

Boundary Tensions and Resource-Based Conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan on Three Frontlines

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Abstract

This study was aimed at investigating the boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan on three frontlines. The study employed online or desk research methods and used the available published and unpublished sources and materials. The first frontline covers from Setit-Humera to Jebel Mutana near 12°N latitude. The second joint point covers from the 12°N parallel to the confluence of the Baro-Akobo Rivers in the Gambella area. The third meeting point covers the northern direction and extends from the Baro-Akobo area to Lake Turkana on the Kenyan border. These areas are rich with fertile lands, valuable large-scale agricultural lands, and abundant products, which are key resources in the livelihoods of the populations living in these areas. These are very important to bring sustainable peace and good international relations, national and local security, efficient local administration and using resources collaboratively and efficiently. However, these areas are full of recurring arenas of tensions and conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan. Competing interests for resources, the interests of regimes and rulers, lack of defined and clear boundaries, the colonials' legacies and foreign interests are the major causes of Ethio-Sudan boundary hostilities and resource-based conflicts. Developing prejudices and continuous conflicts, deaths and bodily injuries, displacements and property destructions are the results of boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts between the two countries. Identifying the common interests of both countries, government and stakeholders' discussion and intervention, involvements external and neutral observant, the presence of participatory demarcation process of both sides and having clear boundaries measured by modern measurements are the possible remedies of Ethio-Sudan claims and conflicts. Boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan in three frontlines.

Keywords: Boundary, Tensions, Land-based, Resources, Conflicts, Ethiopia, Sudan

Introduction:

Boundaries are the defining belt of nationality and loyalty of the nationals to a particular state (Alemayehu, 2019). Boundaries and lands are valuable and often contested resources in Africa. They are the central elements in the production and reproduction of hostilities and conflicts among the neighbouring countries (Derzwan, 2011).

The Horn of Africa region has experienced plenty of conflicts interstate or intra-state conflicts, or even proxy wars due to the borders or borderland's natural and human-made resources (Clapham, 1998; Okumu, 2010). The pursuit of fertile lands and water resources is the major factor for the clashes across the East African region (Temesgen, 2018). Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and

Uganda have experienced long-lasting civil wars involving heavily armed clashes (Clapham, 1998). Although all these conflicts have their specificities, they often have the characteristics of common control over valuable resources¹ (Markakis, 1998).

Review of Related Literature:

Ethiopia and Sudan are the two biggest sovereign states which share a common boundary of over 1600 km in the Horn of Africa (Mulatu, 2016). The long stretch and shared boundaries between Ethiopia and Sudan have appeared as a hot agenda since the 1950s on the three frontlines (Alemayehu, 2019). Although Ethiopia and Sudan are neighbouring countries that share several common values, norms and cultural elements in their history, the border issue is still the source of recurring and long periods of hostility, tensions, and conflicts (Young, 2020; Alemayehu, 2019). These threaten the well-being of millions of people in Horn, East and Central Africa and the Middle East (Young, 2020).

To solve these boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan on the border, various agreements and boundary demarcations have been executed at different times, such as the 1900, 1901, 1902, 1903, 1907 and 1909 treaties between Ethiopia and Sudan. Despite the two countries have held these diplomatic dialogues and agreements to settle frontier claims and boundary tensions, their attempts have failed many times (Mulatu, 2016).

Instead, these demarcations and management of the territories on the ground have remained one of the causes of disagreement between the two countries for over 60 years. Because, these agreements were unclearly and arbitrarily drawn by colonial powers without local knowledge and interests in the political, social and regional particularities of the Ethiopia and Sudan people (Alemayehu, 2019). Furthermore, the land, water, oil and other natural resources are the key assets in the livelihoods of the populations living in these areas and the major causes of conflicts (Cascão, 2013). In addition to this, the Sudanese government developed an aggressive policy towards the uninhabited sections of frontier territories following its independence in 1956 (Alemayehu, 2019).

Generally, these recurring boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan have occurred on three frontlines. The first frontline cover from the junction of the Tekezze and the Royan Rivers in the north² to Lake Turkana;³ the second direction joined the two countries' cover from the 12°N parallel to the confluence of the Baro-Akobo Rivers in the Gambella area; and the third point that connected the two countries is the northern direction extends from the Baro-Akobo area to Lake Turkana on the Kenyan border (Mulatu, 2016).

These recurring frontier claims, boundary tensions, hostilities, prejudices and conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan have caused heavy destruction and allegations in the border areas. It caused mistrust, suspicion, deaths, displacements, and damages to crops and properties in the three frontline communities in particular and between Ethiopia and Sudan in general. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan on three frontlines.

Theoretical Explanations of Boundary Claimants and Land-Based Conflicts:

Boundary are officially sanctioned natural or artificial lines that divide territories on the ground and set limits that mark social groups off from each other. A boundary is a meeting point

¹ boundary and land resources

² Setit-Humera to Jebel Mutana near 12°N latitude

³ formerly Lake Rudolf

of diverse cultures, creates differences in nationality, determines loyalty to the state and restricts limitless movement of citizens (Alemayehu, 2019). Boundaries and lands are valuable and often contested resources in Africa; it is a central element in the production and reproduction of conflicts among the neighbouring countries (Derzwan, 2011).

The spirit of land use conflict is an indication of the antagonistic relationship between lands and human beings. Conflicts are the external imaginary of the result of boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts and the manifestation of land use situations in certain time and space demission. In line with this, this study emphasises the boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts, the result of these boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts, the major causes, existing results and possible solutions between Ethiopia and Sudan on three frontlines.

