



UNITED NATIONS
ETHIOPIA



THE UNITED NATIONS PEACEBUILDING FUND PROJECT: INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SUPPORT TO ETHIOPIA

CASE STORIES

April 2021



Case I Rehabilitated Common Social Infrastructure: Hope to restore Peace and Social Cohesion among the communities of Oromia and Somali Regional States

The inter-communal conflict between Oromia and Somali Regional States in 2018 has disrupted the peaceful co-existence of communities living on either side of the state boundary, displacing millions and destroying social infrastructures. With its objective to promote the regional and interregional security and social cohesion of targeted regions in Ethiopia, the United Nations Peace Building Fund project: “Inclusive Governance and Conflict Management Support to Ethiopia” has invested on consecutive peace dialogues in Eastern Hararghe Zones of Oromia and Somali Regional States among others¹. These dialogues were its main strategy to improve social cohesion among Somali-Oromo communities living in the border districts. Through its partnership of the project with Peace and Development Center (PDC), a local Civil Society Organization in Ethiopia, eight intra-community dialogues and 6 inter-community dialogues were facilitated, which involved local government representatives and community members, including those economically, socially and politically marginalized.



Figure 1 Inter-Community Dialogue for Oromo and Somali Community Members. Photo Credit: PDC



Figure 2 Bilsuma School in Gursum District of Oromia Region before rehabilitation. Photo Credit: IOM

renewed peace and social cohesion for the generations to come. The PBF project supported the rehabilitation two health posts in Somali and two schools in Babile and Gursum districts of Oromia Regions, which have now started receiving students after the long break due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

These dialogues have helped to minimize tensions, analyze the perception of the communities towards their own members and build bridges between those who have been in conflict with each other. Beyond that, the inclusive and participatory approaches of these dialogues have allowed the community to reflect and prioritize short-term and long-term remedies to recover back from the destroyed social ties and infrastructures in their communities. Among the prioritized solutions to restore peace and trust among the communities is the rehabilitations of common social service facilities (schools and clinics) to serve as a testimony of the



Figure 3: Bilsuma School after Rehabilitation. Photo Credit, IOM

¹ Babile (Oromiya), Babile (Somali) Gursum (Oromiya), Gursum (Somali) Chinaksan (Oromiya),Tulu Guled, Mieso (Oro0, Mieso (Somali)

Case 2: Women Peace Forums: Paving the way for inclusive regional and interregional peacebuilding efforts

Oromia and Somali Regional States have been affected by violent conflicts which resulted in the internal displacement of millions of people. The women from the two regions have been disproportionately affected by the conflict. After the violence stopped, there were very few chances created for women to come together, discuss and begin to heal the trauma created by the violence and displacement. In the dialogue that took place between the regions following the different conflicts, women have not been given the space to come together and discuss issues especially their roles in local peace process.

Recognizing this shortcoming, a strategy was embedded in the “Inclusive Governance and Conflict Management Support to Ethiopia Project” to create an enabling environment and a mechanism to engage women at all levels. As a result of the close collaboration with the Bureaus of Women, Children and Youth (BoWCY) in Oromia and Somali regional States, a Women Peace Forum was established in each region.



Figure 3: Member of Women Peace Forum, on the left from Oromia Region and on right from Somali Region Photo Credit: UN Women

Currently, through these forums, women from Oromia and Somali Regions are able to lead and take part in peace dialogues and conferences. This gives them the opportunity to get their voice heard, share their concerns, and aspirations to see peaceful communities in both regions with the community leaders and government representatives leading the inter-regional dialogue process. With the support of the PBF project, both forums were able to connect through an inter-regional experience sharing event that was organized from October 27-29, 2020. This event was highly symbolic for the two women peace forum members as they could share stories about their common grief and discuss ways to bring peace in the bordering localities of the two regions. The personal connections and momentum that was generated by this meeting has initiated a regular collaboration between women in communities living on both sides of the boundary. The forum also provided the opportunity women from both regions develop common agendas for overcoming the challenges that divided their communities and join forces to rebuild peace together.



