

Afar

The impact of local conflict on regional stability

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Introduction

Violent conflict is more the norm than the exception in the Horn of Africa. Conflicts are waged at various levels: state, regional, and local. Conflict involves various actors: governments, nationalist groups, religious groups, and community or identity groups with significant backing from external forces. It is a common for conflicts in the sub-region to promptly acquire a sub-regional dimension, thus transcending national borders by attracting kinsmen from across the border. The result is often a flow of refugees, who destabilise economic and trade relations between neighbouring states, and pose a security threat to the sub-region.¹

The purpose of this study is to identify the origins, patterns, proximate causes, and key determinants of local level conflicts in the Afar Regional State that affect sub-regional stability. It describes and analyses the context and the major actors in the conflict process in order to understand the underlying causes of the internal conflicts, and assesses their linkage with, and impact on, sub-regional stability. More specifically, this study strives to identify and analyse conflicts in the Afar region that have the potential to draw in neighbouring states: Ethiopia, Djibouti and Eritrea. Based on the findings, the study proposes mechanisms of conflict prevention and management in the IGAD region.

Analyses of local level conflicts necessitate field level research, particularly primary data. To this end, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were held with more than 50 knowledgeable and well-informed participants from zones one, two and three in the Afar Regional State over a period of two weeks. They were selected on the basis of their resourcefulness and participants included elders, clan leaders, political party members, administration

officials, young people, and women. Regarding the Eritrean side of Afar, the focus group discussions included leadership members of the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO), Eritrea Afar refugees in Ethiopia, and elders of different clans. From the Djibouti side, one higher official and another former member of FRUD participated in in-depth interviews.² Document analysis and field observation were used to the primary data obtained from the field.

Conflicts in the sub-region acquire sub-regional dimensions that transcend national boundaries

Analysis of the conflict is based on the DFID conflict analysis model (Strategic Conflict Assessment) as stated in the Centre for Policy Research and Dialogue's (CPRD) term of reference. The report has four sections. Section one provides historical background, the context of the conflict and its effect on sub-regional stability. Section two analyses underlying causes, actors, and the dynamics of the conflict. Section three deals with responses to the conflict, and the final section provides conclusions and recommendations.

Background to conflict in the Afar region

Physical and demographic overview

The Afar are one of the large pastoral groups in the Horn of Africa. Their settlement distribution covers the borders of the three countries of the Horn: Ethiopia, Djibouti and Eritrea. There are about two million Afar, more than two-thirds of whom live in Ethiopia.³ They are almost entirely Muslim. Their native language is Afaraf, which is of Cushitic origin. Though the Afar are divided by the borders of the three countries, they maintain close physical contact, strong sentiments of kinship, and an inclusive Afar identity.

In Ethiopia, the Afar Region is organised as one of the nine autonomous Regional States. The Afar



National Regional State (ANRS) is located in the great East African Rift Valley in the north-eastern part of the country. It borders Eritrea to the north-east, Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, and Somali Regional States to the north-west; south-west; south, and south-east respectively, and the Republic of Djibouti to the east. Most of the region is dry and rocky, unsuitable for cultivation. Out of the total area of the region (estimated at 97,250km²) cultivated and arable land constitutes 5.24%, forest 1.54%, bush and shrub 18.62%, grassland 1.56%, marshy land 2.74%, water bodies 0.63%, and degraded and rocky land 63.7%, (ANRS Capacity Building Bureau, 2003:2). The region's altitude ranges from a maximum of 1500m above sea level to a minimum of 166m below sea level. Temperature varies from 25°C during the wet season to 48°C during the dry season. Rainfall is erratic and scarce, and annual precipitation ranges from 200mm to 600mm. The region is frequently exposed to persistent droughts and is classified as one of the drought-affected regions in Ethiopia.

According to the 1996 National Population and Housing Census, the projected population of the region was estimated to be 1.4 million by the end of 2006. Some 9% of the inhabitants reside in towns. Assuming that this figure includes non-Afar migrants who predominantly settle in towns, the actual percentage of the Afar population residing in towns may be lower. The Afars' livelihood is mostly based on tending livestock. In addition, some also have small trading concerns, practice cultivation (mainly around middle Awash), work as day labourers or as government employees (a small section) to generate extra income independent of or in addition to stock tending. Resource depletion due to recurrent droughts and other external pressure is a serious problem that has greatly diminished the size and composition of family livestock, which in turn has resulted in deterioration of living standards.

Afar traditional leadership has historically been divided into various sultanates. There are five sultanates:

- the *Tajurah* sultanate (the *Berhanto Derder* sultan) centred in Djibouti;
- *Rahayto* sultanate (the *Danki Derder* sultan) along the border of Ethiopia and Djibouti;
- *Aussa* sultanate (the fiefdom of sultan Ali Mrah) centred at Assaita;
- *Grifo* sultanate centred at Bilu along the border of Ethiopia and Eritrea; and
- *Gobaad* sultanate in zone three (Gewane) of the Afar Region.⁴

Although the influence and integrity of the sultanates is declining due to interaction with external political and economic systems, they have generally been recognised as centres and providers of political and spiritual leadership.

The clan, a group of extended families, is the most important political and social unit in the Afar culture. Traditionally, the clan as a social organisation serves as a nucleus for administration and co-operation to conduct social activities among clan members. Clan kinship is very strong. Issues that affect members of a clan are discussed and decided collectively under the guidance and leadership of clan leaders. In times of great difficulties (e.g. times of drought, when a family is endangered by external attack, etc) individual families seek and gain support from their clan kinsmen. There are large and small clans. The large ones are *Arebta*, *Damoita*, *Dahimela*, *Hadarmo* (Able), *Hadu*, *Seka*, *Maeyto*, and *Baleessewa*. Members of most of the aforementioned clans are found in all three countries of the Horn. For instance, the *Hadarmo* clan is mostly found in Eritrea, in zones 2 and 4 of the Afar Regional State, and in Djibouti. Members of *Dahimela* and *Hadu* clans are mostly found in zone 2 of the Afar Region, Djibouti, and Eritrea. Members of the *Seka* clan are found mostly in zones 1 and 2 of the Afar Region, and in Eritrea.⁵

Overview of conflict in Afar

Conflict in the Afar Regional State has various manifestations: nationalism, inter communal conflict (e.g. Afar-Issa conflict), competition for power among political parties, and on some occasions, inter-clan conflict over resources. Of these, Afar nationalism is an essential element in conflict in Afar, thus linking the three Afar sections that reside in the three countries of the Horn: Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti. Afar nationalist sentiment grew and developed in response to the lack of fair treatment and neglect by governments that incorporated the Afar within their administration. Since the Afar currently reside in Ethiopia, Djibouti and Eritrea, it is worthwhile considering each country separately.

