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Inter Institutional Alliances and Conflicts in Natural Resource Management

Preliminary Research Findings from Borana, Oromia Region, Ethiopia

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1 Introduction: Development and theoretical context

This paper presents the findings of research into the role of institutions in fostering community-based renewable natural resource management in post-conflict societies. The multiple terms in this research objective are significant: they are a consequence of the way in which, in real everyday situations, many different aspects of society and development are contingent on each other. Instead of studying each of these aspects in isolation, this research attempts to understand the way in which the different conditions and processes overlap, interact, and determine people's lives. This approach is particularly necessary in the context of attempts to work with communities and their environments, in post-conflict situations, in which communities may have experienced disruption of various kinds.

This research forms part of a DFID-funded project comparing the institutional dimension of community-based natural resource management in post-conflict Ethiopia and Mozambique. The part presented here focuses on the case of Borana, a mainly pastoralist area in southern Ethiopia. The local people there depend heavily on the local renewable natural resources of grazing land, forests and water. It is an area which has experienced intermittent conflict in the past, and a recent return of refugees.

The broad rationale for the research is that institutions are the key to successful, sustainable and appropriate development. They provide a tool through which the joint development goals of improved environments and human well-being can be achieved. But there is a need for a greater understanding of the nature of institutions and the role they can play in the construction of sustainable livelihoods and development. Development agents need to know better how to go about 'doing development' using institutions.

There are two more specific reasons for the focus on post-conflict areas: The first is that these areas are considered to be in particular need of development assistance. The people are thought to be vulnerable because of conflict or displacement, and without assistance, it is possible that tensions could quickly escalate and conflict could resume. This is particularly the case in pastoral areas; Scoones summarises the situation:

> Conflict and civil strife dominate many pastoral areas today at great social cost…

Such costs are borne most heavily by the residents of the pastoral areas, but also by national governments and the international community, who in a variety of ways bear the costs of insecurity and famine. Without a recognition of the problems of pastoral areas and support for development needs, problems of insecurity are likely to increase (Scoones, 1994: 3-4).

Development agents need to rise to the challenge of working in the conflict and post-conflict situations, to mitigate the immediate impacts of disruption and to assist people to reconstruct their livelihoods. The second reason for considering post-conflict areas is that in situations where the institutions governing people-environment relations are under duress, processes can be seen in action more clearly, and thus can elicit insights which improve our understanding of institutions more generally.

The research is situated therefore at the interface between three contexts of work in development studies. As it is concerned with the interaction between these principles and contexts, it is first important to discuss what is meant by each one in more detail. In the following I briefly examine what is understood by i) institutions; ii) conflict and post-conflict societies, and; iii) participation and community-based development.

i) Theorising Institutions

It has long been accepted that development has not just experienced difficulties because of technical problems, or a lack of know-how, but because of a lack of institutional capacity, and problems of organising who should participate in, contribute to, and benefit from, development projects (Crewe and Harrison, 1998; Chambers, 1997). The term social capital has been coined in order to draw attention to the importance of local organisational capacity, and has been portrayed as the missing link in development (Hariss, 1997). More recently, development thinkers have pointed to the need to understand the way in which institutions at different levels inter-link and impact on each other (Leach, *et al.*1997; 1999); and in the current climate of decentralisation, with an increased awareness of the role played by local level institutions, and their inter-relations with regional and national institutions, this has become even more important.

Institutions are organisations, but they also include the rules and regulations that determine access to natural resources. They define the access that a group has to natural resources, and they also define

who has rights within that group. Institutions determine who makes use of which resources. Individuals, groups and organisations are not all situated equally in relation to resource use, and institutions define their differentiated access and use. Above all, therefore, institutions are about power. They define who is using the resource (and who is not) and the extent of that use. Throughout Africa for example, men have more institutionalised rights (formal and informal) to natural resources, particularly land, than women.

In addition, institutions define the way in which the resource is used. Institutions are established practices, for example environmental management practices. Thus, institutions may be formal or informal. For example, in Ethiopia, formal institutions could include state-organised Peasants' Associations and Service Cooperatives, and state legislature determining access to land and water (and here I include the state-drawn boundaries to different areas). They are institutions backed up by official legislature. Informal institutions include kin networks, local cultural administrative structures (such as the Borana 'traditional' organisation that is described below), customary rights to resources, and indigenous practices of grazing and use of forests. Research (such as that of Richards, (1985); Fairhead (1992); Ostrom (1990); Chambers (1997); Warren *et al.* (1995); and others) have argued conclusively that informal institutions, particularly the body of indigenous practice and rights and regulations governing those practices, represent good environmental practice. They should not be given any less priority in development planning and practice than formal institutions.

Institutions are potential powerful tools of development because they are multifaceted, and because they act on both society and the environment. They change with society and also in response to changes in the environment. But the breadth, fluidity and power of institutions makes them difficult to understand. Other authors have struggled with this, and have developed complex and broad definitions of institutions. This research has employed the definitions and understandings from the 'entitlements framework' developed by Leach *et al.* (1997; 1999), and also drawn on insights from work on institutions and people-environment relations in a western or global context. For example, there is O'Riordan and Jordan's use of institution:

> The notion of institution applies both to structures of power and relationships as made manifest by organisations with leaders,

members or clients, resources and knowledge; and also socialised ways of looking at the world as shaped by communication, information transfer, and the pattern of status and association … [T]he notion of institution extends beyond organizational form, rules and relationships into more fundamental social and political factors that determine how people think, behave and devise rules through which they expect everyone else to play (1996:65).

Institutions are 'patterns of routinized behaviour' (O'Riordan and Jordan, 1996: 68) or 'regularised patterns of behaviour' (Leach *et al.* 1997). Institutions are not immutable: they shape behaviour, but are also shaped by the actions of individuals and groups. The institutions into which a person is born and through which he or she lives and understands the world constitute that person, but at the same time the person is able to work and change the nature of these institutions (Leach *et al.* 1997). Using Lukes' conceptualisation of power (Lukes 1986), institutions are both constraining and enabling structures; limiting, but also making possible different forms of social action and organisation.

The mechanics of institutions as structures of power can be examined more closely to illustrate how they are applicable to a context which is changing rapidly, such as a conflict or post-conflict situation. Here, institutions are not seen as existing in any a priori form, but as forms of discourse which have become institutionalised. There are discourses for each 'realm of social action', but there will also be different discourses held by different (and often competing) social groups, as these different groups relate differently to different discourses. Social actors do not exist outside of discourses, but it is through discourses that they practice and experience reality. Thus the different groups which Leach *et al.* (1997) describe as cross-cutting any 'community' differentiated by their different culture, racial, gender, class or regional identities and interests are likely to have different discourses, though some may be muted (Blaikie, 1995).

It is through the domination of different discourses and the control of these different discourses that social groups can become dominant over others - and legitimate their desired use of different resources. Applying this framework to institutions shows that there are multiple institutions overlapping and at work in any one setting. The way in which the institutions interact depends on their relative dominance, which varies from place to place, and also over time.

ii)   The conflict and post-conflict context

The second context of the research is that of conflict and post-conflict societies. In the developing world, and particularly in Africa, many societies are experiencing, or recovering from, conflict of one kind or another. Conflict used to be viewed by development agents and governments alike as a temporary anomaly, and it was thought sufficient to supply relief to a society until the perceived temporary emergency was over. After this time, development projects could be resumed. As conflicts have become more protracted in developing countries this thinking has been revised. The conflict and post-conflict situations are no longer simply seen as temporary emergencies needing short-term relief assistance. Many development groups have started programmes such as the 'war-torn societies project' (UNRISD), in order to give more long-term development assistance in times of conflict. Academic institutions have also responded to this new context: the number of Master's Programmes in conflict resolution has increased, and many development agencies are beginning to train their staff in conflict resolution skills (albeit for use on a small-scale). For development studies, conflict has put itself firmly on the agenda.

