators have opened up opportunities for small-scale agricultural production and improved pastures. New roads, marketing facilities, and other infrastructure have made raising livestock for markets outside of SOZ increasingly feasible. For the small but steadily increasing cohort of educated members of South Omo's communities, the expansion of zonal and woreda administrations and new private business investments have provided new employment opportunities. While these nascent opportunities are encouraging, to date they have not altered the fundamental marginal status of the population of South Omo.

GRIEVANCES

The overarching source of grievances in South Omo Zone derive from the unprecedented demand for increasingly more scarce resources by an increasingly large and diverse set of actors. Along with long-time agro-pastoralists groups such as the Dassanech and Nyangatom, there are new actors such as state agencies responsible for dams, irrigation, and sugar development, private investors, and commercial raiders operating across borders. These competitions often take the form of ethnic clashes, with groups mobilized around narratives of territorial attachment, historical enmities, and cultural patterns of violence. Cultural factors such as bride-wealth payments, harmful traditional practices, and values relating to masculinity and heroism link violence to sources of identity and status. Girls and women are often marginalized.

There are significant specific grievances around inadequate compensation for loss of land and access to water, and a general sense that promises made by the federal government and private investors have not been met. In Ethiopia, all land belongs to the federal government and Addis Ababa, at least until recently, has emphasized investing in large state enterprises such as the Ethiopia Sugar Corporation or private investors with plans to develop export-oriented commercial farms. The priority given to production for

markets and private investment often resulted in the federal government paying insufficient attention to local interests.

New technologies such as automatic weapons, mobile phones, and motor bikes have changed the nature of raiding. While Dassanech and Nyangatom woredas remain overwhelmingly rural, there are new social patterns and cleavages between urban residents, who often move to the region to pursue job opportunities, and local people who struggle to get access to urban housing. Politics in Hawassa, the SNNPR capital, add another level of uncertainty in South Omo Zone. Local officials and community leaders in SOZ are maneuvering for position in anticipation of an upcoming political re-organization of the SNNPR and this contributes to growing rivalries among different aspirants to hold referendums to become new regional states. Residents in SOZ overwhelmingly want to transform their zone into a new South Omo Regional State but other actors from outside of the zone have competing visions.

Below are our findings with regard to specific grievances found during fieldwork in South Omo Zone.

UNPRECEDENTTED DEMANDS FOR SCARCE RESOURCES BY MULTIPLE ACTORS

As noted above, the present-day South Omo Zone, especially the Lower Omo Valley, used to be considered as a remote, inhospitable, and resource-poor area. However, recent developments such as large-scale agricultural investment and the growing demand for livestock increased the economic attractiveness of South Omo Zone, raised the stakes for power and control, increased the number of stakeholders, and poised to create new sources of conflict.

Traditionally, the Lower Omo Valley was inhabited and utilized by the local agro-pastoral groups residing on the Ethiopian and Kenyan sides of the border. The arrival of multiple non-pastoral actors and stakeholders significantly disturbed the livelihoods of the local agro-pastoral communities such as the Dassanech and the Nyangatom, who have grievances that could lead to localized violence.

The Ethiopian state, which launched mega development projects such as the Gibe III Hydroelectric Dam and the Omo-Kuraz Sugar Project, is one of the key new actors in the area. The filling of the dam interrupted the flood retreat cultivation practices, thereby leading to failing livelihoods. Almost all local agro-pastoralist informants in Dassanech and Nyangatom woredas expressed anger and frustration because the dam led to food insecurity and forced many people to become recipient of insufficient food aid.

For example, an informant (government official) in Dassanech characterized the Gibe III dam as a double-edged sword. The absence of seasonal flooding during the filling period interrupted agricultural production, while the recent release of excess water from the dam submerged villages, grazing areas, and agricultural fields. According to the informant, the arable land of Dassanech shrunk from 15,000 hectares in pre-dam period to 1,490 hectares today. Statistical data exist that corroborate the local people's complaint (both in the Dassanech and the Nyangatom) that they become more food insecure and greater recipients of food aid. In Dassanech, the number of aid recipients increased in 2020 and 2021 due to the rise of Lake Turkana and its expansion northwards deep into the Dassanech villages (such as Toltale, Lubemuket, Siremeret, and Rukruk) and the flooding of grazing as well as agricultural lands along the river further north. Woreda and zonal informants characterized the impact of the dam on the livelihoods of the people in the Lower Omo Valley as a serious problem beyond their jurisdiction to address.

The Ethiopian Sugar Corporation has built four sugar factories in South Omo Zone and the 4th factory, which is located in the Nyangatom Woreda, is under construction. In the Nyangatom community, the yet-to-be-completed sugar project is portrayed positively as a major federal government investment project designed to create job opportunities for local people, develop irrigation schemes to replace the flood retreat cultivation, and make pasture and water available for humans and animals, not to mention the construction of infrastructural facilities and provision of social services. Hence, the local people expressed consent to the use of their land for the sugar project. At the moment, both the factory construction and the preparation of canals and other structures for the sugarcane plantation stopped apparently due to budget constraints. The informants viewed the delay in the implementation of the sugar project as the failure of the federal government to deliver on its promises.

In Bodi and Mursi territories, where the sugar project has been implemented in part (with factory # 2 operational and factory # 1 under construction), the federal government promises to the local people were not met, and the consequent grievances led to frustration and violent conflicts.² Hence, it is rather unrealistic to anticipate that the government will keep its promises in Nyangatom. There is an emerging report that the sugar projects in the country will be sold to the private sector under the Prosperity Party's new policies around privatization and foreign direct investment. The implications of such transfers for the local people and the risks of violent conflict are not clear. The Dassanech informants expressed their disappointment over the decision of the federal government to cancel the original plan to have a sugar project on their territory, which was seen as a denied opportunity. It is likely that private investors will not be sufficiently sensitive to the interests of the local communities unless strong institutions are put in place.

CONFLICTS OVER PRIVATE COMMERCIAL INVESTMENTS

The owners of large-scale agricultural investments represent another category of new stakeholders in the Lower Omo Valley. The establishment private farms (16 in Dassanech and 10 in Nyangatom) contributed to resource scarcity for the local people. In other words, both in the Dassanech and the Nyangatom, local communities lost access to their traditional grazing areas and common agricultural plots due to the private investment projects without adequate compensation. Of the total 54,896 ha investment land in South Omo Zone, 32,685 ha (59.54%) is found in Dassanech and Nyangatom (see table 2 below).

² The Bodi and Mursi ethnic groups perpetrated frequent attacks on the Konso settlers, the sugar project workers, the residents of Hana town inhabited by migrants, and people travelling from Jinka to the Salamago or from Salamago to Jinka. Before the Bodi and partially the Mursi were forcefully disarmed, the Jinka-Hana road was unsafe. The two groups have grievances related to land alienation and unmet government promises in the context of the sugar project. The Bodi land was taken away to resettle the Konso people and to launch the sugar project. The alleged key mobilizers were enlightened locals and community leaders, and the most common triggers included accidents involving vehicles, where drivers accidentally or intentionally hit humans and/or animals and ran. The local people would take immediate revenge against any driver and passengers coming from any direction.

Table 2. Private investments in South OMO Zone, July 2021

Woreda/Town	Number of Private Farms				Land in Hectare
	Agriculture	Industry	Service	Total	
Dassanech	16	0	1	17	24,521
Nyangatom	10	0	0	10	8,164
South Ari	6	10	0	16	2,884
Bena Tsemay	5	1	0	6	6,992
Maale	4	0	0	4	300
Baka Dawla Ari	4	2	1	7	466
Hamar	3	0	9	12	11,046
Salamago	2	1	0	3	448
North Ari	1	2	0	3	52
Jinka Town	1	1	23	25	20
Woba Ari	0	1	0	1	1
Total	52	18	34	104	54,896

Source: Department of Investment, South Omo Zone

According to informants in both woredas, the private farms were established without proper consultation with and compensation for the local people. During a focus group discussion with the Rate and Borkonech villagers in Dassanech, the participants recounted how the woreda officials and the investors came to their villages to inform them that the government authorities at the federal and regional levels allotted their lands to the investors.³ The guests came with goats as gifts and the elders were asked to bless the investors after slaughtering the goats. During a focus group discussion in the

³ An official at South Omo Zone Tourism Department stated that his office was established only recently and that woredas structures still do not have investment offices. In the past, therefore, investment decisions were made at federal and regional levels without the consent of zones, woredas, and communities required to give their land.

