

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
INSTITUTE FOR PEACE AND SECURITY STUDIES
(IPSS)

**RESOURCE AND POLITICAL CONFLICTS IN
GAMBELLA PEOPLES' NATIONAL REGIONAL
STATE: THE CASE OF ITANG SPECIAL WEREDA**

BY:
GATWECH TUT RIEK

JUNE, 2016
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ADDIS ABABA**

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Abbreviations /Acronyms

AAU	Addis Ababa University
ANDM	Amhara National Democratic Movement
APDO	Anyuwa People Democratic Organization
CSA	Central Statistical Authority
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement of Sudan
E.C	Ethiopian Calendar
EPRDF	Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Party
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
GOSS	Government of Southern Sudan
GPDC	Gambella People Democratic Congress
GPDF	Gambella People Democratic Front
GPDM	Gambella People Democratic Movement
GPDUM	Gambella People Democratic Unity Movement
GPDUP	Gambella People Democratic Unity Party
GPLF	Gambella People Liberation Front
GPLM	Gambella People Liberation Movement
GPLP	Gambella People Liberation Front
GPNRS	Gambella People's National Regional State
IDPs	Internally Displaced Peoples
MPDO	Majangir People Democratic Organization
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoFA	Ministry of Federal Affairs
NGOs	Non Governmental Organizations
NPDO	Nuer People Democratic Organization
SNNP	Southern Nation Nationality and Peoples
SP	Special Forces
TPLF	Tigrean People Liberation Front
WPE	Workers Party of Ethiopia

Abstract

This thesis assesses the link between political and resource conflicts in post 1991 Itang special wereda of Gambella regional state. Building on qualitative case study approach, data was collected from 16 key informants, two group discussions and one observation. To construct meaning, analytical/interpretative qualitative analysis was adopted supplemented by documents of both published and unpublished, inter alia, thesis, journals, books, manuals, and reports. The study finds out striking interplay between the political and resource conflicts and attributed the underlying sources of the conflicts broadly to political, security and socio-cultural factors. It appears, the federal modus operandi is far from furnishing and harnessing a political culture that facilitate a political game designed to articulate the interest of various groups and build a workable political community. Various groups compete for political power and resources with various narratives of entitlement fomenting disputes. The study reveals inter-ethnic conflict between the Anyuwa and Nuer, intra-ethnic conflict among the Nuer clans and inter and intra ethnic political conflicts between the Anyuwa and Nuer as major levels of conflicts. Identity at its various denominations is manifested throughout as main driver of conflict. This is particularly the case given that identity is at the heart of political dispensation and power sharing at various administrative posts.

The study also discloses the interface and interplay between the political and resource conflicts. Numerous variables such as the mode of political dispensation, the social structure, resource scarcity, the culture of politics, response mechanisms to conflicts, and decisions at local, regional and national government add to the intricate relation and link throughout the resource and political conflicts in Itang special district. In light of the findings, the study recommends, for enhancement of democratic culture in party politics and meritocratic entitlement basis, promotion of awareness among various stakeholders about the link between political and resource conflicts, strengthening of civil societies, contextual analysis during the implementation of policies and development projects, systematic address to the demographic politics and the security situation along the border, and the deployment of contextual, informed and inclusive conflict resolution approach.

Key words: Conflict, political conflict, resource conflict, federalism, Itang

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

Conflict is a universal feature of human society. It takes its origins in economic differentiation, social change, cultural formation, psychological development and political organization – all of which are inherently conflictual. Differentiation becomes overt through the formation of conflict parties, who have, or are perceived to have, mutually incompatible goals. The goals can be over scarce resources, unequal relations, competing values (Omoje, 2014).

A recent scholarly review over the origin of conflict in post 1991 Ethiopia have attested its nature of complexity and interface at various levels (Dereje, 2010). Particularly, to multi-ethnic regional states conflict originates as a result of their demographic and political structure. In this regard, there is a conflict over the competing political actors representing ‘native’ ethnic groups in the Benshangul Gumuz (Asnake; 2010 cited in Dereje, 2010).

Likewise, most works on political structure of Ethiopia since early 1990s reveal that the devolution of power to the regional level have generated power struggle, political tension and the formations of factions at different levels. At the heart of their justification is the new federal pie which opened a new political space (Dereje 2006, Merara 2003).

Amid Gambella National Regional State (hereafter GPNRS) the introduction of federalism in early 1990s meant inclusion to the Ethiopian states as one of nine National Regional States that formed the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE Constitution, 1995). According to studies in post 1991 Ethiopia GPNRS has benefited from local empowerment and development efforts in unprecedented ways. In spite of such undertakings, the region came to be reckoned by violent ethnic conflicts. As Dereje’s succinct remark reads, “the blessing of federalism turned to be a curse in the region it is expected to have a particularly strong ideological appeal” (Dereje, 2006, p.215).

In a nut shell, scholarly works that came out on GPNRS identity conflicts hitherto tend to be general thereby failing to capture specific realities and dynamics of epicenters. To date there is no systematic empirically rooted specific case study on the interplay between the resource and political conflicts in the region which is dramatically affecting the political development and democratization of the region from below, that resonates with the entire disputes in GPNRS after the adoption of ethnic federalism. In this regard, Itang special district is one of the few areas with mixed settlement of various ethnic groups that exhibits conspicuous identity conflicts in GPNRS since the introduction of the federal structure.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Since the early 1991 Gambella Peoples' National Regional State (GPNRS) is plunged into violent group conflicts that claimed the lives of many people and deteriorated the social, economic and political conditions of the region. The studies reveal that the refugee influx in the mid 1980s, the resettlement program carried out during the *Derg* regime, the Sudan civil wars, identity, resource and the political transformation in Ethiopia undertaken in early 1990s have been the root causes of the conflicts (Dereje, 2006; 2011 Medhane, 2007; Gizachew, 2011). These studies almost solely concentrated on the Anyuwaa-Nuer and Anyuwaa-Highlander and some aspects of intra-ethnic conflicts (Dereje, 2006; 2011; Gizachew, 2011).

Yet, the above studies tend to be generally failing to capture specific realities and dynamics of epicenters. To date there is no systematic empirically rooted specific case study on the interplay between the resource and political conflicts in the region which is dramatically affecting the political development and democratization of the region from below, that resonates with the entire disputes in GPNRS after the adoption of ethnic federalism. In this regard, Itang special district is one of the few areas with mixed settlement of various ethnic groups that exhibits conspicuous identity conflicts in GPNRS since the introduction of the federal structure. In light of the above works, the study has attempted to explore the interplay between the resource and political conflicts in Itang special district of GPNRS. It has also tried to unlock how the interface across resource and political conflicts is manifested. Moreover, the study has addressed causes of and the extent to which the conflicts exhibited interplay.

Therefore, it is hoped that the study will fill some of the gaps on the nexus among various forms and levels of conflict on the ground in GPNRS after the experiment of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia.

1.3. Research Questions

Generally, the study attempted to answer the following basic and specific questions

- What is the link between resource and political conflicts?
- How have the resource and political conflicts been manifested in Itang district of GPNRS?
- How has the resource conflict affected the political conflicts and vice versa in Itang district of GPNRS?

1.4. Objectives of the study

1.4.1. General objective

The general objective of the study is:

- To describe and analyse the interplay between resources and political conflicts among various forms of conflict and unpack their causes and manifestations in Itang district after the introduction of ethnolinguistic federal system.

1.4.2. Specific objectives

Specifically the research is intended to;

- Identify the structural sources of conflicts and reveal the linkage and connection between resources and political tension
- Find out to what extent the conflicts are seen through interface across resources and political conflict.
- Explore the role of local, regional and national actors in the conflict.

1.5. Research Methodology

1.5.1. The Study Design

The research drew on qualitative data collection and descriptive study designs. “Qualitative research is preferred over quantitative because it strives to understand the meaning and experience of people” (Denscombe, 2007, Koang, 2010, p.7.). Qualitative method allows in-depth understanding of people emotions and experience (Denscombe, 2007).

1.5.2. Research Methods

The study used both secondary and primary data sources. The primary data were collected from in-depth interview of selected informants, focus group discussions and field observations. This is corroborated and substantiated by secondary data, both published and unpublished deemed relevant to the topic.

1.5.2.1. Observations

In contemporary field research, observation is the most important technique to collect original data (Gay & Peter, 2000). This is because sometimes the information that the researcher gather from the informant may contradict with that of the real situation. Therefore, observation is better to get first-hand information from the original sources. By employing this method, the researcher has attended dialogues of several groups. To this end, it can be inferred that I have benefited from observation to understand the link between resource and political conflicts in Itang special district.

1.5.2.2. In-depth Interviews

In collecting primary data, in-depth interview was made with 20 key informants who were selected on the basis of their knowledge and experience relevant to the topic. The information given by the key informants were captured on a portable voice recorder. When some informants declined their voice to be recorded the researcher took notes and increased the number of contacts with the informants. To construct meaning data generated through interview was analyzed using interpretive analysis.

1.5.2.3. Focus Group Discussions

The group discussions included people that share resembling ideas. Two focus group discussions were held in Gambella town and Itang special wereda. The former discussion involved 6 while the later 8 participants. The group discussions were held under three themes of basic questions that guided the research.

1.5.2.4. Secondary Sources

The secondary sources were of diverse in nature. It included published and unpublished materials such as dissertations, theses, research reports, government policy documents, constitutions, publications, periodic and statistical reports, performance reports, annual plans, books, research papers prepared and presented for policy discussions and conferences both at national and international levels, journals, workshop proceedings, etc.,

1.5.3. Method of Data Analysis

The data obtained through interview and focus group discussions was analyzed using interpretive analysis to construct meaning while the information is obtained. This is substantiated and corroborated the secondary data. To achieve the maximum validity of the information the researcher employed triangulation method

1.6. Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies in an attempt to make contribution to the understanding of the interfaces across various forms of conflicts. The study is helpful in that it will shed light on the empirical experiences pertaining to the interplay among conflicts in post federal Ethiopia.

Therefore the study:

- Will provide significant insight on the causes and intersections exhibited between political and resource conflicts in GPNRS and also will be useful for other researchers as an input for further study and seeking to investigate resembling topics in other area of the country.

- By unpacking how resource and political conflicts in Itang special district reinforced each other, the research will be used as a mirror to reflect the source, nature and dynamics of conflict in GPNRS given that Itang special marked by intermingled settlement of major and groups.
- The finding of the study will be used by concerned bodies and stakeholders as an input to settle the dispute. This particularly of the essence given that Itang district has been a major flashpoint that saw of the most conspicuous violent identity conflicts.
- Also the result of the study will be added to the limited literature with regard to specific and empirically grounded studies on the dynamics and interface of conflicts and the mode of political development in the periphery since the early 1990s.

1.7. Scope of the Study

The study attempted to investigate the interaction between political and, resources conflicts in Itang special district, GPNRS. Moreover, the features, dynamics and the extent of interplay across political and resource conflicts were addressed. All Kebeles/sub-districts under Itang special districts were included in the research with particular emphasis on *Ler*, *Pulkoat (Makot)* and *Pooldeng* for they appeared to be major epicenters of the resource and political conflicts and their nexus. The period of the study is since 1991- to date.

1.8. Limitations of the Study

In addition to financial and time limitations, the study is constrained by the following limitations:

- Absence of prior study to be used as a springboard, specifically on Itang;
- Lack of willingness of respondents to give first hand (primary data) information,
- Unreliability of informants, particularly officials in due time for the interview.

Although the researcher had easy access to relevant information as an inhabitant of the area owing to the sensitivity and controversial nature of the topic there were limitations to get information particularly from some authorities. Hence, the study relied on a combination of different primary data collection mechanisms with special emphasis to in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and personal observation, and of course with their limitation conceded. However, utmost effort was made to minimize the negative impact of such constraints on the result of the study.

1.9. Organization of the Study

The research is organized in such a way that it contains six chapters. The first chapter provides background information and states the agenda of the research. The chapter explicated in detail how the research was conducted. The second chapter is divided in to two parts: the first part is a theoretical review on the concept, sources and interconnections across various levels of conflicting including resource and political conflicts. The second part presents empirical review on the conflict in post-1991 Ethiopia, the conflict in GPNRS. Chapter three is devoted to describing the study area and the subjects of the study using under themes. This is followed by chapter four and five where the data obtained through field work have been presented and analyzed substantiated with various secondary sources. The final chapter contains the summary of the research, conclusion and recommendation of the study.

1.10. Ethical Considerations

All research participants will be involved voluntarily. The researcher will disclose the aim and purpose of the research. In case of threat and if the participants are to be exposed for the information they give, identities will be kept anonymous. The researcher will also consider the beneficence of the research collaborators.

