Post-Conflict Peace Building By The Inter-Religious Council Of Ethiopia (IRCE): The Case Of Agaro

Tsion Zeraykob[1]

አጠቃሎ

ይህ የጥናት ወረቀት የኢትዮጵያ የሃይማኖት ተቋማት ጉባኤ በሰላም ግንባታ ጥረት ውስጥ ያለውን ሚና እና ተግባር ይተነትናል። በተጨማሪም፣ በምክር ቤቱ ላይ ያጋጠሙትን ተግዳሮቶች፣ ያሉትን ጥንካሬዎች፣ ምክር ቤቱ የተጠቀመባቸውን ዘዴዎች እና የሰላም ግንባታ ጥረቱን ውጤታማነት ይገመግማል። የሁላም ግንባታ ጽንስ ሃሳብ፣ በእምነት ላይ የተመሠረተ የሰላም ግንባታ ጽንስ-ሐሳባዊ እና ንድፈ ሐሳባዊ ማዕቀፎቹ እና አሠራሮቹ ይብራራሉ። ለዚህም፣ ዓይነታዊ የጥናት ዘዴ ጥቅም ላይ ውሏል። ለናሙና መረጣ የተመረጠው ዘዴ ነሲባዊ የናሙና ዘዴ በተለይም ወሳኝ የናሙና ዘዴ እና ስኖው ቦል ናቸው። የጥናቱ መረጃ የተሰበሰበው ለቁልፍ መረጃ ሰጪዎች ቃለ መጠይቅ በማድረግ፣ ቡድን ተኮር ውይይት በማድረግ እና ካልአይ መረጃ ዘዴዎችን በመጠቀም ነው። የጥናቱ ግኝት እንደሚያሳየው የኢትዮጵያ የሃይማኖት ተቋማት ጉባኤ በሰላም ውይይቶች ጊዜ የአመቻችነት ሚና የነበረው ሲሆን ይህም በጅማ የሰላም ግንባታ ፕሮጀክት ውስጥ ጥቅም ላይ የዋለው ብቸኛው የሰላም ግንባታ ዘዴ ነው። የተደረገው የሰላም ግንባታ ጥረትም ነባር አብሮ የመኖርን ዕሴት በከፊል ወደነበረበት መመለስ አስችሏል። የሃይማኖት መሪዎች ጥርጣሬ፣ የሕዝብ አመኔታ ማጣት፣ የገንዘብ ችግር እና ባህላዊ የግጭት አፈታት ቴክኒኮችን አለማካተት ዋና ዋና ተግዳሮቶች ሆነው ቀርበዋል። ይሁን እንጂ፣ ከግጭት በኋላ የተካሄደው የሰላም ግንባታ መርሀ ግብር የሀገር ውስጥ ባለቤትነትን እና የሃይማኖት ተቋማትን ለግጭት አፈታት በማፍራጀት ከደረሰው ጉዳት አንጻር በአንጻራዊ ሁኔታ አብሮ መኖርን ያስገኘ በመሆኑ እንደ ጥንካሬ ተደርጎ ይወሰዳል። እንደማጠቃለያ፣ የሃይማኖት ተቋማት ጉባኤው የሰላም ግንባታ ሂደት በትክክል ከተነደፈ እና ከተመራ ዘላቂ ሰላም ለማምጣትና መቻቻል እና ማኅበራዊ ትስሥርን ለማገጋገጥ ጉልህ ሚና ይኖረዋል።

ቁልፍ ቃላት:- የሃይማኖት ተቋማት ጉባኤ፣ ግጭት አፈታት፣ ውይይት፣ ሰላም ግንባታ።

---

[1] Institute for Peace and Security Studies, Addis Ababa University

1. Introduction

Religious disputes in Ethiopia have a long-standing history, encompassing both cooperative and conflictual interactions among religious adherents. Conflict and cooperation are two interrelated aspects when it comes to these disputes. For a considerable period, inter-religious interactions in Ethiopia have generally been characterized by tolerance towards diverse religions. However, there have been instances where these interactions have faced challenges. In recent years, there have been instances of minor religious conflicts occurring in various districts and towns such as Gondar, Dessie, Kemise, Chagni, Mota (Haileyesus, 2011), and Shashamane (Ostebo et al., 2021). These incidents serve as indicators of the prevailing religious tensions in Ethiopia.

Large-scale religious violence erupted in the Jimma zone and its woredas in both 2006 and 2011 (Zelalem, 2010). Jimma is situated in the Southwestern region of Ethiopia, specifically in Oromia. It is located approximately 350kms away from Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. The Jimma zone comprises 21 woredas (Minyahil & Sisay, 2020). One of the affected woredas within this zone is Agaro, which is the focus area of this research.[2] This study explicitly investigates the conflict that transpired in the zone in 2006 within its defined time frame.

