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Borderland Communities in the Horn: Avoiding Assumptions and Learning from History

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Borderland Communities in the Horn: Avoiding Assumptions and Learning from History

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Editorial principles
The Horn of Africa Bulletin is a regional policy periodical, monitoring and analysing key peace and security issues in the Horn with a view to inform and provide alternative analysis on on-going debates and generate policy dialogue around matters of conflict transformation and peacebuilding. The material published in HAB represents a variety of sources and does not necessarily express the views of the LPI.

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About Life & Peace Institute

Since its formation, LPI has carried out programmes for conflict transformation in a variety of countries, conducted research, and produced numerous publications on nonviolent conflict transformation and the role of religion in conflict and peacebuilding. The main focus of our work has been on Africa, with the Horn of Africa Programme being established and well-known in the 1990s, not least our work in Somalia. Other initiatives have been carried out in Congo-Brazzaville, Croatia, Sri Lanka and East Timor. We have strengthened the capacity of our civil society partners to address the conflicts in their own context, in some of the most difficult and war-torn countries.

Currently, we run conflict transformation programmes in the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes regions in partnership with local civil society organisations and universities in Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and the DRC. There is also a common programme including publications, policy work and methodology design based in Sweden.

The experiences of Intergovernmental Authority of Development (IGAD) member states show the centrality of borderlands and their inhabitants to the peace and stability of individual states and the region. Historically in the IGAD region, borderlands have experienced marginalisation and alienation from the centre and have functioned as the bastion and point of origin of armed groups challenging the authority of the state. The exclusion and alienation of borderlands and their peoples has not only taken a political form, but has also operated on the economic, social and cultural levels. In the IGAD region, borders between member states extend to 10,319 kilometres.[1]

In the Horn of Africa (HoA), borders and borderlands are not only the loci of several sources of intra-state insecurity, but have also led to dormant and active inter-state conflicts. A striking feature of intra- and inter-state tensions around borderlands is their intractability. As Barnes (2011) has pointed out that, "*The history of IGAD and its member states… illustrates starkly some of the challenges of cross-border peace building and the strengths and weaknesses of regional responses*."[2]

It is clear that past tropes and stereotypes regarding borders and borderlands such as their 'arbitrary' nature and their definition as cockpits of violence and threat to the state should be updated to take into account new developments. The expanding scope of cross-border economic and security collaboration between states deserves greater attention and potentially heralds a new chapter not only for inter-state relations but also for borderlands in the HoA. An equally topical and relevant area of focus, bearing in mind the volatility of inter-state relations in the HoA, should be processes of bordering and their reversal and how borderland populations engage with these processes. More specifically cross-border forms of collaboration and economic exchange between borderland peoples deserve attention not least because of their impact on economies, livelihoods and peace. In the HoA, individuals and groups involved in informal cross-border trade (ICBT) have developed and honed some novel business practices and innovations such as informal credit networks, money transfer systems, contextual systems of foreign exchange arbitrage, capital transfers to finance imports, and also a system of informal brokers.[3]

The article by Lemma provides a comprehensive overview of the overarching political obstacles that have slowed down the emergence of a more liberalised border regime at the continental and regional level. The article argues that while many of the problems around borders in Africa derive from the imposition of the Westphalian model of statehood, the African Union (AU) has made significant progress both at the level of creating agencies such as African Union Border Programme (AUBP) tasked with facilitating inter-state collaboration around border management and also in developing normative instruments such as the Niamey Convention. IGAD, through its Minimum Integration Programme (MIP), has also sought to tackle the challenges posed by borders in the region. The article, however, closes with some pessimism, noting the proliferation of normative instruments, none of which have reached the implementation level.

The article by McCallum is set against the background of the cross-border attack allegedly carried out by the Murle in April 2016. The article challenges the dominant narrative and stereotypes that became very visible in the aftermath of the cross-border attack. The article argues that cross-border violence needs to be understood in terms of the political context and the processes of marginalisation that have affected the Murle community in South Sudan. The article concludes by underlining the criticality of civil society, media and research discourse

avoiding the resort to stereotypes and atavistic cultural traits when explaining violence and conflict.

The article by Molla discusses intra-state and inter-communal conflict in the Moyale borderlands on the Kenya-Ethiopia border. The author argues that the traditional factors driving inter-communal conflicts in the Moyale borderland have been exacerbated by the competition over the control of newly-created political-administrative units, and also by conflicting claims over internal administrative boundaries.

This issue of the Horn of Africa Bulletin (HAB) sought articles that would highlight some of the emerging dynamics that increasingly define the reality of borderlands in the Horn of Africa, such as cross-border collaboration at the inter-state level and initiatives by borderland communities. While the articles in this issue of the HAB provide an assessment that is broader than the themes mentioned above, they offer very useful insights and analysis on some of the issues plaguing borders and borderland communities in the IGAD region.

Demessie Fantaye, Editor

[1] International Boundaries Research Unit. 2008. 'International boundary demarcation in the IGAD region: A review of existing practice and thoughts on future developments.' Report prepared for the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

[2] Barnes, Cedric. 'Building Peace beyond the State: Peace, Governance and Security' in Ramsbotham, Alexander & Zartmann, William (eds.), *Building Peace Across Borders*. 2011. Accord International Review of Peace Initiatives: Issue No. 2. Conciliation Resources.

[3] Cassaneli, Lee. 'The Opportunistic Economies of the Kenya-Somali Borderland in Historical Perspective', in Feyissa, Dereje & Hoehne, Markus Virgil (eds.) Borders and Borderlands as Resources in the Horn of Africa. 2014. James Currey: UK.

The Dynamics of Inter-Communal Conflict in the Moyale Borderland Region

By Tesfaye Molla



Source: FAO, cited in Pavanello, 2010:5

Ethiopia and Kenya share a border of over 860 kilometres. Moyale is one of the areas on the border that is divided between the two countries. Diverse communities constitute the inhabitants of the border area, including the Borana, Garri, Gabra and to some extent the Burji. Similar to other African border areas, the Ethiopia-Kenya border in Moyale is a promising borderland region, with great potential to advance mutually beneficial integration between the two countries, as well as among the countries in the Horn, due to already developed trade and social connections across border.[1] However, the borderland has long been a source of inter-communal conflict that can constrain cross-border socio-economic activities. Low intensity conflicts between the communities along the Ethiopia-Kenya border have existed for centuries. Nevertheless, since the beginning of the 1990s, the inter-play of internal (cultural values and beliefs such as raiding and cattle rustling, shortage of land for pasture and scarcity of water, politics of ethnicity and election) and external factors (drought and climate change, proliferation of fire-arms, the presence of armed opposition groups, and political change and reform of administration boundary), owing mainly to changes in the political systems in both countries, have altered the dynamics of inter-communal conflict in Moyale region and in the process created new factors for conflict, the emergence of new actors, and an upsurge in the intensity, duration and frequency of conflict.