Chapter two

Literature Review

Introduction

This section attempts to give theoretical and conceptual framework pertinent to the subject under investigation.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

2.1.1. Theoretical Perspectives and Debates on the Cause and Nature of Conflict

There is no unanimity over the causes of conflict among scholars. “A conflict should exist whenever incompatibilities occur” (Deustch 1973, p.10). According Mitchell (1981), for a situation to be a conflict, there should be two conflicting parties whose beliefs of conflictive situation in a way is discernible to others whereas the intensities of conflicts can vary from simple confusion and frustration to violence between individual groups or communities. Moreover, Husien (2005) pointed out that ethnic conflict occurs when there is political and economic marginalization and exploitation.

Schulenburg (1996) classified the various theories over the causes of conflicts into four major categories. The first category is related to individual characteristics theories. This theory emphasizes that the understanding of individual aggression is a source of conflict. One category of this group is the “innate theory”. The proponents of this theory believe that the cause of conflict is in-born and it exists within us. With this, they explained that human aggressive behavior is biologically inherited. People like Sigmund Freud are among the advocates (Schulenburg, 1996).

On the other level, there is “frustration- aggression” thesis, which claims that when a person is blocked from achieving a goal led to build up a natural energy that can be released as aggression towards a source of frustration or against a substitute subject (Jacob, 2008, P. 67-68).

However, challenging the above individual characteristics and biologically in-born nature as sources of conflict comes the category of “social process theory”. These groups of theories treat the sources of conflict from the interaction in a society or in patterns of competition among society (Cohen, 1988; Zinn and Eitzen, 1991). Proponents this camp put forward that the very process of social organization would lead to conflict, the sources of conflict do not exist within us rather it exists within the “social dynamics of human interactions” (see Cohen, 1988; Zinn and Eitzen, 1991). In line with this tone, many discredited the ‘innate paradigm’ justifying that there are peaceful hunter-gatherer society like Kung sa of Kalahari desert, Copper Eskimos and Mubuti Pygmies of the Ituri forest among whom conflict and aggressive behavior is not inherited biologically. Thus, conflict is learned through socialization (Pelibean 1972 ; Montagu, 1968, 1978, cited in Tadesse, 1988, p. 3).

According to the third category, “social structure theories”, conflict emanates from the social organizations such as class, sex, racial and ethnic divisions (Valzen and Watering, 1960). To this category fails the theory of “fraternal interest group”. It adheres that “a group is involved in fighting with a more distant section when their members are affected” (Valzen and Watering, 1960, cited in Demissie, 2005, p. 14).

On the other hand, there is a “confrontation theory” which explicates that the entire “social structure” is rather the sources for conflict. Proponents of this theory reject the idea that the absence of sharing similar appearance, descent, language and homeland as the causes for a probable conflict. However, they stress the entire “social structure” is the cause for conflict (Gulckman, 1970).

There is also a basic needs theory, which gained wider currency. It believes that basic human right needs can result in deep-rooted conflicts. These needs may be physiological, social or psychological. Likewise, identity/ethnic, religious, cultural race color etc. have also been proposed as a cause for violent conflict among the human beings. For instance, among the traditional Guji society killing a man and presenting the genital organs of the victims as a bride wealth was used as a cultural obligation to fulfill (Pelibean 1972; Montagu, 1968, 1978, cited in Tadesse, 1988).

The nature of conflict has also attracted various views. Scholars like (Durkhiem, cited in Bishop, 2007) attest to the abnormal nature of conflict which is a threat to the stability of social structure and therefore should be avoided. To the other corner, (Dahrendorf, cited in Jacoby, 2008) stated that a well-managed conflict can be a motor for social and political changes. Therefore, a society can achieve changes through conflict. By managing conflict and avoiding violence, a society can reap the fruit of conflict. This view has been comprehended by Marx and Hegel who believed that conflict helps a society to be creative and achieve a better progress. For the purpose of this study I use a theoretical perspective on the origin of conflict as provided by the theory of social structure.

2.2. Conceptual Framework

2.2.1. Conceptualizing Resource and Political Conflict

The conventional analysis of political tensions and conflicts recognizes its countless causes and operations at different levels; local, national, regional and global. The causes of these tensions are very complex and have often been existed over a long period of time. Tensions are, in fact, generated by contest over powers struggles and resources (Anheier and Yudhishtir, 2007).

Political behaviouralists like Robert Ted Gurr converted the frustration – aggression theory in social psychology into a group theory of political conflict – the theory of Relative Deprivation. Accordingly, Political conflict is explained as a consequence of a group's feelings of deprivation relative to need (both basic & political needs) or in comparison with others: The discrepancy or contradiction is between 'expected need satisfaction' and 'actual need satisfaction' over a given time line (Gurr, 1970). It also refers to the discontent people feel in comparative terms - when people compare their positions to others and feel they have less than they are entitled to. Proponents argue that social movements often arise from grievances of people who feel deprived of valued things and entitlements. Gurr, (1970) asserts that in extreme situations, relative deprivation can lead to political violence such as rioting, terrorism, insurgencies and civil wars.

Feelings of deprivation are relative, as they come from a comparison of social norms (e.g. entitlements) that vary across time and place. The potential for violent conflict

varies with the intensity and scope of relative deprivation, when deprivation is relatively prolonged and strongly felt, then the greater the chances of anger turning into violence, especially among members of a social group. As such, number of intervening variables can influence the conversion of relative deprivation – to anger – then, to violent conflict. The intervening variables includes among others, group culture and perception of violence, perceptions on legitimacy of political leadership, nature of exclusion/exploitation, and viability of violent struggle as remedy (Gurr, 1970).

Coming to resource conflicts, it is described as inherent causes of conflict. In areas where members of different ethnic groups co-exist and utilize the same resources there is high possibility for conflicts to arise over resources and to be expressed in ethnic terms. A resource conflict is more pronounced especially when membership to a certain ethnic group significantly provides access to scarce resources (Cohen, 1978). A conflict, whatever its reality is usually about one of several types of issues. The most common is a control over resources. Instance, such resources like space, money, property, power, prestige and food may be viewed as non-sharable. If two or more parties seek exclusive possession or use of resources or a given part of it, conflict is apt to occur between them (Medhane, 2007).

Amid recent advances in understanding of conflicts in Africa attest to the political economy approach. This focuses on those actors of conflict which, motivated by economic interests, use conflict for their own ends. At the heart of this thesis is the Greed and Grievance discourse advocated by (Collier and Hoeffler 2000; Cooper 2005; Studdard 2003). The Greed aspect viewed the tendency by the political elite to monopolize power and resources. Whereas, Grievance is perceived mainly as the experience of society as a whole, not only trigger conflict but are inherent causes of it(Collier and Hoeffler 2000; Cooper 2005; Studdard 2003).

On the other hand, the levels of conflicts and tensions in the Horn of Africa reveal that vulnerability to conflict is related to the internal power structure of the sub-region. Although there may be outside factors that influence these conflicts, they are mostly and primarily conflicts over governance, identity and resource allocation within a particular state (Kumar, 1996).All the above theories have got their own

proponents and critiques but to me as researcher the political economy approach, social process, social structure and resource theories as sources of conflict are suitable. The conflict in the Itang special district of GPNRS emanates from the competition over scarce resources, social structures which are prone to divisions among different ethnic groups and clans concurrently forming identity, the social dynamics that came out of these structure and the new internal power structure and entitlement bases.

2.3. Empirical Literature Review

2.3.1 Conflicts in Post-1991 Ethiopia

The implementation of ethnic federalism as the country's ideology by EPRDF since 1991 has been justified from the ground that it puts up rights-based institutional mechanism that resolves the multiple conflicts (the constitution of the FDRE 1995). Of course, the experiment has resolved some of the major conflicts of the country. The recognition of ethnic right has made culture based conflict anachronistic (Anderas, 2003). A new political space for local government is created appreciably, particularly in peripheral areas which have been disadvantaged throughout the history of Ethiopian state (Dereje 2003, 2006; Medhane 2007; Regassa 2010) and the relative peace and security has made a remarkable and sustained economic growth possible in unprecedented way. However, the country still faces a number of conflicts in various parts and despite recent peace agreements there are still few liberation movements involved in armed struggle. Inter-ethnic and intra ethnic conflicts have occurred in various parts of the country and there are even ethno liberation movements which are involved in armed struggle (Dereje, 2010).

Broadly speaking, there are two categories of scholars on the nature of conflict in post 1991 Ethiopia. The first category of scholars adheres to the gloomy side of the system itself which is prone to conflicts. The second group however reported the externalization factor opposing the view that conflicts are innate to the system. For the first group, conflict is an integral part of ethnic federalism as a system of political representation due to the continual shift of boundaries and the changing nature of identities it provided that makes identities susceptible to manipulation in power politics (Ehrlich, 2000; Baylis, 2004; Alemante, cited in Dereje, 2010). These groups of scholars maintain that the implementation of ethnic federalism *per se* is a 'recipe for disaster',

The second groups essentially affirmed the Ethiopian federalism and see no danger in it. In their views the presence and escalation of conflict in post 1991 Ethiopia has to do with the interference of 'external hands' induced by the foreigners who wanted to benefit from the destabilization of the country (Kinfе, 2001; Cohen, 1995; Henz, 1998; Kidane, 1997; Alemseged, 2004).

Amid more recent scholarly reviews over the origin of conflict in post 1991 period have attested to its nature of complexity and interface at various levels (Dereje, 2010). To multi-ethnic regional states conflict originates as a result of their demographic and political structure. In this regard, there is a conflict over the competing political actors representing 'native' ethnic groups in the Benshangul Gumuz (Asnake, 2010). Another prominent type of conflict in post 1991 Ethiopia is Ethnic conflicts at inter-regional borders which are attributed to the borders in the newly created regional states. The fact that they are not clearly defined have generated territorial conflicts (Fekadu, 2009; Basi, 2010). In relation to this the protracted conflict between the Oromo and the Somali in the contested Mieso woreda in the Eastern Ethiopia is a case in point (Sufian, 2010). To this end, many are of the view that the drivers of conflict in post 1991 Ethiopia are more diverse and complex than resource competition, identity, or elite manipulation of collective memories or instrumentalization of popular feelings of relative deprivation in the pursuit of political power (Dereje, 2010).

2.3.2. Conflict in Post-1991 Gambella

The Gambella region has seen factional fighting and inter-community violence since the last two decades. Particularly recent developments in the region have grabbed the attention of national and international bodies and attracted scholarly interest. Although there had long been conflict in the region what is striking however is the transformation in the nature and intensity of conflicts over the last two decades (Medhane, 2007). The conflicts are expressed in various fields of social interaction: from villages to churches, from schools to political parties. The manifestation of violence ranges from the complete destruction of villages to rioting in the schools; from the targeting of minors and the raiding of public transports to the crucifixion of individuals in order to humiliate the group to which they belong. In recent times, the conflict has assumed a more violent form involving bombings and massacres (Dereje, 2009, pp. 641-642). On another level Dereje (2009) classified the conflict in Gambella region in to five level of inter-ethnic, intra-ethnic, Indigenes -Migrants, the State against Indigenous group and Cross border conflict.

The inter-ethnic conflict is evident in the protracted conflict between the Anyuwaa and the Nuer, and between the Anyuwaa and the Majang. However, the political transformation of the country in the early 1990s marked the intensification and violent phase of the conflict because the Anyuwaa and the Nuer are the two major groups in the region who had to compete for the new political niche that provided ethnicity as the main entitlement base. As a result there have been an intermittent and violent conflict between the two groups which claimed the lives of many and destroyed property. The intra-ethnic conflict is manifested in the regional cleavages among the Anyuwaa; party politics among the Majang and the resource and political conflict among the Nuer clans. The most intense intra-ethnic conflict is among the Nuer which is expressed at two levels: political competition among the ethnic and clan elites and the conflict over scarce natural resources among the villagers (Gizachew, 2011). The indigenous versus migrant conflict is viewed in terms of the relationship between the five indigenously recognized ethnic groups and a category of people being described as “highlanders” who have migrated to the region from the other parts of the country (Dereje, 2004, 2006, 2009; Medhane, 2007; Reggassa, 2010).

A fourth level of conflict is largely related to the political conflict and military confrontation between the EPRDF and armed groups of Anyuwa. This has been explained in relation to the measures taken by the federal government to increase political representation of other groups as part of conflict resolution which angered the Anyuwa who once had assumed a dominant position (Dereje 2006; Medhane 2007; Reggassa; 2010). A different level of conflict in the Gambella region is cross-border incursions. This is related to large-scale cross-border cattle raiding and the associated loss of human lives from the attacks by the Lou Nuer and the Murle from Southern Sudan.