Afar in Ethiopia

Following the incorporation of the Afar into the Ethiopian state at the end of the 19th century, successive Ethiopian regimes' policy toward the Afar focused largely on extending and strengthening the control of the centre, and extracting local resources chiefly for the benefit of the state (Getachew, 2001: 46; 2002:787; UN Emergency Unit Ethiopia, 1996:2). During the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie I, the Afar region in Ethiopia was administratively partitioned into five different provinces (Harar, Shoa, Wallo, Tigray, and Eritrea). The Afar constituted a smaller minority within the provinces and were deprived of any political participation. The centre appointed local *shums* to levy and collect taxes from the locals, but provided hardly any public services such as health and education. State-centred development projects were enhanced in the area, particularly in the Awash Valley, by converting vast grazing



areas into commercial farming at the expense of the local population (Harbeson, 1978:480). In the early 1970s, a group of prominent Afars (elders, clan leaders, religious leaders, etc), motivated by Afar public resentment over the policies of the central government, unsuccessfully petitioned the emperor to bring the Afar territory (divided under the five provinces) under one administrative region. This was defiantly ignored by the emperor (Shehim, 1985:345). The emperor's refusal to the Afar plea deepened the Afar grievances and made the Afar politicians seek other ways to change the status quo instead of appealing to the conscience of the state. This resulted in the creation of an underground Afar political movement in the early 1970s that facilitated the creation of the Afar Liberation Front (ALF).

The military regime that came to power amid popular uprising against the emperor, the *Derg*, had to confront strong military pressure from various nationalist groups in Ethiopia. The *Derg* initially agreed to address the 'nationalities question' and issued regional autonomy for 'nationalities' in its New Democratic Revolution Programme (NDRP). The *Derg's* regional autonomy plan created hopes among some Afar politicians that brought a split within the ALF. While most ALF leaders doubted the seriousness of the *Derg* proposal and its implementation, some accepted it at face value and saw some hope, consequently breaking away to establish what was known as the Afar National Liberation Movement (ANLM) (Shihem, 1985: 344). The ANLM worked in collaboration with the *Derg* in the hope that an autonomous Afar state within Ethiopia could be attained peacefully (ANLM, 1976:6), but the *Derg* remained less committed to the realization of its own proposal. In 1987, the *Derg* elevated the *Asseb Awraja* to a self-autonomous region and the Awssa district to the level of *Awraja*, leaving half of the Afar homeland in Ethiopia under the previous administration of the provinces. To external observers, the elevation of Asseb to a self-autonomous region was done to protect the port of Asseb from the secessionist claims of Eritrean nationalists rather than to address the Afars' nationalist aspirations.

The ALF that had doubted the seriousness of the *Derg's* proposal from the beginning pursued its armed struggle against the military regime, cooperating with other nationalist fronts like the TPLF. Following the downfall of the *Derg*, the ALF was one of the participants at the July 1991 national conference (organized by the EPRDF) where they enacted a transitional charter and established a transitional government. During the transitional period, and later on when the federal structure was put in place, the

Afar in Ethiopia were granted Regional State status – one of the nine autonomous regions.

Indeed, the Ethiopian move was well appreciated by all Afar as a positive step forward. Nonetheless, Afar nationalists in Ethiopia are clearly indignant that the widespread Afar aspiration for an Afar state within Ethiopia has not been fully met, mainly because of the incorporation of the Afar Red Sea Coast within the newly independent Eritrea. In this regard, the Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front (ARDUF) insisted, 'Afar Red Sea Coast and the Afar hinterland must go together' (ARDUF, 2003:4). The spiritual and traditional leader of the Afar people, Sultan Ali Mirah, also remarked that 'Afar is Afar from Leica to Massawa, even the camels know this land is one'. He further emphasised 'our border is the sea'. (quoted in Gilkes, 1993: 9). During our field visit to the Afar Regional State (July 2006), we observed that ordinary Afar people were deeply grieved about the further division of Afar into three countries with the emergence of independent Eritrea.

Afar in Eritrea

We observed differing views from interviews we conducted with the Afar from Eritrea – temporarily living as refugees in the Afar Regional State – regarding the incorporation of the Afar Red Sea Coast into Eritrea. A number of interviewees hesitated to accept the Afar Red Sea Coast as part of Eritrea and saw its inclusion into Eritrea as an injustice because the Afar Red Sea Coast had been incorporated into Eritrea against their will during the referendum on Eritrea. However, quite a few interviewees readily accepted the Red Sea Coast as part of Eritrea.⁶

Despite their different views, all interviewees had deep grievances about the undemocratic, repressive rule of the Eritrean government and the existing situation of the Afar in Eritrea, who they felt were alienated and marginalized by the political system. An informant described the situation in the following terms:

We hated the *Derg* and we were supporting Eritrean liberation fronts for their protection from the *Derg*. Although we were annoyed by the further division of the Afar without getting chance freely to voice for ourselves, we hoped for better and we never expected our condition would be worsen [sic] as it is now. The EPLF government forcefully disarmed all the Afar in Eritrea, placed obstacles on our subsistence economic activities, and forcedly conscripts every able person for military service including women in utter disregard for our culture. Every

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able Afar male is either taken to military service or migrated to neighbouring countries leaving Afar settlements (villages) only with aged men, women, and very young children. We are now found under cruel suppression and our very survival is threatened.⁷

All interviewees reasoned similarly. They moved to escape repression and arbitrary arrest, including torture. They felt threatened by security forces for not turning in their relatives who had sided with opposition to the government; and tried to evade forced military conscription. Some said that the Local authorities confiscated all their property. The interviewees expressed political sympathy with Afar nationalist political organizations currently struggling against the government of Eritrea. At least two – the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RASDO) and the Afar Liberation Democratic Movement in Eritrea (ALDME) – are known to support the Afar cause among the Eritrean opposition.

According to officials of the Afar Regional State, there are more than 10,000 Eritrean Afar refugees, mainly living in zone two. Officials and the refugees themselves revealed that aid to the refugees had been interrupted for more than a year. In the year 2006 the refugees were cared for by their Afar kinsmen and are burden on the local community. The condition of the Afar people in Eritrea is causing ordinary Afar communities in Ethiopia to resent the Eritrean government.

Afar in Djibouti

When Djibouti gained its independence in 1977, the Afar constituted nearly half the population. However, Afar representation in the new government was much smaller than that of Issa, who held a dominant position – a situation that persists, more or less, to this day. The Issa's political and economic dominance and the marginalisation of the Afar led to organised Afar resistance against the Issa-dominated government of Djibouti. The Afar wanted a fair share of power but their resistance was met with repressive government measures (Africa Confidential, No. 19, 1993:3).

In the early 1990s, the Afar-based armed dissident group, Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD), launched military attacks against the Djibouti government forces, initially gaining some ground. Along with the intensification of the conflict, the government of Djibouti was opposed to peace talks with FRUD. They concentrated on mobilising, training and organising a new fighting force to ensure a military defeat of the Afar's armed rebellion (Africa confidential, No. 19, 1993).

As a result of the escalation of the conflict and the use of government forces against Afar civilians, more than 20,000 Djibouti Afar refugees were displaced and sheltered in Ethiopia. The Djibouti government refused to hold peace talks with FRUD, which prompted diplomatic pressure and alienation from some neighbours and Arab countries (Africa Confidential, No. 19, 1993). Finally in 1994, a French-brokered peace accord was signed between the Djibouti government and FRUD, although some leaders and members of FRUD opposed the peace accord and continued their armed insurgency until making peace with the government in 2001 (IRIN, 14 May 2001).