Structural Change as the Prime Driver of Recent Conflicts

The protagonists in the conflicts in the Moyale borderland region[2] align themselves principally along group identities, such as the conflict between the Borana and the Garri

(in Ethiopia Moyale) on the one hand, and the Borana and the Gabra (in Kenya Moyale) on the other. However, a conflict breaking out on one side of the border often has a spill-over effect on the other side, largely due to clan or communal affiliations between communities living in both Kenya and Ethiopia.

Several causal factors account for the emergence and prolongation of communal conflicts between the communities within each country and across the Ethiopia-Kenya border from 1992, which can be classified under socio-cultural factors, environment and resource dynamics, and changes in politico-administrative units and boundaries. Though these factors are interwoven, the politico-administrative dimension has become the dominant motive that exerts new impetus on the old drivers for inter-communal conflict in Moyale.

Change in Politico-Administrative Units and Boundaries

The idea of redrawing regional borders by the national governments along ethnic lines and vesting regions with a degree of autonomy is in itself a conflict management measure.[3] This change has nonetheless led to a renewed round of inter-communal conflicts in both the Ethiopia Moyale and Kenya Moyale borderland, and has transformed the relations between communal groups since the 1990s. Before the reorganisation of local and regional governments in 1992, the Ethiopian part of Moyale was under the Borana Administrative region, and served as the capital of the Moyale province, and the local Borana, Garri and Gabra communities lived in peace for many years, though they experienced occasional conflicts over access to resources. From 1974 to 1991, Ethiopia was governed by the Provisional Military Administrative Council (Derg), which pursued a centralised Marxist-Leninist system of government. During this period, Moyale was under Borana *Awraja* (Province), and the Borana had held uncontested control of the traditional wells.[4] With the demise of the Derg, however, the former Borana province was split into two and fell under the Oromia and Somali regional states, including Moyale town. Consequently, since 1994 Moyale town has become the capital of two competing *Woredas* (Districts) – Oromia-Moyale and Somali-Moyale – without any clear demarcation.[5] Though an attempt was made in 2004 to reach a final decision to demarcate the boundary between Garri and Borana through referendum, it was aborted and the final status of the town has not yet been determined. Since then, the claims and counter-claims over Moyale town and its surrounding areas by the Borana, Garri and Gabra have led to several violent interactions and aggravated the simmering tensions between the communities, culminating in the deaths of 20 people and displacement of over 20,000 Moyale residents in July 2012.[6]

In Kenya Moyale too, the demarcation of parliamentary constituencies and administrative units has been a source of tension, sometimes resulting in direct violence since the introduction of multi-party politics in 1992. When Moyale district was created, for instance, there were claims that a larger number of areas should be included as part of the district, which led to conflicts between the Gabra and Borana communities.[7] More recently, following the creation of 47 counties along ethnic lines under the 2010 Kenyan constitution, competition over control of administrative units or competing

claims over boundaries have escalated the conflict.[8] Candidates for elected positions have gone to great lengths to ensure that the numbers from their own ethnic groups or clans were maximised, often by transporting large numbers of their fellows from other regions to their constituency to register,[9] worsening existing tensions.

The claims and counter-claims over administrative units and boundaries has become a dominant motif in current conflicts in both Moyales, because access to and utilisation of major resources, such as water and pasture, and even employment opportunities, are determined by administrative boundaries, creation of divisions, locations and sub-locations. As Greiner (2013) notes, "*Territorial gains are nowadays more enduring and valuable than a few stolen cattle, as new territories open up more options for grazing and cultivation and lessen internal competition*." [10]

Socio-Cultural Drivers

Some cultural values and beliefs such as raiding and cattle rustling have a long history in the borderland, and to some extent continue to be an aspect of traditional culture that drives inter-communal conflict in the Moyale region. However, the motivations for such practices have evolved. In the past, raids and attacks were carried out to obtain the bride-wealth to acquire a wife or as a rite of passage, but today attacks and raids are carried out to increase one's own wealth or for commercial purposes,[11] or with a more strategic objective such as intentionally displacing communities to gain control over territory or land and resources, which is, most notably, attributable to changes in political system and administrative boundaries in both Ethiopia and Kenya. As stated above, access to and utilisation of major resources are determined by administrative boundaries. Hence, the issue of territorial presence of different communities has become particularly contentious due to the process leading to the new Ethiopian federal constitution and the introduction of multiparty system, as well as the 2010 Kenyan constitution aimed at the identification of ethnic borderlines dividing the regions. Splitting and subdivision of the larger administrative units, which has created new winners and losers, has not only aggravated rivalries between these communal groups but also exerted new impetus for the old drivers. Fluid and flexible attitudes towards identities, which was the norm in the past, have increasingly hardened.[12]

Resource Issues and Environmental Stress

Interrelated dynamics such as drought, climate change, and resource scarcity including shortage of water and land for pasture have often sparked inter-group conflict. The Borana, Garri and Gabra communities frequently cross local boundaries as well national borders in search of pasture and water, but such movements have become more problematic, again largely due to the reordering of administrative boundaries which has raised the stakes in such conflicts.[13] Environmental stresses, coupled with heightened competition over resources, has made lasting control of pasturelands or water by displacing communities a more enticing option.[14] Consequently, the issue of boundaries has become a lingering problem that has produced a continued stalemate between the Garri, Gabra and Borana borderland communities.[15]

The Involvement of External Actors

Breaking from the past, a range of 'new' external actors exert an impact on inter-communal conflict in the Moyale border region. Besides communities (herders, age group systems and organisations, elders, male youth, women and children), local government administrators, police and security forces, armed insurgent groups (including the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and al-Shabaab), mercenaries, illicit arms traders and businessmen in providing money and arms in support of their own clan[16] have been involved in inter-communal conflict in the Moyale region. The Gabra-Borana Conflict in mid-2012 is one instance of the unique nature of the new contests that involved multiple actors. Since 1992, and specifically since the aborted referendum in 2004, the Borana and Garri have articulated competing claims over Moyale town and its surrounding areas, and the status of the town has not yet been determined. A bloody conflict between the Borra and Garri that began on 25 July 2012 in Ethiopia Moyale, and continued for the next three days, involving local authorities and insurgent groups. The conflict was triggered after the settlement of some members of the Garri in the west part of the town.[17] Each group blamed the other for the outbreak of the conflict. Some local officials from both the Oromia and Somali regions were brought before the Federal Court for charge of instigating conflict.[18] On the Kenyan side, political leaders such as Members of Parliament and party leaders and Councillors in Kenya Moyale are alleged to have sponsored raids as a means of raising funds for political campaigns or to maintain political leverage over their opponents,[19] hence fuelling further conflict. The presence of OLF and their activity since the 1990s has added new dimension to the inter-communal conflict in the region. The Gabra and Garri claim that the Borana are supported by the OLF, and the Borana for their part complain that the Garri fighters were backed by al-Shabaab.

Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons

The human costs of inter-communal conflict in the Moyale borderland region have risen, owing to expanded access to and use of more advanced weapon systems such as the AK47, and other automatic weapons, as well as grenades and rocket propelled grenades (RPGs). This has reshaped the dynamics of conflict, and significantly increased the magnitude of fatalities. A case in point is the July 2012 conflict between Garri and Borana, and the 2013 conflict between Gabra and Borana, where fighters used such sophisticated weapons.[20] Consequently, the conflicts have become beyond the capacity of local security forces. For instance, the 2013 fighting between Borana and Gabra only stopped owing to the deployment of the Kenya Defense Forces via the use of air power.[21]

The recent Borana-Garri and Gabra-Borana conflicts have involved large-scale mobilisation of armed men who were wearing uniforms that gave them the appearance of a professional state army, which was not common in the past. Since 2012, fighters in inter-communal conflicts in Moyale have donned military uniform, including in both the July 2012 Borana-Garri conflict in Ethiopia Moyale and the July-December 2013 conflict between Gabra and Borana in Kenya Moyale.[22] Some claim that fighters were not

Garri residing in Moyale, but trained mercenaries hired by the Garri.[23]

Duration and Frequency

The bouts of conflict between the borderland communities in Moyale are not only longer in duration but have also escalated in magnitude, intensity and frequency. For example, the eruption of conflicts between the Gabra and Borana in Kenya Moyale that began in October 2011 and July 2013 continued for around three and five months, respectively. The frequency of the conflict has also increased.[24]

Increased Level of Violence and Indiscriminate Killings

In the past, norms regulated the limits of acceptable violence, and its destructive effects were moderate. In times of tension and conflict, women used to attend markets freely in the territory occupied by rival groups, and even crossed the international borders without fear.[25] However, with the hardening of relations and increasing politicisation and commercialisation of raids, as well as the spread and use of devastating automatic weapons, there are today a much higher number of human and livestock killings, with no discrimination being made between combatants and women and children. For instance, the clash between the Garri and Borana for three days from 25 to 27 July 2012 in Ethiopia Moyale not only forced over 20,000 people to flee across the border into Kenya, but also led to closure of the border, the burning of villages, closing of businesses and the loss of belongings of traders on both sides of the border for around a week.[26] The conflict also affected government revenue – during the three days of the Borana-Garri conflict, the Ethiopian government's revenue from trade with Kenya through Moyale dropped precipitously by 301 percent.[27]

In another conflict that took place from 15 July to 8 December 2013 between Gabra and Borana in Kenya Moyale, the consequences were more substantial. It impacted virtually all areas of central and Gobo division and approximately 6,500 households were affected, of which 107 houses were burnt and 186 houses destroyed and looted, and it also led to most of the households living below the absolute poverty line. Out of an estimated 80,550 people living in Moyale constituency, 53,968 people, around 67 percent of the population, was displaced and faced hunger.[28] The violence also led to the closure of border for around two months following the conflict. The same conflict substantially affected sources of revenue for the Ethiopian government due to its spill-over effects.[29]

Contraction of Socio-Economic Linkages

Another effect of prolonged and unabated conflict in Moyale is the creation of fear and suspicion amongst local communities. In Moyale town (Ethiopia), it has become problematic for the Garri or Borana to cross to the other side of the main road (the road having emerged as the de facto boundary between the two communities) for fear of attack by the other group – not the case before 1991.[30] Though Moyale is a busy market for both informal and formal trade, such market operations can only occur in the absence of conflict. In the event of inter-communal conflict, markets are either

relocated, closed or rendered inaccessible and interrupted. Another striking trend is the proliferation in the trade in small arms and light weapons, while more benign trade exchanges between communities have been declining in the past few years due to the prevalence of tension among the communities. The persistence of inter-communal conflict has reduced cooperative and social relationships that had existed for a long period of time.

Conclusion

The Borana-Garri and Borana-Gabra conflicts in the Moyale borderland region are complex, intricate, and multidimensional in nature, making the attempt by various actors through bilateral as well as local administrative governments, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, and District Peace Committees to bring sustainable peace in the area problematic. Owing to its complexity and the use of sophisticated weapons, and the involvement of multiple stakeholders, a single local actor alone – be it a traditional institution or local government – may not be fully effective in managing conflicts. Hence, external intervention and coordination with local actors is indispensable to bring about a sustainable resolution to the conflict that fosters reconciliation among all sectors of the community, and buttresses socio-economic interaction among communities across the border.

Shifts in the political system in both Ethiopia and Kenya have politicised existing differences and polarised relations between communities. It is recommended that a policy of confidence-building by both governments, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the African Union, and the international community that facilitates regular peace meetings and dialogues between the communities to reduce the mistrust between and among the Borana, Gabra, Garri and Burji communities is pursued.

More positively, in December 2015[31] and June 2017[32] the governments of Ethiopia and Kenya, in partnership with IGAD and the United Nations, agreed to establish an integrated cross-border initiative to foster peace and sustainable development in the northern Marsabit county of Kenya and the southern Borana Zone in Ethiopia. This may have a positive impact on mitigating conflicts, so as to strengthen socio-economic interaction and integration between the two countries at the border.

The overlapping of the Gabra, Garri and Borana communal groups in both Ethiopia and Kenya Moyale makes it challenging to divide them into a clear-cut territorial or administrative constituency, particularly as these groups have lived together for years. Hence, a further recommendation is the development of mechanisms whereby they jointly administer the area.

Tesfaye Molla (PhD) holds a PhD in Political Science from Addis Ababa University in 2015. He is a part time instructor at Kotebe Metropolitan University. He can be reached at tesfayemolla@yahoo.com.