Various explanations have been put forward to explain the causes of the conflict in the Gambella region. Control over natural resources is one of the major causes of conflict. However, various studies (see Abraham, 1999; Dereje 2003, 2006; Kurimoto, 1999; Medhane, 2007; Reggassa 2010; Gizachew) attest that the escalation of the civil war in the Sudan in the 1980s and the political transformation in Ethiopia in the early 1990s are the landmarks that transform the conflict in the Gambella region for such new developments have brought with them new structures and actors of conflict, which drastically changed the nature and intensity of conflict among the communities in the area, Gambella, which is described below.

CHAPTER THREE

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

Introduction

This section is devoted to presenting general and background information about the area covered by the study. It encompasses two parts. The first one gives general information about Gambella Peoples National Regional State (GPNRS). The Second part is committed to the actual subjects of the study, the Itang special district.

3.1. Physical and Socio-Economic Background of Gambella Regional State

3.1.1. Location, Topography, Climate and Land Features

The Gambella National Regional State (GPNRS) is one of the nine National Regional States that formed the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) (the FDRE constitutions 1995). The region is located in the Southwestern part of the country at $7^{\circ}5'$ - $8^{\circ}45'$ N Latitude and $33^{\circ}10'$ - $35^{\circ}15'$ E Longitude bordering with Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia regions to the North, the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPRS) and the Sudan Republic to the South, Oromia and SNNPRS to the East and the Sudan Republic to the West. The regional state has a total land area of $34,063\text{km}^2$ with a total population of about 307,096 according to 2007 Housing Census projection.

The region is situated between altitude ranges of 3000-2300 meter above sea level and characterized by different topographic feature. The eastern part is marked by high mountainous rugged terrain (about 10% of this area lies in the highlands at altitude of over 1500m). The upper reaches have peak Mountains and steep slopes with the elevation of over 2000m. Most of flashing rivers and streams originates from these areas and move to western direction.

These areas include the highland of Godere and Dimma woredas (Eastern part), East and Northern parts of Gambella woreda (Gambella Regional State Strategic Plan, 2006).

The central part of the region, which is estimated to cover about 44% of the total area, is characterized by an undulating plain. It lies between elevations of 500-1000m. It includes most parts of Gambella, Abobo, Itang, South Eastern parts of Godere, Eastern part of Jikawo and some part of Gog and Jor woredas. Low-lying flat plain land is found on the Western part and estimated to occupy some 48% of the total area. Here the elevation is between 300-500m. This area is distinguished by its seasonal or perennial swamps and flat to very flat.

The Gambella Peoples National Regional State exhibits different climatic features. Accordingly, it is divided into three agro-climatic zones namely, Woina-dega, Kola and Bereha. Godere and part of Dimma woredas fall in Woina-dega zones while Gambella town, Abol, Abobo, Itang and Gog woredas lie under Kola zone. Jor, Lare, Jikawo and Akobo woredas are found in the Bereha climatic zones.

Regional mean temperature and rainfall decreases from East to West (mountainous to plain areas) depending on the agro-ecology of the area. The average regional mean temperature is between 27⁰c and 33⁰c. The highest monthly temperature is registered in March, it reaches up to 45⁰c and in August GPNRS experiences the lowest temperature to a 10.3⁰c. Rainfall in the region starts in the end of April and lasts to October in a large amount (Gambella Regional State Strategic Plan, 2006).

3.2. Administrative Structure

The Gambella Peoples National Regional State is one of the nine regions that formed the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). The region is currently divided into three administrative zones, eleven woredas, one special woreda and one town administration. The three zones are the Anyuwaa zone which contains five woredas namely Gambella Zuria (Abol), Abobo, Gog, Jor and Dimma, the Nuer zone with four woredas that are called Lare, Jikawo, Wantewa and Akobo and Majang zone encompassing two woredas of Godere and Mengeshi. The special woreda goes to

Itang woreda because of its mingled settlement. Itang wereda is inhabited by the Nuer and Anyuwa communities. The Gambella town falls to the category of city administration (Regional State Council, 2010).

At the regional level government powers are formally divided into three pillars of government bodies. The legislative organ that makes law is the highest body. The executive organ implements and enforces such laws and decisions and the judicial power is vested to the court that interprets law.

The flag of the region has four horizontal stripes of black, green, white and red with a black 5-pointed star in the center of the white stripe. The red color represents the heroes of the region, their sacrifice and struggle for freedom; the white color embraces peace which comes from the struggle and sacrifice; the black star represents brotherhood of the Gambella peoples with the rest of the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia; the green color is to show the region's natural resource, plants availability and its future hopes; and finally the black color is related to color of five indigenous groups of Nilotes who form the GPNRS (Ibid).

3.3. Population Size, Structure and Characteristics

According to the 2007 census, the total population size of the Gambella region was 307,096 of which 77,925 (25.4%) live in urban areas while the remaining 229,171 (74.6%) are found in rural areas. Regarding Sex composition 159,787 (52%) of the total population are males and 147,309 (48%) women's. For the entire region 65,904 households were counted, which results in an average for the region of 4.6 persons to a household, with urban households having average of 3.9 and rural households 5.0 people. The annual growth rate in GPNRS observed for the period 1994-2007 is 4.1% which the country. From the age structure perspective, people under 15 years of age were about 41.85%, 15-64 of age were 56.65%, and 65 and above of age were about 1.5%.

Table 3.1: Population Distribution in GPNRS

Group	Urban	Percent	Rural	Percent	Total	Percent
“Indigenous” people						
Anyuwaa	20,092	25.8%	44,894	19.6%	64,986	21.2%
Nuer	25,950	33.3%	117,336	51.2%	143,286	46.7%
Majang	837	1%	11,443	5%	12,280	4%
Oppo and Komo	156	0.2%	1,072	0.5%	1,228	0.4%
People from Various Highland Areas of Ethiopia						
Amhara	10,972	14%	14,890	6.5%	25,862	8.4%
Kefficho	1,203	1.54%	14,287	6.2%	15,490	5%
SNNPR	5,112	6.56%	9,936	4.3%	15,048	4.9%
Oromos	9,605	12.3%	5,228	2.3%	14,833	4.8%
Shakicho	244	0.3%	6,732	2.9%	6,976	2.3%
Tigrayans	2,194	3%	1,858	0.8%	4,052	1.3%
Others	1,560	2%	1,495	0.7%	3,055	1%
Total	77,925	100%	229,171	100%	307,096	100%

Source: Housing and Population Census, 2007

As it can be seen from Table 3.1, of the total ethnic composition in GPNRS the Nuer consists 46.7%, the Anyuwaa (21.2%), Amhara (8.4%), Kefficho (5%), Oromo (4.8%), Majang (4%), Shakicho (2.3%), Tigray (1.3%), Oppo and Komo (0.4%) and other ethnic groups predominantly from Southern Ethiopia (4.9%). Amharic is the working language of the region. Regarding religion, Protestants constitute 70.1%, Orthodox Christians (16.8%), Muslims (4.9%), Traditional Religion (3.8%), Catholics (3.4%) and others (1.1%) (CSA, 2007).

Table 3.2: Spatial Distribution of Population in GPNRS

Zone	Woreda	Total population	Percentage Share of Population		Share of Area Km ²		Population Density Persons/Km ²	
			Woreda	Zone	Woreda	Zone	Woreda	Zone
Anyuwa	Gambella Zuria (Abol)	10,590	17.5%	19.7%	3,118.79	60.45%	3.40	4.83
	Abobo	15,741	26%		3,116.17		5.05	
	Gog	16,836	27.8%		3,250.25		5.18	
	Jor	9,366	15.5%		3,342.31		2.80	
	Dimma	8,001	13.2%		7,762.43		1.03	
-	Gambella Town	39,022	12.7%	-	-	-		
Nuer	Lare	31,406	27.9%	36.7%	685.17	13.9%	45.84	23.79
	Jikawo	35,556	11.59%		1,081.04		32.89	
	Wantewa	20,970	31.6%		887.74		23.62	
	Akobo	24,674	21.9%		2,080.34		11.86	
Majang	Godere	38,781	65.46%	19.3%	592.75	6.62%	65.43	26.28
	Mengeshi	20,467	34.54%		1,661.90		17.62	
Itang	Itang Special Woreda	35,686	11.6%	-	2,188.34	6.42%	16.31	16.31

Source: Housing and Population Census, 2007

NB: Total Population=307,096 and Total Area=34,063 km²

The spatial distribution of the population by zones, in the region sees uneven distribution.

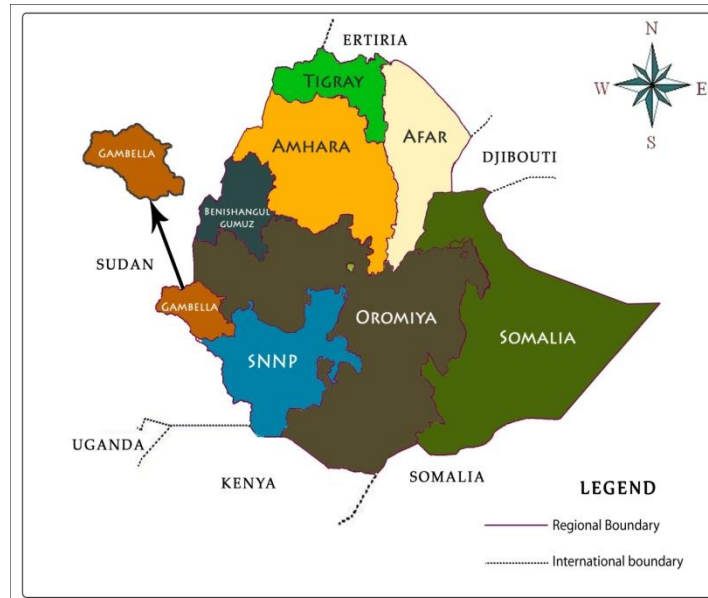
As can be seen from Table 3.2, Anyuwaa, Nuer and Mejenger zones constitute 19.7%, 36.7% and 19.3% of the total population with population density of 4.83, 23.79 and 26.28 persons per Km² respectively. Etang special woreda constitute 11.6% of the total population with a population density of 16.31 persons per Km². Gambella town also constitute 12.7% of the total population. The population density of the woredas is also significantly uneven. It ranges from 1.03 persons per square kilometers in Dimma woreda to 65.43 persons per square kilometers in Godere woreda. Godere woreda is the most densely populated woreda followed by Lare, Jikawo, Wantewa and Mengeshi woredas. Dimma and Jor woredas are the least densely populated woredas in the region.

In terms of area, Anyuwaa zone is the largest zone constituting about 60.45% of the total area of the region. But it has a population density only about 4.83 persons per square kilometers. Nuer zone also composed 13.9% of the total area with a population density of 23.79 persons per square kilometers. Majang zone, having 19.3% of regional population, constitutes only 6.62% of the total area. Itang special woreda constitutes about 6.42% of the total area. The rest of the region's area is covered by Gambella National Park. Then, as the region is sparsely populated, it will have negative impact on the provision of basic social services making it costly and difficult. It requires covering population within a distance of large radius. Reducing the radius of distance covered for the service will lead to serving few people and this in turn will lead to underutilization of the service.

The proportion of the population aged 15-64 constitutes about 56.65% while the young age group (below 15 years) constitutes 41.85%. The old age group (above 64 years) constitutes 1.5% of the total population (CSA, 2007). The young dependency ratio of the region in the year 2007 was 74. The overall dependency ratio in the same year was 77. This indicates that every 100 person in the working age support 77 dependents. Similarly, out of 217,904 persons with the age of 10 and above, 23.67%

were economically inactive. 7236 unemployed and 159,093 employed persons are found in the region. Due to this, the unemployment rate of the region is estimated to be 4.4. The literacy rates of population aged ten years and above by sex and region obtained in the 2007 census shows that nearly half (49.5%) of the population of the region were literate. The proportions of literate persons by sex show the existence of wider gap between sexes. Slightly more than half (56.4%) of males were literate while the proportion of literate females (42%) was far less than male counterparts.

