Religious Institutions and Their Implication for Sustainable Peace in Amhara National Regional State: A Study on Some Selected East Gojjam Woredas

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Abstract: *Religion makes the people to put their lives on the way for salivation through having a vision of reality that transcend temporal world into a becoming world where everyone lives in a situation that is, full of an everlasting peace. But the role religious institutions play in ensuring the desired goal is a bone of contentions among scholars. The focus of the study was to explore the implication of religious institutions for sustainable peace in Amhara National Regional State with a particular reference to East Gojjam selected woredas. The central objective of the study was to uncover the positive and negative implications of religion in the realizing peace and social harmony in five selected woredas of East Gojjam. To meet these objectives the study has employed mixed research approach with sequential exploratory design. Data was collected from primary and secondary sources. In order to draw the research participants and respondents, purposive sampling and simple random sampling was employed. Hence, the participants of the study were religious fathers, sheiks, pastors, Woreda and East Gojjam Hagere Sibket Administrator and religious believers. A total of 218 participants were included. The finding of the study shows that the religion and the peace building endeavors a direct relationship. Besides, the study also indicated that the role of religious forum in ensuring peace and social harmony is not effective in the study area. Furthermore, the finding of the study also identified that due to internal and external triggering factors, religious institutions are serving as source of social conflict in the study area. The study has also identified the challenges that hampered religious institutions to promote sustainable peace and social cohesion in the society. Lastly, the study has recommended for woreda Administrative and security office, East Gojjam Hageresibket Officials, members of religious forum and ministry of Federal Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopian Government.*
Key words: *religion, sustainable peace, implication, East Gojjam, Ethiopia.*

I. Introduction

The role of religion and religious institutions in the overall peace building efforts is one of the bones of contention among scholars and researchers. Religion is and will be one of the potential instruments that instigate conflict or promote peace in different parts of the world (Danmission, 2016). In this regards different scholars and empirical data revealed that, religion has dual implications in human history. In the first place religion serves as a system of symbol which enables individuals to develop social cohesion and common understanding (Rasul, 2009). Religion also makes the people to put their lives in the way for salivation through having a vision of reality that transcend temporal/being world into a becoming world where everyone lives in a situation that is, full of an everlasting peace (Johnston and Cox, 2003).

According to literature the peace building process in a country cannot be realized without religious institutions involvement. For example, the mediation made by the Catholic lay group Sant'Egidio to end the civil war in Mozambique; the participation of religious leaders in South Africa's reconciliation efforts; or the intervention of an imam and pastor team in Yelwa Shendam Nigeria to stem Christian-Muslim violence; faith-based and secular organizations cooperated in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia justified the fact that peace and security endeavor could not be ensured without the involvement of religious institutions at large. So it is important to say that religion and religious institutions play a paramount role in resolving conflicts and ensure sustainable peace in the world (Johnston and Cox, 2003).

However, to the contrary, religion has been a major contributor to war, bloodshed, hatred, and intolerance, which results with loss of life and property at large. In the sense that religion sometimes begets conflict among divergent religious groups since it is tied with the life of individuals (The British Academy, 2015). For example, during the Rwanda's genocide religious leaders including the Bishop were the prominent actors of the anti-Tutsi movement that took the lives of many people (Shillinger, 2000). They were not only engaged in preventing the genocide but also legitimatize the regime of murderer. Even some of the church believers left the church by saying that God is no longer there because many of the Rwandans were killed in church a place which is supposed to be safe and cool (Banyanga and Bjirkqvist, 2017).

Our continent Africa is the cradle of humanity. It implies that Africa had, from time immemorial, evolved its own mechanisms and institutions for managing and resolving disputes and conflicts in ways that preserved the fabric of society and encouraged peaceful co-existence. The argument is that the concept and practice of peace and conflict resolution is not new in Africa, but rather it is the institutionalization of peace and conflict studies at African Universities and schools and civil society organizations, that is the new phenomenon (Francis, 2006). Particularly East Africa region as like other parts of the content, religion plays important role via resolving conflicts and promote peace. The engagement of different religious communities ensures that each group can contribute to a common cause of peaceful coexistence (Singleton and Shingler, 1967). In spite of such contribution, religion has been the source of conflict and instability. Our country, Ethiopia is not an exception. Hence, this research uncovers the positive and negative implications of religion in sustaining durable peace on the selected Woredas of East Gojjam Zone.

