



Ethiopia Programme Peace Incubation Report January 2020



Peace Conference at Shashemene City

Background

The Sustained Dialogue (SD) Project has peace incubation as a component of the project activities which started in the first year of the project period. Peace incubation as an activity has the objective of providing space for innovation of young peacebuilding leaders after they have 'graduated' from SD, to spread the message of dialogue off campus. LPI believes the changes from SD will be enhanced by supporting SD participant action through a peace incubation concept that will take the message of dialogue beyond campus. In this process, students are further supported to see how their personal change can have positive influence on conflict dynamics in their home communities.

Theory of Change: If SD participants are accompanied to realise their ideas for promoting social cohesion, Then their efforts will increase their confidence as future leaders for peace and **may contribute** to social cohesion and address negative socialization patterns, **Because** they experienced personal transformation that they want to share "back home" and will have a safe space, resources, time and technical accompaniment to develop their own ideas for action to reach off campus communities.

Peace incubation off campus enables select outstanding SD leaders to pursue innovative solutions to social problems faced by their community during their summer breaks. LPI as an incubator creates an environment where young peace innovators develop new ideas without fear of risk and failure, with support and direction from staff and experts within and outside LPI.

The peace incubation has three basic stages to pass through: Selection, Nurturing and Graduation.

Selection: This is a pre-incubation phase in which application forms are distributed, orientation about the application and incubation process is organized and selection of the applicants to the incubation process is made. Entry into the incubation process is competitive and on the basis of a viable Project idea and plan, in a way to guarantee that students entering the incubation process are "ready to be groomed".

Nurturing: This phase is a time for the selected students/incubatees to develop and enrich their project ideas with direct one to one support of the incubator. LPI as an incubator provides a range of support services to the selected incubatees and their projects. This includes:

- **Training and knowledge building:** Two weeks of highly interactive training on the topics that both LPI and the students identified as needs, such as concept of incubation, peacebuilding & conflict transformation, basics of conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm approaches, dialogue facilitation, life skills, leadership, communication, networking & partnership, planning, teambuilding, and concept note development.
- **Hands-on-mentoring and management support:** giving significant assistance to help the incubatees understand the role that individuals and organizations can play in building peace, including one-on-one sessions focusing on vision, mission, strategy, planning and implementation.
- **Network and Community Building:** helping in facilitating and strengthening connections with relevant stakeholders in civil society and government sectors.

Graduation: This is the stage whereby incubatees complete nurturing their idea and prepare a viable peace project with clear implementation plan. They graduate from the peace incubation process as future leaders for peace. In addition to the accompaniment and capacity building support LPI provides to the peace incubatees, small budget to cover basic costs to be incurred while implementing the projects will also be allotted for each project incubated. LPI will arrange a reflection and learning session with the peace incubatees after the projects are implemented to reflect on the change they made on their communities, how the process went, what they learnt out of the process and to document success stories and some data for the refinement of the programme for the next round and for possible scale ups of best performed projects.



2018-19 cohort of peace incubatees at the end of the training, Addis Ababa

Selection and concept note development: During the 2018-19 project year, 16 Peace Incubation projects were planned to be incubated and implemented in the “incubatees” home communities. Thus, 16 students (8M, 8F) and their peace ideas were selected, using the selection criteria developed.¹ Out of 410 applications received from the five universities by a selection team comprised of project staff from LPI and PDC. The selected incubatees were invited to Addis Ababa for training and further enrichment of their ideas so that the innovated peace ideas would be enhanced to bring wider community benefits. Two weeks (from 19 to 28 August 2019) of highly interactive trainings on the topics that both LPI and the students identified as needs, such as concept of incubation, peacebuilding and conflict transformation, basics of conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm approaches, dialogue facilitation, life skills, leadership, communication, networking & partnership, planning, teambuilding, and concept note development were provided by both in-house staff and external subject matter experts. At the end of the training, all the incubatees prepared and submitted their final plan of action with draft budget and tentative implementation schedule.

As part of the training package, the participants visited PDC and the Ministry of Peace and had discussions with the leadership and staff of both organisations on different issues related to the

¹1) Is the idea high impact potential? In addressing grievances and strengthening social bond of the target communities? 2) Is the idea viable (doable) in terms of finance and necessary technical skills? Can LPI support the idea within the limit of its capacity? 3) Are the students available the coming summer to nurture/develop their ideas and implement at the target communities?; 4) Is the idea realistic in terms of time? Can it be done during the Ethiopian winter months? 5) Is the idea inclusive - in terms of gender and all identity lines?; 6) Can the idea be taken and supported by the target communities?; 7) Is the idea innovative? Can it create interest in the target people? and 8) Is the idea easily sellable to others?

potential support the incubatees could get during the implementation of the projects.



Peace incubatees during training session at Addis Ababa

Implementation of the incubated Peace Projects: Of the 16 peace projects incubated, 12 of them were implemented in the incubatees home communities, led and facilitated by peace incubatees in districts located in Meki Town, Shashemene Town, Genda Wuha Town, Feresbet Town, Debre Markos Town, Mizan Town, Debrework Town, Dedo Town, Dinkula Town, Dodola Town, Tilili Town and Dire Dawa City Administration. Four of the peace incubation projects at Arba Minch, Teppi, Jimma and Adama are to be implemented in the coming couple of months (in 2020) if the security situation improves and as the incubatees get permission from the respective administrations. SD students, now called “peace incubatees”, in collaboration with LPI, effectively coordinated with local formal and informal authorities to implement peace actions addressing conflict and its drivers in their local communities. Most of the peace incubation projects implemented included dialogue with the youth on drivers of conflict and solutions in their local communities, peace promotion focusing on tolerance, unity and peaceful co-existence among different ethnic and religious groups through art, sport, peace conferences and panel discussions. There was also an awareness-raising and community dialogue project aimed to halt revenge killing practices in Dega Damot Woreda (Feresbet Town) of Amhara region. An estimate number of 12,682 people were reached with peace messages through the different peace projects implemented in 12 sites.