Figure 3.1: Map of Gambella Peoples National Regional State in National Setting



Source: <http://ochaonline.un.org/ethiopia/Maps/downloadables/ETHIOPIA.pdf>

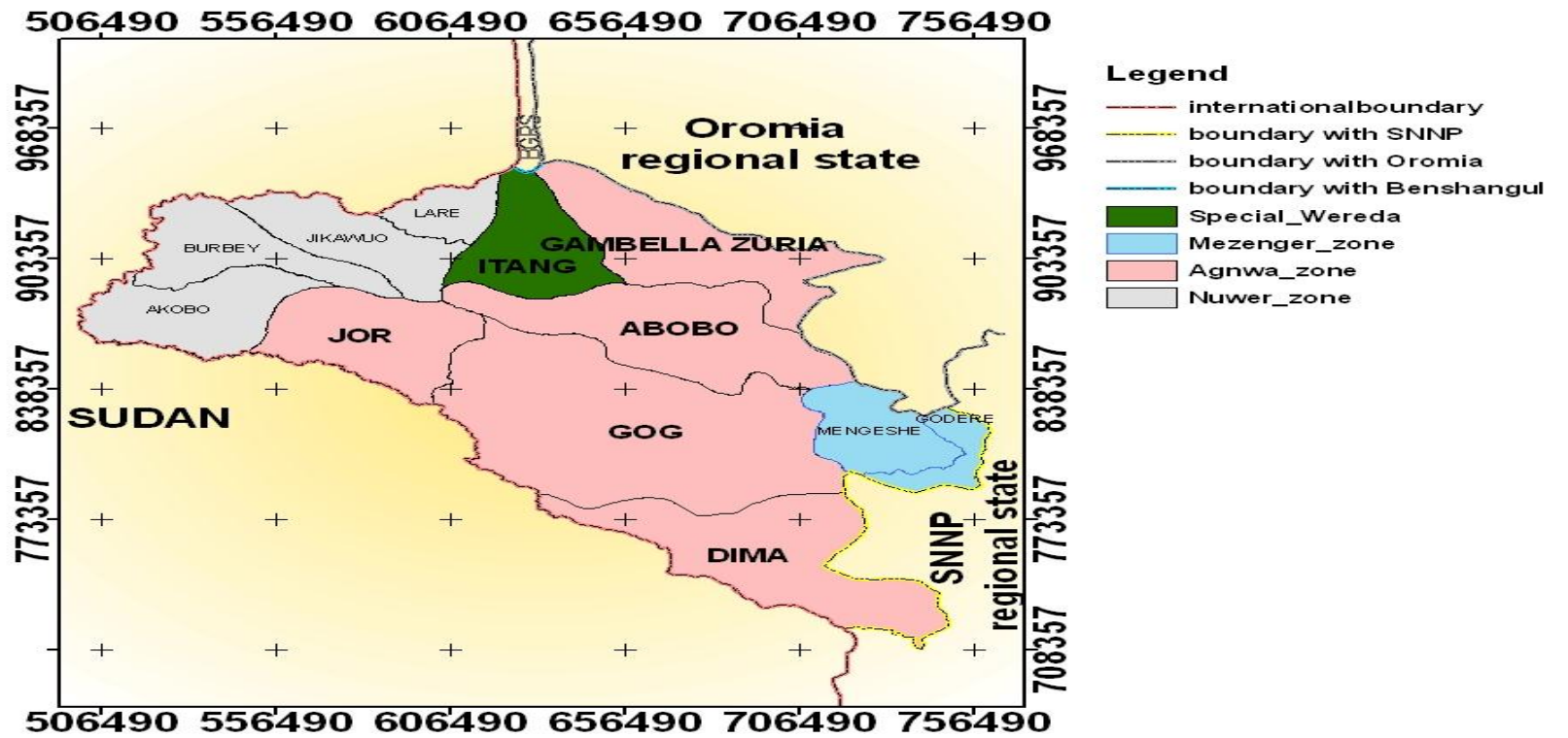


Figure 3.2: Administrative Map of Gambella People's National Regional State

3.4. Ethnic Composition and their Distinctive Livelihoods

There are five indigenous nationalities, namely Nuer, Anyuwaa, Majang, Oppo and Komo in the region. In addition to these, there are also significant numbers of settlers in Gambella and other towns came from different regions of the country belonging to diversified ethnic groups mainly Oromo, Amhara, Tigray, and SNNP. There are also refugees settled in the region. Gambella is an interesting place where various ethnic groups live engaged in different livelihoods (Abraham, 2002).

The Anyuwaa: The Anyuwaa are believed to have come from the so-called ‘Cradle Land of the Nilotes’ or from further southeast near Lake Rudolf and Victoria in Kenya and Uganda (Omat, 1996 as cited in Abraham, 2002). They are mainly crop dependent people with fishing and hunting as their supplementary income sources. The Anyuwaa constitute around 21.2% of the total population of the region and live along the river banks. Most of the Anyuwaa are found in Abobo, Dimma and Gog wordas (Population and Housing Census, 2007).

The Nuer: The Nuer people are largely livestock dependent and are mostly found in Lare, Akobo, Jikawo and parts of Itang wordas. During rainy seasons, Akobo and Jikawo become flooded and the people therefore migrate to the highlands with their cattle until the river banks recede. The Nuers are the majority group, representing 46.7% of the population of the region (Population and Housing Census, 2007).

The Majang: The majority of the Majang live in Godere and Mengeshi worda and in some pocket areas of Gambella and Abobo. While they are mostly dependant on beekeeping, they also practice some cultivation in settlement areas (Abraham, 2002). They represent 4% of the total population in the region.

Oppo and Komo represent minority ethnic groups. They represent 0.4% of the total population in the region (Population and Housing Census, 2007). As it will also help us to understand the dynamics of the ethnic composition in the region, it is important to mention here that there are three refugee camps in Gambella region under the protection of UNHCR. These are Bonga (in Gambella), Pugniwudo (in Gog) and Dimma (in Dimma). These refugees are largely Sudanese Anyuwaa in Pugniwudo

(29%), Nuer in Pugniwudo and Dimma (57% and 79% respectively), Dinka, Shuluk and Uduk (Abraham, 2002).

Other groups: People from Amhara, Tigray and SNNPR (e.g. Wolayita) live in settlement areas in Abobo, Gambella and Etang woredas practice sedentary agriculture. However, many highlanders reside in town as businessmen and employee (Population and Housing Census, 2007).

3.4.1. Economic Activities

In Gambella region, 75% of the population is living in rural areas. Pastoralism is the leading preoccupation of the people. People are also engaged in the cultivation of sorghum, bean, sesame, mango, banana etc. for their livelihood. All the rural communities practice very small-scale rain fed agriculture. The community also practices livestock rearing. Hence it would be very appropriate to consider the community as leading agro-pastoral mode of production. Very small number of people engaged in community practice, fishery business and almost all portion of the community members who have suitable conditions are also traditionally engage in beekeeping. Petty trade is also practiced in urban community (Gambella Regional State Strategic Plan, 2006).

Agriculture is the major economic activity in the region followed by petty trade. The rural population derives its livelihoods from mixed farming and non-farm activities such as trade, handicraft production. The region has great potential either of agricultural development on rain fed or on irrigation. It also has fertile land and water resources, which were suitable for agricultural production. The major agricultural activities include cereal, oil seeds, tobacco, horticulture production and animal husbandry.

Agricultural production is subsistence level and largely depends on traditional means of farming. Oxen plough, which mostly done by male, and traditional simple agricultural implements are the means for farming in the region. The use of low agricultural inputs, erratic and unreliable rainfall pattern and lack of adequate and efficient extension service contribute to the frequent drought and famine in most parts of the region. As a result, the productivity is low. The main actors both in traditional agriculture and off-farm activities in the region are females. Females mostly generate off-farm activities, which supplement rural households' incomes and make significant contribution to the maintenance of the rural people.

Though there is vast land suitable for agriculture, the average size of rural land holding by rural households is less than one hectare/household. The average yield from this holding is 10 quintals/hectare, hardly enough to feed the household until the

next harvest. Agricultural production thus falls far short of ensuring food security in the region and leaves the population much to depend on food aid and specially the female and children more vulnerable.

The region is constrained by multidimensional social and economic problem. Weak public service capacity, high illiteracy rate, poor access to health services and absence of rural infrastructure to support rural households improve agricultural activities have posed tremendous development challenges to the regional government. As the result poverty is pervasive. According to the region's sustainable development and poverty reduction discussion report, in 2006/07 the per capita income of the region was 981.2 birr and half (50.5%) of the population expected to live in a state of absolute poverty. The illiteracy rate is very high for females compared to males. It is the female who suffer most because of lack of health facilities, poor infrastructure and harvest in the region.

CHAPTER FOUR:

The Source, Nature and Manifestations of Resource and Political Conflicts in *Itang* Special District of GPNRS

Introduction

This chapter is organized in four major sections. The first part explains the various causes of resource and political conflicts in Itang special district of GPNRS. Here an attempt made is to find out the structural and proximate sources and triggers of the conflicts. The second section unpacks the essential features and manifestations of the conflict. Section three and four discuss the actor and parties, and the dynamics of the conflict respectively.

4.1. Causes of the conflict

4.1.1. Structural Causes of Conflict

This section analyses the sources of political and resource (root, proximate and triggers) conflicts in *Itang* special districts in to various forms and factors. In short, it explores the structural issues in light of underlying political, resource, security and socio-cultural themes. It is also part of the section to identify proximate factors and triggering phenomenon that create the condition for violent conflicts and that immediately unleash the violence respectively.

4.1.1.1. Political Factors

History, culture and nature of political space

Conflict theorists have provided that the root causes to internal conflicts are embedded in background issues/historical contexts (political, economic, socio-cultural...) *inter alia* ethnic diversity, colonial history and economic situation. The political transformation in Ethiopia in early 1990s that brought with it a federal form of dispensation embedded in ethnicity as the main source of entitlement basis is one of the major determinants of the group conflicts in GPNRS over the last two decades (see Dereje, 2003, 2006; Medhane, 2007; Regassa, 2010).

This new political development in the country in 1991 brought with it new structures and actors of conflict, which drastically changed the nature and intensity of conflict among the communities of Gambella region. The information form key informants

and secondary sources attest to the above assertion as reverberating behind the ethnic violence in post 1991 Itang special district.

From the outset, the power sharing and the political dispensation were not devised meaningfully in comprehensive manners that articulate the interest of various groups in the region. The federalism was not laid on the democratic culture of governance and party politics. There were no robust democratic institutions that facilitate political culture of decent political debates and accommodate internal dissent. It is truism that democratic governance, political practice based on universal principles of democracy and rule of law, popular legitimacy, participation, accountability and the responsiveness of rulers to the governed is an essential requirement for sustained peace, economic growth, and development (Natalaja, 2004, p. 1).

Pertaining one of the most conspicuous conflict in *Itang* special district, the Anyuwaa vs Nuer key informants noted although there had been conflict between the two ethnic groups long ago since the early 1991 political it became pernicious in terms of size and magnitude. Everything is entangled with politics provided that political representation and ownership of a land is tied to ethnicity. In describing the controversies over three kebles that led to Anyuwaa-Nuer conflict namely *Pulkoat (Makot)*, *Puldeng* and *Ler* inhabited by the Nuer clans of *Ci rieng*, *Ci nyajani* and *Ci waw* respectively, one of key informants (Anyuwaa) gave:

“.... unless these three kebeles are not ceased to be part of Itang special district and people in this area resettled to Nuer zone, the problem of Itang will not be settled. The Nuers are highly expanding and catching the land of Anyuwaa. The people there infiltrated from other parts to Itang special district from old Jikow of Nuer and their legalization during the administration of the former president Omod Obang is not acceptable”¹

¹ Key informant (Anyuwaa) former Wereda administrator

On the other hand, the other key informant (Nuer), a former *Itang* district vice administrator, attests in contrast to the above informant, he maintains:

“I don’t see the claims that the people in these three kebeles are not part of the Itang special district as justifiable. For instance those who are in the current Ler kebele were there since the time of the Haile-Selassie regime. Those in Puldeng kebele of the current Itang district were relocated there by the regional government owing to the drying of the Makuie River in their former area due to the impacts of Alwero dam that cut the source of their livelihood. Whereas the people in Pulkot (previously Makot) settled in the area 30 years ago from Sudan fleeing of the civil war in and they have been recognized by the federal and regional government as Ethiopian citizens...”²

Controversies surrounding the above three kebeles are still contribute to the Anyuwaa vs Nuer conflicts in Itang special district.

4.1.1.2. Resource Related Factors

As it is indicated in the literature part, conflict theorists have unraveled how resource scarcity inherently is one of the underlying sources of conflicts. Cohen (1978) maintained that in areas where members of different ethnic groups co-exist and utilize the same resources there is high possibility for conflicts to arise over resources and to be expressed in ethnic terms. A resource conflict is more pronounced especially when membership to a certain ethnic group significantly provides access to scarce resources (Cohen, 1978). A conflict, whatever its reality is usually about one of several types of issues. The most common is a control over resources. Instance, such resources like space, money, property, power, prestige and food may be viewed as non-sharable. If two or more parties seek exclusive possession or use of a resources or a given part of it, conflict is apt to occur between them (Medhane, 2007). The various levels of conflict in post 1991 Itang district of GPNRS are no exceptions of the above assertions. The information gained from key informants and focus group discussions attest to competition over resource as one of the major determinant of the conflicts.