II. Statement of the Problem

According to the UN Agenda 2030 for sustainable development, thinking development without peace is impossible and vice-versa. To do so religious leaders and institutions plays a paramount role in achieving this goal and ensuring sustainable peace (Lagho and Bonaya, 2016). According to different literature, religion plays a significant role in the live and culture of the society of at least 75 percent of the world's population (Danmission, 2016). Most importantly religious leaders who are the forefront in their spiritual leadership, have a paramount role to play and influence all members of their communities. In the sense that, while they tried to speak out, their voices are heard and their messages have the power too. They are the pioneer in preaching the values and commandments of religion must be a voice of sympathy that speaks for the poor, the marginalized and the exploited groups (UNESCO, 1991).

One of the plausible mechanism to ensure peace and stability in a given country is developing an inter-faith code of conduct in preaching that would serve as a blueprint for all religious leaders and followers at large (Ibid). To do so the UN General Assembly resolutions 58/128, 59/23, 60/10, and 61/221 all call for inter-religious dialogue and cooperation to promote a global culture of peace (USIP, 2012). For example the establishment of the World Church Council that encompasses different religions including Protestant, Orthodox Christianity, Angela and other Churches. It was established since 1948, over 120 countries (Fykse, 2016).

Ethiopia like other countries in World, have established Inter-Religious/IRCE Council with the intent to promote religious freedom and equality based on peace, love, tolerance, mutual benefit and for democratic dialogue. To achieve this, the Council has organized itself from the federal level down to grass roots/Woreda levels. The Council has been doing different activities in peace building through preparing and distributing books that teaches about peace and mutual co-existence to all member institutions (IRCE, 2015). It also serves as a key platform for dialogue and national development. But, in spite of such actives done by the IRCE, today in Ethiopia there is no sustainable peace. Rather conflicts are erupting across different regions and ethnic tensions are increasing in an alarming rate. Some of the manifestations of such tensions are between Islamic Community and among Islamic and Orthodox Christian followers (UNDP, 2015).

Even though religion has played a significant role in resolving conflict and peace building by fostering interreligious dialogue, much attention was not given. Rather it was serving as a means of threatening the international peace and security that leads to "Clash of Civilizations" (Nomos, 2012). The same is true in Ethiopia in general and in the study area in particular. Little researches has been done which are related to the title. For example, Tsegaye (2014) studied on the role of interfaith based civil society organizations in peace making in Ethiopia and South Sudan. But, it solely focused on the role of registered religious based civil society organizations in promoting peace.

Hence, the positive and negative implication of religion in peace-avenue in the Ethiopia in general and in the study area in particular is not studied. Particularly, in the study area (East Gojjam) there are conflicts and tensions between Orthodox Tewahdo believers against Kibat in different woredsa including Debre Markos Town. And the issue was transferred into a security problem in East Gojjam administration in particular and in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church believers in general. Besides, there are tensions within Muslim followers. Therefore, this research will go thoroughly and explore the implication of religious institutions in the overall peace building effort in some Selected East Gojjam Woredas.

The general objective of this study is to assess the implication of religion in ensuring sustainable peace in some selected East Gojjam Woredas. The specific objective of this research includes;
* To explore the positive contribution of religious institutions in ensuring sustainable peace in the study area
* To identify the negative implications of religious institutions in resolving tensions and conflict that emanated from the community in the study area
* To examine the challenges of religious institutions in promoting peace and social cohesion in the study area.

III. Definition of Terms and Concepts

Defining religion is not a simple task due to the fact that scholars from different field of study have a specific approach of understanding it. According to Fox (2018), religion is a social institution which strongly influences and shapes the human behavior. Others also defined religion as a system of symbol which is intended to make men influential, persistent, and have long-lasting attitudes and motivate them to get bless and salivation in the eternal world (Geertz, 1973). But, the definition given by this guy is gender biased. In the sense that, it focused on defining religion from the perspective of male than female. Still other scholars argued that religion is just like a culture and/or linguistic framework or medium that is established to make the people to describe the realities or beliefs through experiencing inner attitudes, feelings, and sentiments (Lindbeck, 1984). Religion is a set of answers to the fundamental questions of life in human existence, which includes the systematization of these answers into a meaningful manner and the celebration of different religious ceremonials through establishing institutions.