The inter-religious conflict of Jimma in 2006 began in Dembi woreda, where the discrepancies between Muslims and Christians arose on the Meskel holiday (Zelalem, 2010). Both the Christian and Muslim communities were affected by deaths, forced conversions, the burning of homes and churches, and the displacement of residents (Zelalem, 2010). Another conflict took place in Gomma Woreda, specifically in Beshasha kebele, during a holiday celebrated by orthodox adherents (Yonas & Alemu, 2017). The conflict later spread to neighboring areas, including Agaro (Asebe, 2018).

---

[2] Agaro has a population numbered 25,458. Its religious demography shows the population of Muslims is 60.6 %, Orthodox Christians 33.7 %; Protestants 5.04 %; and Catholics 0.114 %. There are also traditional faith adherents of 0.1 % and 0.03 %others. See CSA, National Census of 2007.

Several efforts were made to build peace and restore the former inter-religious interaction in the area. Religious leaders formed a forum from different religious institutions in Agaro town, which served as a foundation for the establishment of national, regional, and local inter-faith organizations (Yonas & Alemu, 2011). Based on that, the Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE) was established to create religious equality and tolerance among member religious institutions and adherents.[3]

This study examines the role of the Inter Religious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE) in post-conflict peace building and analyzes the mechanisms employed in this process. It also explores the contributions of faith-based organizations (FBOs) to post-conflict peace building. Additionally, the study assesses the effectiveness, strengths, and significant challenges faced by the IRCE in its peace building efforts to address religious conflicts in the Agaro woreda of Jimma. The paper aims to determine the extent to which the IRCE's peace building initiatives have been successful in Agaro, specifically in the aftermath of conflict.

This research makes a valuable empirical contribution to the field of peace and security. It identifies gaps in current peacebuilding efforts, offering valuable feedback for future initiatives by faith-based organizations (FBOs). Additionally, the study has societal significance as it promotes awareness of peaceful conflict resolution methods. The research findings also have implications for policymaking. The cooperative nature of religious interactions can have a positive spillover effect on peacebuilding programs and conflict resolution efforts in society. As a result, policymakers could use the study's findings to enact policies that encourage and improve FBO participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution at national, regional, and community levels.

---

[3] *IRCE constitutes seven members: Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, The Ethiopian   Islamic Affairs Supreme Council, The Ethiopian Catholic Church, The Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia, The Ethiopian Seventh Day Adventist Church, and The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church See Peace Building Training book by IRCE, 2015*

This research employs a qualitative case study design to gain a deep understanding of the understudied context or the settings of the participants (Creswell et al., 2011). Consequently, Jimma, Agaro woreda is chosen as the understudied setting due to its history of interreligious conflict, with the IRCE playing a role in peacebuilding. A single instrumental case study design is utilized, and non-probability sampling techniques, specifically purposive and snowball sampling, are employed. Key informants and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) are used as data collection instruments to gather primary data. Additionally, secondary sources of data are also utilized in this study.

The general objectives of the study include assessing the role, function, contribution, strengths, challenges posed against, mechanisms used and the effectiveness of IRCE in peacebuilding. The study specifically assesses the above mentioned objectives of the IRCE in post-conflict peace building in Jimma, Agaro town.

There have been studies conducted on the inter-religious conflict in Jimma. Zelalem (2010) conducted research on the religious conflict in Didessa and Gomma Woredas of Jimma. Similarly, authors such as Yonas & Alemu (2017) examined the inter-religious conflict in the Jimma zone, specifically investigating the conflict sources in affected woredas. The focus of their article was to analyze the underlying, immediate, and triggering causes of the conflict and explore the dynamics between different religions. Additionally, Abiy (2017) wrote about countering extremism through social capital in cases of conflict in Jimma. This involved the collaboration of religious figures and the establishment of the Religious Forum for Peace, which contributed to resolving various social issues, both religious and non-religious conflicts alike.

However, there is scant research that assesses the post-conflict peace building endeavors by a faith based organization such as IRCE regarding Jimma's religious conflict to the best knowledge of the researcher. The above-mentioned researches focus on interreligious conflict and its dynamics and slightly discuss the involvement of civil society in conflict resolutions and peace

building. Henceforth, the following section of this article provides the peace building conceptual and theoretical framework local faith-based organization contribution in post-conflict peace building, specifically IRCE, and the strengths and challenges incurred are discussed. It also inspects the mechanisms used by IRCE peace building in the Jimma zone, Agaro *woreda*.