Following the signing of the first peace accord, some FRUD leaders were given ministerial positions in the government and some FRUD combatants were integrated into the Djiboutian army. Furthermore, FRUD has formed a coalition with the ruling party, the RPP (People's Progress Assembly).⁸ Besides the power sharing at the top, little is done to address the grievances of the ordinary Djiboutian Afar.⁹ Another part of FRUD (those who signed the second peace accord in 2001) re-organized under a new political organization, the Republican Alliance for Democracy (ARD), which is part of the coalition that opposes the ruling coalition of RPP and FRUD.

Conflicts in the region have displaced thousands of Afar leading to cross-border movements

Cross border ethnic solidarity and impact on sub-regional stability

Despite their geographic division along the borders of the three countries, there is a strong common ethnic identity among the Afar in Ethiopia, Djibouti and Eritrea.¹⁰ This makes it easy for the Afar's resentment and disagreement with their national governments to transcend

national frontiers and involve Afar communities in the three countries. This reality has been demonstrated in the past and in the present.

In the early 1990s (1991-1994), when FRUD was waging an armed struggle against the Djibouti government, many Afar from Ethiopia and Eritrea joined to fight in support of FRUD against the Djibouti government.¹¹ ARDUF combatants were also involved in the fighting in support of FRUD. The Djibouti government then complained about the involvement of Ethiopian and Eritrean Afar in support of FRUD. The Djibouti crisis had further spill-over effects after the involvement of the Ethiopian Issa-Somali in support of the Djibouti government. They (the Issa-Somali) assumed the Issa government in Djibouti was under attack from Afars. At the end of the war, about 8000 Ethiopian Issa-Somalis were demobilized from the Djiboutian army.¹² A consequence of the cross-border mobilization and support from kinship was that the



Djibouti crisis was on the verge of creating large-scale instability in the region.

The Djibouti crisis also had a negative effect on relations between the neighbouring states. Both Ethiopia and Eritrea had concerns about the wider implication of political mobilization of Ethiopian and Eritrean Afar. They feared a 'Greater Afar' agenda, augmented by some Afar political circles (Indian Ocean Newsletter, 4 January, 1992). For that reason, the Eritrean government was looking for a swift solution to the Djibouti problem, insisting that the Djibouti government begin peace talks with FRUD. The Djibouti government's refusal resulted in strained relations between the two governments (Africa Confidential, no. 19, 1993).

At present, the Eritrean government policy toward the Afar in Eritrea is creating uneasiness among the Afar in Ethiopia and Djibouti. In connection with this, a Djiboutian Afar informant stated, 'when injustice is done against the Afar residing in Eritrea or Ethiopia, we Djiboutian Afar feel dismayed and hurt. The situation of the Afar in Eritrea is creating in us resentment against the government of Eritrea'.¹³ Evidently, these points reveal that the impact of national policy toward the Afar goes beyond national frontiers and directly affects the relation and political stability of neighbouring states.

The Issa-Afar conflict in Ethiopia has created a similar effect. Ethiopian Afars blame the Djibouti government for providing arms and training to the Issa to displace them from their land. They also show resentment against the Ethiopian government for letting them be victims of the Issa.¹⁴ Furthermore, the Issa-Afar conflict in Ethiopia has an influence on relations between the Afar and the Issa in Djibouti.

Structural Causes of Conflict

This section analyses the underlying security, political, economic and social causes of conflict affecting the Afar, actors and dynamics of the conflict.

Underlying Causes

Security-related factors

The Ethiopia-Eritrea border conflict, the presence of non-state military actors along the borders, and the proliferation of arms can be cited as main problems related to security.

The Ethiopia-Eritrea border conflict and the subsequent war between the two countries gravely affected the

daily life of the Afar along both sides of the border. Many Afar families were displaced from their localities because of their proximity and the conversion of their region into a battleground. From the Ethiopian side, 30,000 Afar families were displaced during the war (UN Emergency Unit Ethiopia, 2000:2). Even after the war, their condition did not return to its previous level. Because of the massive amount of land mines and other security risks, the mobility of the Afar people and their herds is highly constrained. An informant complained; 'Afar families and relatives along both sides of the border remained detached from each other due to the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict'.¹⁵

Along the border of Eritrea and the Afar Regional State (Ethiopia), there are Afar armed groups and a guerrilla force supported by the governments of Eritrea and Ethiopia. The Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO) is supported by the Ethiopian government and it has a base in Ethiopia. RSADO armed propaganda units operate across the border and inside Eritrea.¹⁶ On the other side, there are five or six separate Afar armed groups (each having at least 80-100 armed personnel) armed and supported by the Eritrean government operating across the border into the Afar Regional State. According to the information obtained during the field visit, the Eritrean government-backed armed groups are disenfranchised groups, without any form of political organization, that plan subversive activities such as kidnapping officials, looting animals, and forcing local people to pay them money in the form of a tax. (In June 2006), 19 camels were stolen by one of the armed groups from Berhale *wereda* in zone two; and in another incident, two camels were killed and another two captured from

armed groups after a gunfire battle with the local militia during a mission to kidnap local officials near Berhale *wereda* town).¹⁷ Besides this activity, the armed groups also serve as a buffer zone along the Eritrea-Ethiopia border for controlling the activity and incursion of RSADO armed propaganda units.

Possession of arms in Afar society is viewed as important in terms of security (self-defence) and as powerful heritage symbols. Following the referendum, the government of Eritrea forcefully disarmed all the Afar in Eritrea who had arms. This was the cause of much unhappiness in the society.¹⁸ Due to the wide proliferation of light weapons in the Horn, many young Ethiopian Afars are armed with automatic rifles, usually Kalashnikovs. (According to some sources, about 20-25% of the adult Afar society in Ethiopia owns light arms; and communities that live close to the Issa are relatively more armed than the distant ones).¹⁹ For purposes of control, the regional administration

Eritrea-Ethiopia conflict, presence of arms and non-state actors along the borders have contributed to insecurity



authorized registration of all arms at *wereda* level; however, its implementation varies from zone to zone. *Wereda* officials state that societal attitudes toward registering arms are not positive because they worry about being disarmed. Furthermore, arms transactions (buying and selling) are very frequent and possession may change frequently even after a light weapon has been registered. Field information indicates that a rifle is more easily available than ammunition or bullets in the market (the prices of a Kalashnikov rifle and a single bullet are 3500-4500 and 5 Ethiopian *Bir*, respectively). The availability of very high calibre arms in the hands of the young Afar and Issa plays a significant role in perpetuating blood feuds and animal raids between the two communities.

Political factors

The lack of democratic governance and the grievances related to it is a major political factor underlying the conflicts in the Afar region. The culture of mutual interference by neighbouring states (aimed at weakening a rival regime) and Afar ethno-nationalist political aspirations for uniting Afar are additional factors.