Related to this is the work on post-conflict reconstruction. Again in recent years, the approaches to dealing with refugees and understanding the social and environmental impacts of displacement have become more sophisticated, partly in response to the failure of more traditional and simplistic approaches. Conflict and post-conflict are stages separated in the mind for classificatory purposes, but on the ground they are linked. Post-conflict only exists by definition in relation to conflict, and the problems associated with a post-conflict situation are generally related to the experiences and conditions resulting from that conflict (displacement, trauma, fragmented societies, and so on). In a post-conflict situation, if the problems resulting from the conflict are not overcome, then the situation can easily deteriorate and return to a conflict situation.

The premise of this research is that conflict changes the institutional relations between people and the environment, and this change is usually, but not exclusively, negative. Displacement by war and conflict-related social transformations can disrupt established natural resource management patterns. They may be directly overridden by force: forests burnt, grazing lands and farms strafed or bombed, wells poisoned. Forests may be cut for building or

fuelwood to meet the needs of the protagonists of war. Conflict can also lead to a power vacuum on the ground: enforcement of the regulations and rules controlling the use of resources can break down, and local and other residents may seize the opportunity to exploit their environment unsustainably. Throughout Ethiopia this has been seen, as state-governed and other forests suffered serious depletion in the shadow of the chaos and conflict surrounding the change between different governments (in 1974 and 1991).

iii)   Participation and the community

The third context of this research is the need to think about and generate development which is more participatory. Participatory development is now *de rigueur* - at least in theory - in the sense of involving local people in the planning, decision-making, execution, and management of development projects. It is also becoming more common in the form of community-based development projects. At a broader scale, it is also part of the process of decentralisation of administration and politics that is taking place, particularly in Africa. This is particularly the case in Ethiopia, where the state has instigated an ambitious decentralisation programme, dividing the country into 14 semi-autonomous regional nations. There has been a general process through which attempts have been made to shift power - again at least in theory - from the central to the regional and then the local level. At present, the inclusion of participation in development is seen as a radical shift, improving development by making it more appropriate, sustainable, and locally empowering people. But there is a burgeoning literature on the pitfalls and paradoxes of participatory development (for example Cleaver, 1999; Mosse, 1994).

There is also an extensive body of work that looks at the difficulties of defining the community: on the ground, development agents (including those of the state) may rely on a rather simplistic notion of the community, as a geographically bounded and homogeneous group of people. Starting with such a notion means that sooner or later they are bound to experience difficulties. For example, in Mozambique, when interviewing government workers on their attempts at development with the community, one man said 'we wanted to work with the community, but when we went there, we found there was no community; the people were living all over the place' (Manica Province, 1999). Thus this attempt at community-based development fell at the first hurdle. The work of Agrawal *et al* (1999), and Leach *et al.*(1997;1999) has also illustrated how the

'community' is far from a unified group of similarly-minded individuals, but can be cross-cut by differences of gender, class, caste, race and ethnicity. A development initiative that does not take these differing interests into account may result in empowering one group over another, and this may lead to conflict at a later stage.

These three foci represent important directions in development thought and practice. The present research does not look at any one of them in isolation, but at how they are inter-related - as they are also on the ground.

The post-conflict situation is extremely complicated, and the broad definition of institutions, make this research ground extremely wide. Compounding this is the number of different ethnic groups in the region in question, and the many differences within these groups: there are those who were displaced during conflict, and those who were not; those who depend solely on pastoralism for their livelihoods, those who combine this with some agricultural activity, and others who depend entirely on agriculture; there are those who have a subsistence lifestyle, and those who trade; those who live in the rural areas, and those who live in towns.

In order to narrow the research ground and therefore make it feasible, I decided to focus on indigenous institutions in the region, and the role they play in the processes described above. I focused on the nature of indigenous institutions, their role in environmental management, and the way in which they are used (or not) by different development agents in the region as building blocks for post-conflict reconstruction and community-based development.

2   Indigenous Institutions as a Bridge to the Community?

Indigenous institutions, according to the definition above, are informal institutions. They include local cultural forms of organisation, for example locally elected, appointed, or hereditary leaders and elders, customary rules and regulations relating to access to resources, and indigenous practices and knowledge. All of these have been recently heralded as a valuable resource through which appropriate and sustainable development can be achieved. For example, Warren *et al.* (1995) have discussed how indigenous institutions provide a good administrative institution through which to achieve development. Customary rights to resources and tenure regimes were previously seen as rather

chaotic and often leading to environmental degradation (Hardin, 1968). Now they have been seen to be flexible and facilitating environmental management (Ostrom, 1990; Bruce *et al.* 1994). Indigenous practices and indigenous technical knowledge have been seen as highly adaptive to precarious and changing micro-environments. They are risk-averse and hence are highly suitable for many environments in developing countries (Richards, 1985; Fairhead, 1992). If these local resources can be harnessed, then it is thought that they can be the means through which local, empowering and sustainable development can be achieved.

It has already been seen how the idea of community-based development is attractive for development agents, but it is difficult to know how to go about this in practice. The alternatives are to create new institutions or strengthen exisiting ones. Attempts to create new institutions have been successful in many parts of Asia, especially with water-user's associations in irrigation development projects, but they do not seem to have been so successful in Africa. In Ethiopia, the communist government under Mengistu Haile Mariam created Peasants' Associations (PAs) and Service Co-operatives (SCs). These were grass-roots organisations with the aim of empowering the local people, but as participation was mandatory, these were not experienced by the participants as local empowering institutions, but institutions of control of the state. NGOs which have created institutions for administrative purposes have found it hard to escape from being tarnished with the associations of this history. One way to try to escape it, is to rely on the people themselves, and to turn to their own structures of organisation.

When I started work in Borana, I also encountered a strong rhetoric from the state and from the NGOs I interviewed, about the local Borana indigenous institutions. They praised the customary social organisation, regulations, and indigenous knowledge. They referred to the indigenous structures as institutions through which they could contact the community, and create a new, more positive development. This was partly a result of the uniqueness of Borana and its social organisation, and the history of development and intervention in the Borana region (see below). Given the body of literature (discussed above), the professed interest on the ground in working with indigenous institutions as a 'bridge' to accessing and enabling the community to help themselves, indigenous institutions seemed the most fruitful place to start the research.

The research in Borana also resonated with the research that was taking place in Mozambique. There, NGOs, and other agencies such as FAO, were encouraging the 'community' to carry out participatory mapping processes and employ new government legislation to convert customary land rights into formal land rights (communities could now register to be land-holders). These development initiatives involved identifying a community to work with and 'empower', and involved drawing a boundary around the unit which was to become the 'community' territory. Invariably, the starting point for this identification was the local traditional chief - the *regulo*. Thus here also indigenous institutions were also used as a bridge to the community, and the experience in Mozambique has already shown that this strategy for development, is far from unproblematic (West *et al.* 1999) but needs further research.

Other work on complex political emergencies, such as that of Harvey in Somalia (Harvey, 1997) has also illustrated how informal institutions can be more resilient than formal institutions in conflict situations, and hence may prove a more fertile ground to work with the community in the post-conflict situation.