2. Conceptual Understanding of Peace, Conflict and Religion

The concept of peace is a subject of ongoing debate, as different interpretations and understandings are discussed (Patomaki, 2001). Galtung (1967) has provided further insight into the term 'peace' by distinguishing it as negative and positive peace. Negative peace is simply the absence of war, personal violence, or organized collective violence (Ibid). It focuses on actively eliminating and reducing direct physical harm or violence towards others (Tsegaye, 2014). On the other hand, positive peace encompasses the absence of structural violence (Galtung, 1969) and involves achieving "social transformation towards a fairer society" (Hintjens & Žarkov, 2015). The concept of positive peace highlights cooperation and integration between human groups, with less emphasis on the absence of violence (Galtung, 1967).

Conflict studies also provide two dominant theories on causes of conflict: resource-based explanation and identity-based explanation. In "resource-based explanation," economic resources are pertinent where war and peace are deemed as the product of the "material relations among economically motivated actors" or "conflict entrepreneurs" (Hintjens & Žarkov, 2015). On the other hand, "identity-based explanation" takes identity as the main factor of conflict, whereas identity politics are taken as motivators of violent conflict (Ibid).

Among the leading indicators of "identity-based explanation," religion can be mentioned. Religious-based conflict may emerge from a threat to an individual or community based on their belief and convictions posing intimidation to the actual existence of a person or members of a specific community because of identity (Brahm, 2016). Similarly, Collier & Hoeffler (2000) have theorized that conflict could be grievance or greed-based. Grievance-based conflicts are

motivated by hatred that could be intrinsic to identity differences and inequality, while greed based conflicts are conflicts initiated for economic causes.

Religious studies have portrayed religion in binary terms: Religion as a source of insecurity or religion as a source of peace (Silvestri & Mayall, 2015). Religion has further been understood either as an independent variable causing conflict or peace; or as an intervening variable that shapes the outlooks on the probability of conflict and its violent potential (Abrahamson, 2013). Regarding the first proposition, religion as a source of insecurity or conflict, scholars such as Cook (2017) indicate that religion involves moral disagreements and debates over identity and ideology, encompassing great divisiveness and generating critical social problems. Contrarily, the second proposition implies that religion can be applied as a source of peace: to prevent or resolve conflicts. The role of religion in peace was less recognized before 9/11 in the western world, where there were more secular apprehensions regarding the notions of conflict resolution and peace. In contrast, religion was marginalized (Abrahamson, 2013). However, the secularists' apprehension was challenged, and religion has become an element in peace building efforts in different parts of the world. Countries such as South Africa[4] and Sierra Leone[5] are some examples of states that have experienced such a substantial role of religion and the involvement of religious actors and leaders in peace building (Patterson, 2013).

Religion holds a significant place in both the inner and social lives of human beings. Its values possess the power to transform and enhance individuals' behavior and character (Gopin, 1997). Furthermore, religious institutions have the ability to influence society and bring about positive changes (Shannahan

---

[4] The establishment of South Africa Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SATRC) see Patterson, 2013 South Africa: P 1-7

[5] See Greybill (2019) Peacebuilding in Sierra Leon p.1 on the formation of Inter Religious Council where Christians and Muslim leaders joined to mediate conflict and promote reconciliation by establishing Sierra Leon's Truth and reconciliation Commission [5]See Boutros-Ghali, B. (1992). An agenda for peace: 201-218.

& Payne, 2016). The principles and values of religion extend beyond personal lives, affecting the social sphere as well, enabling individuals to play a unique role in reconciling adversaries and putting an end to violence (Funk, 2012). Therefore, completely dismissing religion's potential to foster peace and only focusing on its negative perception regarding potential conflicts is an inaccurate portrayal of religion.

Religion and peace are closely related subjects. Hiskias Assefa also argues that social science is only bound by reasonableness, excluding other social realities and social values that are tangible (in Samuelsson, 2003). Therefore, there is a need to integrate social science with social morals and standards from religion and develop a system accommodating religious values in peace building and conflict resolution. Furthermore, working together with faith-based organizations can contribute a great deal to keep and restore peace through conflict resolution.

2.1 Peace building and Faith-based Organization

The peace building discourse has been debated, creating difficulties in describing its components and objectives. The 1992 United Nations (UN) Agenda for peace has defined peace building as inclusive of four main components: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking, Peacekeeping, and post conflict peacebuilding.[6] According to prominent scholar John Paul Lederach (1997), peace building is a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains a wide range of processes, approaches, and stages required to transform conflict towards more sustainable and peaceful relations. It has been argued that peace building has been highly influenced by liberal peace theory. Peace building activities may become problematic since it comes with promoting liberalist foundations or principles of liberal peace building such as liberal democracy, liberal human rights, market values, and establishing a centralized secular state, integration of society to the globalized world system. The values and approaches used to

---

[6] See Boutros-Ghali, B. (1992). An agenda for peace, pp.201-218.

promote peace building may not be universal. Therefore, the construction of a liberal state may disregard customs, norms, cultures, and traditions of the conflict-affected societies making peace building operations/ projects unsuccessful or unsustainable (Richmond, 2010).