Democratic governance refers to the political practice based on universal principles of democracy and rule of law, popular legitimacy, participation, accountability and the responsiveness of rulers to the governed (Natalaja, 2004: 1). This sort of governance is an essential requirement for sustained peace, economic growth, and development. Unfortunately, in most cases, governance in the Horn is non-inclusive, lacks popular legitimacy, authoritarian, and unresponsive to public grievances. Previous regimes in Ethiopia saw cultural heterogeneity as an obstacle to national harmony and nation/state building. As a result, they concentrated on policies of forced assimilation and cultural repression, which resulted in creating more alienation and fomenting radical nationalist sentiment among the excluded (Markakis, 1987:245; Berdal and Aida, 2006:83). To redress the imbalance, the present government has tried a federal state structure with self-administering (autonomous) regions, primarily on the basis of ethnic or linguistic boundary lines. Reaction to the new arrangement has been mixed.

On the one hand, the new arrangement is generally seen as a positive step (compared to the past), and is particularly appreciated on the periphery of the state. In general, Afar public opinion on the present arrangement is positive.²⁰ On the other hand, notwithstanding the harsh and unwelcome criticism from some commentators, there are

reasonable criticisms related to the process and the implementation of the new arrangement. An important criticism related to the federalization process is that it was a top-down process and was dominated by one party political line (Tadesse, 2005:45). This narrowed the opportunity to see all other possible alternatives thoroughly and to build consensus on key issues in the new federal arrangement. More importantly, the process could have created wide public awareness about the basic features of the federal arrangement, something which is now seriously lacking.

Concerning the practical implementation, there are questions about the extent to which the regions can exercise their autonomous rights without interference from the central government. The answer is not a straightforward positive. The ruling parties' control of the centre and of the regions is creating a hierarchical relationship between the federal government and the regions, which in effect prevents the regions from exercising their autonomous rights (Aalen, 2001:100–105).

The lack of democratic governance has contributed to conflict in the Afar region

Regulating conflict before its violent manifestation is an essential element of democratic governance. The Afar-Issa conflict in Ethiopia is causing much damage to both communities. The conflict between the two communities was left by previous regimes to pursue its own dynamic course and, sadly, the present government has done no better. The conflict is perpetuating itself to the level what conflict analysts' call 'psycho-social dispositions' i.e. becoming intractable, based on deep hatred and blood feuds. Hostility between the two groups has deepened to the extent that they cannot live together in one place.

For instance, no Issa lives in Gewane; only Afar and non-Afar highlanders live in the town. Conversely, no Afar lives in the three truck-stop towns: Adaitu, Endufo and Gedamaitu,²¹ only Issa and non-Issa highlanders live in those towns. When travelling by car, members of both groups become very anxious (fearing revenge) while passing towns controlled by the other group.

Before the five Afar political organizations united to form the Afar National Democratic Party or ANDP (now the ruling party of the region), competition between the political organizations was sometimes accompanied by violent confrontation. This caused political instability in the region.²² Currently, the authors know of just one political organization (ARDUF) that operates as the opposition in the region. In the most recent election (May 2005), ARDUF campaigned for a seat in the Regional Council but did not win it. ARDUF has complained about securing free political movement in the region.



Informants indicate that dissatisfaction within the ruling party exists among those who united to form the ruling party. They allege that the party and the regional offices are dominated by certain groups and that key posts are not fairly allocated; they are held by members who originally came from one specific political organization. There are also allegations of corruption and the misuse of funds in the region. There are signs of mal-administration in which employment, education and training opportunities are only available to party members.

One positive initiative is the formation of Advisory Council of Elders (ACE) alongside the state administration structure at all levels (from region to *wereda* level). The ACE consists of clan leaders and elders. In traditional societies, modern state infiltration into the society is constrained by various factors. One factor is the strong influence of traditional leaders. The formation of the ACE, if it is properly utilised, alongside the modern state structure can serve to bridge the gap between the modern state and the broader society.

The other two countries in which the Afar reside still have some trouble being inclusive and accommodative. Though the Djibouti government agreed to some power sharing at the top level, following the 1994 peace accord with FRUD, the system is basically unchanged. In this regard, the US Department of State's country report on Djibouti's human rights practices (2004) states, 'Discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, and clan background persisted'. The situation in Eritrea is even more grave because of the total ban on any political activity opposing the government. Amnesty International's annual report on Eritrea (2005) described the gloomy situation of the country as follows:

Hundreds of people were arrested for the peaceful expression of their opinions or religious beliefs. ... The government and ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice made no move towards multi-party elections as required by the 1997 Constitution. No opposition activity or criticism was tolerated and no independent non-governmental organizations were allowed.

To sum up, these political factors have a major effect on the Afar: lack of democratic governance, non-inclusive and discriminative government policies, unwillingness to redress grievances, and failure to regulate conflict. When all mechanisms to communicate and redress grievances through peaceful means are closed, as in Eritrea, the prospect of violence transcends national frontiers and invites instability.

The states in the Horn have a long-standing culture of mutual interference by providing a bases and support to dissidents (Cliffe and White, 2002). There seems to be a systematic pattern: internal rebel groups or dissidents operate from neighbouring countries, often with support from those governments. This is exemplified by the Mengistu regime's support for the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army/ Movement (SPLA/M) and (Somali National Movement (SNM) against the regimes of Sudan and Mohamed Siad Barre (Somalia) in response to those governments' support for armed movements (such as the Tigray peoples Liberation front (TPLF), Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Afar Liberation Front (ALF), etc) fighting to overthrow Mengistu's regime. Similar practices continue today: Sudan with Eritrea, Sudan with Ethiopia (1994-1998), and Eritrea with Ethiopia.

Following the border conflict, the governments of Eritrea and Ethiopia have widely been involved in hosting and supporting opposition groups (Gilkes, 2000:5). The Ethiopian government is providing support to an Eritrean opposition groups, the Eritrean National Alliance (ENA). ENA has a branch office in Addis Ababa and was recently provided with radio transmission time. Both Eritrean Afar political organizations, RSADO and ALDME, are members of ENA. On the other side, the Eritrean government gives broad support to Ethiopian opposition groups by providing offices, radio transmission time. It also supplies military training and arms to armed opposition groups such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The Eritrean government is doing what it can to help destabilise Ethiopia, including supporting Islamic fundamentalist groups in Somalia and

disfranchised Afar armed groups. As part of this wider strategy of mutual interference both governments are fuelling conflict in the Afar region to suit their own purposes.

The Afar communities have ethno-nationalist aspirations to unite the Afar people in some sort of loose political union, and there is thus some resentment, to say the least, within the Ethiopian Afar regarding the further division of Afar as a result of Eritrea's independence. The Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front (ARDUF) opposed the Afar Red Sea coast's inclusion into Eritrea and waged a guerrilla armed struggle, mainly against the Eritrean government (there were some clashes between ARDUF and Ethiopian government forces) from 1993 until 2002. The ARDUF then decided to quit its armed struggle and eventually concluded a peace agreement with the Ethiopian government.²³ ARDUF combatants and leadership are comprised of Afar from both Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Instability is caused by lack of mechanisms to communicate and redress grievances peacefully



ARDUF's official explanation for ending its armed struggle cites unfavourable international relations, i.e. Eritrea's international recognition as a sovereign state (ARDUF, Communiqué, 2002:2). However, ARDUF's main problem was the Ethiopian government's refusal to support ARDUF's claim (of uniting the Red Sea Coast with the Afar hinterland in Ethiopia).²⁴ Before the eruption of the border conflict, both governments were cooperating in the war against ARDUF.