² Key informant (Nuer), former deputy wereda administrator

The controversy over the aforementioned three Kebeles which is the spotlight of inter-ethnic conflict between Anyuwaa and Nuer has its very genesis to resource scarcity.

The construction of Alwero Dam in 1986 has affected the water system and disrupted the traditional resource use pattern. It affected the flow of water at lower areas particularly the Cieng Nyajani's water base, the *Kongdewec* River, from which they base their living. Their major source of life like fish and pasture reduced significantly. As a result of the dam, key dry season resource reserves (fish and pasture) have been diminished, such as in Kongdewec, the main Cieng Nyajani dry season pasture and fishing ground. Prior to the dam, the overflow from the Alwero River formed the Kongdewec River, which in turn flows into the Makuwei River. The construction of the dam adversely affected the delicate water system that links up the three rivers. It now takes longer before the overflow from the dam reaches the Kongdewec River, ultimately reducing the overflow to the Makuwei River. As a result, there is a growing restlessness among the Cieng Nyajani to push towards the east, which has brought them hostility as much from other Gaajak clans as from the neighboring Anyuwaa. Under such background, the regional government reacted with resettlement schemes and the Cieng Nyajani's were resettled from Pooldeng to Makuie and some of them to Itang special district that aggravated the already existing rivalries between the Anyuwaa and Nuer (Gizachew, 2011).

As we can see from above discussions the resource scarcity is at the heart of the inter-ethnic and intra ethnic conflicts. Ill designed development projects and government responses have contributed to the conflict serving as proximate factors. As Medhane (2007) concurs to this view, clearly, the seasonal infiltration and eastward expansion of the Nuer into areas formerly occupied by the Anyuwaa over the years would be the root cause of the conflict in Gambella. A contributing factor was cattle raids, but communities value courage, fighting ability and autonomy, and as a result intra- and inter-tribal conflict are common (Young, 1999).

4.1.1.3. Security and Socio-Cultural Related Factors

Civil War in neighboring Sudan (south Sudan since 2011) that resulted large number of refugee and population influx to Ethiopia and weak cross border security that have led to large scale cross border cattle raiding and the loss of human life from the attack by the Lou Nuer and the Murle from South Sudan one of the root causes of conflict in Gambella (see Young, 1999; Dereje, 2003, 2006, 2009; Medhane, 2007).

According to Dereje (2009) the resource-driven movements of the Nuer have resulted not only in their territorial but also demographic expansion. He asserted, “Radically formulated assimilationist society that it is, the Nuer have absorbed many Anyuwaa into their society and this is very much resented by the Anyuwaa who have constructed a different identity system that emphasizes territoriality and purity of blood” (Dereje, 2009, p. 642). Likewise, Medhane reiterated the existence of clashes between the Anyuwaa and the Nuer, mainly over resources and for socio-cultural reasons. Traditionally, incompatible modes of production and clashing livelihoods caused conflict between the Nuer (pastoralist) and Anyuwaa (sedentary cultivators) (Medhane, 2007). What is striking, however, is the transformation in the nature and intensity of conflicts over the last two decades. The major defining moments that transformed the conflict in Gambella were the Sudanese civil war and the political transformation in Ethiopia in the early 1990. Both led to the regionalisation of the conflict and to some extent, seem to have altered traditional competition and rivalry, which are at the centre of this study (Dereje, 2003, 2006, 2009; Medhane, 2007). This competition over scarce natural resources is compounded by struggle for political power at the regional level. Power struggle between Anyuwaa and Nuer elites started in the 1980s during the *Derg* period, and extended in post 1991 where competition for political post takes settlement history and settlement pattern greater currency (Dereje, 2009). Medhane put, “the source of conflict goes beyond incompatible livelihoods to who controls power at the wereda power structures” (Medhane, 2007, p. 13).

The empirical data collected from *Itang* special district reflect the above assertions. According to key informants conflicts in the district are also attributed to resource, security and socio-cultural realities. Although there have been inter-ethnic (between Anyuwa and Nuer) and intra ethnic (among the Nuer clans) conflicts the political transition in Ethiopia in early 1990s and the ensuing rivalries over who is who have largely determined and metastasized the complexities of conflicts. The case of people in Makot (now Pulkot) kebele is one of the theatres that demonstrate the issues. This are people of the Cir reing clan of the Nuer who came from Sudan fleeing the civil war three decades ago and later legalized by Ethiopian government as Ethiopian citizens being one of the kebeles that formed the Itang special district which was fiercely dissented by other groups³.

Altogether, as we can learn from the above analysis in this chapter so far, resource scarcity, decisions at regional levels and identity interact with each other at the conflicts at local and regional levels. The development project especially the Alewero dam the led the Makuei river to dry created problem down on the Ci Nyajani Nuer clan as a result the Ci Nyajani moved to which led to clash with other clans of the Nuer (particularly the Ci waw, cin bie and CiNyajani) around Puldeng in an attempt to settle the problem the regional government created new wereda around Nuer zone and moved people in Ler and puldeng to Itang special wereda areas and they become part of the problem in Itang special wereda because the Anyuwaa particularly resented it. From this we can also understand how the response to one conflicts created another and the interface across various levels of conflicts. This is particularly aggravated by the mode of political dispensation in which ethnicity is landed and ownership of *weredas* and land is tied to ethnicity and their political constituency thereof. Although resource conflicts were there before and people also moved in search of pasture now it is politicized as land is tied to ethnicity (Dereje, 2007).

³ Key informant, village elder, *Makot* Kebele, Itang special wereda

4.2. Feature and Manifestations of the Conflict

As indicated in the theory part, for a situation to be conflict there should be conflicting parties who should manifest their belief of conflictive situation in a way it discernible to others. On the other hand, the intensity of conflict varies from simple confusion and frustration to violence between individuals, groups and communities (Mitchell, 1981).

According to the data generated via interview and focus group discussions, the political and resource conflict in *Itang* special district are marked by inter-ethnic conflict between the Anyuwaa and Nuer, intra-ethnic conflict among the Nuer clans and inter and intra ethnic political conflicts. Identity at its various denominations is manifested as the major driver of the conflicts. This is particularly the case given that identity is at the heart of political dispensation and power sharing at various administrative posts. For instance, in describing the Anyuwaa vs Nuer conflict as informants attest the trigger of the conflict was a petty quarrel over soap along the Baro River in Itang town but the stage was already metastasized in to major confrontation between the two across the district extending to the entire region of Gambella that exhibit mixed settlements. The intensity of the violence involved from a mere fighting between two individuals to destruction of entire villages⁴.

As it can be discerned from above, the dispute that began between the Anyuwaa and Nuer leadership at the major district posts engulfed the entire Anyuwaa and Nuer community at whole levels. These situation concur with what Kumar (1996) provided, the level of conflict and tension in the Horn of Africa reveals that vulnerability to conflict is related to the internal power structure of the sub-region. Although there may be outside factors that influence these conflicts, they are mostly and primarily conflicts over governance, identity and resource allocation within a particular state.

In the same vein, another feature of the conflicts in *Itang* districts over the last two decades is the interface across various levels of conflicts. Owing to the social structure and the mode of political dispensation the political conflict is apt to be

⁴ Key informant, former administrator, Itang special wereda

transformed and connected to resources and social conflicts and vice versa. Conflict at local level sparked by resource scarcity and cattle raiding invites political conflict up to the regional arena.

As such, the politicians want to gain power by manipulating situation in the communities on the other hand when facing resources and social conflict communities appeal to their ‘clansmen’ fellow at the political arena to take out of their predicaments. In this case there appears interplay and interface across conflicts. One of my key informants gave:

*“The prime and important reason for the conflict among the political elites is the greed to control the political structures. Meanwhile, the social structure among communities itself paves the tendency to turn the political conflict in to social conflict for there is a strong communal, tribal, clan and other attachment between the community and the politicians’. Therefore, when facing resource and social conflict the communities appeal to their respective representative in the political arena. Likewise, politicians want to gain power by manipulating the situation among the community. The net result of this is the clear interplay between the political conflict and other layers of conflicts among the Nuer. The availability of small arms has further worsened the situation”.*⁵

The above situations corroborates with a recent scholarly review over the origin of conflict in post 1991 period which have attested to its nature of complexity and interface of conflicts at various levels (Dereje 2010). Moreover, it goes along with the “social structure theories”, which argue that conflict emanates from the social organizations such as class, sex, racial and ethnic divisions. A group is involved in fighting with a more distant section when their members are affected (Valzen and Watering 1960, cited in Demissie, 2005).

⁵ Key informant, expert, Itang special wereda, security office

To sum up, the data obtained from in-depth interview, focus group discussions corroborated with document analysis demonstrate that the conflict in *Itang* special districts of GPNRS among them is manifested and materialized in various ways and at different fields of social interaction. It ranges from simple disagreement that shows up stopping greetings to violence between individual group and communities. The conflict also transforms in to communities and exhibited an interplay nature. Shifting of alliances, successive changes within regional government, intra and inter-ethnic fighting, and consequent redefinition of sources of entitlement, reconstruction of identity, inter community warfare and exiles have been the hallmarks of the conflict (Dereje, 2007,2009).

4.3. Actors and Parties in the Conflict

It is truism that analysis of the conflict situation requires an understanding of the actors and parties involved. Bertovitch, Kremenyuk & Zartman defined *parties in conflicts* as “individuals, groups, organizations, nations or other systems in the conflict” (Bertovitch, Kremenyuk & Zartman, 1985, p.4.). They refer to those units which initiate conflict, purse it and determine its outcome. The empirical data generated reflect that the political and resource conflict in Itang special district of the GPNRS over the past two decades has involved array of actors and parties among others political parties/elites, factional groups, local, regional and national governments, the Anyuwaa, the Nuer (with various denominations at clan and sub-clan basis), and other communities, the security forces and non-Ethiopian actors across border like the Murle of the south Sudan.

Political Parties and their Elites

As it is already indicated in the early 1990s formation and competition among the political parties formed a meeting point to various levels of conflicts in the region. 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. To the contrary, this seemed lacking and political parties and their

elite's plunged into disputes and conflicting strategies and interests that grabbed the Anyuwaa and Nuer groups in to violent conflict.

The violent clash between the Anyuwaa and Nuer in Itang town is triggered by a petty quarrel over soap at Baro river in June 1994 had its gestation in the tension between the then two competing groups of political parties over who would replace the deceased vice president (Nuer). The Nuer elites under the Gambella People Democratic Unity Party (GPDUP) proposed their candidate. On the other hand, opposing to the above nominee a party called Gambella People Democratic Union Party (GPDU) presented another candidate with a significant backing from the contemporary president (an Anyuwaa). A major corollary development of the tension across the political elites as mentioned is Anyuwaa-Nuer ethnic violence. According to my key informants because the convention was that the regional vice presidency position arranged to be Nuer or from GPDUP a Nuer dominated party the 'interference' from the then regional president, Anyuwaa by backing another candidate also from Gajook clan of Nuer from newly formed party, GPDU is fiercely contested and translated by the GPDUP elites as manipulation to put Anyuwaa 'friendly' on the vice presidency position saw it 'interference' of the Anyuwaa over Nuer matter leading to the assertion that the *"clash should not be here with in us but with the Anyuwaa"*.

Nevertheless, due to the connection across various levels of conflicts, the mode of political dispensation and nature of party politics in GPNRS (discussed in the next chapter in detail) the conflict erupted in its worst way in the mixed settlement of Itang district. These developments concur with what Deutsch entails, "a conflict of interests exist when the action of a person attempting to maximize his or her needs and benefits, prevent block, interfere with, injure or in some way make less effective the action of another person attempting to maximize his or her needs and benefit (Deutsch, 1973 cited in David and Frank 2003, p. 381). If two or more parties seek exclusive possession or use of a resources or a given part of it, conflict is apt to occur between them.

Government Bodies at Various Denominations

One major striking point in conflicts in Itang special district and the GPNRS at large is the role of government bodies at all levels in sustaining, creating and exacerbating the conflicts through their actions, policies and intervention mechanisms, at times measures that taken to end conflicts have produced another.