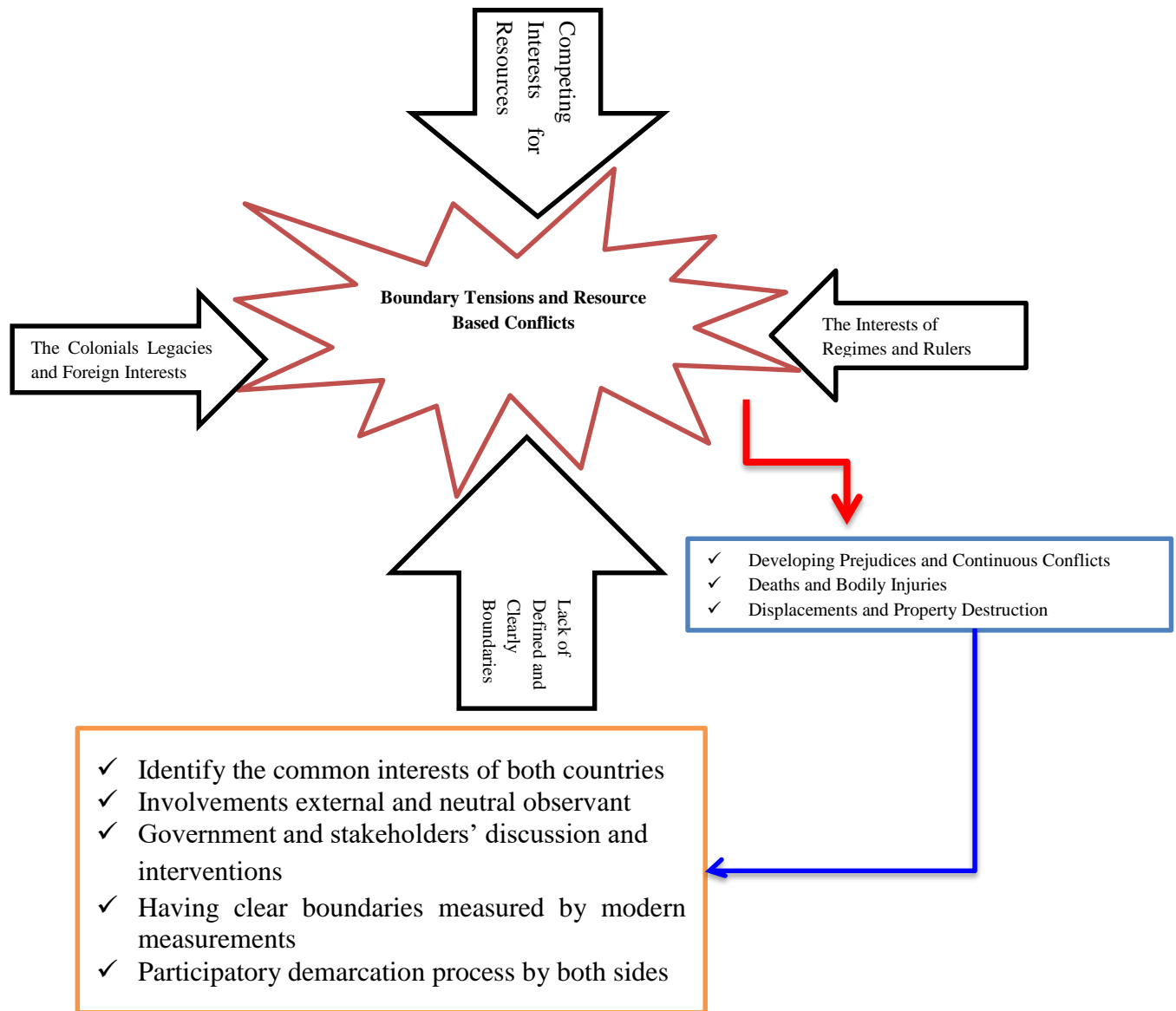


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Boundary Tensions and Resource-based Conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan

Methods and Materials:

Study Setting: The Ethio-Sudan boundary is located on the western edge of the Ethiopian plateau, also known as the western highlands, which extends from the junction of the Tekezze (Setit) and the Royan Rivers in the north to Lake Turkana on the Kenyan border in the south. Elevation drops from ± 4000 m in the Simen Mountains to ± 1000 m in the Humera-Metema area in the north, and from ± 2000 m in Gore (Ilubabor) to less than 500 m in Gambella in the south. The western plateau of the Ethiopian highlands is traversed by many of Ethiopia's mighty rivers including, from north to south, the Tekezze (Setit), the Gwang (Atbara), the Angereb (Bahr As-Salam), the Shinfa (Rahad), the Abay (Nile), the Didesa and the Baro-Akobo (Sobat). The land through which these rivers flow constitutes some of the best agricultural areas (Mulatu, 2016).

Temperatures in the area can soar above 35°C in some areas including the Humera, Metema, Guba and the Gambella regions. Annual precipitation along the border ranges from 800 to 1000 mm. The Upper Blue Nile and the Baro and Akobo basins are relatively wet areas with a mean annual rainfall of 1500 mm. The dry season is from November through to April and the wet season runs from June through September (Mulatu, 2016). According to CSA (2007), Humera (population 21,653), Metema (10,171), Abderafi (10,831), Gambela (39,022) and Itang (5958) are major urban areas, which serve as important trading centres (CSA, 2007).

The economy of the border area is dependent on the production and trading of agricultural products such as sesame, sorghum, beans and cotton. Sesame⁴ and coffee⁵ are exported to Port Said to reach the international markets (WFP, 2011). Cross-border livestock trade is another major economic base of the area. The major hinterlands that supply livestock are some of the richest agricultural areas, such as Alefa, Dembia, Quara and Armachiho, to name a few (ILRI 2007; CSA, 2015). Gambella town is the other major cross-border transshipment centre in Western Ethiopia. In the early twentieth century, Gambella attracted about 75% of the Ethio-Sudan trade, particularly trade in coffee, beeswax, salt and kerosene oil for more on the historic significance of Gambella as a border trading town (Zewde, 1987). Today Gambella serves as a major cereal and livestock export center (WFP, 2011).

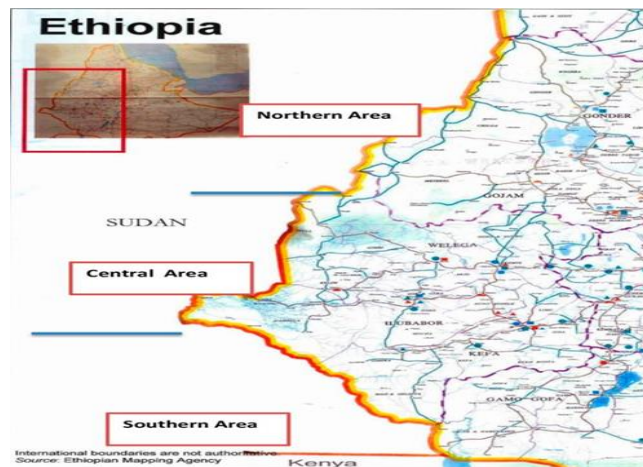


Figure 2: The three frontlines Ethio-Sudan border regions of Ethiopia (Ethiopian Mapping Agency, 2024)

⁴ traded through Humera

⁵ traded through Metema

Study Design: The study was carried out using the qualitative method with a case study design. The design is very useful to get multiple sources of evidence and to investigate issues under the study in-depth. Hence, a case study is a pragmatic inquiry that is important to explore the root causes of the recurring boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan on three frontlines. Accordingly, the study employed online desk research, including available published and unpublished sources and materials. Eligible sources of data such as research articles, books, media, newspapers, magazines, and government and organizational reports were used. The author also used various search engines, such as Sci-Hub, Bookfi.net, Library Genesis, www.freefullpdf.com, and Google Scholar.com. Then, the data were interpreted and discussed thematically in line with the existing realities about the recurring boundary tensions and resources-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan.