[1] Cross-border socio-economic activities between the two Moyales are marked primarily due to their proximity, inter-group marriages and other relations (speaking the same language) among the borderland communities, and political linkages (crossing Ethiopian border to participate in election in Kenya); and the fact that their populations visit the same markets, share the same education (about 4,000 Ethiopian students attending school in Kenya Moyale), and health centres.

[2] Moyale borderland region refers to the districts of Ethiopia Moyale (Oromia and Somali) and Kenya Moyale.

[3] Glowacki, Luke and Gönc, Katja (2013). *Investigating the Potential of Peace Committees in Ethiopia: A Needs Assessment in IGAD CEWARN's Karamoja and Somali Clusters.*

[4] Bassi, Marco (2010) *The politics of space in Borana Oromo, Ethiopia: demographics, elections, identity and customary institutions, Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 4, 2, 221-246.

[5] Bernabini, Francesca (2012) *Pastoral Livelihoods in South Ethiopia – Value Chain Assessment of Gum and Resins in Moyale Area, Doctor of Philosphy in International Cooperation and Sustainable Development Policies, Bologna University.*

[6] BBC News (2012) *Ethiopia: 20,000 flee Moyale clashes – Red Cross.* 28 July 2012 http://www.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7912242.stm.

[7] The Marsabit Conflict Assessment Report of July 21 – 28, 2005 cited in CEWARN (2006) *CEWARN Baseline Study: For the Kenyan-Side of the Somali Cluster The Conflict Early Warning and Response mechanism (CEWARN)* September 13, 2006.

[8]For instance, violence in Kenya Moyale in 2012 between the Borana and the Gabra was linked with the perceived importance of controlling power devolved to the County level the accompanying community tensions. For more see Feinstein International Center, et al (2013) Conflict Management and Disaster Risk Reduction: A Case Study of Kenya. July 2013.

[9] Carrier, Neil and Hassan H. Kochore (2014) *Navigating ethnicity and electoral politics in northern Kenya: the case of the 2013 election, Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 8, 1, 135–152, Retrieved from http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rjea20.

[10] Greiner, Clemens (2013) *Guns, Land, and Votes: Cattle Rustling and the Politics of Boundary (Re) Making in Northern Kenya Oxford University Press*. Retrieved from from http://afraf.oxfordjournals.org/

[11] CEWARN/IGAD (2007) Report of the IGAD Regional Workshop on the Disarmament of Pastoralist Communities from 28-30 May 2007 confirms commercialization of raiding, which entails funding of raids and purchasing of raided stocks by wealthy business people is fairly a recent phenomenon.

[12] Conflict Early Warning and Response mechanism (CEWARN) (2006) CEWARN Baseline Study: For the Ethiopian-Side of the Somali Cluster Inter Governmental Authority On Development (IGAD)Region September 8, 2006.

[13] Integrated Agriculture Development Consultant (2009). *Assessment and Consolidation Report on: Existing Approaches and Best Practices in Cross-border Peace Building and Conflict Mitigation and Strengthened and CSOs across the Ethio-Kenya Border*.

[14] Interview with FGD 2014.

[15] Gardner, Tom (2017). *Uneasy peace and simmering conflict: the Ethiopian town where three flags fly.* Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/may/16/uneasy-peace-ethiopia-three-flags-fly-oromia-somali-states-tension-ethnic-federalism.

[16] Interviews with Gitonga, 2013, Kenya and Oda 2014, Ethiopia.

[17] Interview with Boru and Aschalew, 2014.

[18] Interview with Tsegaye and Aschalew, 2014.

[19] Gakuria, Anne R. (2013) *Natural Resource Based Conflict among Pastoralist Communities in Kenya. A Research* Project Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Award of the Degree of Master of Arts in International Studies, University of Nairobi.

[20] Interview with Joseph, 2014.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Interviews with Boru and Golicha, 2013.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Interviews with Abdulkadir, Tsegaye and Joseph, 2014.

[25] Interview with FGD 2014.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Writer's own calculation of percentage change of Government Revenue due to ICC based on data collected from Moyale Custom Authority.

[28] Moyale Conflict Joint Assessment Report – Assessment period: 14-12-2013 to 16-1--2013. Retrieved from http://reliefweb.int/report/kenya/moyale-conflict-joint-assessment-report.

[29] If we compare the June-July 2013 revenue (Birr 33,978,723.45) when the Moyale region was relatively peaceful to the revenue gained in late July-August 2013 (Birr

7,330,862.12) where ICC started in Kenya Moyale, the revenue in Moyale custom was suddenly dropped by 446 percent. For more see Tesfaye Molla (2015) PhD Dissertation, Inter-Communal Conflicts in Moyale: Drivers, Dynamics and their Impact on Micro-Regionalization, Addis Ababa University.

[30] Interview with FGD 2014.

[30] For more information, see: http://www.president.go.ke/2015/12/08/kenya-ethiopia-sign-pact-to-develop-pacify-their-common-border-regions/.

[30] For more information, see: http://journalducameroun.com/en/ethiopia-kenya-sign-cross-border programme/.

[31] For more information, see: http://www.president.go.ke/2015/12/08/kenya-ethiopia-sign-pact-to-develop-pacify-their-common-border-regions/.

[32] For more information, see: http://journalducameroun.com/en/ethiopia-kenya-sign-cross-border programme/.



The Murle and the security complex in the South Sudan-Ethiopia borderlands

By Judith McCallum

Perceptions of the Murle

In April 2016 the Ethiopian government accused the Murle community in South Sudan of staging a brutal cross-border attack into Gambella province of Ethiopian territory which resulted in numerous deaths, injuries and displacement.[1] This led to Ethiopian forces crossing into South Sudan to recover children and cattle alleged to have been taken by the Murle community.[2] This was an extraordinary attack on several fronts – the Murle community does not border with the locations attacked, and the brutality of the attack was not in keeping with usual cattle raiding patterns in the region. While some question whether the attack was indeed carried out by the Murle community (or factions within the community), others suggest possible political motivations behind the attack.[3] However, official rhetoric has insisted on portraying this attacks as apolitical – and the result of 'primitive and destructive forces driving the Murle community.'[4] Regardless of the ethnic affiliation of the perpetrators, absent security provision on both sides of the border create a lawlessness that hampers human security, enables impunity, resulting in loss of life, disruption of livelihoods, food insecurity, and mass displacement on both sides of the border.[5]