The other thing pertinent to religion is the essence of religious institutions. Religious institutions are institutions established for the purpose of collecting religious followers and worship their creator (God/Allah). They are established by the consult of individuals for the very purpose of getting bless from their creature and other saints. It includes Churches, Mosques and others. According to Frazer and Ower (2018), all religions institutions have different structures, hierarchies, organizations, and leaders. The structure may also differ within the same religion depending on the context. For example in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, the administrative arrangement is organized from Woreda to the national level/Tekilay Betekihinet. The leaders' honorable title includes Patriarch, Liqa papas and Papas/Arch Bishop.

Peace on the other hand is the most desired element of humanity. Peace seems to be an "umbrella concept", a general expression of human desires, of that which is good, that which is ultimately to be pursued. Mankind will always be heading for goals, some of them very concrete, some of them more abstract and diffuse, and "peace" seems to be one of the terms that used for this generalized goal. In the early years of peace studies, it was assumed that peace is the opposite of war. Peace was defined as *the absence of war,* partially because the early peace studies was strongly motivated by the reflection on the tragedies of the Second World War and by a sense of crisis of human survival caused by the danger of a total nuclear war between the two superpowers (Matsuo, 2005).

When peace is defined narrowly it can imply passivity and the acceptance of injustice. During the cold war the word had subversive implications and was often associated with communism. Moscow sponsored ersatz "peace councils" which gave the word a negative connotation. Hesitancy about the meaning of peace existed long before the cold war. In the years before World War I Andrew Carnegie lavishly funded programs to prevent war and advance international cooperation, but he was uncomfortable with the word peace and wanted to leave it out of the title of the international endowment he left as his legacy. Peace is more than the absence of war. It is also "the maintenance of an orderly and just society. In this regard many writers distinguish between negative and positive peace, where the former implies the absence of war, and the later implies the presence of justice. Peace is also a state of balance where the rights of all citizens are respected and their voices are heard by employing dialogue and discussion to reach at mutual respect and trust (IIR, 2009).

IV.   The Role of Religion to Ensure Peace

Scholars in the field of peace and conflict studies believed that ensuring peace is not an overnight task. It is rather takes time and needs the involvements of different stakeholders. Of these religious institutions and their respective leaders are important in the peace building process. According to Gerrie Tar Haar by mentioning the views of Assefa stated that;

> *Bringing the spiritual dimension into the peacemaking process can create access to the more deep-seated, affective base of the parties' behavior, enabling them to examine critically their own attitudes and actions. People's conflict behavior is often based on more emotional considerations and thus may not be changed simply by rational negotiation processes and subsequent agreements. Cognitive decisions and commitments, he argues, do not necessarily translate into feelings and action (Haar, 2004.p.22).*

The document of Danmission also denotes that religion plays a pivotal role in the lives and cultural practice of at least 75 percent of the world population (Danmission, 2016). It means that religious values and practices are always tied with the day to day lives of each individual through shaping their attitudes, opinions and behaviour. Thus, religious institutions in most cases serve as source of peace and a tool for conflict resolution. More importantly, religious beliefs or values are thought to have the potential to promote peace and security in any society (Silvestri and Mayall, 2015). Religion also makes the people to put their lives on the way for salivation through having a vision of reality that transcend temporal/being world into a becoming world where everyone lives in a situation that is, full of an everlasting peace (Johnston and Cox, 2003).

In line with this religious leaders who are the forefront in their spiritual leadership, have a paramount role to play and influence all members of their communities. They are assumed to be the pioneer in preaching the values and commandments of religion and they must also be a voice of sympathy that speaks for the poor, the marginalized and the exploited groups (UNESCO, 1991). In addition, they can contribute for peace through providing early warning of conflict, means of managing and resolving any kind of conflict that would happen in the day to day lives of the society (Sommers, 2001).

For example the mediation efforts made by the Christian denominations, such as in South Africa with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in Mozambique with Sant'Egidio, in the US with Martin Luther King, the Middle East and the Balkans of various priests are best examples of which religion and religious leaders played a significant role to ensure peace in their respective country (Thomas, 2005; Smock, 2002; and Lederach, 1996). So like the Christian religion, Islamic religion has also its own values of resolving conflicts. In this regard a Muslim scholar Abu-Nimer (2003) argued that Islam is based on fundamental human values encoded in the Qur'an, related religious writings and the Islamic tradition. Based on those values, Muslim societies have developed a considerable set of non-violent tools for conflict resolution and peace-building experiences. The Traditional Arab-Muslim mechanisms for dispute resolution include third-party mediation and arbitration in any form of social conflict. Such mechanisms also included traditional reconciliation methods, based on the value of forgiveness and public repentance (Ibid).