Results and Discussions:

In this section, the historical Ethio-Sudan boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts, the causes of boundary tensions and resources-based conflicts, the consequences of boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts, and finally, the possible remedies for the recurring boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan in three frontlines have presented and discussed.

The Historical of Ethio-Sudan Boundary Tensions and Resource-based Conflicts: Ethiopia and Sudan, the Horn of Africa are the two biggest countries, which have experienced recurring boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan on three frontlines. The Ethio-Sudan boundary has served as a transition zone where people from both countries have moved back and forth for economic⁶ and political reasons and have faced recurring boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts (Mulatu, 2016).

These competitions, hostilities and conflict between Ethio-Sudan boundaries can be observed in Setit-Humera to Jebel Mutana near 12°N latitude; the joint point from the 12°N parallel to the Baro-Akobo Rivers in the Gambella area; and the Baro-Akobo area to Lake Turkana on the Kenyan border. These areas are rich in land, water, mineral resources,⁷ forests, fisheries etc. Frontier claims and borderland tensions between Ethiopia and Sudan heightened particularly over Amhara, Gambella and Benishangul regional states (Mulatu, 2016).

The history of the Ethio-Sudan boundary competitions, hostilities and conflicts can be traced to 1882 when Egypt took full control of the present territory of Sudan and started to expand its boundary eastward to have full control of the headwaters of the Nile (Langer, 1950). Egypt's survival depends on the waters of the Nile and the fear of Ethiopia taking full control of the Nile's headwaters and undertaking a major development project that would have a permanent impact on the flow of the Nile has always been a principal national concern of Egypt (Mulatu, 2016).

In 1898, England took full control of Sudan and created Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. England continued to promote the principal Egyptian national policy-maintaining full control of the territories of the headwaters of the Nile. England was particularly concerned about competing European powers⁸ exercising their influence in the region (Mulatu, 2016; Alemayehu, 2019). In 1891, Britain and Italy divided East Africa into spheres of influence with 35°E longitude as the

⁶ trade, farming, cattle grazing

⁷ Oil, gold, etc.

⁸ France, Italy and Germany

dividing line and Ethiopia relegated to the Italian side. In the same year, emperor Menelik was very clear in defining the territorial extent of his land, and his claim of the territory adjacent to Sudan extended from Tomat in the north to Gedaref in the west and the junction of the White Nile and the Sobat, to Lake Samburu/Turkana in the south. The British, who were in full control of the Egyptian-Sudan territory, were not willing to accept Menelik's claim; rather they were more interested in negotiating to define the location of the boundary line between Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and Ethiopia (Mulatu, 2016).

The various diplomatic talks and agreements on the recurring boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts in African countries were executed in the late 19th century (Mulatu, 2016). Ethiopia and Sudan have made many attempts to define their boundaries. Among the many agreements, the 1900, 1901, 1902, 1907 and 1909 treaties were relevant in defining the Ethio-Sudan boundary (Alemayehu, 2019). However, all were not successful in making clear boundaries between the two countries. This was because, all boundaries demarcations between Ethiopia and Sudan were drawn by the colonialism Era by the colonial powers based on the colonists' interests and ambitions, without local knowledge and interest in the political, social, and regional particularities and willingness. Onwards, this, Ethiopia and Sudan have developed prejudices and stereotyping attitude toward each other and have recurring competitions, especially in their border areas.

The Boundary Conflicts of Ethiopia and Sudan on Three Frontlines: The Ethio-Sudan boundary and resource-based tensions and conflicts have been observed on three frontlines. The three frontlines which have experienced recurring boundary and resource-based tensions and conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan are:

- i. **Setit-Humera to Jebel Mutana Area:** The first confront frontline between Ethiopia and Sudan covers from Setit-Humera to Jebel Mutana near 12°N latitude.⁹This area had a long history of large-scale agricultural development, producing sesame, sorghum, cotton and other cereals and oil seeds (Mulatu, 2016). The escalation in the Setit-Humera to Jebel Mutana frontline has raised the alarm about the dispute erupting into a wider border conflict, with tensions rising between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia over the latter's construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile.

One of the areas claimed by the Amhara people based on historical facts and realities on this frontline is:

- a. Setit-Humera: which includes most of the Al-Fashaqa Triangle, which extends for about 40-50 km west of the boundary line, includes part of the major agricultural zones of Lukdi and Mechach.
- b. Delelo-Shimele Gara: located on the eastern side of the Gwang River extending from Abderafi south to Metema. This area constitutes the large tract of land formed by the alluvial deposits of the Gwang and Angereb rivers and their tributaries and covers rich agricultural land.
- c. Taya-Fazrah: comprises a strip of land extending from Gallabat and Metema towns south up to the Shinfa (Rahad) River. Both Taya and

⁹ just north of the Dinder River

- Fazrah served as border posts, and the surrounding region was used by Ethiopians for cattle grazing and as a wild animal reserve.
- d. Nefsgebeya: extends from the Rahad River south into Metekel (Gojam) following the present boundary. It includes much of the rich agricultural land covered with bamboo forest, gum trees and acacia. The area is also rich in wild animals since there are very few settlements to disturb the ecology.
 - e. Kurmuk: the strip of land extending from Kurmuk town south to Jebel Jerok, incorporated into Sudan during Gwynn's demarcation in 1903 (Mulatu, 2016; ACLED, 2021).

Hence, the economy of this border area is dependent on the production and trading of agricultural products such as sesame, sorghum, beans and cotton. Sesame¹⁰ and coffee¹¹ are exported to international markets (WFP 2011). In 2014, the Humera-Metema area produced over 52% of the total sesame production in Ethiopia, with a total production of 1.5 million quintals of sesame (CSA, 2015). Cross-border livestock trade is also another major economic base of the area. A 2010 International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) study revealed that as much as 100,000 cattle are exported annually through Metema and Humera towns (ILRI, 2007).