In developing a peace building and conflict resolution framework, building a peace constituency within the conflict setting is necessary. The people in such a setting should be taken as input and not only as recipients (Lederach, 1997). Hence, constructing context-driven peace building or local–liberal hybrid implies applying peace strategies beyond the liberal view recognizing the social fabric such as culture, norms, traditions, customs, and (faith) values; it also indicates a shift toward post-liberal peace (Richmond, 2010).

Correspondingly, we can find the concept of faith-based peace building. This later developed concept creates an intersecting platform where religion and peace building efforts are applied together. The involvement of religious actors and religious resources concerning the elimination of violence and the inspiration of peace is crucial to faith-based peace building (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2013). Faith-based organizations are among the major actors of faith-based peace building. They are established at an international or local level in which their purpose of establishment is highly about promoting and facilitating social changes and cohesion using religious means. They may use faith values during the provision of services, limiting them to operate contextually on acceptable norms and values of a specific society. It contributes to rejecting other influences such as westernization (Davis et al., 2011).

In addition, FBOs may engage in resolving conflicts and facilitating reconciliation. They mainly use non-violent means which is inclusive and more participatory. It is assumed that they make a prominent contribution by eliminating stereotypes, challenging norms and traditions, instigating structural violence, changing attitudes through education, mediating adversaries, and promoting sustained inter-faith dialogue (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009).

2.2 Faith-based Peace building Mechanisms

Different tools and conflict management approaches are used in faith-based peacebuilding. This includes inter-Faith Dialogue, mediation, observation, early warning and advocacy and peace education.

Inter-faith dialogue is a tool used in religious peacebuilding. It is designed to involve people with different religious backgrounds, meeting to examine and discuss societal issues causing conflict by highlighting the difference and similarities among them and aiming to transform their relationships towards positive social change (Dessel & Garlington, 2006).

Mediation: refers to ``an approach to conflict management in which a third party, which is not a direct party to the dispute, helps disputants through their negotiations and does so in a nonbinding fashion" (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009).

Observation: Religious actor appears as watchdogs discouraging violence and opposing encroachments of human rights from actions of governmental or non–governmental entity.

Early Warning and Advocacy: - Early warning by FBOs is to alert the government to take action on areas where conflict signs and indicators appear. In other words, it is *lobbying of the government* in fulfilling and securing societal interests (Browne, 2014).

Peace Education: Education is among the responsibility of FBOs or religious institutions that have legitimacy in the eyes of the society undertaking peacebuilding action through direct and indirect involvement (Hanachor & Echezu, 2021). It is assumed that it contributes to conflict transformation and changes the members' mindset.

2.3 Peace building Endeavor in Ethiopia

In order to prevent conflicts at the state level, the Ethiopian government has implemented various peace building efforts. This includes the establishment of governmental entities that focus on conflict resolution and peace building. One prime example of this is the Ministry of Peace (MOP), which was created through proclamation number 1263/2021.[7] The MOP collaborates with relevant government departments, cultural and religious institutions, local and international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), as well as Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), to promote peace and foster mutual respect amongst different social groups. In essence, the MOP works alongside the social groups, taking into consideration their existing social customs, as part of their peace building initiatives. Additionally, the ministry assumes the responsibility of formulating and implementing strategies that combat extremism and fanaticism that may manifest under the guise of religion[8].

Another peace building endeavor by the government was establishing a dialogue commission at a national level. The commission was established based on proclamation 1265/2014. The National dialogue commission aims to facilitate consultation among different parts of society when there is a difference regarding national issues. It scrutinizes historical, root, and contemporary causes that resulted in conflict manifestation. It arranges platforms and makes recommendations on the resolution.[9] CSOs and the inter-religious council are also invited to collaborate in the instituting process in which they are allowed to participate in the commissioner selection.[10]

---

[7] Art. 41(1c) stipulates on the power and duties of the Ministry of Peace. See Proclamation No. 1263/2021   Federal Negarit Gazette

[8] Art. 41(1d) stipulates on the power and duties of the Ministry of Peace. See Proclamation No. 1263/2021 Federal Negarit Gazette

[9] Art. 6, See Proclamation No. 1265/2014 on the objective of Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission. Federal Negarit Gazette

[10] Art. 12 See Proclamation No. 1265/2014 on the role of Inter-religious council on the appointment of Commissioner. Federal Negarit Gazette .

These two mentioned endeavors imply that progress is being made at a national level to resolve conflicts through dialogue instead of physical confrontation. The formation of such governmental units allows CSOs to participate in peace building initiatives in collaboration with the government. It creates a conducive system for the different religious/social groups and CSOs to get involved in conflict resolution.