V.   The Negative Implication of Religion to Ensure Peace

Despite the aforementioned realities where religion has played a significant role in resolving conflicts and violence, there are many dark sides of religion which will be mentioned as follows. From the pages of history we find that religion created conflict and disunity in the society. Galtung (1969), who is the founder of the field of peace and conflict study argues that religion is often the source of 'cultural violence', a form of violence which is basically used to legitimize other forms of violence (structural and direct). Hence, the following are the empirical evidence where religion serves as the source of conflict. The glaring examples of these are the conflict between the Protestants and Roman Catholics, the Hindus and the Muslims. Not only had these, the conflict of religion led to the religious wars of the sixteenth century. In many cases it is proved that religious fanaticism is responsible for much inhuman bloodshed. Sometimes it is seen that religion creates an obstacle in the development of the free spirit in common people. This was prominent in the middle ages where free enquiry and independent thinking was thwarted by religion. In addition, the violent conflicts which have been erupted in Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, Balkans, Sudan, East Timor, and Sri Lanka are in the name of religion.

Besides, according to John Hall's understanding the following are events which are tied with religion: the September 9/11 terrorist attacks; the continuing struggles between Jews and Palestinians; the problems in Northern Ireland; the nationalist conflicts in the Balkans; ethnic wars and tensions in Africa; conflict between Pakistan and India; terrorist actions by extreme right Christian fundamentalists in the U.S. and Islamic terrorist attack in different cities of Europe; poison gas attack by the Aum Shinrikyô sect in Tokyo; the deaths of hundreds in a burning church in the name of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of

God in Uganda etc (Hall, 2001). The other shocking incidence in the world which is caused by religion is the Rwanda genocide. The role of Christianity specifically the implantation of the Roman Catholic Church in Rwanda has contributed for the genocide to happen and leaders were actively involved in it (Spijker, 1997). According to different literatures, the Rwandan genocide would never have taken place, if Christian missions (the Roman Catholic Church) had not been implanted right in the Rwandan society (Ibid). Since the arrival of the Roman Catholic Church, they preach in a way that promotes racial division between Hutu and Tutsi and degrading the social status one over the other (Banyanga and Björkqvist, 2017).

Even in Ethiopia during the 16th century due to Gragn Amhed's jihadist movement, the EOTC has lost many heritages and its resources had been looted and burned out. This have had created reservation between religious followers for a long period of time. Besides, the politicization of Islamic religion in Ethiopia and the aspirations to be terrorists are the other challenges that instigated conflicts and tensions in Ethiopia. In this regard Erlich (2010) believed that there are two varieties of Islamic wings which are prevalent in today's Ethiopia. The first one is the Ethiopian or African Islam, which is flexible brand of Islam having a popular set of beliefs, traditions, and customs and accepts Ethiopia and its legitimacy as a land led by a Christian establishment. The second wing is the fundamentalist and politically oriented militant group which is not founded based on the tradition and custom of Ethiopians rather imported from the Middle East. Accordingly the second wing of Islam does not accept the views of Christian-led Ethiopia and aspires to change this narrative into to win Ethiopia for Islam (Erlich, 2010). This group of Islam is one of the sources of conflict in today's Ethiopia which resulted with the loose of both human life and material destructions particularly in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church. Another scholar called Samatar also described this phenomenon as "the politicization of religion" whereby faith (religious dogma) is transformed into political ideology that can instigate conflict and hatred between the societies (Samatar, 21984). Therefore, we can conclude that polarization of religion is one of the sources of conflict and violence which has been erupted in different countries of the world in general and in Ethiopia in particular.

VI.   The Role Of Inter-Religious Council Of Ethiopia In The Peace Building Efforts

Inter-religious dialogue is a platform for religious leaders to describe and orientate the followers of their religion about the essence of religion and the way to practice it in their day to day life. It is also defined as *"*all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of faith which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom."(Dialogue and Proclamation1991 a document of the Catholic Church cited in Forde, 2013). The UN General Assembly resolutions 58/128, 59/23, 60/10, and 61/221 also call for interreligious dialogue and cooperation to promote and strengthen global culture of peace across the world (Hayward, 2012). The ultimate goal of inter-religious dialogue is to build common values that help different religions to come together and discuss problems within the society. It is an important step to build peace by developing common understanding among believers.