Aypa village in Nyangatom, members of the Murle community, the original occupants of the current commercial farms in the woreda, reported that they have been neither consulted nor compensated.

As a standard formality, private investors reportedly signed agreements and entered numerous promises to help local communities. These included provision of water for humans and animals, preparation of access roads, preparation of agricultural fields for the communities, reforestation, and provision of social services such as schools and clinics. Almost all investors failed to deliver on their agreements and promises and this angered the local people.

One government official (informant in Nyangatom) stated that most investors were more interested in securing land title and site map so that they can qualify for bank loans. This view is widely shared by authorities in Dassanech Woreda and South Omo Zone. In recent years, however, most investors started to develop parts of their lands because the government threatened to expropriate uncultivated lands. The loss of huge tracts of land and the failure of the investors to meet their promises agitated some herders to release their animals to graze on certain commercial farms. This caused tension and low-level clashes between communities and the private farms. Two managers of commercial farms, who participated in the study as informants, stated that herders with animals sometimes encroached on their property and destroyed crops, often at night. There are reports where guards and workers of the private farms were killed (in Nyangatom) and beaten up (in Dassanech).

It is feared that widespread if not large-scale violent conflict is likely to happen if the concerns of the agro-pastoral communities (land for cultivation and pasture and water for their animals) are not addressed. Representatives of the investors, who participated in the study, expressed their commitment to support the local communities in terms of facilitating access to resources (water and pasture) and provision of social services. However, many informants (community members and government officials alike) characterized the investors' words as lip service and doubted that commitments would be honored in the future.

PATTERNS OF RAIDING

Among East African pastoral communities, livestock raiding has been a common traditional practice. In the context of traditional raiding, the actors are members of pastoral communities and raided animals were sometimes returned to the rightful owners through negotiations, reconciliations, or as a result of pressure from government authorities. In the last two decades, however, according to informants in Dassanech and Nyangatom, highly organized non-pastoral actors from the Kenyan side of the border began to engage in livestock raiding. The alleged involvement of non-pastoral actors (elements of the Kenyan security forces expecting share from raided animals, business people engaged in livestock trade and meat selling, and students who need money for tuition fees) marked a new trend – the commercialization of raiding – which increased the frequency and severity of cross-border violent conflicts.

Violent clashes between ethnic groups residing along the Ethiopia-Kenya border peaked between 2008 and 2010. Between January 2008 and December 2010, perpetrators from the Turkana side entered the Nyangatom territory 45 times, killed 35 people, injured 20 more, and raided thousands of livestock (Gebre 2011:16). Similarly, perpetrators who crossed the border from the Turkana territory attacked the Dassanech 24 times, killed 19 people, injured 9 residents, and raided thousands of goats (Gebre 2011:48).

Ten years later, cross-border violent conflict continued unabated, and recent attackers from the Turkana side repeatedly used motorbikes, mobile telephones, and high efficiency machine guns during surveillance and organized raids. Between September 2018 and June 2021, according to the Security and Administration Office of Nyangatom Woreda, perpetrators from the Turkana side attacked the Nyangatom 53 times, killed 28 people, injured 39 others, and raided over 795 different animals. Likewise, during the same period, perpetrators from the Turkana side entered Dassanech 34 times, killed 27 people, injured 17 others, and raided 5,726 different animals.

Table 3. Conflict between Turkana and Dassanech/Nyangatom by year and effects

Description of Effects	Woreda	2018/9	2019/20	2020/1	Total	
Number of Clashes	Dassanech	13	8	13	34	87
	Nyangatom	17	11	25	53	
Deaths	Dassanech	12	10	5	27	55
	Nyangatom	10	7	11	28	
Injuries	Dassanech	2	4	11	17	56
	Nyangatom	6	3	30	39	
Animals raided	Dassanech	2,764	0	2,962	5,726	6,521
	Nyangatom	400	208	187	795	

Source: Peace and Security Offices of Dassanech and Nyangatom Woredas

The Dassanech and Nyangatom informants explained the increase in the frequency of cross-border attacks in terms of the commercialization of raiding that attracted the non-pastoral actors, the use of motorbikes and mobiles that gave the Turkana attackers a competitive edge, and the ability of the Turkana herders to acquire weapons.⁴ During a focus group discussion in Kajamakin, Nyangatom, a young man (herder) stated,

In November 2020, the Turkana raided 350 cattle and 40 donkeys, killed 5 people, and took 5 guns.... Normally, we would have pursued them the same day or would have taken revenge within a short period of time. We decided not to launch a quick attack in Turkana because they are better organized, better armed, and they use motorbikes and mobiles.... Our elders also advised us to be patient and wait for the right moment. But they came again and again to attack our people and raid our animals.... In May 2021, there was a peace negotiation between the Turkana and the Nyangatom in the border area, and the Turkana killed one of our negotiators to disrupt the peace process.

⁴ The Kenyan government reportedly trained and armed local militia.

The elderly and women are also frustrated by the actions of the Turkana attackers in recent years. An elderly man in Kajamakin village recalled the last seven incidents, the name of the location clashes occurred, and the number of Nyangatom people killed as follows: “In the last one year, they came here and killed 4 people in Kangerinqo, 2 in Loturtur, 5 in Siyakutuk, 6 in Kalata, 4 in Lachepot, 6 in Namiresiyay, and 3 in Kajamakin.” One of the participants of the women’s focus group discussion in Kajamakin said, “The Turkana brought the war to our village.... As women, we are suffering too much.... It is unsafe to fetch water, to collect firewood or to visit your relatives.” The women seemed relieved by the recent peace initiatives even if both men and women do not trust that the Turkana are serious about lasting peace.

The risks of violent conflicts in the border area are likely to continue or even increase because, according to one zonal official interviewed, the Kenyan authorities are reluctant or unable to stop the attackers, apprehend criminals, and force perpetrators to return raided animals. It is equally important to recognize the positive developments, such as the growing improvement in surveillance and early warning mechanisms that helped thwart planned attacks and the agreements reached between some communities to share resources.⁵

LAND CLAIMS IN CONTESTED AREAS

In South Omo Zone, numerous unresolved historical claims over land continue to fuel violent conflicts between various ethnic groups. Some of the major historical and current territorial claims that are likely to fuel conflict in the Lower Omo Valley are discussed below. Most of these conflicts over contested land are framed as conflicting historical claims. To date neither local nor federal authorities have managed these conflicts.

Dassanech vs Turkana: The Dassanech share borders with the Turkana in Kenya. Focus group discussion participants in Koro villages indicated that they lost their land to the Turkana during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974).⁶ Four of the elderly participants in their 80s and 90s reported to have witnessed, as young herdsman, the erection of the border markers in the middle of their territory annexing such areas as Todonyang, Lokitang, and Lebur. One of the participants recounted,

⁵ The relationship between the Nyangatom and the Turkana began to improve in June and July 2021 based on local initiatives implemented without the involvement of government officials and non-state actors. The recent positive developments include: visitation of families and friends, sharing pasture and water in Kibish area, improved trade relations, meetings between district level officials, and a football match between the Turkana and the Nyangatom players which took place in Kangaten on 25 July 2021. The Turkana reportedly took the initiative to make peace with the Nyangatom, who received the offer with suspicion. According to the Dassanech informants, the Turkana pastoralists expressed reluctance to make peace with the Dassanech.

⁶ “The land boundary between Ethiopia and Kenya was initially defined in 1907 by the United Kingdom and the Empire of Ethiopia. It was redefined in 1947, demarcated in the 1950s, and finally approved in 1970 by now-independent Kenya and Ethiopia.” (Source: <https://sovereignlimits.com/boundaries/ethiopia-kenya-land>)

We observed three white men and some black laborers mixing materials and erecting the white markers. We were laughing at them because we thought they were playing some kind of game with special mud.... Then, we observed three helicopters flying over the marked areas. It took us many years to learn that they were demarcating the borderline between Ethiopia and Kenya. The three white men were called Rusha, Merro, and Whitos and they were stationed at Lokitang.... Whitos was the leader. We heard that he died after handing the new border over to Jomo Kenyatta.