Economic factors

Economic factors that affect or promote conflict in the Afar region include state-centred and biased development policies, problems regarding land tenure, a lack of skilled labour, and ecological stresses that have caused pastoral resources to dwindle.

Development policies in the Afar region have historically reflected the governments' political and strategic priorities, as well as foreign commercial interests. As a result, the Afar often lost access to their resource bases. For instance, in the early 1960s, large commercial cotton irrigation farms were established by displacing large pastoral groups from their communal land. Furthermore, the imperial government established the Awash Valley Authority (AVA), which was entrusted with full authority to administer and supervise the agricultural development activities of the fertile Awash River basin. The AVA denied the communal land rights of the pastoral Afar in the area. Under the AVA development scheme, a large part of the Afar's dry-season grazing land was lost to commercial irrigation programmes run by foreign concessions, members of the royal family, and Ethiopian entrepreneurs (Ali, 1998; Markakis, 2002:447). This loss of resources meant that the Afar began to resent the involvement of 'outsiders', which eventually evolved into full ethnic conflict (Ibid).

In the same vein, an expansion of large state farms under the *Derg* regime resulted in a large-scale 'land grab' and the displacement of many pastoral clans of the Middle Awash. According to Getachew, (2001:96), the scheme did not bring the intended results; instead, it resulted in large financial losses, ecological disaster, and drove the local pastoral communities into poverty. The land use practices on state farms caused huge ecological damage such as deforestation, soil exhaustion, salinity, and related problems. Compounded with recurrent drought since the 1970s, these changes in land use led to increased pressure on the remaining clan lands, intensifying inter- and intra-ethnic conflicts over remaining resources (Ibid).

Under the current government, problems related to pastoral development policy still persist. One important issue that has not been clearly and properly addressed is the land tenure system in pastoral communities. Traditionally, in many pastoral communities, including the Afar, the land tenure system is communal or clan-based. Individual members of the community or clan do not own it but they are entitled to use it with strict observance of well-defined customary rules. Communal ownership of land conforms to the pastoral production system and, consequently, pastoral communities have developed efficient land use and management systems over many generations (Getachew, 2001:147-149). However, the land policy of successive governments, starting from the times of the emperor, through the *Derg* to the present government, did not officially acknowledge or recognise clan or communal ownership of land. During the Imperial period, the state had full power to expropriate land not owned by individuals (Shehim, 1985:336). The *Derg* nationalised all land, including the communal land of pastoralist communities, placing it under the direct jurisdiction of the state. Under the present government, though the 1995 constitution postulated pastoralists' right to use and not to be displaced from their land (Art.40 (5)), possession of land is arrogated to the state. As a result, large areas of dry-season grazing land (about 90,000 hectares) is currently allocated to state-initiated projects, mainly for sugar plantations in the Lower Awash Valley, without due involvement and consultation with local communities.²⁵ Lack of recognition of the communal land tenure system is paving the way for continuous state expropriation of communal land without considering projects that might benefit the local population.

State-centered and biased development policies affects or promotes conflict in Afar

The current planning approach in most pastoral areas in Ethiopia is highly centralized, and allows little or no participation by the community. Most power and the decision-making role is given to the regional states (Kelemework, 2003). Moreover, the development planners are biased toward the highlanders, who pay little or no attention to pastoralists' skills and do not recognise the experience gained over many generations. This bias is reflected in the focus or orientation of development plans that emphasise the conversion of pastoralists into sedentary cultivators. As a result, less attention is paid to standardising and developing the pastoralist skills of livestock management and production. One striking example observed during the fieldwork in zone two (in the Afar region) revealed the authorities' indifference to community participation. The regional administration, with support from the Tigray Regional State, planned to construct a small dam in Aba'ala *wereda* in zone two. The local community and the *wereda*



administration opposed the site selected for the dam's construction, explained why it would not fit the intended purpose, and suggested an alternative site. The civil engineer turned a deaf ear to the advice and the regional administration strictly ordered the *wereda* administration not to interfere in the work of the dam. Accordingly, the dam was constructed, but during the first floods the dam collapsed, causing much damage to surrounding crops and plantations.

It appears (from focus group discussions and desk study) that governments' land policies have shrunk the pastoral resource base, increased competition over land and pastoral resources, at times, involving warfare. These policies, therefore, seem to be partly responsible for the present state of Afar pastoral production crises and conflict between the Afar and their neighbours (Getachew, 2001:46; Ali, 1996:198; interviews and focus group discussions, June/July, 2006). Hence, economic decline was partly caused by wrong perceptions by the governments and international agencies, which viewed pastoralism as a backward and environmentally unfriendly production system practised by 'traditional' people who made little contribution to the national economy (Kelemework, 2003:13). It has been pointed out that the decline in the availability of grazing and water can be the result of ill-conceived development policies by governments (Kelemework, 2003:34).

The overall consequences of the development schemes were poverty and dependence on food aid for the local population, whose standard of living fell sharply along with their pastoral economy, creating economic disparity in the community. Moreover, the schemes created resource scarcity, resource conflicts, and herd losses that drove pastoralists to settlements in and around towns rather than empowering them and improving their lives in animal husbandry. Necessity has driven some pastoralists to illicit economies and illegal trade, which in effect brings about macroeconomic instability. Consequently, when actual people are not consulted and involved in the planning and implementation of development programmes that affect their lives, they naturally feel excluded. This can develop into violent conflict in the region

It is also worth noting that the Afar region is currently experiencing a critical shortage of skilled labour at all levels (from the regions up to lower administrative structures) because preceding regimes neglected development in the periphery. The lack of skilled labour negatively affects socio-economic activity in the region (interview with the president of the Afar Region with IRIN, 2002). If the autonomous political status of the region is not accompanied by concrete socio-economic progress, and if the development gap keeps widening in comparison to other regions, dissatisfaction and a sense of alienation is likely to crop up.

Social factors

Major social factors that contribute to conflict in the Afar region include latent intra- and inter-ethnic conflicts, the decline of traditional values and dispute settlement mechanisms, and the low profile of women in conflict resolution.