Summary of the peace projects incubated with implementation sites and schedule

No.	Implementation Site	Project Title	Key Events/Activities	Dates
1	Adama	Promoting Peace and Unity Among the Youth in Adama City	Dialogue with Students and Panel Discussion with their Families and Teachers, Establish/Strengthen Peace Clubs at Schools, Establish Student-Family Peace Forum	October 20

2	Meki	Promoting Peace and Unity in Meki town	Peace Conference (including Art for Peace) and Establish Peace Club	September 19
3	Shashemene	Promoting Peace and Unity in Shashemene City	Dialogue with the Youth, Peace Conference (including Art for Peace), Sport for Peace, Establish School Peace Club, Linking the Project with the City Administration	October 19 & 20
4	Dodola	Promoting Peace and Unity in Dodola Town	Dialogue with Youth, Peace Conference (including Art for Peace) and Sport for Peace, Establish Peace Clubs at Schools	October 26 & 27
5	Dire Dawa	Promoting Peace and Unity in Dire Dawa City	Peace Conference (including Art for Peace), Establish Peace Association, Linking the Project with the City Administration	October 24 & 25
6	Debre Markos	Promoting Peace in Debre Markos Town	Peace Conference (including Art for Peace), Establish Peace Association, Linking the Project with the Town Administration	October 17
7	Feresbet	Creating a Peaceful Community by Creating Awareness Against Revenge Killing Practices at Dega Damot Woreda	Awareness Creation Conference (including Art for Peace), Sport for Peace, Media Engagement, Establish/Strengthen Peace Associations, Experience Sharing on the issue of Peace Between Different Kebeles	October 12 & 13
8	Tilili	Resolving Conflicts over Land Between Ashefa and Derewa Kebeles in Guagusa Shikudad Woreda	Peace Conference	October 5
9	Gendawuha	Promoting Peace and Unity Among Kimant and Amhara Youth in Gendawuha Town and its Environs	Peace Conference (including Art for Peace)	October 3
10	Kose	Promoting Peace Among the Guraghe and Hadiya Youth Living Boadering Endegagn Woreda and Hadiya Zone	Dialogue with the Youth, Panel Discussion (including Art for Peace)	September 21 & 22
11	Dedo	Promoting Peace Among the Oromo and Dawuro Peoples Living Boadering the Dedo and Dawuro Woredas	Dialogue with the Youth, Peace Conference, Sport/Running for Peace, Linking the Project with the Woreda Administration	October 12 & 13
12	Jimma	Promoting Peace and Unity Among Different	Panel Discussion (including Art for Peace), Sport for Peace, March for Peace (Peace Rally), Establish Peace Clubs at Schools,	October 5 & 6

		Ethnic Groups in Jimma Town	Linking the Project with Culture & Tourism Office	
13	Mizan	Revitalizing the Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanism (Erg) of the Bench People for Sustainable Peace in Mizan-Aman Town	Panel Discussion (including Art for Peace), Sport for Peace, Establish Peace Clubs	September 26
14	Teppi	Promoting Peace and Unity Among the Sheka and Sheko Peoples in Yeki Woreda	Dialogue with the Youth, Peace Conference (including Art for Peace), Establish Peace Clubs at Schools	October 1 & 2
15	Debrework	Sustaining Peace Among the Sheko and Bench Youth Through Dialogue in Debub Bench Woreda	Dialogue with the Youth, Peace Conference, Media, Establish Youth Peace Club, Linking the Project with the Youth Office	September 29 & 30
16	Arba Minch & Chench	Promoting the Gamo Bayiras Tradition as a Useful Mechanism for Conflict Resolution in Arba Minch Town	Dialogue with the Youth, Panel Discussion (including Art for Peace), Sport for Peace, Establish Youth Peace Forums	November 2 & 3; 6 & 7

The number of promising practices witnessed from the small but successful peace incubation projects signifies the need to actively engage more young people to take the message of SD and nonviolence beyond campuses and in implementing small scale community-based solutions contributing to social cohesion.

Description of the Peace Projects implemented at different sites - Examples

Peace Incubation Projects in Shashemene Town: Shashemene is a town in West Arsi Zone, Oromia Region, Ethiopia. It is located about 250 km from the capital of Addis Ababa and is famous for its Rastafari community. The city is a crossroads – a transit point where buses head out in every direction, including to Addis Ababa. Like many other towns and cities in the country, it is a home for peoples of different cultures, religions and ethnic backgrounds living together peacefully for long. However, since 2016 the city became known for its anti-government protests, and recently with deadly ethnic clashes and violence have resulted in the death of citizens. The brutal killing of a young man (hanged upside down on a utility pole and beaten to death) in August 2018 at a public rally suspecting him of carrying a bomb (although there were no bombs found on him) stunned the nation and left deep scars in the town. It damaged the image of this beautiful city. The project developed by the peace incubate aimed to renew the damaged image of the city and promote unity, peace and reconciliation among peoples living there.

The peace incubatee was a graduate student of Jimma University with good records of facilitating SD sessions and organising on-campus peace actions along with PDC and the university administration.

After the two weeks of peace incubation training and with the technical support provided to him, he came up with a final project proposal titled "Promotion of peaceful co-existence among different ethnic groups in Shashemene city." The tools used to promote peace were: Peace conference, Sports for peace, Dialogue and Street arts show. The peace conference was the first ever "Peace Conference" on the promotion of peaceful coexistence in the city to be organised after the incident of August 2018. It was held on 22 October 2019 at Rift Valley Tourist Hotel and attended by more than 250 people drawn from the youth (including Qeerroo), Aba Gadas, Sinkes, religious leaders, government, and community representatives from each kebeles of the city.