In the remaining part of this paper I describe the region of Borana. First I introduce the people of the area and give some historical background to the intermittent conflict that has plagued the area. Then, I introduce the dominant indigenous institutions in the region, and look at why and in what way, when I first went to Borana in 1999, the state and the NGOs showed a strong commitment to working with indigenous institutions as a means to achieving development. Following this, I examine why, by the time I returned to Borana in 2000, the interest in indigenous institutions had waned, and why development agents and local people had become more sceptical about institutional partnerships of this kind. Finally, I will make some concluding remarks about what can be learnt about 'developing institutions' from this work in Ethiopia.

3 Borana Zone: location and people

Borana Zone is situated in the south of Ethiopia along the border with Kenya. The people of Borana are mainly part of the larger Oromo ethnic group, and since the decentralisation of Ethiopia along ethnic lines (post-1991), Borana Zone has been a sub-section of Oromiyya Region. This region is also known as Region 4 of Ethiopia. Borana Zone is divided into a relatively highland area, characterised

mainly by forest and agriculture, and a relatively lowland pastoral area. This research focuses on the lowland area. These areas are made up of stretches of grass-land with pockets of bush and forest. Increasingly, however, the grass-lands have been encroached by bush and agriculture. There are different sources of water in the area that vary throughout the year: wells; rain-fed ponds and reservoirs; seasonal surface water and rivers; and also bore-holes that have been built by NGOs or state bodies. Most important are nine deep wells, which contain water throughout the year. They are as old as the Borana's residence in this region (approximately 400 years) and sacred to them. These nine wells are known as the *tulaani saglaani* (Helland, 1997).

There are several different ethnic groups living in Borana Zone. The relationships between them are complex and changing and influence natural resource management in various ways. Though reviewing the different groups present is complicated, it is worthwhile as it avoids over-simplifying the situation on the ground.

According to Getachew Kassa, who has written extensively on this region, there are at least fifteen ethnically different pastoral groups living in Borana Zone. The identities of these groups, and the relations between them, are dominated by two larger encompassing ethnic identities: the Oromo and the Somali. These identities have become even more important since the post-1991 decentralization programme. This process has redrawn the boundaries of the region, and the area to the west, which is mainly inhabited by Oromo groups, is Borana Zone and part of Oromiyya Nation (Region 4). The area to the east, which is mainly inhabited by Somali groups, is part of the Somali Nation (Region 5). Despite this, there are Oromo and Somali speakers and ethnicities resident in Borana Zone.

Of the Oromo groups in Borana, the Borana are by far the most dominant group. There are also Guji and Arsi, though these are located more in the highland areas, and will be of less concern to this paper. In the lowlands, another Oromo group important to this research is the Gabbra, who are a minority group. There are two Gabbra groups, the Gabbra Miigo and the Gabbra Malbe. The Gabbra Miigo are the main Gabbra group in Ethiopia (Schlee, 1989). They are found in pockets in the region between Yabello and Agara Maryam, around Arero, around Moyale, and around Negele Borana. There used to be a population in the area between Wachile and Web, but these people are currently

displaced from that area, and are living around Arero, Moyale and Yabello (Surupa). Other groups in the region include the very small Waata Wondo, a marginalised group of craftspeople, who speak Oromo.

The Somali groups are also in a minority in terms of the numbers resident in Borana Zone, but they are significant and have a key influence on the natural resource management. The Garri are the most important group in relation to this research. They are resident in Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia. They are a Somali group, but they have many cultural links to the Borana (Schlee, 1989; Bassi, 1997; Getachew, 1996). The Garri who live in close proximity to other Somali groups speak Somali languages, and the Garri who live close to the Borana speak Oromo. Many of the Garri are bilingual, and their allegiance to Somali or Borana groups can vary over time. Although, in the final analysis, therefore, they are classified as Somali, they could be placed at a point between the Oromo and Somali groups. Ethnicity is not something necessarily clear or immutable, but the meanings and statuses attached to different ethnicities, and the alliances between them, are continually negotiated and redefined (Schlee, 1989).

The other main Somali groups in Borana Zone include the Digodi, Marihan, and Gurre. Minority groups in the region include Duriante and Shabelle. There are also very small groups who provide different services for the pastoralists. They are smiths, or make different crafts, or provide boat services. These include the Warrdube and the Bonta (Getachew Kassa pers. comm). There are also other people from other groups living here, most of whom are settlers and who live in and around towns. Most of these people are either traders or farmers. These include the Amhara, Gedeo, Burji and Konso.

All of these pastoral groups use different animals including donkeys, goats and sheep, but they are differentiated in terms of lifestyle and identity by their emphasis on cattle or camels as their main source of livelihood. The Borana rely mainly on cattle[1]. Recently they have started to keep more camels, but in the past and today, some Borana have been subject to ritual taboos which limits their camel keeping. The Gabbra, Garri and other Somali groups rely mainly on camels. The distinction is important, as the different groups can be described as being associated with cattle or camel-complexes respectively. This refers to the symbolic role that the animal plays in the group's sense of identity, social interaction, and the use of the animal in ritual exchange, for example for marriage payments.

Moreover, the reliance on these different animals has important practical implications because cattle need significantly more water and grass than camels. Cattle must be watered every two to three days, whereas camels can be watered after seven to fourteen days (Gufu, 1998a). Cattle also rely on grass, whereas camels, and other stock, forage leaves from bushes which are becoming more common.

The Borana reliance on cattle is made possible by their control over water sources in the area. Water sources are known as *mada*, and those who use the same *mada* form one organisational unit which is administered by the *aba mada* ('father of the *mada*') Water is the limiting resource in Borana, and so rights to grazing lands, units known as *dheda*, depends largely on access to the *mada* which is situated there. In the main therefore, the Borana control access to water and grazing land. This control is legitimized by their claims to be the descendants of the people who dug the wells. This is despite the fact that they may agree that the nine most important deep wells in Borana were present before the Borana came to this area and are sometimes said to have been dug by the Wardai people (Bassi, 1997). The Borana continue to claim the rights to the wells using their claims to have been the original excavators. At times, contested claims cause conflict, between the Borana themselves, and also with other groups (Gufu, 1998a). The Borana institutions for regulating access and use of resources are dominant in the region. Schlee (1989) refers to their powerful position in the area as a hegemony or overlordship.

4 Conflict: Inter-ethnic politics and natural resources

The dominance of Borana natural resource management institutions is related to their dominance as an ethnic group in the region. This dominance has not been unchallenged. It is beyond the scope of this paper to look at this in detail (Schlee, 1989, Bassi, 1997, and Getachew, 1996, provide thorough accounts), but since it relates to the conflicts that have taken place in the region, it is necessary to give a brief outline. Quotes have been used here from interviews, to illustrate how local people relate to this history today. When quotes

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[1] The Borana used to raise horses also and take great pride in this activity. Horse rearing was outlawed by Menelik, as they were seen literally as war-horses, enabling the Borana to wage war against their neighbours. There are horses in Borana, but they are not as common as they used to be.

have been used, the group of origin of the speaker is also indicated, as not unsurprisingly the different groups have different perspectives on the situation.

Over the last one hundred years, the Somali groups have encroached further west and into the lands of the Borana, and this has led to conflict over access to the wells and grazing lands (Bassi, 1997; Schlee, 1989; Hogg, 1997). At times there have been alliances between the Garri and the Borana, and as part of this alliance the Borana have allowed the Garri to use water and grazing lands, but their rights have always been secondary. Bassi describes the historical struggle over resources as the '*leit-motiv*' of relations between the Garri, Gabbra, and Borana, in this area (1997: 29).