The inter-religious Council of Ethiopia has been established by the full consensus and collaboration of various religious institutions in 2010 with the vision to see a developed Ethiopia religious communities and their institutions stand together for peace, love, justice, human dignity, mutual respect, tolerance and religious equality (IRCE, N.D). It is established with the aims of promoting and systematizing interfaith learning collaboration to address common concerns. IRCE targets in bringing religious leaders and institutions of various faiths at national and regional levels to identify potential on building trust and relationship among the various religious communities. Currently, the IRCE has a total of seven member of religious institutions and namely: the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewando Church (EOTC), Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC), the Ethiopian Catholic Church (ECC), the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia (ECFE), the Ethiopian Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDAC), the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) and Ethiopian Kale Hiwot churches (EKHC). The council is on the way to decentralize its structure up to Woreda levels.

According to Karbo, (2013) the Inter-religious Council of Ethiopia to achieve the aforementioned goals has established the Inter-religious Dialogue- Ethiopia (IRD-E). The IRD-E was first designed in a way that can develop and strengthen interpersonal relationships between the various religious leaders of member faiths through learning about the cultural, ideological and religious views of each faith. In doing so these dialogue sessions which were took place among different religious leaders reveal that members of each faith have been able to enrich, deepen and broaden their own religious life and their perspective towards other faiths through mutual understanding.

VII.   The Challenges Of Religious Institutions For Peace Building In Ethiopia

Even though religion has a significant role in the peace building process, it is accompanied by different challenges. According to scholars, one of the challenges that hampered the activities of religion is secularism. In this regard Geoffrey (2017), stated that "secularization has not only rejected the metaphysical and religious

explanations of reality, but also separated religion from the culture, the sacred from the secular, the spiritual from the material, holy from unholy just to mention but few." It implies that secularism has eroded not only religious values and but also the cultural values and norms of the society in a country. Secularism also begets atheism which in turn, led to individuals to shine away from religion.

Besides religious fundamentalism is the other challenge that hampered the performance of religious institutions. Even though the concept of religious fundamentalism is contentious among schools, but most commonly it stands to show to extremism, fanaticism, and literal thinking in connection with a religious faith (Ercan, 2006). According to Desta (2017), the expansion of Wahhabism with the view of making Ethiopia to be the land of Islam (dar al Islam) is one of the biggest challenges that affect the peaceful and social harmony of Ethiopians. So religious fundamentalism is one of the challenge that affects the peaceful existence of different religious groups in Ethiopia. In a similar fashion the study of Ayalew (2018), Islamic fundamentalism and out-group hostilities are manifested in Kemissie city administration.

The study of Haynes (2009:67) as cited in Ashafa and Wuye (1990) stated that;

> *Religion today, instead of serving as a source of healing sickness, hanger, and poverty, stimulating tranquility and peaceful co-existence among human beings, It is used to cause sadness. It is bringing pain instead of relief, hatred instead of love, division instead of unity, sadness instead of joy, discrimination and destruction instead of accommodation and development. This is especially true between some adherents of Islam and Christianity. Nigeria has its own share of this negative phenomenon. The ethno-religious conflict has become a matter so serious and devastating that it can now be seen as a harbinger of the danger of a crisis such as those that have engulfed the former Yugoslaavia, Rwanda and Liberia (pp.1).*

Therefore, religious institutions are running out of their objective and this by itself would have a direct implication on the peace building endeavor in Ethiopia in general and in the study area in particular.

VIII. Research Methodology

This study has employed mixed research approach. A mixed research method enables the researcher to collect and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data in a particular and helps to integrate the data at one or more stages in the process of research (Creswell et al., 2003). Hence, the premise behind choosing mixed research approach is because it helps to understand and clarify the positive contribution of religion; the limitation/negative implication of religion and its challenges. Besides, it also provides the researcher with many design choices which involve a range of sequential and concurrent strategies and to look at the problem from the wider spectrum (Terrell, 2012).

The research has also employed sequential exploratory strategy. It is a research design that enables to collect and analyze the qualitative data followed by quantitative data. According to Terrell (2012), sequential exploratory research design is relatively straight forward due to clear, distinct stages and easier to describe than other strategies. Hence, in order to select the research participants both probability and non-probability sampling techniques was employed. Of the categories of probability sampling, simple random sampling technique was also employed. On the other hand from non-probability sampling, purposive sampling was employed.

