

COLLABORATIVE ACTION FOR PEACE

in Gedeo and West Guji

Evaluation brief, December 2021



Funded by
the European Union

THIS MEANS THE WORLD

THE CONTEXT



Ethiopia has long experienced protracted armed conflict, social tension and instability. Home to more than 100 million people¹ and over 80 ethnic groups², the country is extremely diverse, with unique political and social dynamics across its regions.

Historical grievances between groups contribute to recurring escalations in conflict, volatility, and violence. Such insecurity has stifled progress towards many human development outcomes, despite the country recording consistent economic growth throughout the last decade³.

In 2018, inter-group conflict broke out between the Guji communities in the Oromia region and the neighbouring Gedeo communities in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), spurred by long-standing tensions related to land, resources and governance⁴.

Up to 1 million people were displaced by the conflict⁵, which quickly spiralled into a humanitarian crisis. Property, agriculture and livelihoods were destroyed. A shortage of shelter led to overcrowding in host communities and displacement centres as those feeling the violence sought refuge.

1. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POPTOTL?locations=ET>

2 [Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade \(12 August 2020\) "DFAT Country Information Report Ethiopia"](#).

3. Ibid.

4. [Reuters \(4 July 2018\) "Violence in southern Ethiopia forces more than 800,000 to flee"](#).

5. Ibid.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Collaborative Action for Peace in Gedeo and West Guji was a two-year project implemented by World Vision Ethiopia, Catholic Relief Services Ethiopia and CARE Ethiopia. Funded by the European Union's Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), the project was carried out in numerous districts along the SNNPR and Oromia border. Its aim was to collaboratively build social cohesion and promote reconciliation between Guji and Gedeo communities in the lead-up to the 2021 Ethiopian federal election.

EVALUATION PURPOSE

The project was evaluated by GYB Consulting, with guidance and support from World Vision, CARE and Catholic Relief Services. The evaluation's purpose was to determine whether the project had realised its intended impact within the target communities, and to measure success and identify challenges in delivering key outcomes. The evaluation generated learnings and insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the project's approach, ultimately offering recommendations on aspects such as sustainability and coordination.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation research was comprehensive, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods in the data collection process. These included:

- a questionnaire
- key informant interviews with stakeholders
- focus group discussions
- desk research
- participant observation

This approach was designed to triangulate the data and ensure that key questions were addressed in relation to the outcomes of project activities.

In total, 517 participants from six districts across the West Guji and Gedeo zones were engaged in the evaluation research. They included representatives from faith and community groups, leaders, youth, women, and representatives of relevant institutions and local government organisations.

The questionnaire formed a substantial component of the data collection. Survey instruments were thoroughly designed and tested to capture all relevant information in line with project indicators and the project model. Qualified field staff were intensively trained to administer the questionnaire and collect accurate, quality data.

PROJECT GOALS

- Increased support and opportunities for youth to participate in peacebuilding.
- Increased empowerment of community and faith leaders to actively promote social cohesion and reconciliation.
- Increased conflict sensitivity in community-based programs and services provided by the government, humanitarian agencies and local and international non-governmental organisations.

In pursuit of these objectives, the project adopted three pathways for change.

1. Youth were identified as positive actors of peace and equipped with the knowledge, skills and support to influence peacebuilding.
2. Faith and community leaders were engaged to develop peacebuilding action plans – establishing peace-focused institutions, facilitating dialogue and delivering peacebuilding projects that target the needs of their communities.
3. The capacity of government, humanitarian agencies, non-governmental organisations and other service providers to deliver programs within a conflict-sensitive approach was strengthened, empowering these groups to implement services that enhance peacebuilding infrastructure.

Given the sensitive nature of conflict, peace and security, all appropriate measures were taken to ensure confidentiality and adherence to ethical guidelines.

A formal baseline evaluation was not conducted due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, this methodological approach – in conjunction with the conflict assessment, youth livelihoods opportunities assessments and gender analysis carried out during project implementation – acted to substantiate findings and credibly measure impact.



Gedeo youth build a house for their West Guji neighbours, putting their peacebuilding action plans into practice.

KEY FINDINGS

Project relevance

The evaluation found that the project was highly relevant to the needs of communities in the West Guji and Gedeo zones. Ninety-three percent of community group respondents agreed the project was relevant in responding to community needs and existing issues regarding conflict, peace and security, with sixty-four percent describing it as “very relevant”.

Interviewees reported that violent conflict had been persistently rife in the area and that support and training delivered by the project was effective in enabling regional government bodies to prevent and resolve conflicts on their own. For example, the evaluation noted that, following the project, the Oromia region was able to resolve conflict related to grazing land between SNNPR and Oromia communities along their shared border.