To control these and other valuable resources, there have been recurring hostilities and conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan. The other reason for the bloodiest conflicts related to this frontline has been linked to a treaty signed in 1902 between the British and Ethiopian governments (ACLED, 2021). The Ethiopian government and people knew that the intersection of Guang and Setit as far as Jira is a natural boundary between the two countries, where Ethiopia had been administering since time immemorial. On the contrary, the Sudanese government and people have drawn and accepted the Gwynn line and claimed all the said lands located outside the boundary of the Gwynn line in 1903 (Alemayehu, 2019).

Furthermore, the TPLF/ EPRDF elites secretly offered large agricultural areas to the Sudan in this frontline (Mulatu, 2016). This was an intentional and planned decision made by earlier Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and TPLF elites to haram and revenge on the Amhara people. In addition, the Sudanese troops made rapid progress in consolidating Ethiopia's original landhold on the disputed territory at the current time. The Amhara people have repeatedly been attacked by the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), particularly after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power on 2 April 2018 (ACLED, 2021). On 2 December 2020, the Sudanese Armed Forces occupied the Khor Yabis area, controlled by Ethiopia, Amhara people for a long time, expelling Amhara people. This is the homeland of Ethiopia (Young, 2020).

In this regard, the Sudanese authorities asserted that Sudan has recovered its territory which has been occupied by Ethiopia for the last twenty-five years. On 2 March 2020, the Sudanese army continued to push into the last Ethiopian stronghold of Bereket in the disputed border region of Al-Fashaga, against

¹⁰ traded through Humera

¹¹ traded through Metema

Ethiopian-backed forces. Sudan forces also closed the Gallabat-Metemma border crossing with Ethiopia on 3 April 2022 (Ethiopia Peace Observatory, 2023). Al-Fashaga is one of the areas in this frontline, which spans over one million fertile lands, and sits between the eastern bank of the Atbara River and the western bank of the Salami River, known as the Tekeze River in Ethiopia. The Sudanese army in mid-December, 2020 moved into al-Fashaga, after 25 years of absence. Walid Ahmad al-Sajjan, commander of the Fifth Brigade of the Sudanese Armed Forces in Umm Barakit, stated on 8 April 2022 that the Sudanese military had retaken 95% of the disputed Al-Fashaga frontline from Ethiopia (ACLED, 2021).

Since November 2020, Sudan has also invaded “the historical land of Ethiopia” and demolished Ethiopian administrative institutions, overtook camps, fired the crops and destroyed the properties, confiscated oxen and crops arrested, killed and displaced Ethiopians.¹² Likewise, Dessalegn Tassew, the administrator of West Gonder, who is now the Amhara regional peace and security bureau chief, accused the Sudanese government of occupying large swaths of land, plundering, and killing residents during their occupation of the area, on 27 December 2020. He stated that property worth more than US\$25.5 million was plundered, and destroyed and that 400 to 500 households were displaced, and their villages were burned to the ground (Addis Standard, 2022).

Many scholars including Sudanese military leader General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan confirmed that the Sudan government has controlled these Ethiopian lands with the permission of Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.¹³ In this frontline, Sudan has invaded and occupied more than 51 square kilometres of Ethiopian history and homeland.

- ii. **Baro-Akobo Rivers in the Gambella Area:** The second frontline covers the 12°N parallel to the confluence of the Baro-Akobo Rivers in the Gambella region (ACLED, 2021). This area comprises much of the Beni-Shangul region and the Nile-Didesa basins (Mulatu, 2016). The population of Gambella was estimated to be 50,000 people in 1984, and in the following couple of years, the population in the region increased sevenfold in a short period (Johnson, 1998; Mengistu, 2005).

Officially, Gambella only became part of Ethiopia in 1902, after long and complex negotiations between Emperor Menelik II and the British, which were translated into a swap of territories between the two empires-Gambella was exchanged for Kassala, located on the northern border of the two empires (Markakis, 2011). After the adoption of the bilateral agreement, Gambella became then the westernmost border of Ethiopia until 2011 bordering Sudan (Cascão, 2013).

In contrast to the northern part, large-scale agricultural development started in this region only in the last 10-15 years (Mulatu, 2016). This frontline is the major cross-border transshipment center in Western Ethiopia and it is the key Ethio-Sudan trade route. At the beginning of the 20th century, traders and mercenaries came from different parts of the world and the Ethiopian government itself had great plans to transform the Baro-Sobat-White Nile into a major trading corridor and trade station in the Horn of Africa region (Bahru, 1987). In the early twentieth century, Gambella

¹² Amhara civilians

¹³ secret agreements of Ethiopian and Sudan government

attracted about 75% of the Ethio-Sudan trade, particularly trade in coffee, beeswax, salt and kerosene oil, which shows the historic significance of Gambela as a border trading town (Zewde, 1987). Furthermore, the cross-border trade of Ethiopia shows that about 18.5% of the total cross-border cereals¹⁴ trade in October 2011 was from Ethiopia to Sudan via the Gambela route with another 6.7% traded as inflow into Ethiopia through Kurmuk (WFP, 2011).

Moreover, the strategic location of Gambella is very much explained by its hydrology-the region is crisscrossed by several rivers¹⁵ that are tributaries of the White Nile, and as such part of the geopolitically very important Nile River Basin. The river had perfect navigation conditions and had therefore always been considered perfect to become a main corridor for trade¹⁶ between the neighbouring countries (Bahru, 1987). In general, the neighbouring bordering of South Sudan and Gambella region are rich in natural resources such as land, water, forests, fisheries and mineral resources. These key resources are also the livelihoods of the populations living in South Sudan and Gambella. Hence, these key resources are the main causes of conflicts between South Sudan and Gambella-not only during times of full-scale war but also in times of low-intensity disputes in this area (Cascão, 2013).