Uri Almagor (1979, 1986) documented these claims and how the British colonial government in Kenya established police stations along the new border to limit the movement the Dassanech to their traditional grazing lands. The British colonial policy in Kenya in the 20th Century, including the border demarcation, apparently contributed to the intensification of hostility between the Dassanech and the Turkana to date (Mburu 2003; Sagawa 2010).

Nyangatom vs Turkana: The Nyangatom, who also share a border with the Turkana, claim that their traditional home and pastureland on the western side of the Kibish river is now occupied by the Turkana (Gebre 2016b). During a focus group discussion at Kajamakin, informants reiterated their longstanding claim they have lost their territory from the Kibish River to the east to the Mount Tepes to the west to the Turkana due to arbitrary colonial demarcation of the border and the continued northward expansion of the Turkana. The local narrative about the northward expansion of the Turkana is consistent with the reports of de Waal (1991) and Mburu (2003) that the boundary of Turkana grazing and the limits of Kenyan administration moved north over the years.

The Nyangatom people seem to have lost land to the Turkana twice: during the colonial period and in the 1980s. Historically, the British colonial enclosure of the so-called Ilemi Triangle (also called Ilemi Appendix) in the 1920s and 1930s and the establishment of the police posts along the Ethiopian border to curtail their movement of the Nyangatom to their traditional pasture marked the first land alienation. In 1988, the Kenyan government attacked the Nyangatom with helicopter gunships and paramilitary forces, killing hundreds of people and destroying at least five villages (de Waal 1991:345-6).

Soon after this incident, the Kenyan government strengthened its presence by increasing the police force, establishing a military camp, and reinforcing the district office. The Ethiopian government failed to come to the support of its citizens. Nor did it question Kenya's aggressive moves in militarizing the border area and, according to informants, in emboldening the Turkana, to perpetrate more attacks on the Nyangatom that caused further displacement to the east and to the north. An informant, who felt abandoned by a father (metaphor for the government) both in the past and today, had the following to say:

“The Turkana have a father who fights for his children even when they are ill-behaved. The Nyangatom father never cares about his well-behaved children in despair.... The Turkana father is always present in case the children need his help. The Nyangatom father does not know even where his children are.... The Turkana father trained his children as militias and gave them guns to defend themselves against enemies. The Nyangatom father trained his children as militias but gave them only uniforms to wear. How can one protect an enemy with uniforms?”

Nyangatom vs Kara: Historically, the Nyangatom and the Kara lived together peacefully in the Lokulan and Kandaqochin areas, on the western bank of the Omo River (Gebre 2016b). The Kara, who live

largely on eastern side, reportedly helped the Nyangatom when they were expelled from the Kibish area by the Turkana. When a large number of Nyangatom migrants began to penetrate deep into territories traditionally cultivated by the Kara, the latter began to bar the Nyangatom from using their lands, and this marked the transition from solidarity to hostility (Girke, 2008). A large-scale conflict between the two groups occurred in 2006. The 2006 official administrative restructuring in the area demarcated the contested arable land on the western bank of the Omo River under Nyangatom Woreda to the disappointment of the Kara, who never gave up their historical and traditional rights to the land.

Nyangatom vs Surma: Until the second half of the 20th Century, the Nyangatom had friendly relationships with their Surma (also Suri) neighbors (Gebre 2016b). They used to live together around Mount Naita, the traditional homeland and ritual site of the Surma (Abbink, 2009). In 1986-87, a combination of factors led to devastating conflicts between the two groups in which the Surma suffered heavy losses (Abbink, 1993). Besides, the Surma were forced to evacuate from the Mount Naita area losing access to pastureland, water points, and ritual sites. More Nyangatom people, who were forced to leave the Kibish due to conflict with the Turkana, migrated to the Mount Naita area, while the Surma lost the strength to reclaim their land. Consequently, both groups maintained hostile relationships ever since.

Nyangatom vs Hamar. The historical relationship between the Hamar and the Nyangatom is characterized by less cooperation and more conflict. The main causes of conflict between the two groups relate to livestock raiding/theft and claim over a territory that belonged to the Murle people, who have been assimilated by the Nyangatom.⁷ According to the Murle informants at Aypa village, their traditional homeland was the territory between the Omo River to west and the Keske River to the East. Over long period of time the Murle moved westwards and settled at the following locations: Gamballa, Mukunya, Murkepel, Kiso, and Kuma (close to the Omo River). Due to a mysterious disease called *Lojo* that killed people as they slept, the Murle left Kuma, crossed the Omo River, and started to live with the Nyangatom at Aypa. The Nyangatom and the Murle, as an affiliated entity, challenge the Hamar ethnic group's alleged recent claim over the former Murle territory, especially the fertile Kiso and Kuma areas, which became attractive to investors.

Dassanech vs Nyangatom. The Dassanech-Nyangatom conflicts may be explained in terms of territorial claims, competition over scarce resources (land for cultivation/pasture and water points), and the strong culture of retaliation (revenge killings and raids). There are two resource-rich places (Kare and Kuraz mountain) along the border of the two groups. The Dassanech informants reported that they were the original occupants of the Kare area, which is now controlled by the Nyangatom.

GRIEVANCES OVER URBAN LAND

Historically, the Ethiopian urban areas evolved from garrison towns, residences of Christian feudal elites, and/or Muslim trading centers. In Southern Ethiopia, especially in South Omo Zone, migrants from Amhara, Gurage, Wolayta, and other places inhabit most towns. The local people, the original occupants, live as minorities in their own cities and towns in that they have limited access to urban land, business opportunities, employment opportunities, education, health, and other public services. In neighboring areas such as Oromia and other parts of SNNPR, the exclusion of local people from urban

⁷ The ethnic identity of the Murle, who lost their language in favor of the Nyangatom language, was recognized only in the last two decades.

institutions and opportunities generated grievances and violence. During the recent conflicts in Shashemene, Ziway, Dilla, Tepi, and other towns, local youth targeted migrants and their property for attack.

The urban resident in Omorate, the capital of Dassanech, are non-Dassanech migrants from Amhara, Wolayta, Konso, and other ethnic groups. Other rural villages such as Bubu'a, Ocholoch, Kapsia, are showing signs of becoming small towns. The migrants (fishermen and service providers) from other parts of Ethiopia are not only settling in large numbers but also buying land from the Dassanech for very cheap prices speculating that the resale value will increase as these towns develop. The residents in Kangaten, the capital of Nyangatom, are predominantly migrants from Amhara, Wolayta, Gamo, Konso, and others.

Informants (educated locals) in Dassanech and Nyangatom woredas complained about two types of urban problems. First, urban land is accessible only to the rich and merchants because of the lease system. Let alone the ordinary pastoralists, the ethnic-Dassanech and ethnic-Nyangatom government officials and civil servants cannot afford to purchase urban land. They are frustrated to be minorities in what they regard as their own towns when migrants with money from distant locations easily access land, business opportunities, and other advantages. Second, the migrants living in the urban areas reportedly brought to the local people alcoholism, prostitution, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, and so forth. Local people often visit the towns are said to become victims of alcoholism (which is illegal in Dassanech and Nyangatom woredas) and sexually transmitted diseases.

FISHING RIGHTS AND CLASHES IN LAKE TURKANA DELTA – DASSANECH-TURKANA CONFLICT OVER ACCESS TO FISHERIES.

The fish concentration is high in the northern tip of Lake Turkana (the place where the Omo River enters) in 2021 because the water is fresh due to heavy rainfall and the release of water from the Gibe III dam. The concentration of the fish attracted Kenyan fisherman using advanced and fast motorboats equipped with heavy machine guns. The Ethiopian fishermen use light motorboats and wooden canoes that are equipped with light weapons. Therefore, there is an imbalance between fishermen of the two countries. The fishermen clash in an attempt to control the fishing ground and because of fishing-net thefts. At the moment, there is relative peace and the fishermen are beginning to cooperate in part because fish are abundant. However, if the current power imbalance in the use of Lake Turkana continues, recent signs of cooperation are likely to give way to conflict.