Bassi also describes the way in which the historical competition between these groups was shaped by, and shaped, the nature of conflict between larger political powers: the Italians recruited Somalis (including Garri) to carry out their invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Through this collaboration, the Somali groups were able to benefit from the supply of arms they received from the Italians, and use this superior weaponry to consolidate their access to, and control over, areas which had until then been Borana (Bassi, 1997; Getachew, 1996; Helland, 1997; 1998; Hogg, 1997).

During this historical struggle the Gabbra have occupied a very ambiguous position. They have used the institutions that they have in common with both the Garri and the Borana to build alliances with both groups at different times. The majority of the Borana and Gabbra that I interviewed in this research said that the Borana and Gabbra have always lived together and share resources:

> The Borana and Gabbra live together. They share difficulties and they share successes. They have disputes but it is not common (Liban Jaltesa, future Borana *aba gada*, 18.7.00).

> In Borana's land, wherever there are Borana there are Gabbra. They don't have any other language other than Borana. They don't have a Gabbra vernacular. They know no other land than Borana. They own no other land other than the one we share. What differentiates them is their speciality in breeding camels, whereas the Borana breed cattle, horses, goats and sheep... Those who depend on cattle and other animals need water and grass, their animals are more thirsty. Camels are

resistant and can go without water more than the others. The Borana therefore dig ponds to collect water, and the ponds are owned by the original digger. The Gabbra don't dig ponds or wells. They usually ask for permission from the Borana to use them and it is usually given automatically (Guyu Dida, Borana man, 24.7.00).

This is the dominant view: that the rights to water (and therefore grazing land) are legitimately in the hands of the Borana, and that the Borana share them with the Gabbra through generosity. This discourse portrays the two groups as living harmoniously together and sharing resources. This also explains and legitimises the larger share of the resources that the Borana claim. Narratives are also used to give support to this viewpoint, particularly stories of cases of mutual cooperation. One example of this is when the Gabbra helped the Borana to restock after a black-fly epidemic in the 1880s which wiped out most of their animals (Borbor Bulle, Borana, 26.7.00; Maleb, Moyale, Gabbra, 24.7.00). The Borana and Gabbra build alliances by emphasising the institutions that they share: the Gabbra speak Oromo and share many aspects of the Borana social organisation. Both the Gabbra and the Borana have *aada* and *seera*- a sacred and profane set of laws governing behaviour and maintaining peace and order in society, and they also have *gada* - the generation grade system and its elected leader, the *aba gada*.

Despite the strength of this discourse it is clear that it is not accepted by all Gabbra, and that this has led to the disputes mentioned by the *aba gada* above. Quite a different account emerged in interviews with some Gabbra people, but only when there were no Borana people present. For example, a group of men in one Gabbra settlement explained in relation area known officially as Borana:

> When you talk about the territory of the Borana and the Gabbra, you always say Gabbra-Borana. You first mention the Gabbra, then the Borana, which gives the Gabbra precedence, as they were entitled to the land before the Borana... When you talk about Gabbra and Borana, and when it comes to control of water wells, the Borana control all the wells, but they control them with the consent of the Gabbra (Surupa 1: 20.7.00)

This seemed to contradict the dominant viewpoint. Again, another group of Gabbra men in the same area said:

You have been told that the Borana and the Gabbra use the grazing land and the wells equally, but when you go to the centre of Borana you still find Borana that are hostile to the Gabbra. So we prefer to stay on the fringes of the area. If you are in the midst of Borana, if a Borana finds a little Gabbra child looking after young goats and lambs, the Borana will not hesitate to kill him, not even taking the animals! Even when there is peace he will kill the child and cut the penis, and take it home and wear it as a ring on his finger. He will grow his hair long [to show his status as a man who has killed] and show everyone his trophy. The Gabbra will also do this; in revenge they will do it. (Surupa 2, Gabbra, 29.7.00)

Such practices were traditional warring practices between groups (Schlee, 1989), and it is not surprising to hear hostile feelings about the Borana's 'hegemony' articulated along these lines. These comments were made in a group interview, and following them, the man responsible for them was berated. The others present did not deny what he had said, but they told him to be quiet because 'now he had said too much'. This suggests that they did not disagree with what had been said, but that they felt these things should not be discussed openly, at least not with a stranger.

It illustrates that the Borana control the resources in the region, and that there is some sharing of resources, but that this is not totally amicable. There are many different discourses and institutions that come into dominance at different times and in different conditions. Joint resource access is managed through institutions in the context of an uneasy truce.

It is this uneasy truce that has flared up into conflict intermittently. Over the last 10 years, there has been a great deal of conflict. Here, the power of political struggles at different levels to impact on each other is evident, as it was at the time of the Italian invasion. For example, in 1991, Siad Barre's regime in Somalia fell and many Somali people, including Garri, were displaced to Ethiopia and Kenya. Some fled to refugee camps, others simply crossed the borders with or without animals, and tried to continue their lives in this new area. Many of them were heavily armed. This process brought a new wave of Somali people to the region, and pushed the existing ones further west into Borana territory (Helland, 1998). The Garri and other Somali groups gained new control over territory and wells, and this control has since been consolidated, partly by the redrawing of the boundaries of the new administrative regions (Getachew, 1996; Bassi, 1997). Resources that were shared between Borana, Gabbra and Garri (albeit on Borana terms, see later) are now only used by one or two of these groups. As a result, the Borana, the Garri and other Somali groups have been fighting over these resources. Most of this fighting has been concentrated in the areas where Region 4 and Region 5 meet.

With this regional political context in mind, I turn to the Borana indigenous NRM institutions. These have been dominant in the past, and still dominate in the main areas of Borana Zone where there are substantial numbers of Borana people.

5 Borana Rangelands and Indigenous NRM Institutions

Borana has been viewed in the past as an extremely productive rangeland. For example, Scoones writes,

> the pastoral Borana system has higher returns of both energy and protein per hectare compared to industrialized ranching systems in Australia. Australian Northern Territory ranches only realise 16% of the energy and 30% of the protein per hectare compared to the Borana system (1994: 12).

Such praise is commonplace when discussing Borana, for example, Huqqe Garse:

> The rangeland belongs to reportedly the best, most productive rangelands in Eastern Africa, as well as in Ethiopia. This is due to its high potential, the famous Borana cattle breed and the competence of the pastoral livestock keepers (1999:1).

There is a strong agreement in the academic and development literature, and the opinions of those interviewed, that the Borana rangelands represent a case of an exceptionally efficient and well-managed dry-land area. This is considered to be because of the richness of the natural resources, the skill (or indigenous knowledge) of the Borana, and the wealth of Borana institutions and their capacity to regulate access to the resources.

Rainfall in Borana varies from 450mm to 700mm per annum. It falls in two seasons, a long rainy season (*ganna* - March to May) and a short rainy season (*hagaya* - September to November). The water sources available vary in the seasonality of their water, and also in the rights and regulations which apply to the use of their water. These can be

divided into different types (drawing on Huqqe Garse's summary for names and descriptions [1999:11]):

Most important sources which are highly regulated by indigenous institutions:
- Deep water wells, which supply water most consistently. These are divided into two kinds, *adadi* (shallow wells) and *tulla* (deep wells). The deep *tulla* wells are famous because they can reach a depth of 30m, and water is drawn by as many as 21 people standing one above another and passing containers of water. They sing as they carry out this hard and cooperative labour, and hence these wells are sometimes referred to as the singing wells.
- Hand-dug shallow ponds known as *harro*.