Hence, data was collected from religious fathers (Priests, Sheiks and Pastors), believers of each religion, religious institution administrators. The participants and respondents of this research were drawn from five woredas namely, Shebel Berenta, Hulet Eju Ensie, Debre Markos Town, Enarij Enawga and Basoliben respectively. These woredas were selected through purposive sampling. Pertaining to sample size a total of 218 were participated.

In order to determine the sample size for the quantitative respondents Yamane (1967) formula that uses 93% of confidence level and 0.07 level of accuracy was employed. Hence, the following formula was applied;

$$n = N/1 + N(e)^2$$
$$n = \frac{651{,}818}{1 + 651{,}818(0.07)^2} = \underline{204}$$

The required sample size was 204

Where,

  n= stands to show the sample size to be used

  N= stands to show total number of customers in the city

  e = shows the level of precision or sampling error 7% (0.07)

  1= designates the probability of the event occurring

Therefore, the total sample sizes of this study were 218 addressed.

In order to collect the data, both primary and secondary sources were used. Primary source of data was collected via semi-structured interview, key informant interview, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and questionnaire.

The data that are collected via semi-structured, key informant interview, and FGD were analyzed thematically. In addition, the data collected through questionnaire was analyzed by using the software application (SPSS version 24) through descriptive statistical analysis technique that is, based on frequency, percentage and tabulation.

IX.   Data Analysis and Discussion
The Background of Respondents

The respondents before they filled the research questions, they were asked about their age, sex and religion. Accordingly, the following table clearly indicates the profile of respondents who were participated in the study.

Table 1: the profile of respondents

Demographic Features of participants or customers of selected institutions	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	150	86.2%%
Female	24	13.8%
Total	174	100%
Religious affiliation		
Orthodox Tewahdo	130	74.7%
Islam	32	18.4%
Protestant	12	6.9%
Others	0	0%
Total	174	100%
Age		
20-25	10	5.7%
26-30	70	40.2%
31-40	75	43.1%
Above 40	19	10.9%
Total	24	100%

As indicated in the above table 1, 150(86.2%) of the respondents are male, whereas the remaining 24(13.8%) are females. It indicated that majority of the respondents for this study was males. Besides, the table also shows that religious affiliation of the respondents. Accordingly, 230(74.7%) are Orthodox Tewahdo, 32(18.4%) are Islam and the remaining 12(6.9%) are Protestant followers. Therefore, it is concluded that majority of the respondents were Orthodox Tewahdo which also includes (though not included under the options) Kibat followers. Furthermore, the above table also indicated the age composition of respondents. Accordingly, 10(5.7%) are between the age of 20-25, 70(40.2%) are between the age of 26-30, 75(43.1%) are between 31-40 and the remaining 19(10.9%) are above the age of 40. Therefore, it is pretty much important to conclude that majority of the respondents were between the age of 20-30, which is the youngest group in Ethiopia in general and in the study area in particular.

X.   The Positive Contribution of Religious Institutions to Ensure Sustainable Peace

Almost all of the research participants have agreed that religion and peace building has a direct relationship. Accordingly one of our informants from Mota Woreda Betekihnet strongly believed that: *"the church among others, pray and work on not only for domestic peace but also for the entire world."* Others also delineated that in order to ensure peace and stability the religious institutions preach their religious followers to live in peace and harmony with others.

All of the participants have agreed that in most cases, it is through religion particularly (religious) fathers that disputes at household or community level are addressed and resolved. Resolving conflicts and disputes are an integral part of peace building in the selected study areas.

XI.   The effectiveness of inter-religious council/religious forum in peace building

The study has also identified the role of inter-religious councils of Ethiopia or locally known as *religious forum* in peace building in the selected Woredas. The council was established to undertake the promotion of peaceful coexistence and collaboration among religious institutions and communities in Ethiopia. According to the research participants the forum is active in some Woredas such as in Motta, Debre Markos, Debre Werk, whereas in the remaining Woredas, the existence of the forum is symbolic and it is not in a position to achieve its objective due to different reasons. In this regard one of our informants from Debre Markos Town who is the member of the forum posited that;

> *Even though the forum is established with the objective of strengthening peace and harmony through open dialogue and discussion between different religious followers, it is not supported by the concerned government body. For example, the forum does not have the right place and schedule to discuss and make decision on varies issues. Our work is occasional and has no formal procedure (interview with M/hadis Belay, 2019).*

Others also stated that the forum with its limitations, had resolved conflicts and tensions in the society. Particularly in the year 2008 -2009/10, in Motta and its surrounding the forum has made an intervention between Islamic and Orthodox Tewahdo believers before they indulged into dysfunctional conflicts. The forum among others enabled the two followers to resolve the problems with one day. In this regard the study of Karbo (2013) portrayed that the Inter-religious Council of Ethiopia to achieve its goals has established the Inter-religious Dialogue- Ethiopia (IRD-E) and the Inter-religious Dialogue-Ethiopia through dialogue sessions which were took place among different religious leaders reveal that members of each faith have been able to enrich, deepen and broaden their own religious life and their perspective towards other faiths through mutual understanding.