Generalized pastoralist conflict accounts of bloody cattle raids, communal clashes and violence, revenge attacks and selective killings in regions such as the Jonglei and Upper Nile areas¹⁷ and the Akobo area bordering Gambella in Ethiopia, make headlines almost every time (Cascão, 2013). Thousands of South Sudanese emigrants came to the Gambella region and encamped in the area after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power on 2 April 2018. Abiy gave citizenships to more than 400,000---Sudanese tribes and this makes the native people of Gambella a minority and marginalized in their own countries. However, many Gambella people have been killed and displaced by South Sudan militants and other terrorist groups. According to an Ethiopian reporter released on April 20, 2023, the South Sudan militia groups have entered to Ethiopian border in Gambella region and occupied more than 200 square kilometres of Ethiopian homeland and changed the name of one city on the Google map, incorporated into South Sudan territory. Furthermore, one ethnic group in Gambela has been killed by South Sudan militia groups, and only 50-60 persons have left. However, Abiy's government is silent, passes the issue carelessly and does not give any attention to the shameful invasion and spoliation of Ethiopian historical and native lands by South Sudanese. Instead, the South Sudanese militia group claimed that they had occupied the Ethiopian land with the secret consent of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

- iii. **Baro-Akobo Area to Lake Turkana on the Kenyan Border:** The third point that connects Ethiopia and Sudan is the northern direction extends from the Baro-Akobo area to Lake Turkana on the Kenyan border, which contains mainly the Tops Mountains and the Kibish River to connect to Lake Turkana (Mulatu, 2016). From the town of Melile, the boundary follows the Akobo River and then connects with

¹⁴ sorghum, maize, rice and wheat flour

¹⁵ Baro, Akobo and Gilo being the major ones

¹⁶ imports and exports

¹⁷ north of South Sudan

the Kibish River which flows into Lake Turkana (ACLED, 2021). This area is rich in wildlife and contains more than 60 types of mammal wildlife, palm oil and rice production (Taye et al., 2016).

The 1907 Treaty between Great Britain and Ethiopia defined the boundary between Ethiopia, extending from the 6°N parallel and 35°E longitude to Lake Turkana (Rudolf) and Sudan and between Ethiopia and Kenya. This portion of the boundary was surveyed by Major Austin. He completed his report in August 1900; however, the treaty was only signed seven years later in 1907 due to delays in ironing out differences between the two governments.¹⁸ In 1908, Major Gwynn was commissioned to demarcate the boundary starting from the 6°N parallel to Lake Rudolf, as well as the boundary with Kenya. Major Gwynn completed the demarcation in 1909 with no participation from the Ethiopian side (Mulatu, 2016). As literature and history show, it has been never seen that Sudan ventured and invaded Ethiopian lands like Abiy's regime.

This shows that the military incursion by the Sudanese army into the Ethiopian territory on these three frontlines is illegal and provocative. First, it violates the basic international principle against the threat and use of force provided under Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter. Second, it undermines the Joint boundary mechanisms that are put in place and the progress made so far to discharge the task of the re-demarcation. The Sudanese Army killed Ethiopian people residing in the area, looted and destroyed their hard-earned assets, and generated fear and mayhem in the border area is also another violation of international laws and conventions. Therefore, the aggression of the Sudanese government needs to be reversed with the view to create a conducive environment for the bilateral mechanisms to function.

Causes of Ethio-Sudan Boundary Tensions and Based Conflicts:

There are different factors for the recurring boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts in Africa in general and between Ethio-Sudan borders in particular. Despite there have been different internal and external factors, the following situations are the major root causes of the boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan.

- i. **Competing Interests for Resources:** The Horn of Africa region has experienced plenty of conflicts for a long time it interstate or intra-state conflicts, or proxy wars mainly for the control of valuable resources in the three frontlines. Ethiopia, Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia and Uganda have experienced long-lasting civil wars involving heavily armed central governments with neighbouring countries for resources (Clapham, 1998). The issue of territorial ownership entails that cross-boundary conflicts between the Ethio-Sudan do not exclusively emanate from the demand for land for production, but the conflict is also associated with deeply held sentiments of territorial ownership of the regional resources.

Many scholars have agreed that ambitions for the control of land and other natural resources are the causes of conflict between Ethiopia and Sudan contributing to perpetuating conflict and, undermining peace-building efforts. The

¹⁸ Ethiopia and Sudan

areas in Setit-Humera to Jebel Mutana, the Baro-Akobo Rivers in the Gambela area, and the Baro-Akobo area to Lake Turkana on the Kenyan border are rich in valuable resources. There are abundant natural and land-based resources that include precious minerals,¹⁹ water, fertile and pasture lands, forests, wetlands, fisheries etc. These resources are the root causes of the conflicts/disputes and continuous disagreements between Ethiopia and Sudan (Cascão, 2013).

The Setit-Humera had a long history of large-scale agricultural development, producing sesame, sorghum, cotton, oil seeds and other cereals; the Baro-Akobo Rivers in the Gambella area, which comprises much of the Beni Shangul region and the Nile-Didesa basins, the major sources of coffee, beeswax, salt and kerosene oil; and the region extends from the Baro-Akobo area to Lake Turkana on the Kenyan rich in This area is rich in wildlife, contains more than 60 types of mammal wildlife, palm oil and rice production (Mulatu, 2016). Because of the richness of the areas by these and other valuable resources, they have been exposed to recurring tensions and conflicts.

- ii. **The Interests of Regimes and Rulers:** The interests of regimes and rulers are other sources of the boundary tensions and land-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan on three frontlines. The treaty known as the Hewett Treaty or Adwa Treaty was signed on 3 June 1884. In this treaty, Britain on behalf of Egypt allowed Yohannes free import of goods, ammunition, Egyptian facilitation of the appointment of bishops, and the restoration of Bogos to Ethiopia. On his turn, Yohannes agreed to facilitate the evacuation of the besieged Egyptian troops from Kassala, Amideb and Sanhit towns of Sudan. This action of Yohannes led to a war between Ethiopian forces and the Dervishes of Sudan (Wondwosen, 2009).

After the death of Yohannes in 1889, Menelik II (1889-1913) became the emperor of Ethiopia. In his early years, emperor Menelik wanted peaceful relations with Sudan. The Adwa victory greatly increased the image of Menelik in the international world. Many European countries, particularly, the French, the British, the Germans etc., sent emissaries to Menelik asking for his friendship (Mulatu, 2016). This time, the Sudanese leader Khalifa Abdellah was also interested in allying with Menelik. However, the British, who were in full control of the Egyptian-Sudan territory by this time, were not willing to accept Menelik's claim; rather they were more interested in negotiating to define the location of the boundary line between Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and Ethiopia (Yacob, 2007; Wondwosen, 2009; Mulatu, 2016).