Additional sources, where access is mainly opportunistic:
- 'Natural' ponds containing water throughout the year known as *boke*.
- Surface water and river water.
- Temporary ponds
- Collections of rainwater

New water sources constructed by NGOs and state organisations. The access to these sources varies, but in the main they are characterised by poor institutional development and little regulation of access. In some cases, rights to the water has been privatised and is sold by individuals or groups. The increase in water sources has led to pressure on the surrounding grasslands and degradation (Boku, 2000; Gufu, 1998a):
- Machine-dug ponds
- Boreholes with diesel, hand or solar pumps.
- Underground water cisterns.

The first group of water sources is most important, and as it is regulated by indigenous institutions, it is what is of most concern here. Ponds (*harro*) are the property of the individuals who initially excavated them, or their direct descendants (Gufu, 1998a). This person is called *aba konfi*. Rights to use the pond are obtained by providing labour for the maintenance of the pond. Although the property of the *aba konfi*, the pond is administered by local elders (Gufu, 1998a).

The wells (generally referred to as *ella*) are highly regulated. At each water source (*mada*), there are several wells, often referred to as a cluster. Overall, there are about 75 well complexes throughout Borana (Gufu, 1998a). *Adadi* wells are shallow wells in sandy river beds. *Tulla* wells are deep wells cut through limestone rocks. The nine deep well

complexes are at Dubluq, Melbana, Erdar, Gayo, Dh'aas, Borbor, Iggo, Goof and Lae. Wells are the property of the descendants of the person who initially started to dig that well - again the *aba konfi* - and each well is associated with the clan (*gosa*) of that *aba konfi*.

The well is the property of the *aba konfi*, but the day-to-day administration of the well is carried out by a person appointed by the *aba konfi* and his clan. This man is known as the *aba heryriga*. His job is to make sure there is no conflict over the use of the water and to take appeals from people who would wish to come and use the water. He is assisted in this work by *hayu* - individuals who hold ritual authority to judge.

There is a complex web of entitlements that enables an individual to gain access to water from any particular well and the turn that that person is given in the rota of watering animals. It depends on the membership of the clan (*gosa*) of the *aba konfi*, and contribution to the labour of constructing the well. Animals are watered according to a strict rota: the *aba konfi*, the *aba heyriga*, and then other clan members according to their seniority in the clan. A turn in the rota can also be obtained by someone who is not a member of the clan if he has good relations with the *aba konfi* and also if he provides a bull or bulls to slaughter when the well is being dug. This allows the elders to bless the well and also feeds the labourers.[2]

In addition to these entitlements, the Borana have a set of laws called the *aada seera*, in which it is forbidden to deny someone water, or to ask them to pay for it. The *aada seera* (Borana laws) are rehearsed at a meeting that is held every eight years in Borana. This meeting is known as the *Gumii Gaayo* ('meeting of the multitude'). In the last *Gumii Gaayo* Assembly that took place in 1996, Gollo Huqqa (a Borana man working for EECMY/NCA) wrote down and published some of the decisions and discussions that took place. On the 'Rules about Water Wells' he writes (his spelling of terms has been retained but should not cause difficulty):

> The clans and *abba konfii* (the man who first scratched the ground there) have precedence over owning the *eelas* (water wells) and ponds. On the other hand, all the Booran have the right to water their livestock at any water wells, provided there is sufficient water in the water wells and agreements reached with *abba errega* (the 'overseer')' (Golloo Huqqaa, 1996: 43).

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2   Digging a well is a ritual process as well as hard labour.

This was confirmed for me by another Borana man in Moyale, who described the normative rules by which the Borana regulate water access:

> There are *ella*s (wells) which were dug by Borana with their own hands. Every Borana clan (*gosa*) must have its own *ella*, and these *ella*s will have a clan in control of it. Although each *gosa* has its own *ella*, and the control is in its hands, every man - including Garri and Somali, even a white man - will be allowed to use that water. Even the trough cannot be left empty so that the hyenas and lions can come and drink there. But the control is with one person and there are regulations regarding water, and if you overstep this you will have to answer' (Guyu Dida, 1999).

These regulations give secondary rights to water to groups such as the Garri and the Gabbra. Those who have official access should have enough when they need water. Others who depend on what is often locally referred to as 'begging', can not rely on this for regular or sufficient amounts of water.

The *aada seera* illustrate something of the nature of the indigenous institutions in Borana. They are rehearsed with both regularity and rigour, and this makes it inappropriate to describe them as informal: indeed the formal-informal dichotomy breaks down. For Borana people, the *aada seera* are formal institutions, supported by formal networks of kin, institutionalised in meetings and ritual. Cooperation and friendship are less prescribed and formal, but are also important in determining access to resources.

In addition to the *aada seera,* the Borana have an integrated set of organisations that regulate access to land, water and forests. As one interviewee who was part of local governmental organisation put it:

> They [the Borana] have a strong institutional structure, with good linkages from the President who is *aba gada*, so down to the grass roots. At every level they know what to do and what their duty is' (Atalaw, SORDU, 2000).

Each of these levels of organisation corresponds to a level of organisation: household, settlement, neighbourhood, watershed, grazing land, and Borana region. This structure from the micro to the macro of Borana organisation is sometimes represented as a set of concentric rings with the *aba*

warra at the micro level, and the *aba gada* at the regional (see Huqqe Garse, SOS Sahel, 1999). At each level there is a designated decision-maker, or set of decision-makers. All of these decision-making offices are held by men. Here, each level of organisation is described, and then their spatial relationship is shown schematically, in diagram 1 below:

Warra - the *warra* is the household. It is administered by the male head of the household, the *aba warra*, which literally means the 'father of the house'. The *aba warra* takes decisions about when and where animals should be grazed, and when and to where the household should move.

Olla - the *olla* is the smallest level of settlement. It consists of between 30 and 100 *warra*s. The head of the *olla* is called the *aba olla* ('father of the *olla*), who is usually the first man to have founded that *olla* - or the senior descendant of the person who is considered to have done so. The *aba olla* is responsible for the well-being of those resident in that *olla*. He decides, in consultation with the other men in the *olla*, if and when and to where the *olla* should move. If someone comes from another area he may ask to join this *olla*, and the *aba olla* will decide whether or not this is possible.

Arada - this is a small group of *olla*s - usually two or three only, who may cooperate together in their grazing patterns. They may jointly delineate and fence-off an area called the *kalo*. The *kalo* is for grazing calves and must not be used except when grazing in other areas is extremely scarce.

Mada - is the area surrounding one water source. It refers to the area used for grazing by all those who use the water source, and all the people who use that water source. The *aba mada* is the authority at this scale of administration. He is the most senior male descendant of the man who originally found and excavated that water source. As he owns the water source, he has first rights to it. He can decide who can, and cannot use the water source. Related to this is the *aba konfi* (described above). The *mada* unit was used as a defining unit for Peasant Associations (PA) when they were set up following the 1974 revolution. This has had a great impact on Borana. Previously pastoralists were free to move around Borana, and could join a new *mada* if they asked and the *aba mada* agreed. Now they are registered with a PA, and this limits their movement somewhat. The establishment of the PA committees has also been seen as challenging the authority of the indigenous structures and weakening them (see below).