The Dassanech also seem to be facing competition for fisheries in Lake Turkana with Ethiopian migrants flocking to the area in large numbers. While some have official business licenses to engage in fishing, others represent ordinary migrants looking for opportunities to make a living. In the past, the Dassanech communities who relied on herding and cultivation rarely gave prime importance to fishing. Hence, there was no competition or conflict over fishing within Ethiopia. However, the loss of income from herding and crop production coupled with the availability of fish in the newly submerged areas and improvements in the marketability of fish made fishing an attractive business. According to informants, the engagement of migrants in fishing is now resented by the Dassanech youth who claim rights to the territory and resources.

CULTURAL FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CONFLICT

Certain cultural practices such as bride-wealth requirement, rites of passage, and the culture of reprisal have contributed to the escalation of conflicts. Raiding is a common feature of life among these agro-pastoral communities but is generally limited. In order to get married, young men are expected to provide livestock as bride-wealth. The bride-price requirements force young men from poor households to raid or steal animals from neighboring groups traditionally considered as enemies. According to Admasu (2014), the bride wealth demands in Nyangatom and the Turkana culture put pressure on the youth to engage in raiding.

Age-mates willing to be initiated into a new age-set have to demonstrate their readiness by participating in militant activities. In other words, killing of members of other ethnic groups allow the killer to perform rituals for rites of passage. Earlier studies have indicated that among the Dassanech, killers perform scarification and earn greater reputation, receive killer names, and improve their social status (Houtteman 2010). Since livestock and guns are highly valued assets among pastoral communities, they are acquired through personal efforts (hard work), inheritance, and gifts from friends and relatives or through acts of violence against members of other ethnic groups.

Women and girls who have lost family members or property are reported to agitate or encourage men to demonstrate their masculinity and bravery, and praise them through songs and gift-giving when the men return home victorious. Referring to such practices among the Dassanech, Yvan Houtteman (2010:140) wrote, “The girls of the village, especially those who triggered the anger of the killer and made his heart tremble before he went off to raid offer him pieces of their necklaces.” Depending on the context, women and girls play double roles: agitate men to take action against enemies and discourage men from taking such actions. During the period of fieldwork, informants noted that women in both the Dassanech and Nyangatom communities called for reconciliation with the Turkana, arguing that peace and cooperation were needed.

Local authorities in Dassanech and Nyangatom indicated that efforts are being made to identify and eradicate harmful traditional practices (HTP) through awareness raising and enforcement of the law. The historic marginalization of women and girls, however, makes these changes difficult. Some of the cultural factors that contribute to conflict have been listed as HTP and are targeted by the federal government for eradication. On the other hand, government officials also reported that adherence to certain traditions that are officially considered as HTP, such as female genital cutting, abduction, early marriage, and not sending girls to school, created tension between authorities and local people.

POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY OVER POST-SNNPR INSTITUTIONS

The Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region (SNNPR) was formed in 1992 from a merger of South Omo with five other regions. Subsequently, most zones of the SNNPR including South Omo have raised the question of statehood formation and demanded autonomy. In Dassanech and Nyangatom woredas, the quest for regional autonomy is widely known and strongly supported. During interviews and focus group discussions, the participants listed multiple reasons that justify their demand. These include the long distance to Hawassa (the capital of SNNPR), the marginalization of remote locations, lack of attention to the concerns/questions of the agro-pastoralists, inequitable distribution of resources and political power, and the absence of commonality with most other groups in the SNNPR. If South Omo becomes a region, some woredas or group of woredas will be elevated to zones and groups of kebeles will form new woredas.

One of the focus group discussion participants in Hadho, Dassanech, stated that the demand for self-rule is not new. He said, “We asked the same question in the past. But the government said that we were few and we lacked educated people to run the region.... But we used to be a region.” The fact that South Omo used to be a region answerable to the federal government was also raised by other informants to underscore that the area received more attention and more resources when it was a region as evidenced by the allocation of more budget, the initiation of development projects, and the expansion of infrastructural facilities and social services.⁸ All informants are of the opinion that there be a South Omo Regional State.

It is notable that informants in the Ministry of Peace suggested three options for the future of South Omo Zone: 1) the option for SOZ to become a regional state (the option favored by informants among the Dassanech and Nyangatom); 2) SOZ to become a regional state including a few special woredas such as Basketo, Uba Debretehay, and Ale Woreda, which was raised in a public meeting in Jinka; 3) an option to create a new regional state that includes SOZ along with Kaffa and Dawaro. The third option was mentioned as necessary to create a region that is economically viable. However, this option has little support within SOZ. Regardless of the specific options under consideration in various locations, it will be key for the communities in South Omo to have ownership of their future regional state and perceive whatever new arrangement is developed as consistent with their aspirations.

RESILIENCE

Social patterns at the community level that may be quite resilient may also reinforce and sustain sources of grievance at higher, more structural levels. Within pastoral communities in South Omo there are well-developed intra-group patterns of resilience that may make inter-group or larger level political action more difficult. In other words, the very strength of micro-resilience makes it difficult to reform larger structures in ways that promote inclusion and sustainable development.

As stated in the grievance section above, people in the study areas have numerous complaints, individuals and groups trying to mobilize to engage in conflict exist, and there were moments and events that had the potential to trigger violent conflicts. The elders' advice to stay patient, bear hardships, and overcome the temptation to respond to provocations made people resilient and to seek conflict avoidance. In Dassanech, for example, the impact of the dam on agriculture caused grievances and there exist different categories of people (the elderly, women, the youth), who accused the federal government of retaining the water. The recent release of too much water from the dam that submerged some villages and inundated the cultivation and grazing areas of most other villages could have triggered violent reaction. However, the elders reportedly calmed people down and advised them to handle these disasters in collaboration rather than in confrontation with the federal government. An elderly man in Koro village said,

We know that the government caused the excessive flooding.... Women and the youth are very angry about this problem. Everybody is angry.... We have two strong enemies: the Turkana and the Omo River. Both are killing our people and taking our animals.... We do not need a third

⁸ South Omo had a regional status from its incorporation into the Ethiopian empire in the 1890s to the 1940s, and again, between 1988 to 1992.

enemy. We have to be patient and receive government aid to survive.... We are hoping that the government will fix this problem.

This kind of resilience and social patterns that avoid confrontation with the government may both reduce the potential for violence but, at the same time, make it less likely that the voices of the aggrieved in South Omo Zone will be heard or that meaningful reforms will take place.

In Nyangatom, in the last two years, the Turkana repeatedly attacked villages, killed many people, and raided many animals. The Nyangatom could not take revenge because the Turkana were better organized and better protected. However, because of severe food shortage and water scarcity, the Turkana came to Nyangatom territory seeking help (food for people and water for their animals), while at the same time making themselves vulnerable to vengeance. The Nyangatom elders chose not to take advantage of the Turkana weakness, though the youth would have liked to take revenge. This is particularly because some of the Turkana coming to Nyangatom for help are those related to the Nyangatom through marriage, bond friendship, and trade networks. From this it is apparent that, besides the elders' advice, intermarriage and trade relations contributed to resilience. In those days when the Dassanech produced surplus sorghum, their relationship with the Turkana was much better because of the trade relations. Trade has promoted resilience and dampened potential conflict between the Dassanech and Nyangatom as well. The Dassanech supply female calves for goats and guns from Nyangatom.

In the last couple of decades, actions taken by the government and non-state actors have contributed to conflict management and resilience. The actions were undertaken by both local government officials such as the woreda administration and relevant departments such as Peace and Security and Police, as well as by community leaders, including elders, youth, and women, and civil society organizations such as the Ethiopian Pastoralist Research and Development Association, Peace and Development Center, and VSF Germany. These activities include awareness raising workshops on peaceful coexistence with neighboring ethnic groups, the formation of multiple local peace committees tasked with different responsibilities, the establishment of early warning mechanisms to detect and address grievances, and the improvement of communication and transportation systems. This architecture for peace was created in such a way that localized grievances are handled by people at the local level or reported to the relevant government authorities for immediate actions such as rapid deployment of security forces to stop violence or the presence of relevant officials to support peace negotiations. The challenge remains, however, that the government's record of responding appropriately has been mixed, and local grievances are not always addressed by the government. In many instances, particularly regarding land, the federal government in Addis Ababa is perceived as ignoring local grievances and regional state officials in Hawassa are likewise regarded as uninterested in the problems in South Omo Zone.