Inter- and intra-ethnic conflict

One social factor that 'breathes life' into the different types and levels of conflict in the region is the unsettled Afar-Issa conflict. Though the basis of the conflict is economic (competition over resources, territory, contraband trade routes, etc.), the conflict has ethnic overtones and is expressed as animosity and hatred. Communication between both groups is literally 'broken'. Informants expressed their rage, stating that the Haile Sellassie I, *Derg* and the present governments did little to settle the issue. They remarked that:

The forceful occupation of the land of Afar by the Issa community is apparent; the federal government knows that now the sporadic fighting and retaliation have continued. Both federal and regional governments also know the flash points: Adaytu, Ambule, Gedamaytu, and Undufu, which were originally the Afar land, now being claimed by the Issa. No lasting solution has been provided so far... The question remains whether the federal government is unwilling or unable to settle the disputes.²⁶

According to informants, development policies in the area did not favour the majority of the Afar. Consequently, economic disparity across the community prevailed, creating deep resentment towards those who controlled the economic resources with the attendant social power. An empirical finding by Getachew Kassa (2001) demonstrates that such economic disparity created a marked social cleavage, sowing the seeds of conflict among the Afar.

Decline of traditional values and dispute settlement mechanism

As a matter of fact, the Afar are from different clans with the same language, religion, tradition, culture, and decision-making power and practice of customary law. Each clan has its own leader and they have been able to settle disputes, conflicts and higher-level feuds through their cultural/traditional mechanisms. However, owing to external socio-economic and political influences, the Afar have had to deviate from their established practice. For example, the settlement pattern, i.e. the growth of small urban centres predominated by migrant workers, has had a far-reaching impact on their way of living. This has



loosened clan solidarity, lessened cultural integration, and weakened the authority of elders – all of which were cherished and celebrated pastoral values. An informant remarked:

In the past, Afar conflict with its neighbours was shortly and easily cooled down with free initiatives of elders from both sides, while at present once conflict arises with its neighbours the attitude of animosity continues for a longer time and attempts to cool-down and to return to normal relation are becoming arduous and time consuming.²⁷

The status of women in conflict resolution

Numerous desk studies and field observation show that women generally occupy a lower social position in Afar society, as in many other African societies (Adedeji, 1999; Thomson, 2000). In an interview with the Afar Regional State, Head of Capacity Building Bureau (a female), it was disclosed that the Afar women are largely dependent economically, (hence politically as well) on their male counterparts. This is attributed to socio-cultural factors: a lack of general awareness regarding the value of educating girls; parents' unwillingness to send their school-aged daughters to school; socio-cultural hurdles created by *Abisuma* (cousin marriage) for girls to go to school.

Field interviews reveal that women have no decision-making role in their community. As a result, their role in conflict resolution remains insignificant. Consistent with this assertion are two findings from research in the region (Kelemework, 2003). First, traditionally, women are seen as inferior to men; for instance, a witness account obtained from a male and a female are not of the same value: two women are equated with one man as witnesses in settling a dispute. Second, if a woman is killed by someone, her blood price is half that of a man. This gender imbalance may engender social exclusion by creating grievances in the 'other half' of the society in the region.

Conflict Actors

The following can be identified as key actors in the Afar conflict:

- Governments of the countries in which the Afar reside
- Afar political parties/organizations
- Illicit armed groups
- Afar elders and clan leaders
- Ethnic groups
- Afar Diaspora

Governments

The governments of the three countries are parties to the conflict because they promote either discrimination or a policy of mutual interference, or both. In this sense, their role is negative and fuels the conflict. At least, until this time, the three governments have had a similar policy, i.e. maintaining the status quo to thwart Afar nationalist groups' aspirations to unite the Afar. This has diffused possible conflict between the governments. But this alone cannot bring peace in Afar. The basic problem lies in the willingness of the states to correct wrong policies that serve to perpetuate conflict in the Afar region.

Afar political parties

In each of the three countries there are at least two Afar political parties/organizations: in Ethiopia ANDP and ARDUF; in Djibouti FRUD and ARD; and in Eritrea RSADO and ALDME. All the parties except ARDUF officially sanction the international border of the three countries and confine the operations of their political programme to that border. It should be noted that these political parties seek to be pragmatic by promoting the idea of 'Afar is one.' Consequently, the aspirations for uniting Afar is widely entertained within leadership and members of Afar political organizations of Ethiopia and Eritrea.²⁸ Almost all the Afar political parties have a history of conducting an armed struggle. Currently, while RSADO and ALDME are still in a state of confrontation with the Eritrean government, the rest are engaged in a peaceful political struggle contending (including against each other) for power. The continuation of the political parties in a peaceful political struggle depends upon a number of factors such as the prevalence

of a true and workable democratic environment (fair and free political competition, fair electoral law and its implementation, an independent judiciary), and a culture where parties accepting political defeat.

Illicit armed groups

While some of the Eritrean-backed Afar armed groups have long existed as remnants of the so-called 'Ugugumo' (created during the *Derg* regime to contain the influence and movement of the TPLF in the Afar area), most groups were newly formed following the border conflict. Field research shows that at present the groups have no clear political purpose of their own. They have used violent means for so long that many members of these armed groups have adopted banditry as a way of life. For all practical purposes, the Eritrean government provides them with logistical support and uses them for subversive activities in the Afar Regional State.

Key actors in the conflict include governments, political parties, illicit armed groups and ethnic groups



Afar elders and clan leaders

Because of their significant influential role within the Afar society, Afar elders and clan leaders are important actors during peace-making and conflict. Conflicts within Afar society (between individuals and families) are resolved using customary laws, through mediation, and the direct involvement of elders and clan leaders. The modern state apparatus like the police and courts play a minimal role in resolving conflicts that arise within the Afar society (Kelemework, 2002:881; 2004:40-41). Furthermore, Afar elders and clan leaders play a role in bringing rebellious groups back to a peaceful life by exerting their influence. On the other side, they are involved in conflict by representing the grievances of their community or clans. In most cases, revenge attacks and animal raids held by young Afars against the Issa or other groups are carried out with the full knowledge and subtle approval of elders and clan leaders.

Ethnic Groups

Conflict in Afar has some ethnic features. Irrespective of national borders, the perception that 'Afar is one' could be attributed to the ethnic dichotomy of 'we' and 'they'. During the Djibouti crisis (1991-94), the mobilisation of Afars from Ethiopia and Eritrea in support of FRUD on the one hand, and the mobilisation of Ethiopian Issa-Somalis in support of the government of Djibouti on the other, is one example that shows the ethnic component in conflict that involves the Afar.

Afar Diaspora

The Afar Diaspora refers to all Afars who currently live outside of the three Horn countries. Many within the Afar Diaspora share the view that 'Afar is one' and the Diaspora also contains strong advocates for uniting Afar. Though it can generally be assumed that the Afar Diaspora influences Afar politicians, and could be considered an actor in the conflicts, information about its activity is scarce. This information could include the type of contact or organisation within the Diaspora itself (besides holding occasional all-Afar conferences), current political issues and agendas in the Diaspora, the level of contact with the various Afar political organizations in the three countries, and the level of influence the Diaspora has over the leadership of the various Afar political organizations.

Conflict dynamics

In a general sense, the term 'dynamics' refers to forces or properties that stimulate growth, development, or

change within a system or process. In conflict research, 'conflict dynamics' lies between 'conflict formation and conflict transformation' (Galtung, 1996:81). Based on the analysis of actors and structures presented in the preceding sections, the long-term trends, short-term triggers, and possible future scenarios of the conflict dynamics in the Afar Regional State can now be discussed.