Dheda - this is the wider unit of grazing which is used by different *olla*s and *arada*s. The satellite grazing camps of different *warra* (known as *fora*) may cut across the boundaries of different *dheda* in their pursuit of grass for their animals (Gufu, 1998). Opinion is divided as to whether the administrator of this unit of resource access is a council of elders (known as the *jarsa dheda*), as in Gufu Oba's analysis (1998), or one person (an *aba dheda*) as in the work of Sorra Adi (of GTZ). It is possible that this varies throughout Borana. Whether one person or a council, it is the level of administration that governs the use of grazing lands and protects from over-grazing. It also seems probable that this decision-making body has been badly hit by changes in grazing following the establishment of new water sources, and new PA committees, and it has become less important.

The size of the *mada* and *dheda* may vary and the boundaries may overlap. Thus the *dheda* may be the largest unit, or the *mada*.

The **yaa** and **aba gada** - the *yaa* and the *aba gada* can be summarised as the governing body of Borana. The *aba gada* is a man who is elected to lead the Borana, and the *yaa* are his councillors and messengers. Each *aba gada* and his *yaa* members are in power for eight years, then they hand over to the next incumbents. This corresponds to the length of a generation grade (*gada*) in Borana. When one generation grade passes through to the next, then the members of this Borana-wide 'governing body' changes also. The *aba gada* and the *yaa* are responsible for upholding the *aada* of Borana. Helland translates the *aada* as 'the Borana way', and as the 'peace and order' of the Borana. The *aada* is difficult to translate, as it contains moral ideas about good behaviour and specific prescriptions about mundanities like dress, grazing practice and water rights. The latter are embodied in the set of rules and regulations, the *aada* and *seera*, or *aada seera* discussed above. The *aba gada* and *yaa* are also
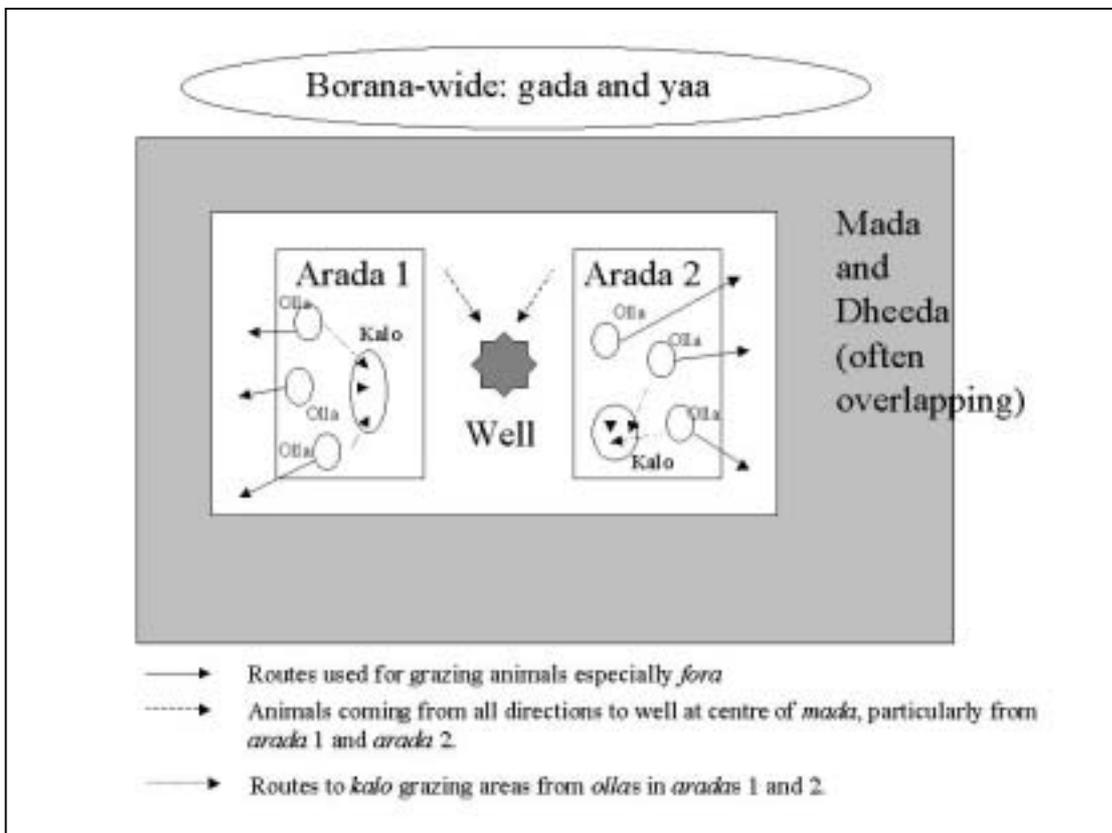
sacred, however, and while they are in office their settlement (also known as the *yaa*), moves from one sacred place to another, following a pre-ordained path. At each sacred place they perform a ritual of sacrifice, singing and dancing. Through these rituals they also protect the *aada* and the *nagaya* Borana (peace of the Borana) and hence ensure the well-being of all Borana.

The *aba gada* and *yaa* are appointed at the *Gumii Gaayo* Assembly that takes place mid-way through the term of the *yaa*. At this meeting the matters of concern to the Borana are discussed, the *aada seera* are rehearsed, and anyone who has violated the *aada* is punished.

The *aba gada* is seen as the figure-head of the whole of Borana, and is often described as the President. As well as performing rituals, matters are referred to him and his council when a decision cannot be reached at a lower level. When conflict breaks out between *olla*s or *arada*s, or *mada*s, then the *aba gada* will rule on the case. If there is conflict between ethnic groups, then he will be called in to help make peace. As the *aba gada* is responsible for dealing with matters of concern to the Borana, and as matters of concern are often related to access to the resources of forests, land and water, the *aba gada* is the highest level of institution of natural resource management in Borana.

Diagram 1: Borana Institutions from Macro to Micro
This diagram has been drawn from a summary of interviews with development workers of SOS Sahel (particulary Huqqa Garse) and SORDU (particularly Atalaw), from the project documents of GTZ Borana Pastoral Development Programme, and from participatory mapping processes that were carried out with Borana people in the field.

Routes used for grazing animals especially *fora*

Animals coming from all directions to well at centre of *mada*, particularly from *arada* 1 and *arada* 2.

Routes to *kalo* grazing areas from *ollas* in *aradas* 1 and 2.

Natural resource access is governed by the combination of these different institutions in operation at different levels. Each of these natural resource management institutions, are also conflict resolution institutions. They are therefore uniquely placed to assist in tackling the inter-linked problems of the environment, welfare, and conflict.

All of these institutions are male institutions. Women cannot hold any of these positions. They therefore have no official influence over the decisions, but they have unofficial ways of influencing decisions or actions. Women are far from powerless in this society. They have full authority over all the food (meat, milk and grain) that is brought into the house (*warra*). After the food has crossed the threshold, a woman can decide what to do with the food, to feed her children, her husband or to sell the food. I was told that it is not uncommon for a husband to be refused food by a wife because she is unhappy with him for one reason or another. If a woman should persist in underfeeding her husband, then the husband will take his wife to the court of the elders, or to the *aba gada*, who will rule that she should feed him well in future. In addition, it is common practice among the Borana for women to take lovers after they have married, sometimes with the husband's permission. When discussing this with Borana women they said, 'it is good to take lovers, because whenever your husband refuses to give you what you want, then you can ask your lover for anything (Daabo Malicha, 2000).