The information obtained from the informants and focus group discussion informs how the intervention, interference, measures and scheme of EPRDF, incumbent national government affected the situation in which different conflicting parties find themselves. Dereje maintained, in dealing with the conflict, it seems the EPRDF either side a group or neglect the situation as trivial issue of 'tribalism' or greed for power. The paramount interest to the federal government has been political expediency and political control which aims at maintaining the status quo. When the situation demands the intervention of EPRDF it declines on the basis of explanations enshrined in the constitution or intervenes after the damage is already done. Ironically, however, EPRDF intervenes when it chooses to do so which escalates the tension (Dereje, 2007). This revealed in the political and resource conflicts in Itang special districts, as shown in the federal government reaction to the *Cien Rieng* citizenship status controversy and cross-border cattle raid and its aftermath.

The data generated from field work and secondary sources allude that the regional political leaderships are key actors of the conflict. It is already noted that, lack of democratic culture in political arena is one of the major pillars to the tensions and conflict situations. This has decided the nature, political culture and the appointment of officials at various administrative posts. It brought about informalization of politics that favours loyalty over competence leaving the 'politicians' to be locked in to disputes in order to control the power and build a nepotic chain leadership of interest groups. The atmosphere has created structural incongruity rather than looking at it from what is soberly on the ground as part of the conventional responsibility and concern from the government point of view pertinent to responding to the plea of citizens, every resource or other issues are entangled with the survival of securing one's and allies position in power. This is evident as how the measure of the regional government that ended in restructuring districts and acceptance of communities

(Nuer) that settle in parts of Itang special district as part of the Kebeles in Itang special district namely Ler, Pooldeng and Makot inflamed the Anyuwaa-Nuer resource and political conflict in Itang special District. This agrees with what argument of Heinz-Jürgen, “intrastate conflict could also have the government power as the key issue. In these cases the incompatibility between the two disputed parties, one of which is the government itself, mostly concerning the political system, concerning the composition of the government or replacement of the central government, is the core of the conflict” (Heinz-Jürgen Axt, 2006, p.13).

To this end, the main drawback of such political practice that escalated the conflict is due to the accountability gap and the growing culture of impunity. In fact, regional political leadership does not take full responsibility for the accentuation of conflicts in the region because of the ‘federal government interference’. There tends to be actions that reflect double standard, EPRDF intervenes so long as this enhances its own political standing in the region whereas it justifies non-intervention referring to regional autonomy. As this thesis is developing we have heard of a gruesome act in April 15, 2016 in the area, Murle, a group in south Sudan crossed border and reportedly killed around 208 civilians (BBC news, April, 16; Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, April, 16; Fana Broadcasting Corporation, April, 16). We observe two important issues here: a dismal failure from the Ethiopian Defense Force whose mandate is to protect the country’s border and threats thereon and depressingly the malfunction of the regional government to protect civilians.

Ethnic groups that inhabit in the wereda

As it has been analyzed in the next chapter, one of the main hallmarks of the resource and political conflict in Itang district is the interface and interplay across various settings. This has made issues volatile and ethnic groups in the area pawns in the political conflict and conversely, elites in the resource and identity conflict.

As such, the Anyuwaa and the Nuer ethnic groups are the most conspicuous actors in the violent conflict in Itang. This is reflected in Anyuwaa-Nuer inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflict among various clans of the Nuer. Both the Anyuwaa-Nuer ethnic and Nuer intra-ethnic conflicts have their root in socio-cultural and resource issues albeit

the political dispensation mechanism the country uphold since 1991, a federal structure based on ethnic lines transformed the nature of the conflicts, the June 2002 violent clash, and controversies surrounding the three kebeles and the Cieng Reing citizenship status is a good reminder here. Gizachew (2011) pointed out competition over natural resources is one of conflict driven factors among the Nuers of Ethiopia, which is particularly true to the resource-based conflict among the five Gaajak clans. Meanwhile, true to the social structure which exhibits strong social attachment of elites with their respective 'tribe', clan and sub clan and the nature of governance and entitlement basis the connection between the conflict among the political elites and communities is displayed. Therefore, what meant political tension therefore turns to inter or intra community tension and vice versa. In the same tone, according to Dereje (2009) leaders of the political factions appeal to their respective, ethnic, "tribal" and clan constituency in the struggle for political power. On the other hand, local communities, pin their hopes on their 'fellow clansmen' to take them out of their predicament. This interplay blurs the genuine concerns of local communities and their issues. As a result, the issue of resource scarcity is sidelined as if it were a mere extension of the political conflicts. And the net result of these is that various groups in GPNRS have become not only actors of their resource and social conflict but also participants of the political conflict (Dereje, 2009, p.9).

4.4. Conflict Dynamics

Generally, the term ‘dynamics’ refers to forces or properties that stimulate, growth, development, or change within a system or process. In conflict research, Galtung puts, “conflict dynamics lies between conflict formation and conflict transformation” (Galtung, 1996, cited in Taddese and Yonas, 2007, p. 11). Building on the analysis of actors, parties, issues, and structures of the conflict discussed in the preceding sections, below an attempt is made to ascertain the long-term trends, short-term triggers and patterns and dynamics of the resource and political conflict in Itang special district as they appear in the setting.

Long-term Trends

As it is already articulated the political and resource conflicts in Itang special district in the last two and half decades has been influenced by factors of variegated characteristics such as the social structure, culture, history of animosities, resource scarcity, demographic issues, the nature of governance, policies and approach of government.

Under such circumstances, an insight into the pattern, direction, and magnitude of the conflict reverberate the central role of the entire governance machinery in determining the long-term trend. Related to this is the management of conflicting interaction among parties involved and the approach to various forms of issues like security, resource and identity and the political space that is beset by gross lack of democratic culture that articulates the interest of various groups. We have also seen how ill-conceived measures and development policies and the failure from the government side to provide security for citizens from cross border raid that comes largely due to weak border demarcation stands at the structure of conflicts (Gizachew, 2011).

For this reason, structural causes of resource and political conflict in Itang special district of the GPNRS for the most part, boil down to a lack of democratic governance in the region, the dealings of EPRDF, the behaviors and status of actors, social structure, primordial identity and its manipulations. Lack of political space to redress grievances peacefully means violence is the only option left for redressing injustices.

This was proven in Itang in 2002 following the death the regional vice president in the contention that arose over who would replace him.

It follows then that the long-term trends of political and resource conflict in Itang special district undergird by the nature and practice of the tiers of government bodies, history of animosity, identity, socio-cultural and resource issues. As such because the governments machineries appear to be ‘shakers, makers and breakers’ of conflicts in region, the long-term trend would seem to depend primarily upon their governance practice, interests, and relations.

Triggers

From the discussions unfolded in the preceding sections the following factors could appear to fuel the tensions and lead to the outbreak or the escalation of conflicts in Itang special district and GPNRS at large.

- **Elections, selection of presidents/ or chairman, dismissal of officials and death of a key actor:** In countries where democracy is less institutionalized, elections often fuel tension or even trigger violence. This happened in Ethiopia following the May 2005 national election. Coming to the conflict in Itang special district over the last twenty four years, political tension predisposition from actors to dominate political power, death of a key actor and dismissal of officials from various administrative posts likely fuel tensions and even triggers of violence. As it is already indicated, this has happened after the death of the vice president in 2001.
- **Delayed Response from the Government:**Theories of conflict resolution suggests that if a conflict is not addressed at the early stage, it tends to evolve through stages towards 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 (Taddese and Yonas, 2007). It is visibly shown that the failure from the regional government to address the situation and demands of the Cieng Reing citizenship status and controversies over Ler and Pooldeng Kebeles early escalated in violence.

CHAPTER FIVE:

The Interplay between Resource and Political Conflicts in *Itang* Special District of GPNRS

Introduction

This chapter is devoted to exploring the link between resource and political conflict in and their impact in Itang special district of GPNRS since the early 1990s. The chapter is divided in two major section and subsequent sub-sections. The first major part overall unveils the interface and interplay across various levels of conflict in GPNRS and political and resource conflicts in Itang special district. Various factors among others the mode of political dispensation, the social structure, resource scarcity, the culture of politics, response mechanisms to conflicts, and decisions at local, regional and national government add to the intricate relation and link among various levels of conflicts in GPNRS and resource and political conflicts in Itang special district. In the second section an attempt is made to demonstrate the impacts of the conflict.

5.1. The Interface across Various Levels of Conflict and Factors

Many scholarly works on the conflicts in post federal Ethiopia allude to its complexity and interface among various levels (see Fekadu, 2009; Asnake, 2010; Dereje, 2010). This interplay nature of conflicts is no exception to the post 1991 conflicts in GPNRS. The data generated from interviews, observations and discussions corroborated with secondary sources attest that the conflicts in post 1991 *Itang* special district exhibits interplay across various levels and variables. The nature of the federal structure where ethnicity is landed and identity (involving various denominations) is at the heart of inclusion in leadership and higher administrative posts affects inter and intra ethnic relations, showing conspicuous interaction between the nature of governance and the social structure throughout the conflicts. Absence of democratic culture of politics, mode of response mechanism which breeds another conflict and resource scarcity at local level also added to intricacy.

5.1.1. The Governance Structure, Party Politics and Culture of Democracy at the Interface of Resource and Political Conflicts

Asnake (2010) showed how conflict in multi-ethnic regional states of Ethiopia originated as a result of their demographic and political structure. There is a conflict over the competing political actors representing ethnic groups. For instance, in the Benshangul Gumuz ‘native’ vs settlers and between major ‘indigenous’ groups this is also the case in GPNRS.

According to key informants what is striking about conflict in *Itang* special district in post 1991 period is when conflicts occur between Anyuwa and Nuer (inter-ethnic) all clans of the Nuer avoid their differences and the conflicts takes the form of inter-ethnic. Dispute at political niche becomes a reason for whole scale inter-ethnic and intra ethnic conflicts because politicians appeal and incite their respective group in order to draw support and defy dismissal or gain positions at the leadership post that affects the inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic relation. By the same token resource and primordial ethnic tensions affect the political conflicts. Greed and grievance, resource scarcity, social structure and mode of political dispensation reinforce and affect each other. Therefore, the form of political dispensation and the nature of party politics with embedded absence of democratic governance and party politics interact and reinforce the political and resource conflicts in *Itang* special district. According to Dereje (2007) one of the current main sticking points in Gambella is the steadily growing public discontent over the regional political leadership. Politics at all levels of the government is not yet institutionalized but personalized. A patron – client relationship pervades the governance structures which puts premium on party and personal loyalty over competence. Democratic institutions are weak at best. Neither the regional nor the federal establishments have helped create a democratic forum for a competent regional political leadership to emerge. On the face of it, the leadership is wrought with factional politics.

As a result rule of law is severely compromised while the culture of impunity is on the rise. Innocent people who are perceived to be disloyal or dubious are unwarrantedly imprisoned without a trial whereas people who have criminal records either get away with their misdeeds or manage to get out of prison unaffected. Favoritism in the job market is also rampant.

As it is discussed in previous chapter, in relation one of the most conspicuous inter-ethnic violence between the Anyuwaa and the Nuer in June 2002, the information retrieved with interviews and group discussions inform the intricate among various factors. The story is this. The cleavage started as leadership dispute at a regional level following the natural death of the vice president (Nuer) as competition who would replace him. At that time there were four political parties in GPNRS, the Anyuwaa-based Gambella People's Liberation Movement (GPLM) established in 1980, the Nuer-based Gambella People's Democratic Unity Party (GPDUP) established in 1992, the Gambella People's Democratic Front (GPDF) an umbrella organization for the GPLM established in 1998 under auspices of EPRDF and the Anyuwaa-based regional opposition party called Gambella People's Democratic Congress (GPDC), established in 1998. The memorandum of understanding reached when EPRDF instructed the formation GPDF instructs, GPLM (Anyuwaa dominated) shall present its candidate for regional presidential seat whereas a candidate for the vice presidential seat shall come from the GPDUP (Nuer dominated). In light of such grounds, the GPDUP presented its candidate to replace the deceased vice president. Amid, Nuer based party called Gambella People's Democratic Union (GPDU), was established in 2002 and confronted GPDUP by presenting a candidate to replace the vice president. Such developments witnessed controversy over who would take over the position not only among the Nuer elites but it also became the source for the Nuer-Anyuwaa elite's tension. The GPLM particularly under the regional president (an Anyuwaa) backed a candidate from the new GPDU, a move that alienated the majority of Nuer under GPDUP who defined the situation as the 'interference' of Anyuwaa over the Nuer matter. In the course of action the situation assumed inter-ethnic tension that escalated in to Anyuwaa -Nuer deadly conflict at the mingled settlement town of Itang in June 2002.