New mobile technology and social media played a significant role in alerting security forces to thwart planned attacks. The Head of Dassanech Woreda Police reported to have received numerous mobile calls from the villages in the border area that enabled the police to deploy a rapid force to thwart multiple attempts by the Turkana to attack the Dassanech. Similarly, the administrator of the Nyangatom Woreda stated:

We have developed a WhatsApp platform with the adjacent district officials in Turkana. This is a result of common understanding reached in meetings.... They alert us on WhatsApp about

suspicious activities or planned attacks. We deploy the police to protect our people and their animals.

It is important to underline that the presence of police to provide protection discouraged the need to respond to rival community's actions and provocations. While the police performance has been varied and sometimes created frustration, overall informants spoke favorably regarding the police role in managing local conflict. The practice of contacting the police for help suggests improved relationships between the communities and the government in Nyangatom and Dassanech.

Social and cultural events like sports competition and music/dance festivals were described by informants as important occasions that promote the spirit of cooperation and help rebuild social capital, thereby enhancing resilience. Both the Dassanech and the Nyangatom informants explained how the sense of enmity gave way to the sense of friendship and solidarity when they organized sports competitions.

The lack of motivation in Dassanech and Nyangatom to engage in violent conflict can also be explained in terms many other factors: the Ethiopian government determination to apprehend perpetrators and bring them to justice; the fear that offensive actions might provoke retaliation and further limit their access to resources; the fear that the Turkana actors using motorbikes and mobiles could outdo them; and lack of guns and sufficient bullet supply.

KEY MOBILIZERS

Key mobilizers exist at multiple levels and may tend to promote peace or exacerbate conflict or both, depending on the context. In this section we begin by drawing upon our fieldwork to identify key mobilizers at the local level among the Dassanech and Nyangatom communities. The second part of this section then considers the limits of this kind of mobilization to shape the structures and institutions that most determine political, social, and economic outcomes in South Omo Zone.

Different individuals and group of people act as key mobilizers of conflict or peace depending on the specific conflict dynamics.⁹ In the context of interethnic resource-based conflicts (including livestock raiding), elders, women, age-mates, and members of certain clans are reported to play key roles in instigating conflict or facilitating peace as stated below. Informants in both Dassanech and Nyangatom have explained the process of how and reasons why the different categories of people promote conflict or peace as follows.

The elders' level of involvement in mobilizing conflict ranges from story-telling about their heroic deeds in the past to ritualized blessing of the youth to go on the offensive. The reasons for the elders to encourage conflict range from simple material interest (meat from raided animals) to the highest goal of defending group interest and pride. The elders also play key roles as mobilizers of peace in other circumstances by calming down or discouraging the youth from taking offensive actions, seeking peaceful settlement of problems, engaging in reconciliation processes representing their groups, and conveying the results of peace deals to their groups so that people refrain from any offensive or provocative actions that could derail the peace deal. Although the role of the elders seems to be diminishing through

⁹ Among the Dassanech, conflict mobilization is called *mamale* while peace mobilization is referred to as *mawra*.

time, they cannot be ignored as irrelevant because most people still rely on their views and advice on most societal matters.

Women and girls who lost loved ones or important resources to the enemy are reported to agitate men in the family and neighborhood to engage in retaliation. As stated elsewhere in the report, men who return home victorious after an offensive expedition (after killing and/or raiding an enemy) are greeted with respect, appreciation, blessings, and gifts from girls. At the same time, it is equally important to note the commendable role of women as peace mobilizers. They have a certain influence on men in the family (husbands, brothers, and sons) in calming their anger against enemy action; pointing to the potential risks of revenge on women, children and animals; and encouraging men to resort to peaceful options. In the past, an ethnic group willing to make peace would send an elderly man and a girl to the enemy territory with an ostrich feather and green tree branch as messengers of peace. During peace deals and reconciliation gatherings, it is women who prepare food and drinks to create a nice atmosphere for the participants.

Young men engage in offensive actions to retaliate against earlier enemy attacks; to raid animals for different purposes such as replenishing lost stock (e.g., due to drought, paying bride-wealth, etc.); and to demonstrate bravery and earn recognition. The youth may launch a surprise attack/counterattack with or without the knowledge and permission of the responsible elders. They may also engage in well-prepared and well-organized attacks often with the knowledge and blessing of the elders and involvement of ritual specialists from certain clans, such as those believed to have mystical power on fire and snakes. As peace mobilizers, the youth observe reconciliation processes (often without any voice) largely to witness the peace negotiations and disseminate the results to their respective groups. It is the youth who display maximum restraint to make sure conflict resolution is sustained.

From the Kenyan side, according to informants from both research sites, a number of actors serve as key mobilizers of conflicts and livestock raids. These include the Turkana pastoralist youth, livestock traders, jobless urban youth, elements of the security forces, and even some students. Independent data from Kenya are lacking to corroborate these reports with certainty. However, studies conducted in Kenya pointed to the presence of commercial interests and the involvement of organized non-pastoral actors behind livestock raiding (Hendrickson et al 1998; Lind 2003; Leff 2009; Omolo 2011). This conflict assessment did not include fieldwork in Kenya and drawing conclusions about Turkana attitudes will require further research.

In the realm of tensions associated with private farms, while the youth and the elderly are believed to play key roles in promoting the agenda, a wide range of people such as some government authorities, civil servants, and the ordinary residents are sympathetic to the agro-pastoral communities who lost their land to investors. In general, Nyangatom and Dassanech are more likely to blame the federal government for the transfer of land with inadequate compensation rather than local government officials in Jinka, who are seen as powerless to check Addis Ababa.

These social interactions at the micro level contribute to the pattern of conflict in South Omo Zone and help explain specific instances of violence and raiding. However, these social patterns have rarely been successful in mediating relations with institutions from outside their communities. South Omo Zone has not seen the scale of mobilization present elsewhere in Ethiopia, such as the Qeerroo youth movement in Oromia, the Welkait Amhara Identity Committee, or the Sidama mobilization to demand a referendum. In South Omo, mobilization generally is very localized, has very specific goals, and is

generally not focused on changing formal or informal institutions in ways that can promote peaceful political transformation, more equitable economic opportunities, or more positive forms of social resilience.

Among the constraints on mobilization in South Omo is the plethora of small ethnic identities (16 by official count), while the Oromo, Amhara, and Sidama have considerably larger populations. Multi-ethnic communities are generally harder to mobilize than communities that share a common language, culture, and narratives. South Omo also is one of the regions where access to education is lowest and where social media is less ubiquitous (although growing). The powerful Ethiopian diaspora has very few members with links to the Dassanech and Nyangatom. The key roles played by demonstrations on college and high school campuses in Oromia and the strategic use of diaspora-based social media is less available to potential mobilizers based in South Omo. Finally, the local administration has recruited many of the relatively few educated residents from South Omo, thereby removing key mobilizers that might have served as leaders of movements to articulate local grievances and demand governmental action.

Contemporary challenges facing the Dassanech and Nyangatom may require new forms of mobilization. As noted above, the Ethiopian state was largely absent from South Omo Zone and until the past decade Jinka was relatively isolated from the communities in the far southwestern corner of the zone. More recently, massive federally funded development initiatives to dam the Omo River, promote irrigation and plantation production of cash crops, and the construction of large factories to process sugar have been launched without meaningful consultation with local residents. It is a nearly universal perception among the Nyangatom and Dassanech that they have lost land and access to water without adequate compensation and that the promised benefits of these development initiatives have not been realized. The federal government is recognized as the institution responsible for this injustice. Yet the ability of people in these weredas to press their demands on the federal government seems limited. On questions at the core of their livelihoods, such as decisions of when and how water is released from the Gibe III dam or employment practices in the Kuraz sugar factories, local communities have not found ways to mobilize successfully and through mobilization demand redress of their grievances. While still a small portion of the total population in SOZ, urban dwellers are unlikely to be mobilized by the institutions that build upon social and cultural patterns among pastoralist groups such as the Nyangatom and Dassanech. In fact, new social divisions between urban dwellers and pastoral communities may exacerbate the challenges of mobilization.