6 Development Organizations and the Idealization and Denigration of Indigenous Institutions

In 1999 and 2000 there were several non-governmental organizations and governmental organizations involved in long-term development projects. The NGOs included CARE, SOS Sahel, EECMY working together with NCA (Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekana Yesus and Norwegian Church Aid), Save the Children US, Action for Development, COOPE, and a Catholic Mission. State organisations include the Southern Rangelands Development Unit (SORDU), the Ministries of Agriculture and Administration, the Administration for Resettlement and Refugee Affairs (ARRA). There were also bilaterial organisations: GTZ, the German Technical Cooperative Organisation, was working in partnership with the Oromiyya Regional Bureau for Agricultural Development. This joint programme, known as the GTZ/ Borana Lowland Pastoral Development Programme (GTZ/BLPDP) was prominent and influencing the direction of development in the area more broadly. UNHCR also had an office in Moyale. All of these groups were interviewed at least once during the research.

The situation in 1999 differed markedly from that in 2000. This was because of the drought that began to result in food shortages towards the end of 1999, and which became severe in 2000. CARE, who were winding-up their operation in 1999, re-opened their offices in the region in order to run food

distribution programmes. They combined this with the commencement of a new five-year development initiative, aimed at tackling the problems associated with long-term food shortages. In 1999, SOS Sahel were starting up a new 'collaborative forest management project' in the region. Many of their long-term development initiatives had to be shelved as they responded to the immediate food and relief needs of the local population. This was also the case for many of the other NGOs; new NGOs also came into the region simply to run famine-relief projects. This context of the research is not exceptional for Borana region, as droughts and the need for famine-relief are unfortunately not unusual.

In the first phase of the research (1999), interviews with state and NGO development agents, the majority expressed a keen interest in developing approaches to working with the community. When I asked how they were going to do this, several of them stated that the indigenous institutions were highly effective and valuable, and could be used to 'access' the community. There was a definite feeling of hope and positive identification with the institutions. On my return to Borana in 2000, I found that this positive attitude had given way to scepticism. I understood this as being either because the experience of working with indigenous institutions in the period between the field visits had led them to re-evaluate their thinking, or because on my second visit I found the situation to be more complex than it had first appeared.

Whichever was the case, the indigenous institutions were still discussed in terms of a golden age of Borana rangeland management. But in addition to this, in many cases, there was also a subsequent denigration of these institutions: they were seen as having been tampered with and having out-lived their usefulness. The development agents' discourse about indigenous institutions had two themes: the institutions were either idealised or denigrated, and this influenced the use to which they were put, and the alliances and partnerships that were formed in the name of development.
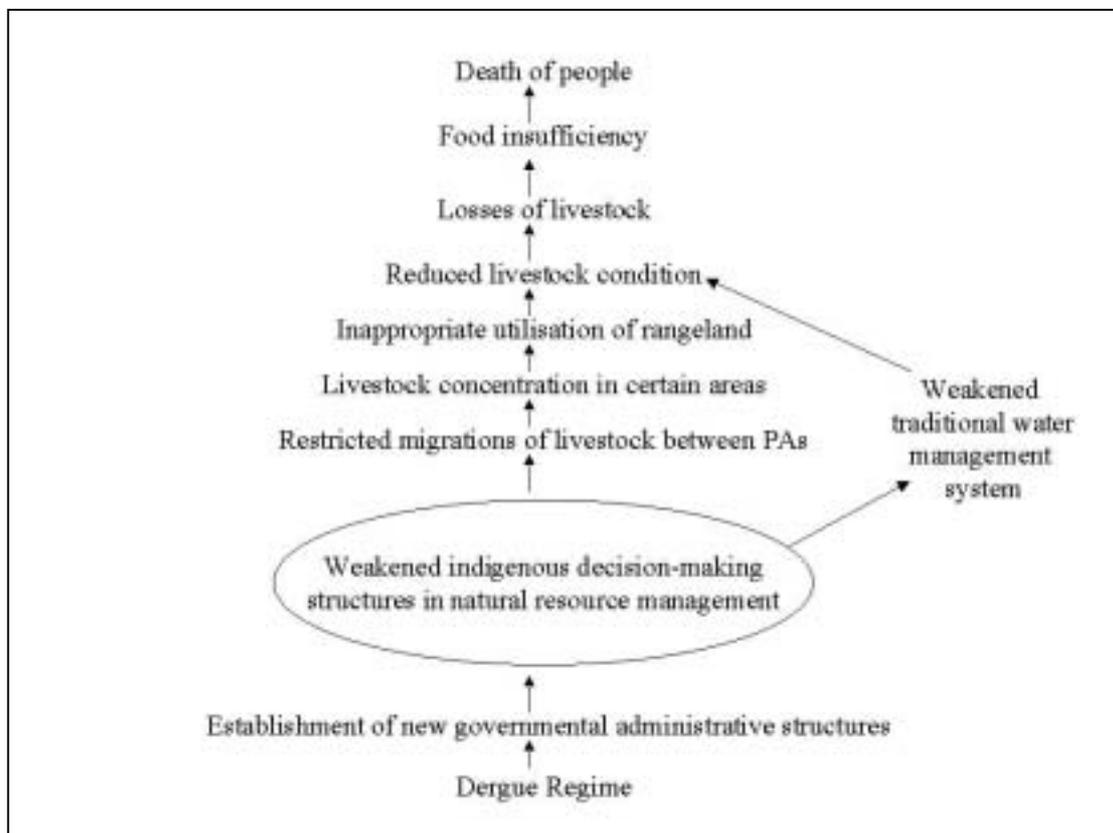
The idealisation of indigenous institutions was partly because of the history of development practices in the region. This was characterised by the failure of top-down development practices in the region, which were technology-centric and resulted in serious environmental degradation and the undermining of livelihoods (Gufu, 1998a). In reaction to this, the indigenous institutions began to be seen as a ready-made set of participatory structures, which if they could be integrated into development, would assist in the process. For example, one NGO officer comments:

> The Borana resource management, social and economic systems must be appreciated and considered as a good example of intelligence, coordination, determination and coherence in achieving the maximum possible in pastoral productivity and ecological balance (Huqqe Garse, SOS Sahel, 1999: 4)

But, there was the notion that the top-down development practices had destroyed an effective set of management practices, and if they could be recovered and strengthened then it would lead to more efficient practices (Helland, 1998).

GTZ/BLPDP is a good example of this rhetoric and approach. For them, the indigenous institutions had been undermined by the establishment of Peasants' Associations (PAs) during the Derg times (Ethiopian government 1974-1991). According to one influential development worker at GTZ, this parallel set of organisation and administration had led directly to problems for the Borana. He drew this flow diagram:

Diagram 2: Flow diagram of Causes and Effects of the Problem of Weakened Indigenous Decision-Making Structure in Natural Resource Management, Sorra Adi, 1999.

In 1999, in a group meeting with GTZ and government agricultural officers, they told me that they aimed to work with the community. When I asked how they went about doing this, they said:

> we support traditional institutions and organisations like the *gada*. Peasants' Associations were imposed during the Dergue regime (1974-1991) and bypass tradition and the elders. We do not work with the PAs or the PA chairman (GTZ, 4.6.99).

Around this time GTZ had also commissioned a consultant, Gufu Oba, who undertook an 'Assessment of Indigenous Range Management Knowledge of the Booran Pastoralists of Southern Ethiopia' (1998a). The first recommendation of this report was the promotion of indigenous natural resource management (1998: iv).