In summary, conflict is not caused solely by identity. It is important to recognize that religion should not be viewed as a source of insecurity; rather, it is the misrepresentation of religion by secularists and fundamentalists that leads to misunderstandings. Encouraging the use of religion and its values in peace building and conflict resolution is crucial, as demonstrated by the success of countries like Sierra Leone and South Africa. Additionally, faith-based organizations play a significant role in implementing various mechanisms in the peace building process.

3. Findings on Peace building by Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE): Role, Mechanisms, Effectiveness and Challenges

The findings of the study, based on data collected from Key Informants[11] Interviews (KII), Focus Group Discussions (FGD), and secondary data, indicate that the main role of IRCE in relation to the conflict was to facilitate peace conferences and dialogues. The Head of IRCE's Peacebuilding Department explained that the organization primarily conducts preliminary studies to inform the facilitation of meetings between the conflicting parties in a peace conference. These preliminary studies aim to identify the root causes and dynamics of the conflict, ascertain the desired claims from each party, and work towards transforming the conflict. When launching a peacebuilding operation, IRCE establishes a platform to bring the conflicting parties together, enabling them to discuss their problems and find a mutually agreeable solution.[12]

---

[11] Key informant Interview with Head of IRCE peacebuilding Department, interviewed on February, 18, 2022.

[12] Ibid

The council also has a function of facilitation regarding administrative and governance questions.

This question often relates to the allocation of burial sites, churches and mosques building. "Since the council cannot operate alone and cannot give a solution by itself for community questions, it will expedite the issue by working together with governmental organs and indirectly works to avert the possibility of conflict occurrence."[13]

Another intended role for IRCE in the peace building project was a mediator role. "The council also takes a role as a mediator, an impartial third party. However, the assessment and resolutions made by the council have non-binding effects".[14] In a mediation platform arrangement, the council applies collaborative and participatory methods in which "affected members of the societies can participate through a selected representative that helps to understand the problem deeply from both sides." In the mediation process, parties are also encouraged to pursue a win-win result in which both conflicting parties will mutually benefit.[15] Though mediation was recognized and selected as mechanisms in the peacebuilding process, it was unfortunately not applied. The council has only organized an inter-faith dialogue.

IRCE also has a watchdog role that aims to provide protection to society and its members. "The council observes and gives early warning whenever there is community concern arising out of different sources".[16] It alerts the responsible governmental organ to take preventive action on areas showing conflict signs. The IRCE notifies or appeals using a press release and makes a public statement using religious figures in which "it can depict wrongful actions against public interest

[13] Key informant interview with IRCE Head of Public relation, Interviewed on February, 21, 2022.

[14] Key informant Interview with Head of IRCE peacebuilding Department, interviewed on February, 18, 2022.

[15] Ibid

[16] Key informant interview with IRCE Head of Public relation, Interviewed on February, 21, 2022.

through the publication of information".[17] Other than that, when there is action by groups against others, the council publicly states its (religious) standpoint by disapproving and discouraging such actions of violence. It teaches that religion does not support such actions.[18]

The Mechanisms applied by IRCE in the Jimma Post-Conflict Peacebuilding process include mainly an interfaith dialogue. The Head of the IRCE Peacebuilding Department stated that "In the case of Jimma IRCE has mainly used inter-faith dialogue in which conflicting parties could discuss the problem mutually".[19] The participants of the inter-faith dialogue were mainly the nominee religious leaders from the different religious institutions having a stake in the conflict resolution.

The selection criteria for these religious leaders were based on their experience in a mediating role, the acceptance they had from their members, their knowledge of their religious principles, their self-initiation, their commitment, their maturity, and their deep knowledge of their cultural traditions (Asebe, 2018). This interaction by multiple faith leaders and institutions serves as a testament to religious tolerance. It demonstrates that the IRCE has made efforts to create an environment that acknowledges diversity and tolerates the coexistence of various religions through interfaith cooperation. Additionally, the dialogue also included government officials, strengthening the connection between religious institutions and the government (Ibid).

Key informants statement implies that "the dialogue platform was necessary because it encouraged religious leaders to work with the youth not to involve in crime against Christians and cooperate with the fundamentalists and criminals. It also helped identify the real adherents from elites".[20] Similarly, it was stated

---

[17] Key informant Interview with Head of IRCE peacebuilding Department, interviewed   on February, 18, 2022.

[18] Key informant interview with IRCE Head of Public relation, Interviewed on   February, 21, 2022.

[19] Key informant Interview with Head of IRCE peacebuilding Department, interviewed on February, 18, 2022.