The conference was started by the blessing of the religious leaders and all Aba Gedas present at the conference who colorfully expressed their good wishes and blessings as per the Oromo culture. Ato Muleta Tekle, Head of Sport and Youth and representative of the city administration, while welcoming all the participants of the conference underscored that organising events like that brings peoples together to discuss on peace is something the administration encourages and supports. *"Our city administration understands the positive impact of such conferences and other promotional activities carried out in the city in addressing the realities on the ground in our city and zone"*, stated Ato Muleta. *"I would like to thank our young boy, Desta and the organisation [LPI] who made the Peace Conference and other events such as the Peace for Sport and Dialogue with the youth conducted before this conference a reality,"* he said, addressing the participants before the conference. Then, the peace incubatee, Desta Mohammed, introduced himself and briefed the participants about his SD experience at Jimma University. LPI's representative on his part took some time and talked about LPI and its role in Ethiopia in the peacebuilding field and also about the essence of peace incubation as a mechanism to take the message of dialogue off-campus.



The Sport and Youth Commission Head making closing remarks



Peace conference participants

After religious and traditional leaders and government representatives spoke, participants gathered were given the chance to reflect on issues affecting the age-old peaceful co-existence of the different peoples in the city. The chair of conference used the questions below to help facilitate the discussions.

- What are the strengths of the communities living in Shashemene in relation to the Oromo culture?
- How can we regain the common values of the communities, rebuild trust and become close to each other again?
- To restore the strong values within the communities and sustain peace, what is expected of government and nongovernmental organisations?

The conference participants forwarded their reflections with a focus on the role of the communities, specifically on the strengths and weaknesses of the community and what can be done to address the sources of tension at the grassroots level. The participants identified the primary strengths and weaknesses within the community. It was highlighted that the community share a strong culture of supporting one another which was taken as a strength and basic input to restore the image of the city and peaceful co-existence of peoples that the city is known for. The participants shared that the large youth population and high unemployment rates as big challenges of securing peace in the city. The participants emphasised that the youth in the city often participated in mass violence without understanding the consequences. They also said that there was minimal enforcement of the rule of law when the youth instigated violence.

A female participant who came from the Gada institution of the Arsi area said that, *“We from the Gada institution always stood for truth, we have passed very trying and stressful times in the past two years. For example, I have a son who used to steal my money and gamble, he at the same time blocks*

roads with his likes. I beg him to stop both gambling and blocking roads, but he refuses to accept my advice and order. Imagine how disrespectful and disobedient our sons have become these days. What I did was to keep registering the youngsters who were creating conflict, throwing stones, and blocking roads, and I listed 28 youngsters including my son and hand over the list to the city administration for corrective actions. You who are here today to discuss on peace, I am sure all the problems I talked about also happened to you, our children are beyond our control. So, we better look after our children, we have to closely follow where they stay their time, the problem lies on how we raise our children. Peace starts in our home, and we have to ensure our peace within our family level first, and it is after that we need to talk about our role in bringing peace in the city level. Thank you LPI for organising such a useful conference on peace. I used to be invited and participate in different workshops and conferences organized by NGOs, all of them come to us take something from us, it is this organisation (LPI) I witnessed for the first time which comes to us to give us what we want, not to take from us, Galatoma [thank you]!”



A female participant reflecting about the Geda institution and the youth

As a recommendation, it was suggested that elders and traditional leaders continue to transfer the long tradition of peaceful coexistence to the youth. The participants said that it is not the elders and the religious leaders creating problems, it is the youth, so the government and non-governmental organisations should support youth who are positively contributing to their communities as he (Desta) had done in Shashemene. The youth representatives participating in the conference in their part said that the government should recognise the role of the youth in peace process and urged the government to operate the youth in the right direction otherwise adult alone would not achieve the ideal peace it wants.

Religious leaders and government representatives should work together to mobilise the community to be engaged in the peacebuilding process. Participants also mentioned that traditional, religious and government structures of the communities needed to take this type of discussion on peace to the village level, particularly in the villages and districts where tension persists, for example in Aje, Kofele and Arsi-Negelle.

The Conference was wrapped up after the closing remarks were given by the Head of the Youth and Sport Commission, the representative of the City Mayor in the conference. He thanked the paper presenters, the city administration and LPI for sponsoring the workshop. The representative also expressed his gratitude and admiration for Desta Mohammed for organising the conference and other peace promotion activities, and Biftu Bira Association, a youth led civil society in Shashemene, for the support provided to Desta in all the activities. The participants also praised Desta for being a role model for the youth in the city. He has also underlined the importance of giving special emphasis on the youth, especially the in-school youth and issues suggested by the participants and to do regular peacebuilding and peace promotion activities in West Arsi Zone to sustain success peace. *He stated that “We usually label our young brothers and sisters as troublemakers and rebellious and so the enormous task of creating a harmonious society is left at the hands of the government and elders. While it is true that there are many young people who are irresponsible, there are also many others like Desta who feel responsible and do very important activities to their community. Organising the peace conference should be our [government] task, and I am really overwhelmed witnessing this big conference on peace is being facilitated by our own university student. The power of the youth has not yet been explored in a positive way. Their potential and power have to be developed, we have to train and support them and mould them as peacebuilders like this organisation [LPI] is doing. We have to give the youth responsibilities according to their capacities and take them seriously.”*

This quote demonstrates how the leadership of Peace Incubatees can contribute to an increase in respect for young people and more openness to be inclusive across the generational divide. In this case, the Peace Incubatee, Desta, increased his practical capacity to work in partnership and work with government bureaucracies and influential actors at the community level.