The narrative of the Murle as a "primitive" community – often seen as having apolitical motivations for its actions, and driven by their need to abduct children (and cattle) due to an infertility epidemic – is one that continues to hold considerable sway in the current context of South Sudan and wider region, making the whole community convenient scapegoats for any violence which is unclear, or too political to attribute.[6] However, this reductionist perspective diminishes the complexity of the Murle community, and underestimates the potential role of Murle leaders and community within the current South Sudanese political arena.[7] As Felix De Costa (2013) asserts, "*Accusing all Murle of responsibility for violence only serves to magnify the sense of marginalisation and isolation felt by the Murle as a whole*." [8]

At the heart of the dominant discourse around the Murle community is the claim that (only) the Murle abduct children and raid cattle. Yet the Murle community is not the only ethnic group in South Sudan where members of the community participate in these activities.[9] Nonetheless, a strong narrative, even believed by some Murle themselves,[10] asserts that the Murle community is more inclined to abduct children due to infertility, cultural practices and a more fluid sense of identity.[11] Other communities, for their part, claim they only abduct children as revenge for the Murle child-abducting practices.[12] This feeds into the discourse of the Murle as a primitive and ungovernable community, and in turn has been utilised by political leaders to incite cycles of violence against the Murle as a whole.

At the most simplistic level, the Murle are divided into two groups – the cattle keepers who inhabit the Lotilla Plain, and the agricultural Murle, inhabiting the Boma Plateau.

Despite a common ethnic identity and history, these two groups developed distinct livelihood strategies and cultural patterns – the cattle keepers following a seasonal transhumance pattern, with cattle at the heart of their society (much like their neighbouring Nuer and Dinka), and the agriculturalists culturally less cattle-focussed and employing a mix of other livestock and livelihood strategies.[13] [14] The Murle are also divided along various clan lines, age sets (*buul*), religious, and political ideologies.

> *"While sharing an overarching ethnic identity, when it comes to issues of peacebuilding the Murle can be neither seen nor treated as a consolidated group."*[15]

The Murle as Stakeholders in Political Contests

The Murle community has long experienced deep divisions based on political allegiances. During the second Sudanese civil war (1983-2005), the Murle were split between those who supported the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and those who supported the Pibor Defense Force headed by Sultan Ishmael Konyi.[16] The Pibor Defense Force was formed to protect the Murle community from the predation by the neighbouring Dinka and Nuer, who dominating the leadership of the SPLM/A. Despite the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, and the Juba declaration in 2006 when Sultan Konyi joined the SPLM and his militia were integrated (somewhat) into the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the split within the Murle community continued.

Although for many in South Sudan, the CPA created a period of relative peace and stability, for the inhabitants of Jonglei state, bordering with Ethiopia's Gambella region, this era was characterised by almost constant inter-ethnic conflicts, fueled largely by cattle raiding, mass killings and abduction – often justified as revenge attacks for both current and historic grievances, often leading to mass displacement of populations into Ethiopia.[17] Cattle raiding is endemic in Jonglie State, amongst the Murle as well as the other pastoral communities, as cattle are highly prized and central to their cultural traditions and values, in particular marriage. This reciprocal cattle raiding is often a trigger and driver of conflict in the region, particularly in the absence of other livelihood strategies for the youth. Throughout this period, the Murle community continued to be at odds with the dominant Nuer and Dinka communities in Jonglei State – with very little representation in either the Jonglei State government in Bor nor the national government in Juba. During this period the Murle community also saw very little in terms of improved infrastructure, economic development or access to services and alternatives sources of livelihood.[18] This political and socio-economic marginalisation was reinforced by prevailing narratives and political discourses that portrayed the Murle community as the principal aggressors in the violence in Jonglei, which, according to Felix De Costa (2013), ignored the reality that the cycle of violence was the responsibility of all the communities involved, not just the one group.

A series of inter-communal attacks targeting the Murle, with alleged support from the

SPLA who armed the Dinka Bor and Lou Nuer youth in 2011 and 2012 combined with heavy-handed forced disarmament of the Murle community, resulted in a rebellion headed by former payam administrator, David Yau Yau, leading to an unprecedented flow of arms and ammunition and the mobilisation of youth. According to Todisco (2015), "*The specific grievances of Yau Yau and his close entourage aside, the struggle had progressively embodied a feeling of marginalisation shared by most Murle people against the state government headquartered in the state capital, Bor, which they perceived as hostile and Dinka-dominated*.".[19]

In 2013, Yau Yau and his militia group re-entered negotiations with the Juba government, and on 9 May, 2014, Yau Yau signed a landmark peace agreement with President Salva Kiir, but committed to stay neutral in the wider conflict in the new civil war that had erupted in December 2013.[20] The peace agreement between resulted in the formation of a new Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) along the South Sudan-Ethiopia border, combining the Pibor and Pochalla counties of Jonglei State,[21] primarily inhabited by the Anyuak, Jei, Kachepo, and Murle. The political apparatus of the GPAA was now controlled by the previously-marginalised Murle political leadership, with David Yau Yau appointed as the Chief Administrator. Todisco (2015) noted that while the post-CPA era was characterised by protracted violence and displacement in Pibor, the collapse of the country into civil war in 2013 resulted in a considerable improvement of security for the Murle communities in the GPAA.[22]

Because of the newly erupted civil war, the Murle community moved from being the enemy that the other communities in Jonglei state despised and worked together to attack, to the potential lynch pin who could potentially swing the war one way or another. As Todisco (2015) stated: "*Yau Yau has repeatedly pledged neutrality, but if the new troops were deployed on the Pibor–Akobo corridor they would represent a significant new military advantage for the government*.".[23]