Fieldwork uncovered considerable interest in creating a new South Omo Regional State with the expectation that this form of institutional relationship to the center will provide the Dassanech and Nyangatom greater voice in their own development priorities and governance. Academic informants who are specialists in federalism, however, generally do not see marginalized populations gaining greater influence when they create smaller political units. Instead, smaller units tend to be less important to the center and receive fewer resources or political influence. Furthermore, the new unit is often riven by new parochial rivalries as communities previously united in their grievances against a higher unit (such as SNNPR) are now directly competing with each other for decreasing resources.

Initiatives, promoted in part by USAID's Resilience in Pastoral Areas (RiPA) project, to encourage market-based production may succeed in increasing the level of resources coming into the region. Without careful consideration to support and empower civil society organizations such as producer cooperatives or marketing associations, increased production for markets may make wide-scale and

effective mobilization more difficult. Local cooperation around key issues like sharing of irrigated water or collective ownership of water pumps may be places where mobilization and market-based production can develop together.

Therefore, historical patterns of mobilization for raiding may be a form of community resilience that keeps the focus on discrete acts of community violence and self-defense, thereby making it more difficult to contribute to larger systemic change. This may be a kind of resilience that reinforces a status quo that has consequences that increasingly lead to greater poverty.

However, the present situation could change. It is possible that if the dam, sugar project, and private farms continue to generate grievances among the many ethnic groups in South Omo, they may put their differences aside, articulate their common interests, and fight for their rights. The unprecedented violence in the sugar project area and on the road between Jinka and Hana represent a significant challenge. It is possible that these kinds of acts of violence may erupt elsewhere in South Omo Zone if major development actors continue to ignore local communities.

TRAJECTORIES AND TRIGGERS

Despite high levels of poverty and increased competition for scarce resources, the potential for large-scale violence in South Omo is unlikely. Pastoralist communities in South Omo are divided among many, often competing, identities, making sustained, large-scale mobilization difficult. While small-scale violence is pervasive, it is unlikely to transmute into a major threat to the state or to development projects. Dassanech and Nyangatom have demonstrated a continued ability to remain resilient and adjust, even under extreme pressure and perhaps at the expense of needed structural reforms.

While there are many specific trajectories possible in South Omo, it may be useful to present a trend analysis that outlines different possibilities and the kind of data that might indicate that one or the other is becoming more likely.

On the one hand, South Omo Zone may face further marginalization in the coming years. The initial expectations for massive sugar development have stalled, and became the source of frustrations rather than hopes. South Omo for a period of time received attention and resources from the center because it was seen as a place where the Developmental State model could produce hydropower, sugar, and other agricultural products for the growing national market and for export. But those expectations have not been met. Prospects for massive foreign investment to take over the debts of the Ethiopian Sugar Corporation and revive the plans for massive agro-industrial development seem dim. The federal government's efforts to utilize the significant natural resources of South Omo to counter poverty and promote development are significant and have potential to benefit the national interest in the long-term. However, the impact on the communities in South Omo Zone such as Salamago Woreda that are not the subject of this assessment have been largely negative.

On the other hand, the government in Addis Ababa has for the first time in Ethiopia's history approved a Pastoral Development Policy and Strategy (October 2020). This policy aims to support a pastoral community that is resilient and where peaceful and inclusive development is realized. While the current violent contention in Ethiopia is focused on the North, the longer-term economic center of gravity has moved south, where the greatest value is from agricultural production of Oromia and SNNPR and the potential for export in high value crops is highest. It is possible that South Omo will become a

development corridor in Southwest Ethiopia. The state projects, private farms, and tourism have been attracting people and businesses. Towns are expanding in number and size. The proximity to Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda adds to its potential strategic importance. An asphalt road has been built to the Kenyan border and interaction with Kenya is likely to increase as soon as the road on the Kenyan side is complete. The potential for oil development, while unclear, remains important.

The future break-up of the SNNPR may lead to further marginalization as well. Many in South Omo complain that officials in Hawassa pay too little attention to them but it is unclear why Addis Ababa will be more engaged than those in Hawassa in promoting the interests of the communities in a South Omo Regional State. With an extremely limited local tax base, South Omo will rely upon resources from the center for most administrative functions and to continue to support major development investments. Rather than a common agenda shared by the different ethnic groups in South Omo to get a fair share of SNNPR resources, the strategy will shift to engaging with the federal government where prospects for better outcomes are at best unclear.

Furthermore, any resources sent to Jinka will become the object of fierce competition among the different communities, each with its own legitimate set of demands and parochial conflicts. Sidama Regional State has not seen significant increases in resources since shifting its status from a zone within SNNPR to a regional state (although it may be too early to make that assessment). Ethiopian politics at the federal level in recent years is overwhelmingly a competition among the Tigray, Amhara, and the Oromo with most of the other communities (even relatively large ones like the Somali and Sidama) largely on the margins. In the short-run, as the SNNPR is preoccupied with re-organizing itself and setting up new administrative centers and managing new border issues, the region may be of less importance to politics and resource allocations in the center.

On the other hand, with the break-up of SNNPR already underway, South Omo Zone will need to be located in a new regional state. Whether it chooses to join with other zones or become its own regional state is an important decision, and it seems clear that the people of South Omo want to have control of their future. Local informants perceive that becoming a regional state will insure them greater power and resources and a greater voice in new development opportunities. Informants in South Omo made clear that they would reject linking SOZ to other zones, creating a new source of grievance and potential conflict.

This kind of trend analysis suggests a number of key developments and potential triggers that might be watched in order to assess the prospects that the region is heading in a direction likely to promote reforms and a more peaceful and resilient society. These include:

- Decisions regarding privatization of the sugar corporation. If major investors see the sugar project, with its irrigation and factories and other infrastructural investments, as viable, then some of the promise of sugar might return and sustain the potential for greater employment in South Omo Zone. Alternatively, authorities in Addis Ababa might decide to use the land for something other than sugar or abandon the project and return land to its former occupants, although sunk costs make this option unlikely.
- If, perhaps alongside large-scale agricultural development, an increase in access to smaller pumps to allow for small-scale irrigation to replace flood retreat production and supplement livestock, then the prospects for a transition from agro-pastoralism to a livelihood based on diversified economic activities becomes more likely.

- Urbanization and improved infrastructure may provide new markets for South Omo livestock (including cross-border markets) and support more sustainable market-based production. Recent moves into fishing might complement such developments and reinforce regional resilience by diversifying sources of income.
- A clearer understanding of the federal government's commitment to the 2020 pastoral policy would provide an important signal on how the center envisions its future relationships with communities such as the Dassanech and Nyangatom. Some preliminary evidence suggests that the government is committed to consultations with local communities.
- How the process to create new regional states to replace SNNPR takes place, and whether South Omo voices will be able to determine the outcome.

There are a multitude of possible triggers of violent conflict in South Omo Zone. Historically patterns of livestock raiding and theft have sparked violent responses. The new increasingly commercialized cross-border raiding, however, may result in different forms of organized violent reactions. Development in the form of new roads has increased small scale conflicts around people and animals being killed by trucks, and conflict between new investors and local communities over access to water or failure to respect property rights are common. In short, the common triggers that have led to (or are likely to lead to) local violent conflicts in Lower Omo Valley include livestock raids/thefts, killing of people especially herders in the bush or on the road, using contested grazing areas and water points, trespassing, hit-and-run (especially in Salamago Woreda), and betrayals in illegal trade.