Table 3: the effectiveness of inter-religious council/forum in peace building in the study area

How do you see the effectiveness of inter-religious council in peace building?	Item	Frequency	Percent (%)
	Low	73	42%
	Medium	62	35.6%
	High	30	17.2%
	Very high	9	5.2%
	Total	174	100%

As indicated above 73(42%) replied by saying low, 62(35.6%) stated as medium, 30(17.2%) also stated as high and the rest 9(5.2%) replied as very high. Therefore, the majority of the respondents also confirmed that the religious forum is not effective enough in the peace building endeavors.

The Negative Implications of Religious Institutions in Resolving Tensions and Conflict that emanate from the Community

According to the research participants there were intra-religious conflicts particularly between Orthodox Tewahdo and Kibat, b/n Salafi and Wuhabi followers on religious preaching (Dogma) in Motta and Bichena town administrations. According to the research participants the conflicts and tensions between Orthodox Tewahdo and Kibat was exacerbated in the year 2010 onwards. In this regard the Abbink (2014) confirmed that there were repeated signs of growing tensions between 'Sufi' Muslims and reformists and/or Salafists, resulting in mosque burnings and personal attacks. In the Gondar area and some other places, several extremist Takfir wal-Hijra groups were active and there was destruction as a result of such hostile relationships. In addition, in March 2011 Muslims in the Goda district of Jimma were engaged and burned down 10 Christian homes and 80 Christians becomes homeless (Ibid).

Table 4: the negative implication of religious institutions in instigating conflicts and tensions

Besides to the above mentioned data the following table also illustrates about the negative implication of religious institutions in instigating conflict and tension.

Do you believe that do religious institutions have their role to aggravate conflict?	Item	Frequency	Percent (%)
	Yes	124	71.3%
	No	50	28.7%
	Total	174	100%

As indicated in table 4, 124(71.3%) replied by saying 'Yes' and the rest 50(28/7%) also replied by saying 'No'. Therefore, it can be concluded that majority of the respondents confirmed that religious institutions can beget conflict and tensions in different occasions.

In addition, participants of the study also further asserted that due to the fact that religious leaders act out of the objective of religion and execute the political will of the government, conflicts are instigating in the community. Almost all of the research participants agreed that corruption, religious fundamentalism, influence others to accept once religion, provocative preaching and religious books that devalue other religions are some of the factors that exacerbate conflict and tensions between different religious followers in the study area.

Therefore, the study concluded that due to internal or external triggering factors religious institutions are serving as a source of social conflict. But one has to remember that religious institutions per see have no problem rather when the religious dogmas and other preaching missed their objective and used for political and other purposes by the religious followers and leaders, religion would have the potential to instigate conflict and tensions.

XII. The Challenges of Religious Institutions in Promoting Peace And Social Cohesion

As it is mentioned above religious institutions in general and the religious forum in particular is not effective enough to achieve its objectives. First of all Social cohesion is an aspect of social wellbeing and unity in a given community which is demonstrated by shared understanding, mutual support and interchange in relationships (Deepa et al., 2000). Hence, the following are the challenges that hampered the overall effectiveness of such institutions. Generally four challenges are identified and these include lack of loyalty from religious leaders, disobedience of religious followers, intervention of the government and lack of good governance.

i) Lack of loyalty from religious leaders-
The first challenge that hampered the religious forum is lack of loyalty of religious leaders themselves. According to the data obtained from the respondents show that religious leaders are not in a position to execute their tasks rather they are serving to the best interest of government. Most importantly, members of the forum are not free from politics rather they act like government cadres. As a religious father they are supposed to act in accordance with the tradition and dogma of each religion.