The above case reveals the interconnection among various variables. Political leaders manipulated and politicized citizen's ethnic identities and used them as a means to justify and to get mass endorsement and participation in self serving wars. Such conflicts therefore, are an indication that the governance framework lacks democratic structures and mechanisms for equitable participation, allocation and distribution of power, and resources. In the vent, political parties were looked in to conflicting strategies of entitlements and interests. Owing to the gross lack of democratic political culture and party politics which nurture the culture of decent political debates and accommodate internal dissent competition at political niche metastasized in to deadly inter-ethnic conflicts. Meheret (2007) underlined that in a decentralized system of governance, competitive party politics at local level is an essential element for it widens the political space for different actors to participate in economic and political decision making on open political process that allows open policy debate and free flow of alternative by state and non state actors is the institutionalization of democratic culture.

In the absence of such situation as Deutsch (1973) entails a conflict of interests exist when the action of a person/ group attempting to maximize his or her needs and benefits, prevent block, interfere with, injure or in some way make less effective the action of another person attempting to maximize his or her needs and benefit. For Heinz (2006) although tensions are bound to arise in any society in the course of interaction between various competing social identities and beliefs, such tensions cannot degenerate into serious conflict, unless the country's existing governance institutions, policies and ideologies are not adequately responsive to the diverse social identities and instead, tend to encourage social fragmentation rather than social cohesion, which resonates with the case in Itang special district.

5.1.2. The Nature of Response Mechanisms, Social Structure and Decisions at Local, Regional and National Levels at the Interface of Political and Resource Conflicts

An in-depth investigation into the conflicts unleashed in *Itang* special district over the last twenty four years also finds out that response mechanisms employed to address the conflicts, the very nature of social structure and various forms of decisions at the different tiers of government as intervening and affecting each other throughout the conflicts.

To begin with, as noted in previous chapter, the development project especially the Alewero dam led the Makuei river to dry created problem downstream on the areas inhabited by Cieng Nyajani Nuer clan forcing them to move to other areas which brought them clash with another Nuer clan namely, *Cieng Waw* on an area called *Puldeng*. In an attempt to settle the problem the regional government reacted by forcing the *Cieng Nyajani* out of the areas, a move that led to a fatal clash between the Cieng Nyajani settlers and the regional special force unit that was instructed to force the people out in 2009.

This created a rift extending up to the regional political scene as it divided Nuer politicians who represented their clan ultimately leading intra-ethnic conflicts and purge and arrest of dissident groups and factions. Further this conflict was imported to *Itang* special district for the regional government moved the Cieng Nyajani to areas of Itang districts which was resented by the host district as a fear that it may change the demographic balance in the already contested mixed Itang that has a mixed settlement. Hence, as Ci Nyajani moved from Nuer zone to Itang special district to form a new kebele of *Puldeng* in Itang become part of the problem in Itang special wereda because the Anyuwaa particularly resented it. The response to one conflicts created another one. This is particularly aggravated by the mode of political dispensation in which ethnicity is landed and ownership of districts and land is tied to ethnicity and their political constituency thereof. Although resource conflicts were there before and people also moved in search of pasture now it is politicized as land is tied to ethnicity.

The way the regional government addressed the disputes appeared to be devoid of a scenario of win-win outcomes and consideration of long-term structural issues. It is shown that the *modus operandi* of conflict resolution lacks objectivity hence the very action to solve conflict fuels it or become the sources of future conflict. Medhane, (2007) succinctly put ‘the solution to every conflict forms the basis for further conflicts’ this has been to the case at the heart of the link between resource and political conflict in special district. The leaders appeared to be part and parcel of the problems and the tensions. Various institutions are co-opted and carrot and stick approach is the kernel of response at the regional level. It might be dared to say there are no neutral bodies or institutions that can articulate the interests of various actors and mediate the conflicts.

As part of conflict resolution ‘dissident’ factions are removed by the ‘winners’ as it was the case following the Pooldeng aftermath when members of one of the Nuer factions were purged from their administrative posts. As Dereje lamented, “the main faulting line for the federal experiment in the GPNRS and the escalation of violence is the failure to form a workable political community that articulates its interest at the regional level. Far from being partners, the various groups, which compete for the political space, are locked into conflicting strategies of entitlement. As a result, the new political house is not in order. Fragments of the regional state are captured by one or the other group causing a structural paralysis, the net result of this political malaise is the escalation of conflict at different levels” (Dereje, 2006, p. 227).

According to the data generated from field work, the Cieng Reng quest for citizenship is also one of the most noticeable issues that saw various dimensions and criss-crossed various levels of conflict including resource and political conflict in *Itang* special district. It is also one of the drivers of conflict in GPNRS. In his research report for Pact Ethiopia Dereje also unveils that the Cieng Reng quest for citizenship as one of the drivers of conflict in the Gambella region which acted out in Anyuwa-Nuer political conflict, as well as in intra-Nuer resource conflict and a factor in the regional-federal tension (Dereje, 2007). The Cieng Reng are a Gaajak Nuer clan which migrated from Yom in southern Sudan to Itang, Gambella in 1984. Over time, they have become socially and economically integrated into the local community and

been incorporated into regional and national political and military structures. Natural resource competition and electoral politics, which has increased the relevance of demographic size, have politicized the Cieng Reng settlement. Their citizenship appeal was rebuffed by the local administration and regional government. Dereje also noted that the Cieng Reng appealed the citizenship quest to the federal government and the federal government showed an ambivalent stance on the issue, which introduced an element of indeterminateness (Dereje, 2007). Absence of consensus regarding the issues of Cieng Reng citizenship status has made the Cieng Reng pawns in the *Itang* special district and regional power and resource game. In fact their citizenship status was ultimately approved by the regional government in 2010 albeit it still remains controversial and detested by many politicians in *Itang* special district.

Many studies allude that the approach and response of the federal government to the various levels of conflicts and political conundrums in GPNRS has also contributed to the problems, a fact that is also reverberates in maligned in *Itang* special district over the last twenty four years, as to the empirical information retrieved for the study. Gizachew (2011) entail that, in dealing with the conflict the EPRDF either sided some a group or neglects the situation as trivial issue of ‘tribalism’ or greed for power. The paramount interest to the federal government has been seen to political expediency and political control aiming at maintains the status quo. When sometimes situation demands the interference of EPRDF it declines on the basis of explanations enshrined in the constitution or intervenes after the damage is already done.

Ironically however, EPRDF intervenes when it chooses to do so which escalates the tension. As a result, the EPRDF has appeared to be one of the actors of conflict among the Nuers and GPNRS at large. Informants gave that in dealing with the deadly conflict between the Anyuwaa and Nuer in June 2002 in *Itang* the EPRDF reacted by replacing GPDF with a new regional coalition party, the Gambella People Democratic Movement (GPDM) in 2003 consisting of three ethnic-based parties – the APDO (Anyuwaa People Democratic Organization), the NPDO (Nuer People Democratic Organization) and the MPDO (Majangir People Democratic Organization) and dismissing officials and many police members as part of the

resolution scheme, a process that alienated many changing the cycle and scale of the conflict.

Various studies in the region attest, the ideal resolution norm from the EPRDF has been security-military approach driven mainly by parochial party interests, often sidelining the sensitivities and interests of the conflicting parties or a focus on symptoms, not root causes. In short, it sounds that the overriding motive of the federal government response read as political control rather than facilitate the evolution of political process that articulates regional interest. Abolishing, merger and formation various parties, dismissal and replacement of officials, infringement of regional autonomy and declining when the situations demanded has been the hallmarks (Dereje, 2003, 2006, 2011; Medhane, 2006; Regassa, 2010; Gizachew, 2011).

We have seen already how the response of the federal government to the Cieng Reng citizenship left the situation in limbo is still lingering and is a driver of resource and political conflict in Itang special district and the region at large. These events are often considered by local political actors as opportunities to settle old scores and advance their sectarian interests at the expense of perceived or actual competitors; leading to factional politics which is often 'resolved' when the EPRDF sides with one or the other. Subsequent to that, members of the 'loser' faction will be purged as part of 'conflict resolution'. This creates bitterness and the 'losers' wait for another opportunity to strike back.

From the above discussions one can infer how the political action by the federal government and state centered development policies became the source of the political conflict adding to complexities. What is striking is not the federal intervention but the contradiction over when the need and the situation demand its failure to intervene and its unrestricted intervention against the will of the constitution. Above all, the intervention is not in a way of promoting a democratic culture in party politics and internal party politics; facilitating the emergence of competent and representative regional leaders capable of articulating regional interests. In line with this assertion, Medhane maintains, "it is a truism that the solution to every conflict forms the basis for further conflicts, and this is certainly true of the post-1991 political architecture and its application in Gambella.

Ethnic federalism, regardless of how well intentioned it was, did not give local actors the power and influence to prevent conflict. The primary reasons that the new political structure has so far failed to bring stability to the region is because the post-1991 political order produced new political minorities, and the various groups have failed to strike a political bargain and articulate a regional interest. Instead, they have sought to capture fragments of the regional state and its institutions. In the event, they have all increasingly realized the ‘rationality’ of violence in the politics of group entitlement (Medhane 2007, p. 15).

The aforementioned, conflicting situations in Itang special district can go along with what conflict theorists provided, the very competition of the political class and the actions of ‘ethnic entrepreneurs’ drive ethnic conflicts (Brass, 1997), and that the political elites create ethnic conflicts manipulating with ethnic identities in their quest for power. Gurr (1994: 348) defined ethnic conflict as “... groups that defines themselves using ethnic criteria to make claims on behalf of their collective interests against the state or against other political actors” Gurr (1994, p. 348). Intrastate conflict could also have the government power as the key issue. In these case the incompatibility between the two disputed parties, one of which is the government itself, mostly concerning the political system, concerning the composition of the government or replacement of the central government, is the core of the conflict.

5.2. The Impact of the Conflict

As it can be drawn from the preceding subsequent discussions the resource and political conflict in Itang special district political, social, and security ramifications, it can even be dared to say that the conflict has negatively affected and stumble the entire societal milieu.

The nature of governance and the political process is adversely affected as the conflict largely expanded the culture of informal politics, leading to the *informalization of politics*. For the reason, the leadership is wrought with factionalism marked by successive shifting of alliance, loyalty becoming the desideratum selection and dismissal of officials at various administrative posts which hindered the development of competent political leadership. This has further resulted in the lack of accountability which has created power abuse leading to local tyranny. Non-accountability of power holders ('local tyranny') is easily noticeable. For instance in spite of the heavy demand from the victims no one was held accountable for the Pooldeng crisis and for the losses of life.

The conflict has constrained the emergence competitive party politics. Factional politics is often 'resolved' when the Ministry sides with one or the other. Subsequent to that, members of the 'loser' faction will be purged as part of 'conflict resolution'. This has created bitterness and the 'losers' wait for another opportunity to strike back and a sense of alienation by some groups creating the sources for another level conflict⁶

The conflict has also inflicted damage on various communities. The political conflict has exacerbated and triggered inter and intra-ethnic conflict and the resource competition vice versa for the political conflict and elites manipulation and instrumentalization. It has strained the relationships between the various clans with those and with whom there are already resource and other layers of tensions. By changing the status quo the political tension increased community's vulnerability to violence and their capacity to commit violence against each other.

⁶See (Dereje, 2006; Regassa, 2010; Gizachew, 2011) to learn how the 2002 Anyuwaa-Nuer conflict that erupted in Itang become the source of Anyuwaa-Highlander conflict.

Altogether, when unpacking the primary data collected from the field corroborated with literature, it can be figured out that the political and resource conflict in Itang negatively influenced the security of not only the elites but also the communities at large. It brought about governance paralysis in the region and chaos and uneasy environment. It brought about harm including the loss of life, the damage of property and villages. Communities also become preys to cross border raid. Although they meant to be protected civilians became the targets violence from the government bodies. The rule of law, protection of civilians against inhuman treatment is severely breached. The political dispute also transformed in to resource and social conflicts that restricted persons' movements and led to blood feuds.

CHAPTER SIX

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1. Summary and Conclusion

This thesis tried to examine the political and resource conflict and their interplay in Itang special district of GPNRS since 1991, a year that saw the adoption of a federal mode of governance in Ethiopia. Overall an attempt is made to ascertain the structural sources of the conflicts, drivers, and features, and the interfaces and interplay between political and resource conflicts in Itang special district over the last twenty four years.