[20] Key informant, Anonymous, Interviewed on March, 9, 2022

by another anonymous key informant that "the dialogue platform contributed to settling conflict and stopped it from spreading through the condemnation of crime and unlawful actions. It allowed religious leaders to teach and counsel the youth and work towards restoring peace".[21] It was stated that the peace dialogue has also improved the relationship between the Muslim and Christian communities in which "the day to day peaceful social interaction has resumed although the values of peaceful coexistence and tolerance have not been completely restored".[22]

On the other hand, some society members were dissatisfied with the dialogue. An anonymous interviewee stated that "the dialogue did not influence solving the problems and bringing peace, it was a mock, only conducted for the sake of acting. Due attention was not paid to the resolution, and it was non-participatory to victims, youth, and other affected members of the society".[23] Nevertheless, the dialogue platform has several advantages its main drawbacks include it lacks transparency, was non-participatory of the youths and victims and the top-down project design applied by IRCE was exclusive of grass-root community which created a gap in the implementation of the peace building.

Another approach deliberated by the Council was intensive awareness creation and capacity building on matters of peace and reconciliation. Lots of training on peace and reconciliation were said to be given by IRCE to the community, youth, women, religious fathers, and government employees (IRCE-USAID project report, 2016). However, it was stated by a key informant stated that "it was only a dialogue that has been conducted. IRCE provided no training or peace education for the society; instead, the religious institution has taken care of the issue through their specific teachings for their respective adherents".[24] Even though awareness creation and capacity building on matters of peace and

---

[21] Key informant, Anonymous, Interviewed on March, 9, 2022

[22] Key informant, Anonymous, Interviewed on March, 9, 2022

[23] FGD held with orthodox Christians on May, 10, 2022.

[24] Key informant with anonymous, interviewed on March, 9, 2022

reconciliation were included as mechanisms in the peace building process by IRCE; however, they were not applied.

Other actions showing the effectiveness of IRCE's project were related to the issues on the allocation of worship places and cemeteries. The IRCE Public Relations Officer stated that "cases regarding the building of religious places and the cemetery issues have been resolved in some areas in which IRCE has played part in bringing the question to the government office and facilitating so that the issue is resolved."[25] However, anonymous informant stated that, "there are instances here the land under the ownership of the Orthodox Church was looted".[26] Hence, it can be seen that there are actions taken by IRCE to facilitate the allocation of worship places and cemeteries.

Moreover, the strength of the IRCE's peace building program is that it is under local ownership. It is advantageous because it allows the Council to use social, moral values, norms, and standards to influence the stand of the conflicting parties resulting in conflict transformation and resolution. Nonetheless, IRCE has not used this opportunity to mobilize local capacities to correspond the local needs effectively.[27]

On the other hand, the challenges of IRCE peace building include the skepticism of religious fathers. "There is the spirit of working together with religious fathers at the national level. However, regarding the regional, zonal, and woreda levels, the case is different. There is high mistrust among the religious leaders and a lack of understanding of the goodwill of each other".[28] The cooperation at regional level is loose. "There is competition over power in which religious leaders try to show dominance. The dominance depends on the numerical strength; for

---

[25] Key informant interview with IRCE Head of Public relation, Interviewed on February, 21, 2022.

[26] Key informant with anonymous, interviewed on March, 8, 2022

[27] See Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations, 2015

[28] Key informant Interview with Head of IRCE peacebuilding Department, Interviewed on February, 18, 2022.

instance, in a place where the Muslim majority exists, there is a tendency to pressure the Christian and vice versa".[29]

Another challenge is the lack of public trust towards the Council. There are claims made against the neutrality of the council. The council is alleged to be influenced from the government authorities and officials who are members of certain social and political groups at federal, regional, and woreda levels. In addition, the limitation on the peace building process was that there were no schemes to include traditional conflict resolution practices in the peace building process. Such practices were not fully incorporated in the project at local levels (IRCE-USAID project evaluation report, 2016). The sole transplantation of peace building undertakings without integrating traditional practices may become challenging since it only promotes liberal peace building principles, values, and approaches that are not universal.[30]

4. Peace building Implication by Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE)

The study indicates that religion's values can play a dual role, functioning as an identity marker and a factor in identity-based conflicts, but also being instrumental in the peace building process to resolve conflict. This perspective challenges the prevailing paradigm in religious studies, which portrays religion as a source of insecurity, fueling extensive division and social problems. The findings reject the notion that completely dismissing religion's capacity to promote peace and acknowledging its solely negative influence in conflicts is an accurate portrayal of religion.

The importance of faith-based organizations in peace building is equally significant. Faith-based organizations play a crucial role in peace building, employing religious methods to promote social change and unity (Davis et al, 2011). These organizations use faith values when engaging in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. The study's results demonstrate that IRCE focuses on conflict transformation through research, organizing peace conferences, and facilitating interfaith dialogue, helping opposing parties

---

[29] ibid

[30] See Richmond, Resistance and the Post-Liberal Peace, 665.

mend their relationships and bridge their differences. Moreover, they address the underlying causes of conflict in line with the conflict transformation model, aiming for long-term peace and satisfying the interests of all parties involved. As a result, it can be inferred that IRCE adopts a comprehensive and gradual approach to addressing and transforming root causes, including prevention, resolution, and management of conflicts beyond containment.