In the days following the Peace Conference (on 23 and 24 October) held on 22 October 2019, major unrest was sparked in different parts of the Oromia Regional State of Ethiopia after Jawar Mohammed, a high-profile activist, said on Facebook that police had surrounded his home in Addis Ababa and tried to withdraw his government security detail. The unrest was violent especially in towns located in West Arsi Zone and 86 people were reportedly killed and several injured, with vast properties looted and burned between 23-24 October, in different parts of Oromia. Despite the deadly conflicts occurring in the nearby towns such as Dodola and Arsi Negelle, the protest in Shashemene was peaceful with no single life lost nor properties damaged. In the morning after the conference and observing that the protest in Shashemene was nonviolent, unlike the protests in nearby towns, the mayor called LPI to share that the conference, in his view, had had a positive effect contributing to this. Based on past experiences violence would have erupted, but participants in the conference had assumed the responsibility to ensure their families and relatives would stay calm and act nonviolently.

Sports for Peace: Sports, when managed well, have long been recognised as a tool for peace promotion. It was with this notion that the incubatee, Desta, chose sport (football) as another tool to create an environment for the youth to come together, communicate, understand each other and to begin to develop respect for each other. The football match was organised in collaboration with the Sport Commission of Shashemene town, Biftu Bira Association, and Lincoln Richards, father of Micah Richards (an English professional footballer). Six football teams played three matches on the 19 October 2019. Peace messages were conveyed to the football match audience before the start, in the middle and at the end of the three matches played with Montarbo, sound amplifier. Banners displaying the event were hung in different places around the football field. The participating teams

were presented with awards in recognition of their participation in the Sport for Peace event by the Shashemene Sport Commission. An estimate of 3000 peoples (majority youth) attended the matches.



Football match kick off at Shashemene

Dialogue with the Youth: The dialogue conducted on the 21 October, brought together 50 in-school youth aged between 16 and 20, for honest conversation about young people and their critical role in promoting peaceful coexistence in Shashemene city. The questions which the dialogue circled around were: why is such a dialogue important? What are the causes of conflict in the context of Shashemene city? What is the role of youth in preventing conflict and ensuring social cohesion within the community? How can youth work to diminish the current state of ethnic polarisation? How can the government help the youth engage more in peacebuilding initiatives?

Talking about the importance of dialogue, the participants pointed out that dialogue is the best means to solve problems, ensure peace, unity and security across the country. They also said that the positive role of dialogue helps to clarify issues, develop new insights into an issue, and enhances the ability to make informed decisions. They highlighted the current nature of conflicts in Ethiopia as ethnic and religious based. The participants also attributed the main reason for ethnic conflicts in the country to the failure of good governance and that of the political system to accommodate ethnic differences and interests. The participants agreed that in order for any form of social cohesion to happen, there needs to be a sense of security and belonging for all the communities living together. Youth can work together to create platforms which is inclusive for all the communities. Youth can also collaborate on putting forward constructive policy suggestions to the government which promote cohesion in the community. They pointed out that youth associations, civil society organisations (CSOs) and NGOs are mostly linked with parties, a perception that there is a kind of political control or dominance over this sector, and that although Prime Minister Abiy's government is trying to shift the status quo, it takes time and commitment among officials at the local level. So, the government should let the youth free and support them to play their peacebuilding role in the community.

The participants of the dialogue group also agreed that the Oromo majority of Shashemene society have the main role of being inclusive of the other communities to make them feel safe and integrates into the rest of the communities.

In summary, one of the dialogue participants said that, *“this is the first time we get a chance to talk about our own issues together. This dialogue should continue, and we hope we will continue it in our school with our friends.”*



Student dialogue groups at Shashemene

Art for Peace: Art is another proven tool used to inspire a culture of peace and hope and educate for nonviolent alternatives to create a sustainable and harmonious society. The art for peace event was organised in the afternoon of 19 October 2019 at the big public square located in the centre of the Shashemene. The arts performed were music, cultural dance and circus shows and were organised by Desta in collaboration with Biftu Bira Youth Association and Shashemene Circus Club. The city administration deployed security forces to protect the safety of the audience and it was the first open air event organised in the city after the mob killing in August 2018. This shows that city administration’s interest and determination to restore peace and change the spoiled image of the city. Uplifting peace songs which preached unity, and peaceful coexistence among the peoples of Ethiopia at large, were played at the event. Theatre that focused on social issues in a way that is relevant and sensitive to the local context, was also performed by the amateur youth artists from Biftu Bira Youth Association. There was also circus show by Shashemene Circus Club which was very entertaining and helped to keep the audience active until the end of the event. An estimated 2200 people attended the art for peace event at the public square, locally called Aposto Square.

From LPI’s perspective, the peace conference and other peace promotion activities done through sport and art were the best executed peace incubation projects witnessed so far. Reasons for success included that a variety of activities were conducted, the planning/scheduling were timely, participant selection was relevant as those involved were active and interested, partnerships created with local

civil society actors enhanced the activities, the support and buy-in secured from the government was effective, communicating with journalists and other reporting on the events contributed to wider reach, the attendee registration and the turn out of the events was high, and the organising skills and contextual understanding of Desta about his city and its administration was deep. The event also promoted youth clubs and youth associations to continue as active agents for peacebuilding in Shashemene. Desta established a peace club at Edo Meda Primary School as a mechanism to continue to promote peaceful coexistence and community cohesion in Shashemene.

The peace incubation projects and their implementation in Shashemene city can be taken as a standard that subsequent peace incubatees should aspire to reach.



Art for Peace event at public square in Shashemene

Peace Incubation Project at Mizan Town: Formerly known as Mizan Tefere (also called simply Mizan), Mizan town is located in southern Ethiopia. The largest town, and the administrative centre, of the Bench Sheko Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region (SNNPR), and located about 160 kms southwest of Jimma and 561 kms from the capital Addis Ababa, Mizan, together with the neighbouring town of Aman, forms a separate woreda called Mizan-Aman. The Southern Ethiopia is the home of many multilingual and multicultural societies which are referred among some scholars as “museum of culture.”