Long-term trends

This section maps out the pattern, direction, and the degree of tension, and assesses whether tensions are increasing or decreasing.

Conflict in the Afar Region in Ethiopia is influenced by government policies of the three governments of the Horn in which the Afar reside. Analysing the interaction between conflict structures and actors offers a vivid picture showing the critical role of governance in determining the long-term trend of the conflict. For instance, security-related problems in the Afar region are at present mainly associated with the Ethiopia-Eritrea border conflict and their mutual interference. The less accommodative and non-participatory governance practices in Eritrea (and the resultant political grievances) has scope beyond the Afars in Eritrea, embracing the other two Afar sections in Ethiopia and Djibouti. The economic and development difficulties currently prevailing in the region are clearly closely related to past and present Ethiopian regimes' ill-conceived development policies. For this reason, structural causes of conflict in the Afar Region, for the most part, boil down to a lack of democratic governance.

Governance in the three countries affects the behavior of the actors in the conflict

Governance in the three countries affect the behaviour of the other actors in the conflict. Lack of political space to redress grievances peacefully means violence is the only option left for redressing injustices. This was proven by the Afar in Ethiopia pre-1991, the Afar in Djibouti from 1991-1994, and currently by the Afar in Eritrea. Democratic governance diffuses tension, and the lack thereof exacerbates conflict. It follows then that the long-term trends of conflict emanates from the nature and practice of the governments in the three countries. Since the governments appear to be 'shakers, makers and breakers' of conflicts in the Afar region, the long-term trend would seem to depend primarily upon their governance practice, interests, and relations.

Pursuant to this, Ethiopia's present policy of conferring autonomous Regional State status on the Afar will have its own effect as a 'pole of attraction' for the Afar in Eritrea and Djibouti. As observed in field



interviews, positive appreciation on the autonomous arrangement also exists among the Afar in Eritrea and Djibouti. This may compel them to compare their respective situations with that in Ethiopia, making them more resistant to practices of exclusion and domination.

Triggers

What factors are there that could lead to the outbreak or the escalation of conflict in the Afar Region? We suggest these:

- **Elections:** In countries where democracy is less institutionalised, elections often trigger violence. This happened in Ethiopia following the May 2005 national election. Currently, there is just one opposition party in the Afar Regional State and it has some complaints regarding its free political movements. The lack of free and fair elections as well as the tendency of political parties to refuse to accept political defeat can be seen as triggers of violence in the region.
- **Drought:** Pastoral life is intimately associated with mobility. Afar mobility means going beyond one's own territory in search of available grazing and water for their herds, which attracts confrontation with other groups. Separately conducted research and field interviews confirm that Issa incursion into Afar territory and Afar herders' movement into other groups' territory increases in times of drought, resulting in more frequent violent confrontations, in most cases with the Issa.
- **Killings and animal raids:** It is widely documented that killings and raids can unleash a series of vengeance killings and animal raids between the Afar and the Issa or other groups, and, on rare occasions, within the Afar between different clans. The Afar-Issa conflict is more critical. Spirals of vengeance between the two groups were halted temporarily after heavy involvement of the federal government and higher officials of the two regions, only to re-occur later another new incident.
- **Flashpoints:** Currently, tension between the Afar and the Issa is rising in three small towns (now controlled by the Issa), Adamaytu, Gedamyt, and Endofo, on the Addis Ababa-Djibouti route. In 1998, an agreement was reached with the involvement of the federal government. Until the final status of the three towns is determined (by delineating the border between the Afar and Somali Regional States), they will fall under a joint committee administration composed of the two regions and barring any type of new construction in the towns until the final decision. By September 2006 no decision had been made as to the final status of the towns. Moreover, new houses have been constructed in the towns and, owing to complaints from the Afar Regional State; some of the new houses were demolished. There is also a

fourth town (Embole) being created by the Issa. The entire situation is tense, creating concern that these towns may become flash points in an eruption of violence between the two groups.

- **Delayed responses by the government:** Theories of conflict resolution suggest that if a conflict is not addressed at the early stage, it tends to evolve through stages toward the intractable stage when it is too late to seek a solution. In the same vein, a delayed response or the failure to address grievances, as in the Afar-Issa conflict, might lead to a vicious circle of violence.

A scenario is a description of an imagined hypothetical future state of affairs, situations or sequence of events (Evans & Nienham, 1998). Hence, two supposed developments or conflict scenarios have been considered: (1) a change in Ethiopia's policy on direct or own-port access; and (2) changes in the Ethiopia-Eritrea border conflict.

Change in Ethiopia's policy

With the end of the Cold War came the demise of the Derg in Ethiopia. This created a new state in the Horn of Africa, Eritrea, and made Ethiopia (the most populous state in the region), a land-locked country. The present government of Ethiopia has accepted the present status quo although for various political groups in Ethiopia the situation is unacceptable. But will the present government persist with its current policy without considering a change? Might there be a change of policy with a change of government?

Various geopolitical, demographic and economic factors give us good reasons to ask this sort of question. First, before the outbreak of the border war in 1998, Ethiopia was dependent on Eritrea's port (Asseb), and it now depends on Djibouti's port. Relations between governments in the Horn are far from stable. Anything that might damage the existing relations between Djibouti and Ethiopia could make Ethiopia hostage to less dependable port access via its other neighbours. Second, the population explosion in Ethiopia demands economic growth, which is naturally linked to exporting and importing goods and services. It means a sea route is a sine qua non. Third, less efficient and more costly freight services could cause significant harm to Ethiopia's economic performance. Fourth, there is some resentment, (at least within Ethiopian Afar) about further division among the Afar after the independence of Eritrea. Some Afar political circles have ambitions to reunite the two countries. These four reasons and some additional factors mean Ethiopian policy on direct or own-port access cannot be totally excluded.

If a change of policy occurs under the present government or following a government change, it would certainly drag the sub-region into an arena of



wider conflict, making it very difficult for third parties to broker a settlement.

Ethiopia-Eritrea border conflict

The border conflict imposed immense political, economic and human costs on Ethiopia in general, and on the Afar people in particular because of their proximity and strategic location. The conflict keeps inflicting heavy psychological and physical damage on the Afar people living on and around the border. It seems that the current impasse that was created following the ruling of the Boundary Commission will remain for a long time. In this case, the worst-case scenario is relapsing into another round of war, a scenario that seems remote but which cannot be totally ignored. The existing pattern of mutual interference by providing political, material, and other support for each other's dissidents will continue and probably intensify. This will affect regional security and political stability and will probably not be limited to the Afar Regional State.

Responses to the conflict

The national level

Governments of the three countries have responded differently to Afar's demand for fair participation. The present government of Ethiopia responded by restructuring the highly centralised state into an ethnic-based federal state, creating autonomous regions, of which the Afar Regional State is one. The Afar people seem to be positive about the self-administration mode of government; nevertheless, their most critical issues, the issues of security, and the need for more political and economic space have made the region a crucible for conflict.