Figure 4 Women Peace forum members during the experience sharing Photo Credit: UN Women/ Oromia BoWCYA

These women have also been playing active role in peacebuilding activities in their respective regions owing to the PBF project capacity building training provided to them on conflict transformation, transformative leadership and peacebuilding. In Oromia, members of the women peace forum have been

involved in the effort of mediating on between conflicting groups in their region. In Somali Region, women peace forum members have been active in the efforts of resettlement of internally displaced peoples in the region.

Case 3: Religious and Cultural Leaders: leading the way to peaceful coexistence in West Arsi Zone, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia

West Arisi zone is a newly formed zone, curved out of Bale, Arsi and South Shoa Zones in Oromia Regional State in Ethiopia. Its Zonal capital Shashamane city is home for diverse ethnic and religious groups Muslims being constituting the majority of the population in the zone. Going back in history, though the minority Non-Oromo ethnic groups and Christians lived peacefully in the area that constitute today's west Arisi zone, there were also a degree of polarization sometimes resulted in tensions and religious conflicts leading to attack and vandalization of churches. Especially, the recent incidence that followed the assassination of Hachalu Hundesa, the famous Oromo singer was the most devastating with the destructions and looting of huge business and government facilities, killings of hundreds, displacing thousands.

The West Arsi Zone was being one of the targets of the United Nations Peace Building Fund project: Inclusive Governance and Conflict Management Support to Ethiopia, following the devastating conflict in the Region. Community dialogues, experience sharing and cultural reconciliation conference with religious leaders and men and women cultural leaders (*Aba Gedas*) and (*Hade Seqqes*) respectively², representative of the business community, and the youth, were the main interventions conducted by leveraging on the effective partnership that was created with Interreligious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE)³. Four districts⁴ and Arsi Negele and Shashemene cities were the specific targets of these events.

These platforms created by the project has been instrumental for local religious leaders to appeal to the youth to refrain from being the cause of destruction also sharing their experiences on how they can bring relative peace as compared to what happened in West Arsi. Opportunities for both the Christian and Muslim community members was created helping them to jointly identify each other's positive practices and the conflict triggering factors with a bold request on what they want for the other religion in order to improve peaceful coexistence among their communities.

Furthermore, these events lead to the assignment of five women's peace ambassadors for each district being a symbolic moment recognizing the cultural role of women (*Hadde Sinqqes*) to promote peace and reconciliation in the Region.



Figure 5 Left and middle Orthodox and Protestant members respectively and right Muslims while identifying the positive and negative practices of their respective religions (Photo Credit: IRCE)

² Aba Gedas and Hadde Sinqqes are male and female highly respected "cultural leaders" in the Oromia Region

³ IRCE is a local Civil Society Organizations working to promote religious Harmony in Ethiopia.

⁴ Dodola, Shalla, Kofele, Shashemene Districts

The cultural -religious conference in Shashemene was also a huge platform conducted based on the request of several communities following the community dialogues and experience sharing events. This inclusive reconciliation conference resulted in a renewed resolutions and reenactment of the Gada⁵ traditional laws that the community members should obey and share with their families and friends. The Gadda traditional laws which were reenacted by the Abagadas during the conference include the following translated from the local language: -

All people regardless of their ethnicity, gender, age, and place of origin have the right to live in peace. People have the right to create wealth and their properties should be protected. Roads belong to all people. Roads are public properties and should be cared for. We should not close roads to protest. We strongly condemn anyone who is involved in actions that hinder people’s movement from place to place. Anyone who does such action does not belong to our community. We will notify such people to the police.”



Figure 6 Top, Aba Gedas while leading on the reenactment of the law, below, Hadde Siqqes who participated in the reconciliation conference. Photo Credit: IRCE

⁵ Geda is a traditional system of governance used by the Oromo people in Ethiopia. It serves as a mechanism for enforcing moral conduct, building social cohesion and expressing forms of community culture

FAST FACTS

The aim of the Inclusive Governance Conflict management support to Ethiopia project is to support the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) to start a national process on the inclusive development of peacebuilding strategy, while attending to regional peacebuilding challenges by increasing security and social cohesion in the most urgent conflict prone clusters through enhancing capacity and responsiveness of state actors and other stakeholders to needs and grievances of conflicted affected communities.



**Funded by
UN PBF**



**December 13, 2018 -
December 2020**



\$ 2,840,341.48



**Federal, Oromia,
Somali and SNNP
Regions**



**Contribution to SDG
5 and SDG 16**