The peace incubatee named Tigist Mulugeta, was a 4th year student of law at Gondar University and her project idea was on the “Bench Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanism: Roles, Experiences, Challenges and Recommendations.” According to the elders of the Bench people, this traditional conflict resolution mechanism called “Erg” in Bench ethnic group had been in use for generations in preventing and resolving conflicts including murder cases, until the coming of the Derg regime (1974-1991). Regardless of its critical role in managing conflicts and bringing lasting peace, the practice has been degraded and paralysed and has lost its relevance. Many of the young generation know little of its existence. It was with this aim of promoting and enhancing the Bench communities’ traditional methods of conflict management so as to enable the communities to handle their social problems by

themselves through their own traditional mechanisms that Tigist developed her project. To this end, she organised a panel discussion on the matter in collaboration with the Mizan-Aman Town and Bench Sheko Zone Administrations. The interesting part of this project was that the town administration assigned a focal person to support Tigist in facilitating the whole process of organising the panel discussion from the start to finish. For example, the venue for the conference was arranged by the town administration free of charge. This was one of the peace incubation projects implemented with no bureaucratic hassles.

Coincidentally, at the time the panel discussion was organised, a group of elders of the Bench community were in the process of setting up a committee to work on revitalising the traditional mechanism. It might be due to this that the local government was very receptive and supportive of the idea of the project presented by the peace incubatee. The Zonal Culture and Tourism Department took the responsibility of preparing a document on the Bench Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanism to be presented for discussion on the day of the panel discussion. A day before the panel discussion (25 September), a consultative meeting was held with the elders and the government representatives on the steps carried out for the panel discussion. The document produced by the Zone Culture and Tourism Department was also presented for feedback and comments.



Consultation meeting with the elders group before the panel discussion

The panel discussion on the Bench Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanism (Erg) was held on the 26 September at Mizan multi-purpose hall and more than 300 peoples invited from different sections of the society attended the discussion. An expert from the Zone Culture and Tourism Department and another person who did research on the subject were the panellists. The panellists reflected on the following points:

- The role of indigenous institutions in handling conflict/disputes in Bench Sheko area in particular, and the country in general.
- The processes and procedures followed by the institution.

- The advantages and limitation of the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms including the Erg.
- The challenges facing the indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in general, and Erg in particular.
- The ways in which indigenous institutions of conflict resolution can be strengthened and /or integrated with the formal modern state judicial framework.

From the reflection made by the participants of the conference, it was observed that the community, especially the elders, have very positive attitudes towards the Erg, and its significant role in the past managing conflicts and bringing long lasting peace among ethnic groups living in the area. Most of the participants attributed the violent conflicts and killings of peoples in different parts of the country to the weakening of the traditional systems besides the deficiency of the present formal conflict dealing mechanism and systems, especially in the context of ethnicity in which case the found the traditional authorities to be the more prevailing. Finally, LPI received a certificate of appreciation from both the town and zone administrations for supporting the panel discussion and the elders group tasked to revitalise the traditional system, requested LPI to continue its support to the group in the process of documenting the practice and in the revitalisation work.



Panel Discussion at Mizan town

Peace Incubation Project at Debrework Town: Debrework is a small village-like-town serving as an administrative seat of the Dehub Bench Woreda of Bench Sheko Zone in SNNPR. The town is located some 50kms away from Mizan town. The peace project developed by Tigist was aimed at contributing to peace among the Sheko and Bench youth through Dialogue in Dehub Bench Woreda.

The activities carried out in Debrework town was a peace conference and dialogue with the youth on 29 and 30 September, respectively. The peace conference was not as large as the ones conducted in Mizan and Shashemene, yet it was still attended by 100 people, most of whom were government employees. The place is remote with poor infrastructure. The road from Mizan to Debrework is rough and it was very difficult for both the Tigist and LPI to have rounds of travel and follow up preparation

for the events planned to be undertaken. As the conference participants were government employee dominated, most of the peace and security discussions made were revolve around the government and the role of its security apparatus in securing peace in Dehub Bench Woreda. With all its limitations, in part due to the remote location and the resultant limited follow ups of the process with the government, this was the first initiative of its kind in the Woreda.

The second activity undertaken at the site was dialogue with 50 youth drawn from different kebeles of the woreda. As done in other sites, the incubatee divided the participants in to eight dialogue groups and provided them with discussion points. The participants were very pleased with the dialogue platform created for them and the deliberation they made on important issues such as the meaning of conflict and drivers of conflict in the local context, the role of the youth as a social group in building peace. The reflection on the attitude the participants have for peoples from other ethnic and religion lines was very hot. The incubatee insisted that they discuss freely, and surprisingly most of them confessed that they do not have positive attitudes towards others other than their own ethnic group. However, in the final reflection session, the participants honestly expressed that they will no longer hold such a bad attitude towards others. They said that lack of awareness and exposure made them hold such attitudes and requested LPI to help to organise similar dialogues and awareness raising activities targeting many youths in Dehub Bench Woreda and Bench Sheko Zone.



Dialogue with the youth at Debrework town

Peace Incubation Project at Sheki Town, Dedo Woreda: Dedo is one of the woredas in Jimma Zone of Oromia Region located some 266km away from Addis Ababa. The administrative seat of the woreda is Sheki town. The majority of the inhabitants are Muslim. The woreda is a place where different ethnic groups have lived together peacefully; Oromo being the majority followed by Yem, Dawuro, Amhara and Kafficho. Since recently, ethnic based conflicts started to be seen in the woreda especially between the Oromo and Dawuro communities. Thus, the project idea incubated and implemented was aimed at promoting peaceful co-existence, pluralism and respect for diversity among the two ethnic groups in particular, and peoples living in the woreda in general, through a peace march and a peace conference conducted on 8 October 2019.

