

Youth contribution

'My mother does not allow me to go out of this camp': Reflections on experiences as an internally displaced adolescent girl in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia

'Fatima'

Against the backdrop of historical tensions between Ethiopia's Oromo and Somali ethnic groups, clashes along a shared 1,400-kilometre regional boundary spiralled into mass killings and displacements in late 2017 and 2018. By mid-2018, more than a million people had been displaced from their homes. As well as inter-ethnic animosities, the conflict involved the regional administrations and security forces of both Oromia and Somali regional states.

As part of the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) longitudinal research study in Ethiopia, GAGE has gathered data from young people affected by this forced displacement to better understand the experiences and perspectives of young people in these communities. Fatima¹ is a 12-year-old adolescent girl from a Somali family who had been living in

Oromo region, but who were displaced as a result of the violence, and have been living in a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Dire Dawa city administration. Dire Dawa city is unique in that it is its own administrative region with consociational power-sharing between the two dominant ethnic groups – that is, Somalis (40%), Oromos (40%) and other ethnic groups (20%). As Fatima explains, inter-ethnic tensions remain high, and while the federal government initially provided support to IDPs, this has waned over time. Now, the options for young people to rebuild a future are very limited, especially for girls, due to security concerns and deep-rooted gender norms that preclude girls' mobility.

I came to Dire Dawa with my mother and siblings because the Oromo chased us away from our home. When we were looking after our goats, children started to say to us, 'Somali, Somali we will slaughter you'. They had knives and threatened us. When we told their parents, they chased us away. They said, 'You are Somali and have nothing here'. Then they burned our house one night and slaughtered my father.

I was sitting with my father when they came for him. He was relaxing and chewing 'khat'. We were chatting. Then they came. I was telling my father 'the Oromo are coming, let's go'. He told me I have lived my life, you run away. I told him 'I will stay with you, I will not live with Oromo'. They told me to go away. Others said, 'Leave her, she is a girl. She will give us children'. They knifed him while I was watching them. I was shocked. I could not even walk. I was sitting there. The houses were burning. Then my mother came. We went to my sister's house. Her husband is Oromo. Elders prevented them from killing us. They helped us hide behind sacks of peanuts. We stayed in that situation for about ten days. Then the federal security forces came. They collected dead bodies and buried them. Then we left the area.

When we first came to Dire Dawa, I felt that I wanted to kill Oromo. We used to go outside and sit. When children pass by who speak Oromo language, we stand up. We want to kill them. We leave them when we see a cross on their neck as we realise they are Amhara [highland Christians from the Amhara ethnic group]. When we see those who have 'Oda' [a large tree which symbolises Oromo culture, history and administrative system] on their neck, we feel like something burning inside us with rage. They stop us, but we wait for them. One day the federal police saw us and told us that if we do that, they will make us leave the camp. But we wait for them whether they are children, women or adults. When we see Oromo coming to the compound, we beat them. Then the federal police stop us. They tell us that we are in the camp of the government, we don't have to do that. The federal police

put us back into the compound and tell the others to go away. We feel angry when we see Oromo. The anger tells you to kill them.

One time an Oromo and Somali quarrel broke out in the community. At that time, we didn't sleep at night. We got organised and prepared sticks to protect the compound. We stood guard in different directions of the compound to protect ourselves. The federal police also protect the compound... Once, an Oromo person entered the compound at night. Then people caught him and beat him. They took him to a dark place and beat him. Then they threw him away and told him not to come back here again. When the federal police come in such cases, they fire their guns. Then we run away to our houses. They fire tear gas at us. It burns our eyes... They detained some Somali youths who threw stones in the camp. They took them to a police station and advised them and released them. The government then came to advise us, telling us not to attack people who are passing by... Now, we don't do that anymore. Now, the Oromo enter the compound and leave. We don't talk to them. We don't leave them if they provoke us though.

When we came here, the government gave us support in a good way. But for the last six months, we are not getting any services. They stopped all the services they have been providing us with... In the compound, we used to be given 1,000 birr per month (£14). They told us to go to the bank to collect the money. They took our parents' photos to open bank accounts for them. They also gave us food and everything that we need for cooking. But they stopped providing this support during the recent fasting season. We told the people in our village to sell the land we have there. They sold it and sent it [the money] to us. We are using that now. The government is not supporting us now. Everything we need for cooking we buy ourselves...

My mother does not allow me to go out of this camp [due to risk of gender-based violence and sexual violence]. She told me that she will kill me if I go out of this camp without her permission. Girls cannot work. Boys in our family work and buy things for themselves. When we were at home, we told our mother the things that we need. She would go to market and buy it for us. But here, we cannot get the things we want. My parents don't have the money to send me to school, and we are too poor for me to get married.

Many people have left the camp and moved to another location. Some people wanted to go back to the place they came from since it is peaceful now. The government gave them money and they also gave them food. Those who didn't want to go back to the place they came from were taken to the Somali region. We don't have cattle, even if we wanted to go there. We refused to go when they brought a car to take us there... We are just staying here.



FIGURE 29.1

First graders who fled from different areas, Ethiopia.

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NOTE

1 Pseudonym.