During the reign of Haile Selassie I (1930-1974), Ethiopia as a dominant regional power in East Africa faced no serious challenges from the neighboring countries though Somalia and Sudan were occasionally creating border disputes (Nordquist, 2002). However, when the Sudanese People's Liberation (SPLA) started the so-called "Second Civil War" or "Anyanya II" (1983-2005) and appeared to challenge the central government of Sudan, the relations between Ethiopia and Sudan once again became very sour (Wondwosen, 2009). The news of the Sudanese action in Sätit-Humära alarmed Emperor Haile Selassie personally. The emperor dispatched five hundred police forces drawn from Addis Ababa led by Brigadier General Yimam Goshu to Sätit-Humära. The emperor instructed

¹⁹ oil, gas, gold, and uranium

Yimam Goshu to do all the best with his saying “If anyone crossed into our territory, peacefully if possible, forcefully declined to accept ...” (Alemayehu, 2019).

Sudan’s relations with Ethiopia during the Derg regime (1974-1987) were full of competition and conflicts (Young 2020). Ethio-Sudan relations were tied after Prime Minister Meles Zenawi came to power. In 2007, Meles entered into a secret agreement with the Sudan to make adjustments on the border in Setit-Humera and Mutana, Amhara region. Based on this agreement, Meles allegedly sold Ethiopian land to Sudan in 2008 secretly. The agreement was kept away from the public sphere until the Sudan Tribune released the issue to the media (Mulatu, 2016).

The news of the Sudan Tribune about a new boundary settlement along the 1,600-kilometer (994-mile) border surprised and angered many Ethiopians (Temesgen, 2018). Many Ethiopian opposition parties and Ethiopian Diasporas have condemned this secret deal, and thus, the Ethiopian government has agreed to re-demarcate the Ethio-Sudan boundary (Wondwosen, 2009).

While Meles’ death in 2012, the carefully constructed Ethio-Sudan ties of more than 12 years faced new challenges (Ventures Africa, 2013). In 2013, Prime Minister Hailemariam signed another agreement with the Sudan government to place posts and other markers on the ground (Mulatu, 2016). About this, the Ethiopian regime has given large swaths of Ethiopian land to the Sudanese in a deal condemned by the Ethiopian farmers in the border area (Temesgen, 2018).

On 2 April 2018, it was announced that Abiy Ahmed-an Oromo, an evangelical Christian-would be Prime Minister of Ethiopia and chairperson of the EPRDF. After he came to power, the competition and disputes between Ethiopia and Sudan intensified on the three frontlines. In the Setit-Humera to Jebel Mutana frontline, Sudan claimed to capture the villages of Asmaro, Lebbaki, Pasha, Lamlam, Melkamo, Males, Ashkar, Arqa, and Umm Pasha Teddy, on 28 December 2020. In total, Sudan captured eleven settlements that Ethiopian militias and Amhara people had been controlling for a long time (ICG, 2021).

To the worst of the earlier Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles, Abiy has secretly given the Ethiopian original and homelands to Sudan, bordered by Amhara and Gambella regions. Abiy has given more than 51 square kilometres of fertile lands to Sudan at al-Fashaga, Gonder, Amhara region. Similarly, Abiy permitted the South Sudan militia groups to enter to Gambella area occupy more than 200 kilometres and change the name of one city on the Google map into South Sudan territory. In this area, 50-60 persons of one ethnic group have left, who have been killed by South Sudan militia groups (The Reporter, 2023). The current leader of Sudan, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan confirmed that the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) invaded and occupied these areas with the full consent and acknowledgement of Abiy Ahmed. Until now, Sudan’s military is in control of these areas that had once been Ethiopia’s. It has been never seen that Sudan has ventured and invaded the Ethiopian historical lands like that of Abiy’s regime. Therefore, leadership changes and political turbulence in both countries have sharpened old rivalries between the two countries, which resulted from recurring disputes back to the fore along the three frontlines.

iii. **Lack of Defined Boundaries:** According to the Africa Union Border Programme (2014), the centre of all the African border conflicts and tensions have been the results of absence or poorly defined borders as well as questions over border-related pre-colonial territories (Temesgen, 2018). Likewise, Ethiopia and Sudan have no clearly and agreeable demarcated international borders that are equally accepted by both sides of border landers, governments and people, since it is assumed that boundaries have colonial roots and have unclear features, and the Ethio-Sudan borders are full of recurring tensions and conflicts (Leonardi & Santschi, 2016; Ramsbotham & Zartma, 2011; Temesgen, 2018; Eyilet & Senishaw, 2020). In other words, the existing contested border was drawn up when Sudan was under British rule in the 1900s without the physical presence of Ethiopian representatives, which is the main cause of tensions, contestations, competitions, and recurring conflict in the border region of Ethiopia and Sudan up to the present days.

For instance, the Al-Fashaga area located in the southeastern part of Sudan's eastern state of Gedaref is the contentious conflict arena between Ethiopia and Sudan. The Al-Fashaga covers approximately 600 km and is a rich fertile land conducive to agriculture. For decades, Ethiopia has allowed its farmers to plant crops there. Hence, the absence of a visible border would continue to be a potential source of tensions, disputes, and conflicts, especially for the borderland communities. A need for a clear, long-lasting and mutually acceptable border, which can help each side of the countries to avoid competent controversy over the ownership of land in the borderlands to allow long-lasting solutions to land conflict.

iv. **The Colonials Legacies and Foreign Interests:** Except Ethiopia, which successfully fought for the preservation of its independence and territorial integrity, almost all African countries are the creation of European colonialists (Wondwosen, 2009). Thus, dozens of boundaries across Africa have been demarcated by these colonialists (Temesgen, 2018). The British representing their colonies²⁰ signed various treaties such as the Ethiopia-Sudan, Ethiopia-Kenya and Ethiopia-British Somaliland boundaries in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century (Temesgen, 2018; Ikome, 2012). The various boundaries based agreements such as, the 1900, 1901, 1902, 1903, 1907 and 1909 were signed to definite the Ethio-Sudan boundaries (Mulatu, 2016). Many of these boundaries were drawn essentially according to the geopolitical, economic and administrative interests of the colonial powers (Miles, 1994; ACLED, 2021). These arbitrary and artificial boundaries delineated by European colonial powers were taken as one of the causes of periodic tensions between Sudan and Ethiopia.

For instance, the treaty signed on the 1902 Treaty also stated that the 1902 Addendum does not specifically abrogate the November 1901 agreement, and therefore, its claims on the Umbrega and Al-Fashaqa Triangles still stand (Mulatu, 2016). The 1902 treaty the frontier between the two countries---the Sudan government had sought the recognition of the Major Gwynn line. Major Gwynn was a British civil servant who placed large leaps of stones arbitrarily in demarcating the Ethiopian and Sudanese territory. Major Gwynn represented only one side since he had not been delegated any authority by the Ethiopian government to demarcate the boundary on its behalf (Alemayehu, 2019).