The peace conference organized by a peace incubatee named Nugusa Amsalu was attended by 450 people drawn from different villages and Sheki town. Ethnicisation of politics came out as a reason for the eroded relationship of people which they claimed was not the case before EPRDF came to power. The local government was criticised for not discharging the responsibilities entrusted to it. For example, some of the participants said that instead of bringing perpetrators and instigators of violence to justice, some officials in the town administration tend to give protection because the perpetrator is from the same ethnic group and this encourages others to commit similar crimes. There were also recommendations to organise similar peace promotion activities in other nearby locations. The participants vowed to bring back the previous peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, understanding and cooperation by putting humanity before anything else, especially ethnicity.

The biggest challenge during this event was that of high expectations of per diem, even by government, and there was a great deal of negotiation that had to take place to manage the situation.



Peace Conference at Sheki town

Another activity carried out in Sheki town was the peace march. The students in large numbers took to the streets chanting for peace, unity, and dialogue as tools for conflict resolution. The incubatee also managed to set up a peace club in Sheki Primary School as a way to continue promoting peace in the school community and the town.



Peace March at Sheki town

Peace Incubation Project at Dinkula Town, Endegagn Woreda: Endegagn is one of the woredas of the Gurage Zone in SNNPR. The majority of the inhabitants practice Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. The peace idea planned by Kibnesh Oshago was to organise a peace conference with the mission of addressing the conflict between Gurage and Hadiya ethnic groups at Koshe town. The conflict has been caused by claims over Koshe town where the two ethnic groups have a balanced number or population living in the town. But, due to the sensitivity of the subject and in consultation with the concerned officials at Endegagn woreda, the project implementation site was changed to Dinkula town, seat of the Endegagn woreda, with same activity of organising a peace conference aimed at promoting peace, harmony and collaboration was carried out.

The peace conference was conducted on 21 September 2019. This was a project the woreda administration showed deep interest in and greatly collaborated with Kibnesh. The woreda administration set up a taskforce with five members drawn from five sector offices led by the peace and security head of the Endegagn woreda. The taskforce was tasked to collaborate with Kibnesh in terms of arranging venues, dispersing invitation letters to the conference participants ensuring balanced representation of each kebeles, religious and community leaders. The main task of the taskforce was to prepare a document which was presented to the participants of the conference for discussion. The document produced covered topics such as the importance of peace in our life, drivers of conflict in the context of Endegagn woreda (political, religious and social), types of conflicts, actors of conflict, conflict resolution mechanisms with a focus on dialogue, establishing a peace committee and the roles played by elders with high level of acceptance, and the role of the local government in maintaining peace in the woreda.

The conference participants actively participated in the conference by reflecting on what was presented and from their local context related to peace. The expression “Gurage people are known as hard workers and as a model of good work culture in the whole Ethiopia” came out high in the conference. They also generalised the Gurage as a peace-loving society with a culture of living with others in harmony. It is customary for the Gurage people to leave their house open, with no doors to close their houses. The conference participants underscored the change in this age-old practice of trust, collaboration and harmony as something requiring serious intervention. The participants and the woreda administration were very pleased to get the opportunity to discuss on the subject of

peace. LPI received a certificate of appreciation from the woreda administration for the support provided and helping the peace conference possible. The conference was attended by 200 people.



Peace Conference at Dinkula town

Peace Incubation Project at Dodola Town: Dodola is a town located in West Arsi Zone of the Oromia Region. It is the administrative center of Dodola woreda. Similar to other towns in Oromia and Ethiopia in general, the inhabitants of the town are mixed with different ethnic and religious backgrounds. The objective of the peace project implemented was on promoting the peaceful co-existence of the peoples living in the town through peace conference, sport and dialogue with youth groups. It was here in Dodola town that LPI commemorated the International Day of Peace on 21 September in collaboration with the woreda administration. The day was celebrated with various activities including a peace conference, peace walks and football centred on the peace theme. The events were aimed at creating awareness and sensitising the communities on the ways in which they can contribute to building sustainable peace and peaceful coexistence. The woreda administrator in his remarks made during the peace conference, urged participants to commit to peace above all differences and to contribute to building a culture of peace and be peace ambassadors and role models in their schools, homes and communities. An estimated 4500 people are reported to have reached with peace messages with the events organised.

The peace project at Dodola town was originally scheduled to be implemented on the 26 and 27 October 2019, just after Shashemene. However, because of the deadly unrest at the end of October 2019 in Oromia, the plan to conduct the peace incubation project was postponed to another time. Dodola was one of the areas in West Arsi Zone of Oromia region hard hit by the most ethnically tinged conflict that caused the killings of 86 peoples from 23 to 25 October 2019. The new project implementation schedule was set for 6 and 10 December but with restrictions by the administration on organising peace conferences and any form of meetings that bring different peoples together as the tension was not over and members of the community still sheltered in local churches. Thus, the town administrator rather advised to carry out dialogues and some awareness creation activities at schools. He said that *“we know who make troubles and caused all these damages, so we want you target the youth (also called Qeero) not the adults.”* This was a telling insight, common across the peace incubation locations. He then wrote us a support letter to the Education Department so that Amanuel Abdi, the incubatee, got an easy access to work in two schools, Dodola and Dodola Deneba Primary Schools.



Commemoration of International Day of Peace with Sport at Dodola town

Amanuel did two rounds of dialogues with 100 school youth on 6 and 10 December. He prepared dialogue points with a focus on conflict drivers in the context of the town, the role of the youth in preventing conflict and building peace, prejudices and perceptions for other ethnic and religious groups, and the role of the government in maintaining peace in the town.

Ethnic polarisation and the hatred that one ethnic group developed against another were mentioned as the main causes of conflicts in the area. Unemployment also came out as a factor aggravating conflicts occurring more recently in the town. The youth participating in the dialogues clearly pointed out the power they have in easily taking to the streets and demanding whatever they want to the extent of forcing leadership change. The topic which took much time in the dialogues was the “perception to others” part. It was difficult to get them think that all humans are equal regardless of their ethnicity and religion and should deserve fair treatments with the right to work and live in a place of his/her choice freely and peacefully, emphasising the deep need for sensitisation and dialogue. Amanuel established peace clubs in the two schools as a mechanism to sustain the dialogue process and peace promotion activities.