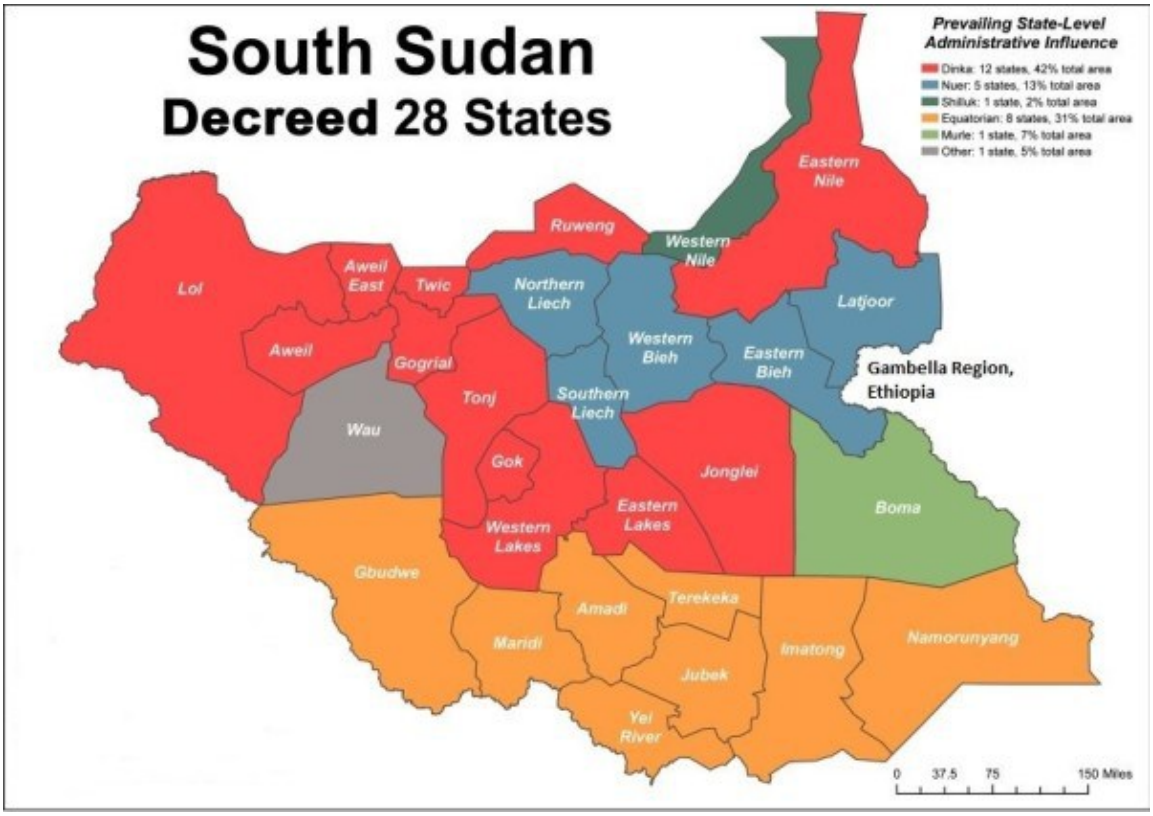


Figure 1 Map of decreed 28 States of South Sudan, including Boma state

The formation of Boma state in October 2015, along with the removal of Yau Yau from the leadership and the installing of long-term SLPA/M member, Baba Meden, in December 2015, resulted in a resumption of intra-community violence.[24] Rejected by the section of the community that supported Yau Yau, Meden was struggled to establish his capital in Pibor town, until he was replaced by Sultan Ismail Konyi in January 2017. The 2016 attack in Gambella attributed to the Murle community was blamed upon Meden and his government in Boma – who countered by blaming Yau Yau's militia for the attack.[25] Currently, the political context in Boma county remains fragile, with continued internal Murle divisions, and little improvement in their relationships with their neighbouring communities. However, the fact that they are no longer under the political domination of their neighbouring communities (at least at the State level), provides more opportunities for a measure of political autonomy and influence.

The failure to engage the Murle as a community with legitimate grievances and concerns, and continuing to treat them as being predisposed to certain forms of violence and behaviours, will only perpetuate continued cycles of violence and revenge, which will continue to spill over the South Sudan-Ethiopia border.

Conclusion

Politicians, and some researchers, present the violence in the border areas of South Sudan and Ethiopia as the result of primitive practices of cattle raiding and child abduction, apportioning blame according to ethnicity, while whitewashing the marginalisation and political motivations that may also be driving this violence. As Rolandsen and Breidlid (2013) assert, the violence in this region is more a result of the

prevailing security vacuum and the political economy of civil war and large-scale violence than because of inter-ethnic conflict, cattle raiding and child abduction (although they do play a part). As communities continue to feel marginalised and insecure in their relationships to their neighbours, they will continue to arm themselves, and the cycle of violence will continue.

Recommendations

NGOs, Researchers, and media must use conflict sensitivity when reporting on violent conflicts to avoid reinforcing harmful stereotypes and feeding into cyclical patterns of conflict and revenge. It is important to avoid attributing violent acts or behaviours according to specific ethnic groups – and recognise that acts of violence and criminality cut across all ethnic groups.

Those working to resolving the ongoing civil war must recognise that political settlements and peace agreements need to be comprehensive to address wider grievances. It is important to also recognise that the resolution of one conflict may cause a resurgence of other conflicts that have been suppressed or remained dormant during the wider conflict, and ensure ongoing conflict analysis and direct resources towards these emerging conflicts to ensure they do not destablise the political settlement.

INGOs, Donors and national government representatives must recognise that grassroots inter- and intra-ethnic conflict transformation is critical to ensure that political settlements are sustained and address deep-seated narratives of grievance and revenge. Whilst political settlements and peace agreements provide the critical space for peace, if these agreements are not bolstered and supported at the grassroots level through genuine conflict transformation between communities, the likelihood of a return to conflict is high.

Judith McCallum (PhD) holds a PhD in Cultural Geography from York University, Ontario, Canada. Her research focused on the impact of the Sudanese civil war on the identities of the Murle community in Jonglei, South Sudan. She currently serves as the Executive Director of the Life & Peace Institute.

[1] 'Death Toll tops 200 in cross-border Ethiopia raid' 2016-04-18. http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/death-toll-tops-200-in-cross-border-ethiopia-raid-20160418-2

[2] Tekle, Tesfa-Alem. 2016. 'Ethiopia launches military action against S.Sudan's Murle group'. Sudan Tribune, Tuesday, 19 April 2016.

[3] '7 questions about the Gambella raid in Ethiopia.' Radio Tamzuj. 21 April 2016.

[4] Despite the incident in question happening around the same time as Riek Machar's planned return to the Juba capital through Gambella region, the Ethiopia premier "confirmed" that the attackers were neither affiliated with the South Sudan government

nor the SPLM-IO (Tekle 2016).

[5] Rolandsen, Øystein H. & Ingrid Marie Breidlid. 2013. 'What is Youth Violence in Jonglei?', PRIO Paper.

[6] Laudati, Anne. 2011. 'Victims of discourse: mobilizing narratives of fear and insecurity in post conflict South Sudan – the case of Jonglei State.' African Geopolitical Review 30(1): 15-32.