²⁰ Sudan, Kenya and British Somaliland

Britain appointed an Irish cartographer Major Gwynn and Captain Austin to conduct a preliminary field survey, Colonel Harrington and Menelik II signed the boundary agreement on 15 May 1902 in Addis Ababa, in which the terms of the agreement were concluded under five major articles (Wubneh, 2015). Article I of the treaty describe the stretch of the boundary from Khor Um Hajer in the north to Melile in the south, where the line passes through Gallabat, the Blue Nile, Baro, Pibor, Akobo as far as the intersection of six degrees north latitude and thirty-five degrees east longitude. Article II describes the issues of representation during the demarcation. It states that the demarcation of the boundary between the two countries would be commenced in the presence of representatives from the Ethiopian and British sides, while Article III provided Britain with exclusive rights for the utilization of the Blue Nile and its tributaries. Article IV and Article V define the British economic privilege over Ethiopia's western frontier territories (Alemayehu, 2019). Harrington started inducing Menelik II to accept a new frontier settlement proposal. On 22 April 1898, Harrington and the emperor discussed the Ethio-Sudan boundaries/borders in Addis Ababa. In the meantime, Colonel Harrington came up with a new proposal, drawing a line on a sketch map from Todluc to Melile. Accordingly, contested frontier areas such as Hamran, Kedaw, Gallabat, Debana, Dar Sumati, Dar Guba, Dar Gumuz, and Bella-Shangul remained in Anglo-Egyptian-Sudan (Alemayehu, 2019).

Likewise, the 1903 demarcation of the border is based on maps made by the Irish geographer Sir Charles William Gwynn, while serving as a military intelligence officer in Sudan following the British reconquest of 1898 (ACLED, 2021). In 1906, Britain, France, and Italy signed the secret Tripartite Treaty, which denied Ethiopia sovereign rights over the use of its own Nile waters (Mohammed, 2013). However, since lack of input from Ethiopian officials while the border was being surveyed by Gwynn and Austin has also been raised, as has reported pressure exerted on Emperor Menelik of Ethiopia by the Europeans to sign what some Ethiopians regard as an unfavourable agreement (Mulatu, 2016; Young, 2020).

These agreements led by colonial powers intentionally demarcated lands to Sudan which historically belonged to Ethiopia for a long time. Hence, many of these agreements were emphasized on the colonials' legacies and foreign interests were rejected by Ethiopian governments and people. This was because the representatives of the two countries had different understandings of the concept of the colonial agreements. Sudan has largely maintained that the colonial demarcation line drawn by Britain's officer Major Charles Gwynn in the 1902 Treaty should be the boundary between the two countries. Ethiopia, on the other hand, has always maintained that the boundary line drawn by Major Gwynn is unacceptable; because they were one party (Britain) with no representation of the demarcation unilaterally from Ethiopia (Mulatu, 2016).

Because of the arbitrary and artificial delineations of borders in African countries including Ethiopia and Sudan by European colonial powers without or with little knowledge of the local areas and interest in the political, social, and regional particularities, the local communities, dividing pre-existing and homogeneous ethnic groups, there have been increasingly frequent conflicts over land claims, boundary issues, and bitter political exchanges between Ethiopian and

Sudan governments and people. These arbitrary and artificial boundary demarcations were taken as one of the causes of periodic tensions between Sudan and Ethiopia. Therefore, despite, several high-level diplomatic meetings and 'exchanges of notes' taking place between the two countries to address the problem in the last 60 years were not fruitful. Hence, the present-day Ethio-Sudan border has been the source of competition, tension and conflict.

The Consequences of Ethio-Sudan Boundary Tensions and Conflicts:

Frontier claims and the quest for re-demarcations have been a hot agenda both in Ethiopia and Sudan since the late 1950s. The following points are some of the major results of the boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan on three frontlines.

- i. **Prejudices and Continuous Conflicts:** Developing prejudices and continuous conflicts are one of the major features and results of the boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan (Wondwosen, 2009). Many times, the demarcation between Ethiopia and Sudan was unilaterally carried out only by one side, leaving several resource-rich and strategic sites on the Anglo-Sudanese sides. In some areas, especially along Sätit-Humära and Metema, Major Gwynn intentionally left Ethiopia's land, 30-40 kilometres on the Sudanese side. To the north of this mountain, the virgin lands such as Mertrahid, Qulit, Askinet, Lominat, Forgena, Zinjero Gedel, Sigara Terara and Tiha were left to the Sudan. Neither the Ethiopian local people nor the government recognized the Sudanese claim for these territories (Alemayehu, 2019).

Between Ethiopia and Sudan, there has been developing mistrust and prejudiced attitudes in the border community in the border areas. These mistrust and negative attitudes are highly observed not only by the border people of Ethiopia and Sudan but also by the governments of the two countries. There are no health interactions and relationships at the border areas of the two countries. Particularity, the Sudanese expansion towards Ethiopian boundaries- Setit-Humera to Jebel Mutana, the Baro-Akobo Rivers in the Gambella area, and the Baro-Akobo area to Lake Turkana on the Kenyan border resulted the property destructors, displacements, and killing civilians, damages on crops, burning house, etc. For instance, the South Sudan militia groups have entered to Ethiopian border in Gambella region and occupied more than 200 square kilometres of the Ethiopian homeland and changed the name of one city on Google map, incorporated into South Sudan territory. Furthermore, one ethnic group in Gambella has been killed by South Sudan militia groups, and only 50-60 persons have left.

- ii. **Deaths and Bodily Injuries:** The form and intensity of land-based conflicts vary widely by place and over time within any location. Whatever the case, boundary and land-based conflicts often have extensive negative effects on human lives, and economic, social, spatial and ecological development (Okumu, 2010). Virtually all the countries in the Horn of Africa have been affected by problems arising from border crises leading to open conflict, displacement of millions of citizens and serious injuries and deaths (Mulatu, 2016). In Africa, cross-border conflicts have led to the loss of many human lives and the displacement of various groups (Ramsbotham & Zartma, 2011).

Likewise, the recurring boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan on three frontlines have resulted in the lives lost and bodily injuries of many individuals from both sides. The mobilization of the Sudanese forces along the Ethiopian border areas and the continuous violation of the status quo witnessed on the Sudanese side posed security threats to the frontier people of Ethiopia and territorial integrity. In response, the Ethiopian people have armed the local security forces and fought the Sudanese invaders (Alemayehu, 2019). These cross-border conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan resulted in deaths, property destruction, and displacement that negatively affected the development of infrastructures and the socioeconomic interactions of people on the border.