Given the limits to mobilization suggested above, however, the likelihood of a trigger to spark wide scale violence is less likely. The 2021 elections took place in South Omo without violence and the costs of violence in Tigray, Amhara, and Oromia regional states is readily apparent. It is possible that the process of constituting new regional states to replace SNNPR might be a trigger for violence, if groups currently mobilized around the formation of a South West Regional State challenge existing borders, for example, or if rivalries between the neighboring Konso and Dirashe zones becomes entangled in efforts by South Omo Zone to become its own regional state. Based on our findings, however, such scenarios seem unlikely.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This assessment has several findings that imply recommendations for development agencies. These findings relate to the imperative to create alternatives to livelihoods that are no longer viable because they relied in part on flood retreat agriculture that is no longer possible since the Gibe III dam ended the annual cycle of drought. Irrigation and improvement of rangelands, opportunities to increase conflict transformation through using contested territory as the site for joint development initiatives, developing fishing to complement agriculture and livestock production, and opportunities to build and reinforce social capital through sponsorship of inter-communal events such as sporting or cultural festivals should be considered as means to address the fundamental problem of resource scarcity.

Livelihoods based on agro-pastoralism require transformation in a context where the annual flooding cycle of the Omo River has ended and where climate change is likely to make rainfall increasingly erratic. At the same time, the potential for small-scale irrigation using water pumps and the increased access to growing urban markets due to improved infrastructure offer potential ways for the Nyangatom and

Dassanech to make a shift in the dominant livelihoods in SOZ. Development partners should look for ways to assist this process while centering their interventions around local ownership.

Other projects that have the potential to increase opportunities for the Nyangatom and Dassanech should also be investigated. Recently fish represent a new livelihood for some communities living near Lake Turkana. The possibility of developing bilateral agreements between Kenya and Ethiopia may open up new options for Ethiopian pastoralists to move their herds into pastures that have the potential for additional production. Education and the opening up of wage employment opportunities for educated Nyangatom and Dassanech may provide more diverse livelihoods that will contribute to resilience.

Program interventions can be expected to be successful if they are based on the major concerns of the people and operate in a conflict sensitive manner. There are particular demands to include women, youth, and other marginalized communities in program development, implementation, and assessment. USAID needs to continue to prioritize a conflict sensitive approach to all of its programming in South Omo and incorporate conflict dynamics into the design and implementation of its activities.

Our findings suggest other important grievances and conflict dynamics, but they are likely to be beyond USAID's manageable interests. Policies relating to the privatization of the sugar projects and the operation of Gibe III dam, questions around security on the border with Kenya, and the contentious issue of new regional states as the old SNNPR is re-organized will have important consequences for conflict in South Omo Zone but may not be best suited for USAID engagement.

Table 4 (below) lists our main findings with regard to grievances with a linked set of recommendations that are then elaborated.

Table 4: Grievances and Recommendations

GRIEVANCE	RECOMMENDATION
Demand for scarce resources by multiple actors	
1. Loss of agricultural land, flood retreat agriculture	Revive agriculture to replace flood-retreat cultivation
2. Decline in quality of rangeland	Improve rangeland management
3. Fishing rights and clashes in Turkana Delta	Development of fisheries as a diversification strategy
Contested land claims	
1. Competing land claims	Turn contested land into joint development areas
2. Local communities lack access to urban land	Expand land governance activities to urban tenure
Patterns of raiding, inter-ethnic conflict	
1. Cultural factors that contribute to conflict	Invest in infrastructure for peace and dialogues that include all stakeholders, including marginalized populations such as youth and women.
2. Weakness in local capacity to manage conflicts	Reactivate social capital through participation in sports, cultural events

Below, we elaborate on each of these recommendations.

GRIEVANCE: DEMAND FOR SCARE RESOURCES BY MULTIPLE ACTORS

RECOMMENDATION: REVIVE AGRICULTURE THROUGH IRRIGATION

In Dassanech, 62,790 people (61.75 % of the total population), and in Nyangatom, 21,695 people (65.17% of the total population) rely on monthly food ration. According to informants, however, the actual number of food insecure people in the two woredas exceeds those figures. The interruption of

the flood retreat cultivation significantly exacerbated food insecurity. This suggests a crisis in livelihoods that requires significant attention.

This problem can be addressed in part through irrigated agriculture that uses gravity or pumps operated by generators or preferably by solar energy. Limited access to pumps is a key constraint in expanding agriculture to replace lost flood-retreat production. Regarding irrigation, the agro-pastoral communities in the two woredas witnessed success stories that encouraged people to seek irrigation schemes and failure stories (due to technical problems and supply shortages) that discouraged people from thinking about irrigated agriculture. Therefore, future intervention should investigate past mistakes to avoid repeating failures. Establishing constructive relationships with local and regional governmental authorities will also contribute to sustainable success of small-scale irrigation in South Omo.

RECOMMENDATION: IMPROVE RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

Pasture and water resources have deteriorated due to natural factors (long dry period, erratic rain, and bush encroachment such as the propagation of *prosopis*) and of directly human habitation related impacts (overgrazing and the expansion of large-scale farms). The solution will be rangeland management and the eradication of the invasive thorny tree species called *prosopis*. Rangeland management interventions and overall sustainable land and resource governance is a requirement to address this challenge and a recommended area for engagement. A project can aim at the recovery of deteriorated areas, the extension of grazing land (i.e., advocacy for cross-border corridors with Kenya), making current practices more efficient, increasing the number of water points and supporting maintenance schemes, and the eradication of *prosopis*.

RECOMMENDATION: FISHING AS A DIVERSIFICATION STRATEGY

The need for the diversification of the pastoral economy in the Lower Omo Valley is of prime importance. Fishing is one such alternative, especially for the Dassanech and to some extent for the Nyangatom, both for subsistence and marketing. The market demand for the Lake Turkana fish is high in Kenya and Ethiopia. Unlike the Turkana, however, the Dassanech people lack technical knowledge and material inputs to engage in modern fishing that deploy standard fishing nets, motorboats, refrigerators, and improved practices of drying and canning fish, among others. Following the northward expansion of Lake Turkana, the fish migrated to the newly submerged villages, agricultural fields, and grazing areas. The communities who lost their homes and resources to the expanding lake water expressed huge interest to participate in fishing if they can be supported in transforming this opportunity into an additional and sustainable income-generating practice.

GRIEVANCE: CONTESTED LAND CLAIMS

RECOMMENDATION: TURN CONTESTED LANDS INTO JOINT DEVELOPMENT AREAS

As detailed above in the section on grievances, there are many contested lands in South Omo Zone and competing historical claims and narratives often provoke violent conflicts. It is possible, however, to turn these contested lands into areas of valuable, joint development and in that way demonstrate the potential gains from cooperation rather than conflict.

For example, in areas where land is contested, USAID and other donors should consider launching comprehensive/integrated development projects that involve agriculture using irrigation, pasture development focusing on quality of livestock production (e.g., fattening and milk production), water for humans and animals, social services (e.g., schools, clinics, etc.), market options, and so forth. Each of these projects could have associated social service infrastructure components and be mindful of issues of inclusivity, notably with regard to gender and youth. In order to promote sustainable peace and resilience, such projects will require extensive consultations and processes to build trust among the communities and the donors.

The intention is to bring different ethnic groups to live together sharing resources, thereby transforming conflict into cooperation. Local government officials expressed willingness to do their part and to request the regional and federal governments to cooperate. The World Bank's Lowlands Livelihood Resilience Project has a plan to initiate such a project for Dassanech, Nyangatom, and Hamar in a common place where the three groups have previously clashed. USAID could collaborate with the World Bank or have a similar project for Dassanech, Nyangatom, and Turkana near the Kuraz Mountain.

RECOMMENDATION: EXPAND LAND GOVERNANCE ACTIVITY TO URBAN LAND TENURE

The difficulties local residents such as the Nyangatom and Dassanech face in securing access to urban land risks escalating into significant conflict as has been seen in Hana in Salamago. This suggests that expanding USAID's efforts that have focused on rural land governance to urban areas may contribute to conflict resolution. An investigation of how the lease system works and creates barriers for even local government officials and civil servants from leasing urban property would be an important first step.

GRIEVANCE: PATTERNS OF RAIDING, INTER-ETHNIC CONFLICT

RECOMMENDATION: INVESTING IN INFRASTRUCTURES FOR PEACE

Informants in both research sites recognized that the various peace initiatives launched by the government and non-government organizations significantly reduced interethnic conflicts within South Omo. There is a strong demand for such interventions to continue and expand further. It appears that the peace initiatives tend to work well only when promoters (e.g., NGOs) are active or operational. It follows that there is a need to create sustainable peace initiatives and structures.