According to the study one of the underlying sources of the conflict is broadly attributed to political (the history, culture and nature of the political space) and security and socio-cultural related factors. The political transformation in Ethiopia in the early 1990s that unleashed a federal system of structure embedded in ethnicity as a main form of political dispensation appeared as one of the major determinants of the conflict. The new political development that brought with it a new structure is not accompanied and laid on prudent and mature political culture and democratic institutions. From the outset, the power sharing and the political dispensation were not devised meaningfully in comprehensive manners that articulate the interest of various groups in the region. The federalism was not laid on the democratic culture of governance and party politics. There were no robust democratic institutions that facilitate political culture of decent political debates and accommodate internal dissent. As a result, political elites in the district succumbed in to competing; contradictory and at times violent political culture instrumentalizing grievances and fomenting sense of deprivation among people and forming the base for inter ethnic and intra ethnic conflicts in the district. As Natalaja (2004), noted democratic governance, political practice based on universal principles of democracy and rule of law, popular legitimacy, participation, accountability and the responsiveness of rulers to the governed is an essential requirement for sustained peace, economic growth, and development. The absence of this produced became one of the major sources of such conflicts in Itang special district of GPNRS.

The introduction of federalism with its self-autonomy to GPNRS does not provide the capacity for the regional political actors to produce a workable political community. In the vent, various groups have competed for political power and resources with various narratives of entitlement instead of building a viable regional political community. It appeared that political actors manipulated and politicized various levels of identities and used them as a means to their ends. Examining the dispute that arose to replace the deceased vice president can bring us to view how in spite of binding convention that clearly illustrates power sharing misguided by the greed of leaders to dominate power and the resource it produced and burst in to violent conflict. This can be substantiated from (Collier and Hoeffler 2000; Cooper 2005; Studdard 2003) which puts Greed by the political elite to monopolize power and resources and the grievance related to it as the experience of society as a whole, not only trigger conflict but are inherent causes of it. It seems the governance framework lacks democratic structures and mechanisms for equitable participation, allocation and distribution of power, and resources.

As to the empirical data collected from *Itang* special district corroborated with secondary sources resource, security and socio-cultural issues also appeared to be the root causes for inter-ethnic, intra-ethnic, political and resource conflicts in the study area. In fact, as Cohen (1978) maintains in areas where members of different ethnic groups co-exist and utilize the same resources there is high possibility for conflicts to arise over resources and to be expressed in ethnic terms. In the case of this study, the resource conflict is unraveled as membership of a particular ethnic/clan group or political elites disproportionately tried to gain control access to the scarce resources. As it is shown in various levels of conflict in post 1991 Itang district of GPNRS, competition over resource form one of the major determinants. This was seen for instance in the controversy surrounding the three kebele namely *Pulkoat (Makot)*, *Puldeng* and *Ler* inhabited by the Nuer clans of *Ci rieng*, *Ci nyajani* and *Ci waw* respectively that form the basis for inter and intra-ethnic, resource and political conflicts. In relation to security, and socio-cultural factors the civil war in neighboring Sudan that resulted large number of refugee and population influx to Ethiopia and weak cross border security that have led to large scale cross border cattle raiding and

the loss of human are also major stumbling blocks behind the conflicts. Because large number of refugees and influx of population escaping the war in Sudan have been Nuer who also form part of the indigenous groups in GPNRS it has raised resentment and opposition from other groups in GPNRS like Anyuwaa and clans of Nuer, driving inter and intra ethnic and political tensions as it is reflected in the case of Cieng Reng citizenship status dispute and Anyuwaa- Nuer conflict in Itang special district. As it is Cross border security is also sidelined with resource competition and ownership of flashpoints which further exacerbated by the so called state-centered and biased development policies, which is particularly gruesome viewed against the nature of social structure and political dispensation that have subsumed things to be approached from the vantage of identity.

Pertaining major features and manifestations of the political and resource conflict in *Itang* special district, as the study revealed they are marked by inter-ethnic conflict between the Anyuwaa and Nuer, intra-ethnic conflict among the Nuer clans and inter and intra ethnic political conflicts between the Anyuwaa and Nuer. Identity at its various denominations is manifested as the major driver of the conflicts. This is particularly the case given that identity is at the heart of political dispensation and power sharing at various administrative posts. For instance, in describing one the Anyuwaa vs Nuer conflict as informants attest the trigger of the conflict was a petty quarrel over soap along the Baro River in Itang town but the stage was already metastasized in to major confrontation between the two across the district extending to the entire region of Gambella that exhibit mixed settlements. The intensity of the violence involved from a mere fighting between two individuals to destruction of entire villages. Altogether, the data obtained from in-depth interview, focus group discussions corroborated with document analysis demonstrate that the conflict in *Itang* special districts of GPNRS is manifested and materialized in various ways and at different fields of social interaction. It ranges from simple disagreement that shows up in cut of salute to violence between individual group and communities. The conflict transforms in to communities and exhibited an interplay nature. Shifting of alliances, successive changes within regional government, intra and inter-ethnic fighting, and consequent redefinition of sources of entitlement, reconstruction of identity, inter community warfare and exiles forming as the hallmarks of the conflict.

As it is seen in chapter five the study disclosed the link between resource and political conflict in Itang special district of GPNRS since the early 1990s. As it was unveiled there tends to interface and interplay across various levels of conflicts. Numerous factors such as the mode of political dispensation, the social structure, resource scarcity, the culture of politics, response mechanisms to conflicts, and decisions at local, regional and national government add to the intricate relation and link throughout the resource and political conflicts in Itang special district.

6.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings identified and conclusion reached by this research, the following points have been forwarded to have policy implication hence for the prevention and management of political conflict and resource conflicts in Itang special district of GPNRS.

1. **Enhance the development of democratic culture in part politics and meritocratic entitlement basis:** According to the study political factors are major determinants both of various levels of conflicts and the interplay exhibited, which is related to the absence of Democratic Party politics and clear and workable entitlement basis that address the interest of various groups. Therefore, there should be a need to increase the capacity and the means to promote democratic culture, internal party politics, facilitate the emergence of competent and representative leaders capable of articulating the interest of the district. Likewise, a clear ground of entitlement basis which will come in an inclusive and democratic manner is important to reverse the simmering identity, resource and political based tensions in the region.
2. **Improve awareness of various stakeholders and strengthen civil societies :** Owing to the lacking institutions which nurture the culture of decent political debates and accommodate internal dissent the local elites instrumentalized 'identity' to enhance political standing in factional politics. Towards that end, they activate community demands and then claim to represent 'community needs'. As it often transpires genuine community issues such as resource scarcity are sidelined and labeled as if they were mere appendices of the political interests of the competing elites. It is therefore, vital to create awareness to various stakeholders like the federal government about the link between the resource and political conflicts and the interface of national, regional and local level decisions and conflicts and strength civil societies.
3. **Re-consider the *modus operandi* of the policies, development projects and intervention mechanisms at local, regional and federal levels:** It is shown

decisions and mode of responses to the conflicts at local, national and federal levels have contributed to and transformed the scale and magnitudes of the conflicts.

Modus operandi to resolve conflict at various government denominations have boiled the conflict or forms the ground for further conflict in that they largely focused on carrot stick approach and parochial interests. This implies the need for an informed and inclusive resolution schemes that exhaust the interest of all actors involved. Policies from the regional government should be cognizant of the need of marginalized and vulnerable groups. Also policies and intervention that comes from the federal government should be cognizant of the context under which it is implemented and consider the unintended damages. It is also seen that that scarcity of resource that comes as a result of development policies (for instance Alwero dam) has affected certain communities and increased movement toward the source of better resources and increased communities tension and brought about resource scarcity fueling tension at the political space of the region. Thus, it is very essential to widen the natural resource base as a sustainable peace building strategy.

4. **Systematically address demographic politics and the security situation along the border:** As it is seen the population influx resulted by the Sudan civil war and the question of citizenship and demographic anxiety and politics have rocked the region. Therefore, there should be a need to systematically address in the issue in the long run for example by delineating who is who, containing large settle and movement of people the study also found out how weak cross border security led to large scale cross border cattle raiding and the loss of human life from south Sudan and inter and intra ethnic resource competitions. Therefore, protection should be granted to vulnerable communities.

5. **Consider the Viability of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms:** In the same vein it is also essential to consider the viability of traditional institutions in the area in order to assist prevent and manage conflict without the cooption from the state apparatus.

6. **Further research:** Finally, further research is important in order to provide more thorough findings and substantiate on the link between political and resource conflicts in Itang special districts and the interface across various variables and conflicts in GPNRS at large.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

1. What is the link between resource and political conflicts?

- ✚ What is/are the priority issues (root causes) for the conflicts ?
- ✚ Is there linkage and connection among source of tension on historical, geographical, socioeconomic and political context?
- ✚ What are the factors that give rise to, or support the tensions?
- ✚ How have existing political processes and institutions fuelled tensions?
- ✚ Who was responsible for the occurrence of conflict/situation?
- ✚ How is competition for resources managed? What inequalities exist?
- ✚ To what extent is identity manipulated for political or economic gain?
- ✚ Does the conflict appear from internal dynamics of the politics?
- ✚ Is there any external connection?
- ✚ What factors intensify (FUEL) the tension?
- ✚ What are the key sources of the tension?
- ✚ How strong is the judicial system?
- ✚ What connection does the conflict have with identity, governance and resource allocation?
- ✚ What is the place of the nature of state and political structure in the sources of conflict?

2. How did the resource and political conflicts manifested in Itang district of GPNRS?

- ✚ Are there any violent cases resulted from this tension?
- ✚ What trend does this conflicts show (how does/did the conflicts are going (the scenario)?
- ✚ Do they have involvement of external actors?
- ✚ What are the indicators of tension in the community?
- ✚ What are the stated reasons for the tension or conflict?
- ✚ Are there tensions within the community or between communities?

- ✚ Are they appearing to involve various areas of the districts?
- ✚ Are there main theaters where these tensions are more viewed?
- ✚ What is the perception of the people, local, regional and national bodies to the conflict?
- ✚ How do you explain the dynamics, structure, nature and intensity of the conflict?
- ✚ What are the key determinants of the conflicts?
- ✚ How do you explain the reaction of regional and national government?

3. How did the resource conflict affect the political conflicts and vice versa in Itang district of GPNRS?

- ✚ What linkage and differences exist between the conflicts?
- ✚ What are the central interests of the key actors?
- ✚ How are different factions formed in the conflict?
- ✚ Does the conflicts showed similarities in its nature and intensity or it is dynamic and shaped by the status quo?
- ✚ What has been the role of different stake holders in the conflict?
- ✚ The interest of stake holders in maintaining the conflict what do they want and their respective importance?
- ✚ What is/are the role of local, regional and national actors in the conflict?



Appendix 2: A group discussion among local community representatives of *Ler* kebele, *Itang* town, January 18, 2016.

Appendix 3: List of informants

No.	Name		Date	Remark
1	Obang	Oriemi	February 10, 2016	Former wereda administrator
2	Omod	Uger	January 24, 2016	Former wereda administrator
3	Chuol	Met	February 6, 2016	Deputy wereda administrator
4	Goaner	Yer	February 14, 2016	Former regional vice president
5	Koang	Ker	January 5, 2016	Wereda security head
6	Buay	Chuol	January 5, 2016	Wereda head of GPUDM party
7	Okelo	Obong	February 23, 2016	Former wereda administrator
8	Nyabor	Bandak	January 6, 2016	Former wereda women Affair head
9	Lul	Yiech	February 3, 2016	Expert, Itang special wereda Agriculture office
10	Chiech	Ochan	February 3, 2016	Expert, Itang special wereda security office
11	Gatdet	Biel	February 9, 2016	Expert, Itang special wereda administrative council office
12	Obang	Omot	January 8, 2016	Expert, regional council administrative council office
13	Ochala	Agot	February 12, 2016	Lecturer, Gambella University
14	Okello	Ojho	February 12, 2018	Lecturer, Gambella University
15	Okak	Puot	January 15, 2016	Chairman, <i>Achwa</i> kebele, <i>Itang</i> special wereda
16	Nyacuol	Kuon	January, 17, 2016	Resident, <i>Wathgach</i> kebele, <i>Itang</i> special wereda
17	Ojuato	Odiel	February 18, 2016	Village elder, <i>Achwa</i> kebele, <i>Itang</i> special wereda
18	Chuol	Hoth	February 21, 2016	Village elder, <i>Ler</i> kebele, <i>Itang</i> special wereda
19	Gakthok	Nyanguek	January 25, 2016	Village elder, <i>Ler</i> kebele, <i>Itang</i> special wereda
20	Kame	Chuol	February 13, 2016	Village elder, <i>Makoth</i> kebele, <i>Itang</i> special wereda

Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis entitled “The Interplay between Resource and Political Conflict in Itang Special District: The case of Gambella National Regional State”, is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university or organization, and that all sources of material used for the thesis have been dully acknowledged.

Declared by:

Name: Gatwech Tut Riek

Signature_____

Date_____

Approved by the Advisor:

Name: Yonas Adaye (PhD)

Signature_____

Date_____