Key informants considered the project to be well-aligned with existing government priorities to enhance peace and security and support the use of cultural systems and community institutions in resolving conflict.

While respondents noted that community participation in the project’s design was severely limited, local peacebuilding processes were strengthened by significant active participation from communities and key stakeholders at the implementation level.

“Before being involved with the training I did not know much about problem solving except by actual conflict and I was often involved. After the training I know much more about better ways of solving conflict and I have changed my behaviour, with which I significantly benefit others.”

– Youth peacebuilder

Outcome 1: Increased support and opportunities for youth to participate in peacebuilding

The evaluation concluded that the project was successful in increasing opportunities for young people to lead peacebuilding processes in their communities. A total of 669 young people were trained in peacebuilding and conflict resolution through the project. Of these, 315 youth champions were selected for further, intensive peacebuilding training, empowering them to develop action plans and foster positive outcomes in their personal lives and communities.

Through the training, youth participants:

- engaged in conflict analysis and had access to training materials that inspired significant behaviour change for conflict prevention and peace creation; and
- participated in practical peacebuilding activities – such as facilitating dialogue and utilising conflict resolution tools to address disputes in the parish, local church, village or higher learning institutions.

This provided young people with the skills, support and capacity to prevent violence, resolve conflict and foster peaceful communities. At the project's conclusion, 93 percent of evaluation participants agreed, to varying extents, that youth were effective at supporting conflicting parties to reach common ground.

Training supported youth participants to create peacebuilding action plans, which identified mutually beneficial community “connector” projects.



The project trained youth to become champions of peace in their communities, harnessing their capacity to influence peers.

From establishing water points and rebuilding a bridge, to refurbishing schools and health centres, these projects inspired cooperation between communities, putting peacebuilding into practice. The connector projects were very successful in reconciling Gedeo and Guji communities, with 72 percent of evaluation respondents indicating as such.

“If each individual ensures peace, then the family of the individual will live in peace, and a peaceful family will ensure a peaceful neighbourhood, and a peaceful neighbourhood becomes a peaceful society.”

– Fikadu, youth peace champion



CASE STUDY

In November 2020, following their training, youth peacebuilders from Yirga Chefe in the Gedeo zone mobilised 182 young people to help farmers from West Guji harvest their coffee crops.

They drew upon a custom known as *debo* – common in many parts of Ethiopia – which is the practice of supporting a neighbour regardless of ethnic or religious differences. They organised themselves into two groups and gathered early in the morning to start labouring.

A local farmer who received this support said that this act of kindness would help to restore lasting trust between the two communities.

Outcome 2: Increased empowerment of community and faith leaders to promote social cohesion and reconciliation

The project successfully trained religious leaders, leading to positive changes in their attitudes towards people of other faiths. Many participants reported that the training shifted their previously held misconceptions, prejudices and biases towards acceptance and appreciation of others. Indeed, many reported that they had developed cross-faith friendships as a result of the training.

“My attitudes towards other religious practices have been changed and I have started to think that every religion has similarities where we can sit together and work together for a better future.”

– Project participant

Ultimately, training contributed to increased understanding between different faiths, which inspired new relationships of cooperation and strengthened community approaches to peace creation.

TRAINING FOR WOMEN

It is an established fact that in the event of violent conflict, women and children suffer most.

The project provided training for women within the relevant communities. This was designed to offer opportunities for interaction and learning, to ultimately reduce their vulnerability to violence, abuse and conflict. It involved creating awareness and shaping perceptions of human dignity, reconciliation and peaceful co-existence.

As a result, participants gained leadership skills and greater confidence in their ability to help resolve both family and community issues. All participants expressed that they had gained new knowledge, skills, and better communication and conflict transformation qualities, and that this strengthened their capacity to intervene on issues affecting their communities.

It was noted, however, that future interventions should also include men in such initiatives to better prevent violence and provide community-based protection from conflict.

Outcome 3: Increased conflict sensitivity in service delivery

The evaluation concluded that the project was successful in strengthening the capacity of government, universities, humanitarian agencies and other service providers to respond to situations of potential conflict. Capacity building and leadership training delivered to relevant stakeholders led to increased understanding of the peacebuilding process and strategies to address conflict through gender-responsive initiatives.

The training inspired significant behaviour change among participants. For example, university students employed the tools they learned to resolve minor disagreements that would have otherwise descended into inter-ethnic conflict with the potential to destabilise the campus.