However, the results indicate that the IRCE peace building program was effective in promoting societal peace. Yet, the program fell short in achieving peace on an individual level, particularly for victims, as tensions and grievances persist. The relationship between the two communities does not mirror their past relations due to prevailing mistrust and doubt. In essence, while coexistence is relatively positive given the extent of the damage, it remains unsatisfactory. The likelihood of a recurring conflict cannot be disregarded. The conflict has fostered radicalism, and the presence of lingering grievances in certain areas of Jimma increases the chances of further conflict.

The study's findings also suggest that IRCE's interfaith dialogue has partially achieved its intended goal, as evidenced by the relationship between members of the two communities. Nevertheless, interfaith dialogue tries to deepen understanding and acknowledge competing parties' interests and grievances, which runs the risk of ignoring other conflict elements such as politics, social, and economic issues. As a result, it may impact the dialogue's outcome. Although IRCE has achieved success in certain areas of its mission, including fostering collaboration among different groups and providing platforms for dialogue on social issues, empowering communities, and working with local government offices to address concerns regarding burial sites and worship places, its effectiveness has been hindered by its non-participatory and non-compensatory approach. This approach implies that the grassroots community should have been allowed to participate and that measures should have been taken to provide compensation for the victims.

5. Conclusion

The study's findings on the role and function of IRCE in the peace building process in the Jimma zone indicate that IRCE plays a key role in facilitating dialogue between conflict parties. Through providing a platform for discussion, conflicting parties can identify and work towards shared solutions. The project acknowledges the influential role of religion in promoting peace and utilizes faith-based institutions as catalysts for conflict transformation and peacebuilding. By incorporating religious institutions, this approach aims to counter radicalism and foster tolerance. Additionally, the study recognizes the importance of leveraging local resources and expertise to ensure effective and sustainable interventions that align with local needs.

The IRCE peace building project has successfully facilitated the reconciliation and coming together of conflicting parties. Its positive outcomes can be replicated in other contexts, as it has created a platform for dialogue where conflicting parties can discuss their differing interests without resorting to violence. The council's implemented mechanisms utilize win-win strategies, aiming to satisfy all parties' interests without causing any losses. This approach also promotes healing and helps parties move forward without holding onto resentments and grievances. Consequently, the IRCE has enabled parties to maintain amicable relations following the dialogue. Furthermore, the project has fostered changes in societal attitudes, understanding, and behavior, leading to improved coexistence between the two communities. As a result, there has been slow but noticeable progress in re-growing the value of diversity tolerance within society, which indicates a promising future for the relationship between the conflicting parties.

Moreover, the IRCE project is locally owned, making it autonomous and free from external actors or foreign influences. As a locally established organ, it has credibility in the eyes of the society in which such type of organization works for a common interest, i.e. peace for Ethiopia. This shall be encouraged and

imitated by other faith-based organs since local ownership of the peace building initiative is advantageous in terms of instituting existing social and moral values, norms, and standards contributing to its effectiveness. The component of value sensitivity, i.e. sensitivity towards religious and cultural values, makes it preferable to apply such kind of project or peace building initiative for effective peace building and bringing sustainable peace in similar conflict settings.

In addition, the IRCE project also has policy implications in which new policies can be enacted incorporating principles on the use of dialogues and religious/ indigenous conflict resolution values to improve the participation of FBOs in peace building.

Reference

Abiy Ahmad. (2017). Countering Violent Extremism through Social Capital: Anecdote from Jimma, between co-option and autonomy: Grassroots CVE initiatives as the alternative? *Ethiopia Horn of Africa Bulletin, 29* (4)

Abramson, Y. (2013). Culture, Religion, War, and Peace. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*.

Asebe Amenu (2018). The Dynamics of Interreligious Relations: Religious diversity, Peaceful Coexistence and Tension in Jimma Zone, South Western Ethiopia (PhDDissertation Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa)

Bercovitch, J., & Kadayifci-Orellana, S. A. (2009). Religion and mediation: The role of faith- based actors in international conflict resolution. *International Negotiation*, *14*(1), 175-204.

Brahm, E. (2016). "Religion and Conflict". Beyond Intractability. Retrieved from: <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/religion-and-conflict>.

Browne, E. (2014). Faith-based organisations, conflict resolution and anti-corruption. GSDRC Applied Knowledge Services. *GSDRC, University of Birmingham.*

Collier, P., & Hoeffler, A. (2000). Greed and grievance in civil war, world bank policy research working paper 2355. *World Bank (http://www. worldbank. org/research/ PDF)*.