I was also lucky to be able to attend a meeting where GTZ consulted the elders about their programme. The in-coming *aba gada* was also present, and he was consulted in this meeting. At the same time as these overtures towards the indigenous institutions, many organisations (including SCF-US; SOS-Sahel; GTZ/BLPDP;

SORDU) were carrying out participatory rural appraisal programmes, and working with elders and other indigenous institutions (such as *aba mada* and

aba olla) in the process. There was a general feeling of a turning towards indigenous institutions, improving knowledge about them, and integrating them into the development process. It was thought that this was a way in which people could be empowered, included in the development process, and environmental and human welfare could be improved.

In 2000,there was a significant change in approach: the hopes that had been linked to indigenous institutions had diminished. The narrative that had idealized indigenous instituions wsa replaced by a narrative that emphasised that the institutions had been interfered with and undermined to the extent that their potential as tools for community-based development in this context was low. This was expressed by workers of GTZ, SOS Sahel, CARE, and the government; agencies which had seemed to feel that they held so much promise before.

GTZ/BLPDP, in particular, seemed to have become more uneasy about directly approaching the indigenous institutions. In their development programme they were setting up natural resource management committees, but they now stated that they did not want to influence the membership of these committees to ensure that indigenous institutions had a place on them. In order to set up their NRM committees, they said that they were approaching everyone in each *mada* and asked them to elect representatives for the new committees.

The result of this process was that the members tended to include the elders, but also the PA Chairperson and committee members. In the interview with the GTZ workers, one man explained how this was a positive development because the PA chairperson tended to be 'young and of good conduct' (S. 2.8.00):

> Most of the PA officials are young, and they have much to say. The *aba olla*s are elders, and they don't have much to say on development issues (S. 2.8.00).

As the meeting continued, it became clear that they felt that the indigenous institution had been changed so much that it no longer had the same potential:

> we don't try to bring back the traditional system. If the community thinks the traditional system is functioning then well and good, but if not then no. It is difficult to bring back the traditional system. Things have already turned 180° - it doesn't make sense to try and turn it back again (2.8.00).

In contrast to what they had said before, they commented that it was not desirable to by-pass the PA administration. GTZ, as a bilateral organisation, is working in partnership with the government, and they should therefore work with the local level of government, the PA.

In 2000, not all organisations had moved away from using indigenous institutions. The extent of the scepticism towards them varied: SOS Sahel agreed that the institutions had been weakened, but still hoped to 'catalyse the traditional institutions to work in the modern context' (B. Irwin, Borana Programme Director, 2000). This would involve working with both indigenous institutions and modern state structure such as the PA. SCF-US also set up NRM committees with a high component of indigenous institutions but also 'adding women'. SCF-US hoped to build on the potential of indigenous institutions, but also improve the position of women in the society by giving them a voice in the decision-making process. During the field research, this particular innovation could not be seen in action, but its outcome will be very interesting.

In 2000, the drought and conflict meant that many of the long-term, and more innovative, development practices were shelved. It is possible to identify that the scepticism that developed towards the potential of indigenous institutions was rooted in an assumption that strengthening indigenous institutions simultaneously involves undermining the PA and other local government structures. These feelings were particularly strong among bilateral and government organizations, who are by definition involved in maintaining and strengthening a functioning local governmental structure. There are some reasons to think, however, that this assumption should not be simply taken for granted.

These interpretations of the situation, hinged partly on viewing the PA structures at a local level, and the indigenous institutions as incompatible and involved in their own struggles over power and resources. This to some extent is true: there can be a conflict of interests for example when decisions must be made over various matters. For example, there are cases of individuals bringing a case for ruling to the elders. If that person does not like the decision that is made, then he may take it to the PA committee, in the hope that a different decision is made. This may undermine the authority and the position of both the elders and the committee, and may put them in conflict with each other. But there are also cases where the PA committees, and the indigenous institutions (elders, *aba olla*, *aba mada* and so on) cooperate and work together. This needs more research but the field visits in 1999 and 2000 indicated such a situation. During visits to different *olla*, informal focus group discussions were held, and frequently the *aba olla*, the elders, and also the PA Chairman were present. They discussed matters together and seemed to be able to reach agreement on different issues. In one *olla* I visited several times, the PA Chairman was the younger brother of the *aba olla.* They appeared to have a strong alliance and division of tasks which worked to their mutual advantage. On two occasions I watched rulings being made in this community: on the first, a young boy was being tried for stealing a camel; on the second a man was being fined for grazing his animals on land that the *olla* had reserved and had not yet agreed to use. On both occasions the PA Chairperson made the ruling together with elders, but the *aba olla* presided more generally over the proceedings, and it was the *aba olla* I was directed to, to ask for permission to enter the *olla* and talk to the residents.

It seems that the indigenous institutions and the state institutions at a local level, rather like the different ethnic groups discussed in section 3, are quite capable of building alliances and working together. It should not be assumed that they are necessarily in opposition or incompatible. In

addition, it should not be assumed that if the indigenous institutions change, then that means that they are eroding or becoming useless. They also have the ability to adapt and meet new challenges. An approach that sees the indigenous institutions and the local state institutions as being in opposition has to be careful of making this into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Instead, development organizations have a role to play in making the relationship one that is more of cooperation than conflict.

Conclusion

This preliminary research has shown that a thinking that relies on a dichotomy between state and non-state organizations, or formal and informal institutions is unhelpful. According to theoretical models, the Borana indigenous institutions would be informal, yet the way in which they are made up of rules that are reinforced every eight years, elected councils, or people who have hereditary authority, shows that in many ways they are quite formal. Stressing the difference between state and non-state tends to imply with it certain other relative qualities: that they are in opposition, and that some institutions are 'of the past', whereas others are 'of the future'. Instead, it is important to look at the way in which institutions change, are re-invented, and create alliances between themselves. Development organizations have a role to play in fostering environments in which different institutions cooperate rather than conflict. If one kind of institution is left out of the process, then it is likely to lead to conflict of various kinds.

This research has also examined the way in which indigenous institutions are frequently thought of as traditional. With this label other associations are frequently applied. As well as being thought of as unchanging, they are thought to have legitimacy and to represent 'the people'. The research has shown that the indigenous institutions are as likely to have changed in the past as much as they are changing today, and that they have their own political and historical context. The main indigenous institutions in Borana Zone are those of the dominant group in the area, the Borana. Other groups must cooperate with the Borana to gain access to resources. A development organization working in this context must make sure that all groups are included and represented in any development process. Otherwise they are likely to perpetuate, or worsen, the exclusion of minority groups. This also relates to groups who might not be represented in other ways by the institutions; approaches that rely on indigenous institutions may unwittingly exclude women from the development process.

Working with indigenous institutions is undoubtedly complex, but avoiding working with them because of this will not help to engender participation. Alliances that can be constructed between state and indigenous institutions can be a way in which partnerships can be formed and discussions can take place over different development initiatives. Indigenous institutions provide structures in which people are used to discussing matters and which have a degree of continuity. But the positive partnerships should be made at all levels, from the household up to the *aba gada*, and from the PA up to the administrative headquarters. And the discussions are not likely to be easy, but involve compromises being made on all sides.

Conflict is something that has been common historically in this region, and has been exacerbated by recent events. Indigenous institutions provide a useful tool for development in this context, because the Borana see the role of these institutions as being related to keeping the peace. In Borana minds, natural resource management and peace-keeping are combined, and this is something that the development organizations and the state could learn from. Unless all different groups involved are included in discussions about the future of Borana, and unless there is an emphasis on cooperation at all levels, there is unlikely to be a transition to a post-conflict situation.

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