Peace Incubation Project at Dire Dawa City: Dire Dawa is a city under the federal administration located in eastern part of Ethiopia. A distinctive feature of Dire Dawa is that it regarded as a "melting pot" where many different cultures, nationalities and religions can live together without conflict. Although the city is widely known as a city tolerant of diversity and celebrates peaceful coexistence of Christians and Muslims and between different ethnic groups, ethnic based conflicts which have caused loss of life and damage of properties have been witnessed since recent times. Eden Kassahun, the peace incubatee, born and raised in the city and had recently witnessed the harmony deteriorating and conflict breaking out, designed a project aimed at promoting peace and unity in the city by organising a peace conference and art for peace events. Unfortunately, the intermittent conflicts in the city caused the postponement of the project implementation schedule from 24 October to 5 January 2020. In addition, Eden faced bureaucratic challenges and lack of interest on the side of the city administration to organise the conferences and other public events in the city due to fear of conflicts. The peace conference scheduled to happen on 5 January 2020 was cancelled due to fear and uncertainties around the security context after she had finalised all the processes towards the

conference. She then organised the art for peace event in a very confined premises, where 150 people attended the event. In the event, poems, monologues, and drama with peace messages were presented by amateur artists from Kal Arts Association.

Stories from Peace Incubatees

“A well-trained young person will be a responsible citizen and peace ambassador in the future”

Desta Mohammed, 24, was a student in Jimma University, graduated with B.A Degree in Hospitality and Tourism Management in June 2019 and has been involved in SD Project for three years since he joined the university in 2017, two years as a participant and moderator and one as a facilitator. *“I was always interested to participate in extra-curricular activities in the campus, like many people are, and I was very lucky that I was selected by PDC to participate in the SD Project, but the notion of dialogue was not clear until I learned from PDC all aspects of dialogue and started conducting dialogue sessions with my group members”,* he recalls. Desta was part of the Peace Incubation Programme of 2019 cohort and participated in the peace incubation training (from 19 to 28 August 2019) organised by LPI in Addis Ababa. As a peace incubatee, he organised a big peace conference, sport for peace, dialogue with the youth and art for peace events in his home community in Shashemene city where he was praised by the community and the city administration for ably facilitating the promotion events to happen. He says SD has permeated his personal and professional life. He notes that today’s Ethiopia is full of conflict and very polarised, but SD has taught him “how to think about conflict” beyond the idea of winners and losers, right or wrong. He is committed to training others in dialogue and in particular, youth, as he believes this will have a greater impact on the future. *“When you are no longer young, it is difficult and sometimes even impossible to change. But young people are open-minded and easier to shape. A well-trained young person will be a responsible citizen in the future. Besides, some young people are doing amazing things in the community. If you don’t share your knowledge with them, it is difficult to have a real impact,”* he says.

“Not only people from Asia, Europe or America don’t know Ethiopia and the Ethiopian people. People here in Ethiopia, especially in regions, that are only a four-hour car ride away have very bad perceptions about us and us about them. That’s why I am convinced that dialogue especially intercultural dialogue is very important.” After passing through the SD process and successfully executing his peace project at Shashemene, Desta considers himself as a peace ambassador and despite the challenges on a personal level, he takes this role very seriously: *“It means I accepted the challenge to make a better Ethiopia through my attitude, actions and initiatives; to make living together easier by sharing what I learned and help others dialogue. Sometimes it feels like you are doing nothing or can’t achieve it, but when you are convinced, you still continue because you made a commitment and as a peace ambassador our Ethiopia is to be kept whatever the situation is.”*

“If we apply it in our daily life, we will have a multiplier effect”

Amanuel Abdi, 26, was a student of Law in Gondar University and earned LLB in Law in June 2019. When he returned to Dodola after he participated in the dialogue process in 2018, he shared all his new knowledge and discoveries with his parents. The conversation was an eye opener for his father, just as it had been for himself. *“I knew about dialogue as in a conversation of two persons, but I did not know the proper meaning of having a dialogue. After encountering PDC and LPI I know it is something that goes beyond that”,* he explained. And in the same way he initiated a conversation with his parents about dialogue, he believes young people apply and share any other valuable lessons they learn, which to him justifies investing in youth and offering them dialogue trainings. *“If we apply it in our daily life, we will have a multiplier effect,”* he said. He added that *“we young people are very open minded and passionate, which makes us invaluable multipliers when we are convinced about the importance of something, dialogue in this case.”*

Amanuel, an active peace incubatee, thinks that if people knew more about dialogue, conflicts in Ethiopia and around the world could be avoided, beginning at the family and work levels. *“Daily situations would not escalate. Dialogue is something we all need. Even coming from the same culture, we have different ways of perceiving*

things, but we have to try to understand the other, see the two different sides, and come to a common ground". Amanuel was trained by LPI as a peace incubatee in August 2019 in Addis Ababa. He praises LPI's engagement with the youth and he refers to the peace incubation program as one that, "is really practical for our ages, not just theory, but including practice to explain and take the dialogue off campus". In his peace incubation project, he engaged in a very enriching dialogue with Muslim and "Qeerroo" participants in Dodola town, hard hit by the most ethnically tinged conflict that caused the killings of 86 peoples from 23 to 25 October 2019 in Oromia region. "Sustained Dialogue means a lot to me personally because of the ways it allowed me to connect with other students on campus and gave us a platform where we could make meaningful change. It also creates a space where students can connect with their peers and share aspects of themselves that make them unique. The peace work is something I will continue to take part throughout my life," he said.