Cook, M. (2017). Religious-Based Conflicts through the Academic Dialogue. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, *4*(1), 1-7.

Creswell, J. W., Hanson, W. E., Clark Plano, V. L., & Morales, A. (2007). Qualitative research designs: Selection and implementation. *The counseling psychologist*, *35*(2), 236-264.

Davis, C., Jegede, A., Leurs, R., Sunmola, A., & Ukiwo, U. (2011). Comparing religious and secular NGOs in Nigeria: are faith-based organizations distinctive?

Dessel, A., Rogge, M. E., & Garlington, S. B. (2006). Using intergroup dialogue to promote social justice and change. *Social work*, *51*(4), 303-315.

Ethiopian Central Statistics Agency (CSA). (2015). National Census, Addis Ababa (2007). Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations, 2015

Funk, N. C. (2012). ``Building on what's already there: Valuing the local in international peacebuilding. `` *International Journal*, *67*(2), 391-408.

Galtung, J. (1967). Theories of peace. A Synthetic Approach to Peace Thinking. *Oslo: International Peace Research Institute.*

Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of peace research*, *6*(3), 167- 191.

Gopin, Marc. (1997). ``Religion, Violence, and Conflict Resolution. `` journal of Peace and Change, Vol. 22, pp.1-31

Hanachor, M. E., & Echezu, B. C. (2021). Contributions of Faith-Based Organizations towards

 Peace Building for Sustainable Community Development in Rivers State,   Nigeria. *International Journal of Education, Learning and Development*, *9*(3), 11-18.

Haileyesus Muluken. (2011). Religious Tolerance, Tensions between Orthodox Christians and Muslims: In Gondar Town: North West Ethiopia. *Saarbrücken:* Lambert Academic Publishing.

Hintjens, H., & Žarkov, D. (2015). *Conflict, Peace, Security and Development (Vol. 256)*. London: Routledge.

Kadayifci-Orellana, S. A. (2013). Inter‒ Religious Dialogue and Peacebuilding. *The Wiley‑Blackwell Companion to Inter‑ Religious Dialogue*, 149-167.

Lederach, J. P. (1997). Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies. *Washington, DC: USIP*.

Miyahil Alemu & Sisay Tola (2020). Social Capital and its Implication for Economic Wellbeing and Sustainable Development: Household Level Analysis to Jimma Zone, South-West Ethiopia. *Journal of Analytical Techniques and Research, 2*(1), 18-26

Ostebo, T., Haustein, J., Gedif, F., Kadir, J.K., Jemal, M., & Alemu, Y. (2021). Religion, Ethnicity, and Charges of Extremism: The Dynamics of Inter-Communal Violence In Ethiopia. European Institute of Peace

Patomäki, H. (2001). The challenge of critical theories: Peace research at the start of the new century. *Journal of Peace Research, 38(6)*, 723-737.

Patterson, E. (2013). *South Africa: The Religious Foundations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Berkeley center for Religion, peace and world affairs, at Georgetown University.

Peace Building Training Book by Inter Religious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE). (2015). Peacebuilding training, IRCE.

Proclamation No. 1265/2014. The Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission Establishment Proclamation. Federal Negarit Gazette.

Proclamation No. 1263/2021. Definition of Powers and Duties of the Executive Organs Proclamation. Federal Negarit Gazette.

Richmond, O. P. (2010). Resistance and the Post-liberal Peace. *Millennium*, *38*(3), 665-692.

Samuelsson, T., Assefa, H., Prakash S.J., F. C., Kassis, R. O., GIuffrida, L., Vargas, L., Volf, M., Hansson, N., & Gerle, E. (2003). Tools for peace, The Role of religions in peace and   conflict. *New Routes, A Journal of Peace Research and Action 8 (3–4)*.

Shannahan C. & Payne L. (2016), Faith-based Interventions in Peace, Conflict and Violence: A Scoping Study Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations Coventry University

Silvestri, S., & Mayall, J. (2015). The role of religion in conflict and peacebuilding. British Academy.

Tesgaye Kassa. (2014). *The Role of faith-based civil society organizations in peace making in Ethiopia and South Sudan: A comparative perspective,* (Master Thesis, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa).

USAID, (2016). Evaluation of Terminal Evaluation IRCE-USAID project final report, November 2016. USAID/CEP Community-wide Meeting.

Yonas Tariku & Alemu Kassa (2017). Interreligious Conflicts in Ethiopia. *Ethiopian Journal of Studies*, 41-67

Zelalem Temsgen. (2010). The 2006 Religious Conflict in Didessa and Gomma Woredas of   Western Oromia. (Master Thesis, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa) Laws, Policies and Reports