The project fostered a common understanding among service providers that peacebuilding and conflict management is a shared responsibility between the community, government, civil society organisations and other agencies and institutions. There was widespread consensus among evaluation participants regarding a reduction in incidences of violent conflict. This indicates the effectiveness of the training in promoting social cohesion and conflict sensitivity in government and civil society program delivery.



Gedeo and West Guji community members play a friendly soccer match, demonstrating their unity and commitment to reconciliation.

ESTABLISHING PEACE COMMITTEES

The establishment of community-level peace committees was a key aspect of strengthening institutional responses to conflict and fostering an environment of social cohesion. Fifty-six percent of evaluation respondents reported that peace committees had contributed to enhancing participation in peacebuilding, with 18 percent reporting their contribution to be very strong.

Peace committees initiated and participated in projects related to internally displaced persons resettlement and integration, livelihoods, conflict transformation and joint peacebuilding and reconciliation programs. This promoted connections and understanding between people, particularly of different faiths. The evaluation noted that the theme of unity emerged among members of different religions and ethnic groups involved in peace committees, indicating a significant attitudinal shift towards mutual respect and cooperation.

The impact on the community was described by one participant who declared: "Some have started to talk that we could live happily through dialogues and exchange of views as a result of the initiative of the peace committee."

Eighty-two percent of respondents believed that the establishment of peace committees "very much strengthened" or "strengthened" positive relationships in their communities.

OVERALL IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Promoting a culture of dialogue among key stakeholder is one of the main positive impacts of the project. The evaluation concluded that, by facilitating constructive dialogue and increasing collaboration, the project empowered target communities to address conflict in a peaceful manner, resulting in fewer conflicts. Seventy-eight percent of respondents reported that project activities ultimately fostered an increased sense of community, belonging and peace among the Gedeo and Guji communities.

The project was designed in alignment with priorities and programs already endorsed by local government institutions. This enhances project sustainability and ensures that those trained through project activities will be able to utilise the acquired skills and knowledge within their personal and community lives, and within their institutions.

Efforts to embed the sustainability of the project beyond its duration included:

- Production of numerous training materials through the project, which continue to serve as key resources on peacebuilding, social cohesion and gender mainstreaming for communities and implementing partners.
- The establishment of peace committees, partnership building, and network expansion within communities to continue to maximise resources and promote diversity.
- Raising ongoing awareness of human dignity and the need for social cohesion and peace at all levels.



After being destroyed during the conflict, this bridge was reconstructed as part of the connector projects – allowing travel and trade to resume and bringing Gedeo and West Guji communities back together.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Resume income generation support for vulnerable youth

Vulnerable youth in conflict-affected areas have long experienced neglect, economic disempowerment and limited livelihood opportunities, contributing to social unrest. Peace and reconciliation initiatives should prioritise support for income generation and increased employment opportunities for young people.

Support peace, social cohesion, reconciliation and confidence-building at the community level

Service providers should continue to mainstream social cohesion and reconciliation in their programs, employing a conflict sensitive approach. Faith and community leaders should continue to be supported to bring people together to address the needs of their communities and foster peace. For example, peace committees should be afforded additional and comprehensive support, including with operational expenses, provision of supplies and advanced training courses for their members.

Increase the role of women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution

Women should be given greater opportunity to implement community development initiatives. This would demand a more targeted and in-depth gender awareness-raising approach and highlight the positive role that women can play in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

Strengthen community-based organisations

A challenge for the people of West Guji and Gedeo is to promote, support and maintain a new strategic alliance between their leaders and grassroots institutions. One of the aims of this strategic alliance must be to ensure good governance. Capacity building should be a continuous process and one that extends to civil society organisations, local authorities, members of local sector offices and local leaders – enabling them to peacefully address conflict in their areas.

Engage local authorities and increase donor action

To ensure the continuity and sustainability of projects in the target areas, local authorities should continue to be involved in peacebuilding processes. Tailored capacity building and institutional support should be provided to ensure their effective engagement and to keep peace in communities.

As a result of the project, World Vision Ethiopia, CARE Ethiopia and Catholic Relief Services Ethiopia have developed a favourable reputation with regional governments and other stakeholders in the SNNP and Oromia regions. This should act as a catalyst for increased donor action on social cohesion and reconciliation endeavours in Ethiopia.

Prioritise community participation in project design

Future peacebuilding project design should take a more participatory approach to further strengthen active community involvement.



Funded by
the European Union



For more information, please contact:

Silvio Dorati
Country Impact Manager
World Vision Australia
silvio.dorati@worldvision.com.au

Eyob Yishak
Peace-Building Manager
World Vision International
eyob_yishak@wvi.org