Peace and development need not only to be brought together but also planned and implemented as an entanglement (embedded peace). While development is easily associated with notions of *infrastructure*, peacebuilding or conflict transformation is usually associated with *initiative* or *intervention*, suggesting urgency oriented, ad-hoc and understood more as a tool than an approach or system. Investing in an Infrastructures for Peace (I4P) (Giessmann 2016) approach on the other hand, can increase preventive capabilities and secure developmental gains even under conditions of (limited) crisis.

- a) Projects should build-up and invest in gender and social inclusive community based civil society and governmental institutions and mechanisms that can address conflicts on different levels and issues and are being considered as a viable first option by the conflict parties to settle or resolve their conflicts non-violently. Promoting and combining old and new deliberative practices that can be utilized in various contexts can pave the way for a more inclusive and efficient development and more legitimate governance structures.

- b) Such institutions and mechanisms should be ongoing and contemporaneous, have an ability to (at least) partially self-fund and be networked or co-designed with other social, economic and political institutions and programs. Usual formats can be women and youth peace forums, governmental and non-governmental peace committees, customary institutions, early warning and early response mechanisms and CSOs primarily working on peace and dialogue.
- c) Civic participation in development planning (governmental or non-governmental) can be promoted as a conflict sensitive practice and a non-violent mobilization strategy to galvanize the public's interests and grievances. Establishing an infrastructure that can mobilize social groups to express their grievances and interests and that *enables them to wield creative power* in the transformation processes can be a powerful and effective way to prevent violent conflict and the emergence of novel grievances.
- d) Projects or programs that are intended to work *on* conflict are recommended to utilize systemic approaches for conflict analysis and planning (CDA 2016 (1)) and follow examples of Reflecting on Peace Practices (CDA 2016 (2)) (or similarly robust methodologies) to ensure the relevance of the intervention and avoid doing harm.

RECOMMENDATION: REACTIVATE SOCIAL CAPITAL THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS, CULTURAL EVENTS

Traditionally, social capital such as intermarriage, bond friendship, resource sharing, participation in sports and cultural events, and barter trade relationships played key roles in sustaining resilience, preventing conflict, and fostering peace. Women often played important roles in these practices. Informants in Dassanech and Nyangatom believe that the decline in the social networks partly contributed to increased conflicts.¹⁰ Hence, they called for actions aimed at nurturing and promoting social capital.

Social capital co-develops with the material environment, economic reproduction and political systems. With the major and ongoing transformations of the recent decades, all of those have drastically changed which plausibly explains the deterioration of social capital and inter-community relationships. Interventions to address this lack should be built around the emergent new economic, social, and political environment and can use these as drivers to foster new and strong relationships. At the same time, building on historic systems is a feasible entry point and can ensure respecting long-standing identities around pastoralism, which is celebrated, while also acknowledging and appreciating more recently introduced livelihood strategies. Given appropriate development projects and policies in parallel, investing in social capital can also help bridging the city-rural divide (settler-indigenous) and can promote exchange and mutual understanding.

Furthermore, incorporating gender transformative programming approaches such as SASA! and SASA! Faith, a methodology developed by the nonprofit Raising Voices, should be considered. This approach promotes community owned and led initiatives that seek to reduce power imbalances and thereby reduce multifaceted forms of violence against women and girls (such as FGM, lack of access to

¹⁰ The limits of this assessment excluded traveling to Kenya to collect similar data on Turkana attitudes. Such research would be important to better understand these complex dynamics.

education) and to promote social cohesion and sustainability of development interventions. Engaging youth in projects to build social capital and therefore foster peace is also imperative.

CONCLUSION

This conflict assessment of the Dassanech and Nyangatom woredas in South Omo Zone of SNNPR suggests that historical marginalization and massive top-down development in recent decades have both contributed to significant levels of grievance. Specifically, the increased number of actors competing for declining access to natural resources have generated conflicts that remain unresolved. The institutions and social patterns among the pastoralist groups in South Omo generate considerable small-scale violence but have hampered larger scale mobilization to advocate for structural change that can support more equitable access to resources and power. The future of South Omo Zone as a regional state or as part of competing initiatives to build a post-SNNPR set of institutions, may provoke violent conflict. USAID may wish to consider new or expanded projects to replace lost agricultural production due to the ending of season flood retreat agriculture and building social capital and infrastructures for peace.

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ANNEX I. PARTICIPANTS OF INTERVIEW SESSIONS AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

A) Jinka Town, Capital of South Omo Zone

1. South Omo Zone Administration
2. Department of Peace and Security
3. Department of Police
4. Department of Pastoralism
6. Department of Finance
7. Department of Water Mines and Energy
8. Department of Investment
9. Office of Disaster Risk Management and Food Security
10. Office of Developmental Safety-Net Program

B) Dassanech Woreda

1. Office of Deputy Woreda Administration
2. Office of Dassanech Woreda Police
3. Office of Dassanech Woreda Peace and Security
4. Office of Dassanech Woreda Pastoralism
5. Office of Omorate Town Mayor
6. Office of Dassanech Woreda Agriculture and Natural Resources
7. Office of Dassanech Woreda Women Children and Youth
8. Office of Dassanech Woreda Livestock and Fishery
9. Office of Dassanech Woreda Water, Mines and Energy

10. Office of Dassanech Woreda Cooperatives
11. Office of Dassanech Woreda Environment and Forest Protection
12. Office of Dassanech Disaster Risk Management and Food Security
13. Lucy Agricultural Development (Private Commercial Farm)
14. Dasali Agricultural Development (Private Commercial Farm)
15. Kelem Agricultural Development (Private Commercial Farm)
16. Office of Resilience in Pastoral Areas (RiPA), USAID project

C) Nyangatom Woreda

1. Office of Woreda Administration
2. Office of Nyangatom Woreda Peace and Security
3. Office of Nyangatom Woreda Police
4. Office of Nyangatom Woreda Urban Development and Construction
5. Office of Nyangatom Woreda Pastoralism
6. Office of Nyangatom Woreda Agriculture and Natural Resources
7. Office of Nyangatom Woreda Women Children and Youth
8. Office of Nyangatom Water Mines and Energy
9. Office of Nyangatom Woreda Livestock and Fishery
10. Office of Nyangatom Culture, Tourism and Sports
11. Office of Nyangatom Disaster Risk Management and Food Security
12. Sisay Agricultural Development (Private Commercial Farm)
13. Narus Agricultural Development (Private Commercial Farm)
14. Office of Lowlands Livelihood Resilience Projects (LLRP), World Bank project
15. Office of Vétérinaires sans Frontieres Germany (VSF Germany)

Focus Group Discussions (12 total)

3 FGDs at Hadho Kebele, Dassanech, with elders, women, and youth

3 FGDs at Koro Kebele, Dassanech, with elders, women, and youth

1 FGD at Borkenech Kebele, Dassanech, with mixed groups

3 FGDs at Kajamakin Kebele, Nyangatom, with elders, women, and youth

2 FGDs at Aypa Kebele, Nyangatom, with elders and youth

ANNEX 2: VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLES

USAID RiPA – Dubale Admasu, Temsegen Berisso

Researchers – Addis Ababa University, IPSS, international

Local civil society organizations – Peace and Development Center, Resource Center for Sustainable Change, Ethiopian Pastoralists Research and Development Alternatives, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development and Social Services Commission, Agri Service Ethiopia, Inter-Africa Group, South Omo People's Development Association

International Non-Governmental and Implementing Partners – Mercy Corps, PACT Ethiopia, IRC-WASH, AMREF, World Vision, IGAD – Building Opportunities for Resilience in the Horn of Africa, Farm Africa, Omo Delta VITA.

Development Partners – European Union, USAID Kenya, IGAD, European Union, World Bank, GIZ.

Federal Government – Ministry of Peace – Federal and Pastoralist Development Affairs, Ethiopian Sugar Corporation, Ministry of Water, Irrigation, and Electricity.