"Youth can embrace diversity for a better life"

Tigist Mulugeta, 25, is studying at Gondar University, preparing to be a lawyer. After her graduation, in June 2020, she is planning to work as a judge in courts. Her classroom is as diverse as the country itself, with over 10 recognised ethnic groups. She became interested in dialogue after reading about governmental efforts to address ethnic and religious problems in her community through dialogue. *"Dialogue is very important for our country, because we have ethnic tensions and violence happening, and dialogue is the way to promote peace," she says.* With this motivation, she participated in a SD Project since 2018 and currently she oversees five dialogue groups in her capacity as a facilitator at Gondar University.

After she did dialogue sessions in 2018, she engaged in dialogue with her peers and different peoples in her community. *"We can have different beliefs, religions and cultures, but we are all humans, we are the same. That's why we need dialogue, that's why it's so important. We need to find solutions to the problems and misunderstandings happening around us through dialogue,"* Tigist explains. For her, dialogue starts within her circle of friends. *"My friends and I have different backgrounds, and we have had problems related to our cultures, beliefs and ethnic groups. We ourselves need more and more dialogue to live in peace. I have Oromo, Tigray, Amhara, Christian and Muslim friends and we all do have to dialogue to better know each other, accept each other and to live in peace."* Tigist knows that it is important to train and engage youth in dialogue, as she is convinced of the power of youth to conduct change. *"Young people are very open-minded, more than adults. Youth are very open to learn and can achieve what they want. Youth are becoming more educated and can understand others' feelings and problems, they can embrace diversity for a better life".*

"It is better to get the dialogue skills while you are young"

Temesgen Yihunie, 26, was a student in Bahir Dar University actively participating in SD Project since he joined the university in 2017. He graduated in Economics in June 2019. *"I do SD because it's a space where I can come to understand both myself and others better. I love that I get to meet people who I would have never interacted with on campus,"* he says. *"Conflicts happen in our day to day life. I can now easily identify its stages and how to deal with it, it's no longer an unconscious behavior. I already have the know how I got from SD and in all my way as peace incubatee,"* he explains. As an SD graduate, he can also see now how to apply dialogue to real life situations as he already experienced it in implementing his peace projects in hometown. When serving as SD moderator in Bahir Dar University, it was motivating for him to see the faces of surprise of SD participants when they understand how easily they can avoid conflict escalations through the use of dialogue. *"It feels really good to see that when I facilitate dialogue sessions. Also, some participants approach me saying they know how they can help to manage some problems. I can already see in some of them the seeds of a dialogical person".*

Temesgen believes many current conflicts occurred here and there could have been avoided through dialogue at an initial stage. And at the same time, he believes dialogue ambassadors are created at an early stage in life. For him, it is particularly important to train young people in dialogue for peace. *"When you are young, your problem in reality is not so big. And if you learn to handle conflict from the very beginning, it will go with you*

through the years. When you become an adult, conflicts will not come to the stage of violence or be left unresolved. Later you become less flexible, less open. Afterwards, it is difficult to change behaviours and minds. If you want a dialogical person, it's better to get the skills while you are a younger", he adds. He mentions that some students become involved in politics or have influential positions later in life. By providing them with dialogue skills, he argues, they are being prepared to take a place on higher stages of national and international significance.

General Reflection on the Peace Incubation Activity

The number of students participating in the Peace Incubation Project has shown increment year after year with diverse project ideas ranging from addressing revenge killing practices through community dialogues to promotion of unity, peace and reconciliation among different ethnic groups through conferences, panel discussions and using arts and sports. All the peace projects were implemented in students' home communities with the knowledge and support of local administrations. While young people are widely seen as troublemakers and agents of violence, the peace incubatees, through planning and implementing their projects, have shown to their community and local authorities that young peoples can also play an active role in peacebuilding and in efforts to address violence at local level. The number of promising practices witnessed from the small but successful peace incubation projects signifies the need to actively engage selected SD students and the wider youth to take the message of SD beyond campuses and in implementing small scale community-based solutions to build a momentum for peace and nonviolence.

Areas of Competencies to be considered next

LPI, being an incubator providing different services including accompaniment to the peace incubatees, has identified the following competencies that experience to date suggest the incubatees need to have:

- Networking and stakeholder management
- Facilitating, collaborating and connecting
- Problem solving and creativity
- Regional languages and cultural sensitivity
- Influencing skills
- Strong local community networks with a range of community and government actors.

Lessons Learned from peace incubation:

- Peace Incubation as an activity has reinforced what is already well known, that when youth are directly involved in designing and implementing their own initiatives, they are more likely to "own" and derive meaningful benefits from the engagement.
- Particularly in settings where ethnic or religious cleavages run deep, it is often effective to bring youth together on perceived "neutral" ground. This provides them with the opportunity to face new ideas and approaches with a fresh perspective, away from any other social pressures they might experience closer to home. This is evident in the SD Project at the universities as students first come into contact with people from different ethnic and religious groups, a first exposure to the diversity in Ethiopia.
- Young women and men emerge as role models when provided space and support. This academic year, 8 women and 8 men were selected as incubatees. One of the critical challenges

was the lack of recognition of the positive and critical role of young people in communities on the side of local authorities. However, the feedback given by the community following the peace projects led by the young people showed a shift in mind-set of the local authority and the community towards the role of the youth in peacebuilding.

- Peacebuilding across the country is more important than ever, with increasing polarised discourse, media and communities. The conflict between different ethnic and religious groups requires interventions by which people can communicate across differences. The transitional status of the country makes it necessary that the government, including the local administrations, find a pathway to common ground. Peace Incubation showed that this kind of path is possible despite tensions, while highlighting the tremendous need for long-term, sustained engagement to prevent and address violence.
- LPI is exploring creative and flexible ways to expand the Peace Incubation and nonviolence approaches to other youth leaders across Ethiopia through a system of small micro-grants. LPI's Kenya Programme has experience of managing such grants in the run up to, during, and post 2017 elections in Kenya and in 2020 will explore how to adapt this approach in the Ethiopian context.