[7] Felix da Costa D. 2013. ''We are one, but we are different": Murle identity and local peacebuilding in Jonglei, South Sudan', June Policy Brief, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF), Oslo: NOREF

[8] Ibid.

[9] Jal, Gatluck Ruon. 2014. 'Cross Border Conflicts in Gambella Regional State (from 1991 to 2011): the impacts of the Cross Border Conflicts in Gambella Regional State.' Public Policy and Administration Research Vol. 4. No. 6 pp 52-61p 56

[10] To distance themselves from others in the community, it was not unusual to hear Murle community members blaming other factions of the community for child abduction. For example, the highland Murle on the Boma plateau have sought to differentiate themselves as a separate ethnic ground to distance themselves from the Murle community on the Lotilla plane.

[11] for a more through discussion on this, see the author's PhD dissertation 2013.

[12] Jal (2014:56)

[13] Andretta, Elizabeth H. 1989. 'Symbolic Continuity, Material Discontinuity, and Ethnic Identity among Murle Communities in the Southern Sudan.' *Ethnology* 28, no. 1 (1989): 17-31. doi:10.2307/3773640.

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[15] Felix De Costa (2013)

[16] McCallum, J. 2013. 'Murle Identity in Post-Colonial South Sudan', doctoral dissertation. Toronto: York University.

[17] Rolandsen, O. & Breidlid (2013:4)

[18] Santschi et. al. (2014).

[19] Todisco, C. 2015. 'Real but Fragile: The Greater Pibor Administrative Area.' Small Arms Survey HSBA Working Paper 35. Pg. 5.

[20] Ibid

[21] The counties which have fewer inhabitants from the Dinka Bor and Lou Nuer communities.

[22] Todisco, C. 2015. 'Real but Fragile: The Greater Pibor Administrative Area.' Small Arms Survey HSBA Working Paper 35.Pg. 61.

[23] Ibid: 8.

[24] 'South Sudan President summons Boma governor over military clashes.' Sudan Tribune, 29 February 2016.

[25] 'Boma government accused of being behind massacre of Ethiopia citizens.' Sudan Tribune. 22 June 2016.



Reevaluating the African Approach toward Resolving Border Issues

By Berhanu Lemma

Imagine that you are a stranger to the town as well as to the country, sitting at a table on the terrace of a café on a sidewalk along a narrow but bustling street. Amid the relaxed atmosphere, your eyes capture suddenly a strip of black square brick tiles with interspersed white crosses on them, running on the ground and passing underneath your table. You sense that what you are looking at is strange, but you do not know yet what it is that makes it strange. Your eyes follow the line, scrutinising it backwards and forwards, and you take notice that it runs right up to the front wall of the café behind you. Just in front of you, the black strip runs across the street, crosses over the opposite sidewalk and goes up to the closed door of a multi-story apartment building. A closer look around brings to your notice, just a few steps before you, letters of the alphabet painted in white on either side of the line: 'B' and 'NL'. You do not need to ask anyone what this whole combination of things is all about, because the idea ultimately sinks in: You are just sitting right on the border between Belgium and the Netherlands.

Such is, nowadays, the reality of the border phenomenon one is likely to encounter within the European Union (EU). The case is intended to illustrate how far personal attitudes and behaviors, government philosophies and policies, and organisational systems and practices can possibly evolve and stretch with regard to borders if people are willing to let them. That borders are where they should be only to serve ultimately – not to encroach on or work against – the common interests of the people who put them there by common consent demonstrates itself in an unambiguous manner.

The European Union's existing formal border management practice, as represented above, appears in direct contrast with its current counterpart in Africa. In fact, the parallel is beyond comparison. Despite aspiration and rhetoric, arguably, the African Union (AU) has not yet articulated clearly, and is not able to enforce, a continental, all-encompassing and binding package of philosophy, policy and strategy governing border management regimes uniformly and effectively. Given this reality, it may be too much to imagine border control circumstances in Africa to transform in the near future to any significant degree, let alone to the degree prevailing within the EU.

Taking such a position may not serve one so well, especially considering the possibility that comparing Europe and Africa leads to much graver historical rancor than comparing two different ordinary things, like apples and oranges. And yet, at least, it does not indicate any desire to disregard the existence in Africa of an established tradition in which people interact freely and peacefully across borders. Nor does it mean that borders are a new, challenging or incomprehensible phenomenon for Africans. Rather, by taking that position, our concern turns out to be much more fundamental, that African states, individually as well as collectively, have yet to justify – by any practical measure and primarily to the benefit of their own people – why they should go on maintaining their existing border management regimes. In other words, it is high time that African states and their governments investigated, more seriously now than

ever before, how well the systems they claim to have put in place have been serving the interests of the nation, meaning the interests of the respective citizens. After all, no matter what the specific objectives of a particular sovereign state are, the ultimate goal of effective border management should be ensuring the highest possible well-being for the people constituting the state.[1]

The challenges and issues surrounding the management of borders in Africa are diverse and complex. Reducing them to categories, some of these challenges and issues tend to be philosophical, others historical, and still a few others something else. Starting from the philosophical aspects, we find that states in Africa have yet to redefine and comprehend certain core and prerequisite concepts, and see if they can align or streamline their views and interests accordingly. For instance, we can mention two alternative paradigms identified in the theoretical world. According to one view, nation-states behave as if they were the single most important players on the international arena, and the boundaries between them strict dividing lines shielding state sovereignty and national security.[2] Components of this line of reasoning date back to the colonial era. It is easy to discern that states that have their border management policies and practices oriented along this line of reasoning are more likely to exhibit borders that are closed, fenced, walled, and, sometimes, militarised.

Another view is that states do not have to be the only – not even the major – political players in cross-border and international relations.[3] This position determines that state borders have as a principal function allowing and enabling neighbors and other international players to interact more freely and smoothly. Territorial disputes and border conflicts will not have a chance under these circumstances. Instead, the development of cross-border communications and infrastructure, and other beneficial undertakings will flourish. In a much similar fashion, one can call upon other alternative views for investigation. However, the point to be made here is that, given at least some of the border issues in Africa, it does not seem that the border situations will ever improve unless the views of African leaders happen to evolve in accordance with the demands of the times.

Looking at other dimensions, we may find that the effective management of national borders in Africa appears to have been hamstrung by certain historical excuses and narratives. This happens with regard to two aspects of the continent's colonial history: the imposition of the nation-state model and the arbitrary nature of boundary delimitation and demarcation. The reason why arbitrariness has become a special issue in Africa is related particularly to how the current states were established by the colonial powers, including the manner in which they transported or, rather, implemented their nation-state model in the continent.