In Djibouti, following the 1994 peace accord, an attempt was made to reduce single group domination in the government by appointing some Afar elites to higher government posts. To what extent this measure has served to ameliorate the feeling of alienation of the Djiboutian Afar is hard to say. In fact, at the grass roots level, there is an indication that the alienation has continued. From Eritrea's side, things are progressing in the wrong direction. Statements by international humanitarian organisations like Amnesty International and the international media appear to indicate that repression is intensifying, thus exacerbating the vicious cycle of conflict.

Sub-regional level

Besides providing a forum to resolve the systematic pattern of mutual intervention between states that

continues to underpin much of the conflict-prone Horn, IGAD is expected to be prepared to play a significant role in preventing inter-state wars (Draft Protocol, IGAD, 2002:259). Though IGAD's role in conflict prevention is clearly stated in its protocol, various factors limit its ability to perform this role. One vital limiting factor is hostility between members (e.g. Eritrea and Ethiopia; Eritrea and Sudan) and within members (e.g. Somalia, Sudan, and to some extent, Uganda). It is no wonder that IGAD's capability to act promptly is limited.

International level

There is no significant international involvement in conflict resolution in the Afar region. Some international NGOs such as Farm Africa, and local NGOs like the Afar Pastoralist Development Association (APDA) are engaged in pastoral and agro-pastoral development activities. In terms of focus or orientation, both international and local NGOs have little involvement in conflict prevention and management in the region. Despite their lack of focus on conflict resolution, their role in terms of exacerbating conflict within society (an unintended result of NGOs activity) is unknown.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Conflict involving the Afar in any one state has the potential to affect neighbouring states (Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti) and sub-regional stability. The prevailing Afar perception, irrespective of national borders, that 'Afar is one', is a critical factor in the strong ethnic alliance among the three sections of Afar, intensifying the 'spill-over' and 'pull in' effects in times of conflict.

Governments of the three countries in which the Afar live play a major role in conflicts involving the Afar. Most Afar grievances arise because of the exclusive, discriminatory, and non-participatory governance practices of these regimes. Besides, governments have been less receptive to providing redress for their wrong deeds, which makes peaceful solutions more difficult to find. Afar armed rebellions in the 1970s and 1980s in Ethiopia, in the early 1990s in Djibouti, and currently in Eritrea, are the result of that governance. Similarly, future conflict involving the Afar will depend primarily on the actions and responses of the respective governments.

In the current conflict in the Afar regional state, two factors are immediately important: conflict between the Afar and the Issa, and Eritrea's support for armed groups in the region. The Afar-Issa conflict has for many

Responses to
the conflict
would have to
take place at
the national,
sub-regional
and international
levels



years defied resolution. Government involvement did not go beyond fire-fighting and short-term solutions. Over time, the conflict has gained in scope and collected new issues. If long-lasting solutions to the conflict are not found soon, its destabilising effect will transcend the national level and begin to affect the entire region.

The decline of traditional values and conflict settlement mechanisms, the proliferation of arms as well as the low profile of women in conflict resolution, all limits the region's capacity to prevent and manage conflict.

Recommendations

The following points have policy implications for the prevention and management of conflict in the Afar.

- Strengthening IGAD's conflict prevention capacity in the sub-region by tackling the hostility between and within some of its members. Initially, this IGAD effort could be constrained by the present situation of its members, who will need strong support from regional and international organisations (such as the AU) and other concerned countries.
- The governments of the three states in which the Afar live also need to look inward to ensure their policies are inclusive, non-discriminatory, participatory and provide enough political space, thus ensuring equity in development between various regions and localities.

Specifically related to the Afar Regional State

The federal government should take urgent, long-lasting measures to resolve the Afar-Issa conflict with direct involvement and participation of the communities, who should also recognise the longevity of the process.

- Central government-initiated development projects in the region should involve sufficient consultation with the local communities. In addition, the federal and the regional government should address land tenure policy in pastoralist communities.
- Federal government support to the region needs to focus on easing the bottlenecks in socio-economic performance in the region.
- The activities of illicit armed groups and the damage they inflict on the local population should be prevented.
- The Afar's traditional dispute/conflict settlement mechanisms need to be encouraged and maintained. Ample focus has to be given to improving the political and social status of Afar women, including their role in conflict resolution.
- It is preferable to emphasise and support the control of arms already in the society rather than disarming (which is the main focus of the present policy). At the same time, states must strengthen their control of the flow of arms into the region.

Notes

- 1 A region is one defined territory, while a sub-region represents a sub-division.
- 2 When referencing informants, we mostly use alternative names rather than their original name.
- 3 Source: Afar Aid Organization, 2000 Report projected to 2006.
- 4 Information obtained from Afar elders during fieldwork.
- 5 Field interviews.
- 6 Interview with displaced Red Sea Afars.
- 7 Field Interview.
- 8 Interview with Djibouti government official, 16 June 2006, Addis Ababa.
- 9 Field Interview, 10 August 2006.
- 10 During field interviews all Afar informants stressed 'Afar is one, speaking one language-Afaraf, share common values and culture with identical clan configurations across the national borders of the three countries'.
- 11 Interview with former senior official of ARDUF on 13 June 2006 and Djibouti government official, 15 June 2006, Addis Ababa)
- 12 Field Interview.
- 13 Similar attitude is expressed among interviewees of Ethiopian Afars.
- 14 Field observations and interviews.
- 15 Field Interview, Logia, 11 June 2006.
- 16 Interview with senior official of RSADO, 14 June 2006.
- 17 Interviews with zone two and Berhale wereda administration officials, and local people.
- 18 Field interviews with Afar persons displaced from Eritrea.
- 19 Interview with former zone administrators.
- 20 Observation during fieldwork and interviews.
- 21 Adaitu, Endufo, Gedamaitu and Gewane are small towns on the main road between Addis Ababa and Djibouti. Both groups have made territorial claims to the towns and their surroundings.
- 22 Field interview.
- 23 Interview with an official of ARDUF, Addis Ababa, 2 August 2006.
- 24 Interview with a former senior official of ARDUF, 13 June 2006.
- 25 Field interview indicate local resentment in relation to the project, which is currently under construction.
- 26 Field interviews
- 27 Interview with an Awash Fentale wereda administrator.
- 28 However, the ARDUF seems to have disclaimed this stance, as its new political programme does not mention uniting the Red Sea Coast with the Afar hinterland in Ethiopia.

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About this paper

This paper contends that conflict in the Afar region is attributable to numerous reasons: nationalism, inter communal (e.g. Afar-Issa) conflict, competition for power between political parties, and on occasion, inter-clan conflict over resources. The conflict is exacerbated by misguided and externally imposed development strategies, the militarisation of the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia and decline of traditional values and dispute settlement mechanisms. The paper makes the following recommendations to address this conflict: strengthening IGAD's conflict prevention capacity in the sub-region by tackling the hostility between and within some of its members, especially its early warning mechanism; and an inward-looking approach by the governments of the three states in which the Afar that would produce policies that are inclusive, non-discriminatory, and participatory.

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