ii) Disobedience of religious followers-
The other challenge that affects religious institutions is religious followers themselves. According to the research participants, religious followers could not be abided by the religious laws or religious dogma. Disobedience of religious followers implies lack of interest or attention to be governed by the religious preaches. One of the key informants from Shebel Berenta stated that "we preach our religious followers in the church about Christianity ethics and the saying of the church itself. However, almost majority of them are not in a position to adhere with what they have learned so far." Still others also stated that religious believers are good in attending and worship God. But practically speaking, they are not in a position to stick with what the religious books and a religious father says so.. Because religious fathers themselves sometimes cannot be abided by laws of the religion. In this regard the study of Christine (2009) delineated that the youngsters or religious followers in Ethiopia are shying away from attending church schools because of attractions of the secular life style and other rewards. This is a big challenge that hampered religion not to meet its objective.

Therefore, we can deduce that even though there are programs whereby each religious follower can learn and know what the religion says so, they could not act accordingly. Religious father preach instead of changing religious followers and contribute for peaceful co-existence, in most cases it becomes as lip service.

iii) Intervention of the government-
The other challenge that affects religious institutions in the peace building process is the intervention of government bodies in the study area. In the first place the FDRE constitution under article 11 sub-articles 1-3, stipulated that state and religion separated and the state shall not interfere in religious matters and religion shall not interfere in state affairs. But practically speaking the principle is not really on the ground. According to the research participants religious father who are supposed to the forefront and role model for other religious followers are executing the political agenda of the government.

In a similar fashion the FGD discussants of Motta town administration Orthodox Christianity religious followers stated by supporting the above mention view as follows; "in the first place our religious fathers particularly church and Betekihnet leaders are not free from politics. They are influenced by the governmental bureaucracy and even while they speak, they look like cadres." In a similar vein the study of Abbkin (2014) confirmed that government is the sole determiner starting from defining the role of religious institutions and

interferes without clear grounds in religion issues when it is deemed to take on political garb. In irony religious communities or institutions are not allowed to reject the agenda seat by the state or they could not stop the interference and perform their tasks accordingly.

XIII. Conclusion And Recommendation

Conclusion

The study was intended to assess the positive and negative implications religious institutions in ensuring sustainable peace in selected East Gojjam woredas. The study set out three specific objectives and to meet these objectives, three research questions were prepared. The first find of the study shows that religious and peace building have a direct relationship and they play a significant role in ensuring peace and social cohesion in the study area. In addition, religious institutions are active enough in the peace building endeavor in the selected woredas. The study also confirmed that traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in most cases are organized and implemented through the involvement of religious fathers. Despite some attempts made to resolve social conflicts in the society, the religious forum is not effectively executing its tasks and contributes to the peace building endeavors in the study area. Even in some woredas such as Shebel Berenta and Bichena the forum is not active enough in addressing conflicts and tensions.

The finding of the study further identified that due to internal or external triggering factors religious institutions are serving as a source of social conflict and tension. But one has to remember that religious institutions per see have no problem rather when the religious dogmas and other preaching while they missed their objective and used for political purposes by the religious followers and leaders, religion would have the potential to instigate conflict and tensions. But the researchers have concluded that the positive implication of religion and religious institution in the promoting peace and social cohesion outweighs its negative implication. Lastly the study also identified the challenges that hampered religious institutions to promote sustainable peace and social cohesion among and within religious believers.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are suggested by the researchers to be undertaken by the concerned body.

➢ **To the Woreda Militia Office;** it t should support and fulfill the required facilities and encourage members to do more.
➢ **To East Gojjam Hageresibket Office;** it should have the schedule to let religious leaders and father (both Orthodox and Kibat) to discuss and come to a certain point of agreement, if not accept the difference as it is without the provocation of one against the other. Besides, religious followers should also put pressure on their religious institutions leaders to handle the problems via open dialogue and discussion without waiting for the government bodies.
➢ **To the Inter-religious Council (Forum);** Members of the religious forum should have a schedule to open up discussions and dialogue on handling difference which arises from religious followers.   .
➢ **To The ministry of Federal Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopian Government**; the office which is established to coordinate and support religious institutions (including Inter-religious Council of Ethiopia) should design timely and effective policies and strategies that can enhance the capacity of religious institutions to utilize their maximum effort in the peace building process of the country in general.
➢ Lastly, we recommend other researchers to do a study on the role and challenges of Inter-religious Council of Ethiopia in addressing the unfolding conflicts and tensions at the national level. Because since our research was conducted at five woredas only, it is not holistic. Hence, interested researches are cordially invited to do on that.

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