The nation-state model, as we know it now, had its definitive historical emergence with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Historians assert that these events heralded not only a new period of peace in Europe but also the advent of a modern era that did not tolerate countries' being the personal possessions of monarchs. What is more, Westphalia saw to it that the territorial integrity of other nations was respected, and that rulers had the

right to determine the affairs of their respective states, freeing them from external intrusions.[4]

The Peace of Westphalia did, indeed, live up to its name as far as the wars in Europe at the time were concerned. It ended both the Thirty Years' War and the Eighty Years' War by bringing the warring parties back to their senses. It was instrumental in the signing of the Treaty of the Pyrenees in 1659, as well. However, critics of the 'Westphalian System' of nation-states question the significance of copy-pasting this system as it is in contexts like those in Africa.[5] In their view, the system was, in the first place, a European response to a European problem, thus suiting the prevailing situations there. Our taking on this should be that its exportation and application elsewhere depended for success on how similar and conducive situations were within the host societies.

Two questions arise demanding further scrutiny in this respect. First, there is the question of the manner in which the Westphalian model had contributed to the challenges African states have been encountering with regard to their borders, whether directly or indirectly. We can argue that, in Africa, the Westphalian System was not only unsuitable but also unsolicited. The circumstances in the continent had been such that Westphalia or its prescriptions had to be superimposed in their entirety, often by force, onto pre-existing indigenous systems.[6] Indigenous societies that were originally brought into strong social, economic and political cohesion within time-tested local cultural, ethnic, religious and other boundaries had had to contend with alien regimes. At least in this context, the said nation-state model has contributed to the social, economic and political turmoil that has prevailed in post-colonial Africa.

The second question relates to how much African states, and regional and continental organisations have so far done to rectify the problem. There can be no doubt that early contemporary African political leaders have always had a clear understanding of the depth and magnitude of the difficulties the boundary situation would initiate once leadership had passed to indigenous hands. As a result, different individuals or groups of individuals had put forth what they thought were best for the continent. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) played a pivotal role, in 1964, in bringing all the then-independent states together whereby, for the sake of peace and stability in the continent, they acquiesced in keeping the territory transferred to them at the time of independence. The idea behind such an agreement was to refrain from questioning the doctrinal mould from which territorial sovereignty was established in each state's case. And, in so doing, they sought to maintain peace among neighbouring African states, and work towards an ultimate, long-term political unity at a continental level.[7]

It is public knowledge now that the arrangement did not succeed in either preventing the border disputes and conflicts or unifying the continent as a single political entity. Half a century after the agreement, Africa has yet to show any real breakthrough in relation to just the most fundamental prerequisites of a sound border regime: boundary delimitation and demarcation. According to existing data, not more than a quarter of the inter-state borders are currently demarcated.[8]

This does not mean, however, that efforts to change the status quo are in short supply. Much to its credit, the AU, torchbearer of the defunct OAU, established the African Union Border Programme (AUBP) in 2007 under the umbrella of the Peace and Security Department (PSD) of the African Union Commission (AUC). Its objectives are: (i) the delimitation and demarcation of African boundaries where such exercise has not yet taken place; (ii) the reinforcement of the integration process, within the framework of the regional economic communities (RECs) and other large-scale cooperation initiatives; (iii) the development, within the framework of the RECs and other regional integration initiatives, of local cross-border cooperation; and (ii) capacity building in the area of border management, including the development of special education and research programmes.[9]

It is no accident that the AUBP decided to leverage the RECs for its success. Article 3(I) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union (CAAU) itself stipulates, for the "*gradual attainment*" of its objectives, that the AUC utilises the institutional capabilities of the RECs.[10] Much closer at home, cognisant of this responsibility and those delegated to it through its own charter, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has been engaged in programmes and initiatives that aimed at improving cross-border relations between its member states.

The region that is represented by IGAD, the broader Horn of Africa (HoA), has a number of special characteristics that rather add to the persistence of border-related problems in the region. The borderlands in question are arid and semi-arid, barely habitable and scant in resources that can support livelihoods other than pastoralism, which is itself increasingly being negatively affected by climate change. Added to the natural forces, historical circumstances and decades of deficient governance have been rendering these borderlands increasingly inhospitable even to some of the hardiest people in the world. Poverty, disease, drought, hunger, communal or ethnic friction and conflict have been typical descriptions of the HoA border areas. Emerging events are increasingly piling up new issues and worsening the impacts of existing problems. Extensive degradation of the natural environment, the proliferation of modern weapons or their easy accessibility, profitability of smuggling and trafficking operations of illegal commodities and people, and expansion of large-scale development projects, are new additions to the already too crowded list.

That these problems are quite serious and that they are occurring along almost all the borders of member states of the AU or IGAD indicates one thing: the best chance to resolve them resides in the ability of member states to muster their strength and act in unison. Both the AU and IGAD have instituted several continental and regional mechanisms, respectively, intended to address the issues at different stages and levels. For instance, the AUBP's integrated border management strategy has outlined ways to tackle all the multi-faceted border-related problems in a comprehensive and innovative manner.[11] It has championed the blending of time-tested global models with indigenous ones, meant to deal suitably with the problems in accordance with their specific characteristics. For its part, IGAD has issued a number of mechanisms including, for instance, the Minimum Integration Programme (MIP) intended to fast-

track the integration process with a view to compensate for lost time relative to the AU schedule and the progress some other RECs have accomplished.

In closing, it may be essential as a stakeholder and citizen to judiciously point out one thing at this juncture: Owing to the extraordinary gravity and breadth of the problems affecting borders and borderland people, RECs, especially IGAD, and the AU should explore changing their respective modus operandi. Given the size of the assemblage of declarations, protocols, agreements, programmes, and other frameworks, it is difficult to imagine the shortage of these as an excuse for some degree of change not to occur in the status quo of contemporary border-related problems. Years are passing, with these formalities making little difference on the ground.

Berhanu Lemma is a researcher and consultant with long standing experience in defense and security sector management and capacity building. He is the head of the Border Management and Security Programme at the The Borders Institute (TBI), a regional non-governmental organization focusing on research and consultancy on border issues. Berhanu Lemma can be reached at berhanu.lemma@thebordersinstitute.com.

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[3] Ibid.

[4] http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Peace_of_Westphalia

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] A.C. McEwen, *International Boundaries of East Africa* (Oxford, 1971) 21 – 27.

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