- iii. **Displacements and Property Destructions:** The loss of lives and bodily injuries, and the development of antagonistic attitudes and prejudices are not the only results of the recurring boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan on three frontlines. Rather it also brought displacements and property destruction. Conflicts over the use of land can also affect the overall social environment of the area and downgrade the harmonious relationship between the state and society when people believe that the state transfers land to outside (Temesgen, 2018). This means, that conflicts over land and natural resources often create new occupiers of land, as communities are forced to flee conflict others seize the opportunity to occupy their abandoned property, and Indigenous community members are displaced (Laura and Oei, 2011).

Africa Union Border Programme (2014) states that uncertainty over boundary alignment between Ethiopia and Sudan has resulted in displacements of people and property destruction, and reduces people's desire to invest in the borderland. The Ethiopian borderland people were seriously complaining that the Sudanese expansion towards Ethiopian territorial and original lands had resulted from the confiscation of property, displacements, killing of civilians, damage to crops, burning of houses, etc. (Alemayehu, 2019).

The Sudanese forces have continuously confiscated several tractors and several quintals of sesame and cotton, oil, and gold, imprisoned many Ethiopians, killed peasants and set fire to the peasants' houses in the Amhara region, particularly in Sätit-Humära frontier and Gambella region (Alemayehu, 2019). As literature indicated, there have been institutional, crops, livestock and property detraction due to the Ethio-Sudan boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan on three frontlines. Furthermore, the conflicts also resulted in arresting, killing and displacing civilian peasants living in the border areas on these frontlines.

The Remedies of Ethio-Sudan Claims and Conflicts:

Despite only a few of them being capable of managing the conflicts and bringing sustainable peace, governments in Africa have made many efforts to address trans-border conflict issues. Addressing land grievances and conflicts is fundamental to creating sustainable peace among neighbouring countries.

International boundaries that are clearly defined and well-managed are very important for good international relations, national and local security, efficient local administration and for using natural resources peacefully, collaboratively and efficiently (Pratt, 2006). In borderlands

of East African countries, the local capacity for peace depends on the joint effort of actors. That is regional institutions and bodies, sub-national governmental authorities and civil society, often a hybrid coalition of civic leaders, and the local communities and leaders (Temesgen, 2018).

Likewise, the solutions to the boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan are not to be found in any single action at any one level of the country. Rather, comprehensive interventions are needed at a range of levels, which address the various ways in which the problems have been caused. Furthermore, understanding formative histories is better than knowing the particular viewpoint of individual states and communities within regional boundary systems and being part of the peacebuilding process (Ramsbotham & Zartma, 2011). To do so, in the first place, fundamental structural problems must be solved. Because the two sides of the border have different political and legal systems, values and norms as well as cultural practices. This means too many players at multiple government levels exist in regions with conflicting goals and authorities (Temesgen, 2018).

In the same vein, the ICG (2002, p. iii) has proposed many principles that should be considered in any boundary demarcations. These include, unilateral border demarcations should be stopped; all demarcations should be transparent; official joint commissions should be established to facilitate demarcations; the local population should be consulted; consulates should be opened in border cities; border guards should be trained to stop or discourage corruption among them and customs authorities; map archives should be open; regional governors along the border should be granted a relatively free hand to deal with the social concerns of local populations in the disputed areas; ethnic minorities in border area should be protected; and boundary should be ratified according to the country's legal procedure (Wondwosen, 2009). The African Union (AU) has also recommended the following points to solve the boundary conflicts in Africa: collect positive examples of border dispute settlements as learning tools; identify the common interests of the actors on the borders; demarcation of international borders by the African Union Border Programme (AUBP) in consultation with the states and the borderland communities; and implementation of the strategy for enhanced border management in Africa (Weber, 2012).

Equally, the author of this paper has recommended the following points to bring sustainable and permanent peace to the boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan: first, higher-level concerned officials need to give due attention to the issue and the border re-demarcation. Second, the issue needs to be dealt with by local stakeholders who live on each side of the border landers intensively about the advantages, the process and its potential impacts. Third, the external and neutral observant should be involved at the time of boundary demarcations. Fourth, the distances of the demarcated places should be measured by modern measurements, such as miles, and kilometres, and the boundaries should be constant at any time. Fifth, the demarcation process should be participatory of both sides through their real representatives and they should agree on the issue. Finally, the demarcation process should be with full consent, common welfare and decisions of both Ethiopian and Sudan border communities.

Conclusions:

Although Ethiopia and Sudan, neighboring countries and share several common values and norms in their history, the border issue is still the source of hostility and conflicts between the two countries rather than cooperation on three frontlines. Both Ethiopia and Sudan have issued the speed possession of the frontier territories which had not yet been inhabited in the earlier years.

The long stretch of boundary, which they share, appeared as a hot agenda in Ethiopian and Sudanese politics since the 1950s. Following its independence in 1956, the Sudan government developed an aggressive policy towards the uninhabited sections of frontier territories of Ethiopia.

Hence, Ethiopia and Sudan have tried to define their boundaries on the three frontlines at different times. Borders in Africa were introduced during the colonialism Era by the colonial powers based on the colonist's interests and ambitions. Likewise, the delimitation of the boundaries between Ethiopia and the surrounding colonies was dictated mainly by the colonial powers' apprehension of the expansive potentialities of post-Adwa Ethiopia.

However, many of these agreements were unsuccessful, which led to hostilities and recurring conflicts between them. The colonial powers demarcated these boundaries based on their interests and ambitions without or with little knowledge, and without the consent and consultation of the local people. Not only the colonial era but also the boundaries of contemporary Africa are usually considered arbitrary due to their colonial origin. Hence, colonial and post-colonial history is one of the factors why a war/conflict is recurring between the two countries.

The frontier claims boundary tensions and land-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan on three frontlines have caused heavy destruction and allegations in the border areas. Developing prejudices and continuous conflicts, deaths and bodily injuries, displacements and property destructions etc. are some of the consequences of Ethio-Sudan boundaries tensions and conflicts. There are different factors for these recurring boundary tensions and resource-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan. Competing interests, the interests of regimes and rulers, lack of defined and clear boundaries, and colonial legacies and foreign interests are the major causes of Ethio-Sudan boundaries tensions and resource-based conflicts between Ethiopia and Sudan in three frontlines.

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