

Project  
Best Practices



## Strengthening Local Capacities for Peace: The Case of Local and Cross-Border Community Peace Committee Structures from Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya





CST Working Together




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# **Strengthening Local Capacities for Peace:** The Case of Local and Cross-Border Community Peace Committee Structures from Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya

By

Oromia Pastoralist Association (OPA)

With the financial Support of CAFOD, SCIAF and Trócaire (CST) and GIZ-CPS

Founded in 2006 by selected pastoralist community representatives from Oromia region, the Oromia Pastoralist Association (OPA) works with pastoralist communities, local government structures and other local and international partners to promote culture of tolerance and peaceful coexistence among the various pastoralist community groups inhabiting Oromia region and neighboring areas swamped in intra and inter-community disputes.

This booklet briefly discusses best practices of a Pastoralist community dispute resolution and peace building project initiated in Borana Zone by OPA through the financial support from CAFOD, SCIAF, and Tröcaire (CST) and GIZ-CPS.

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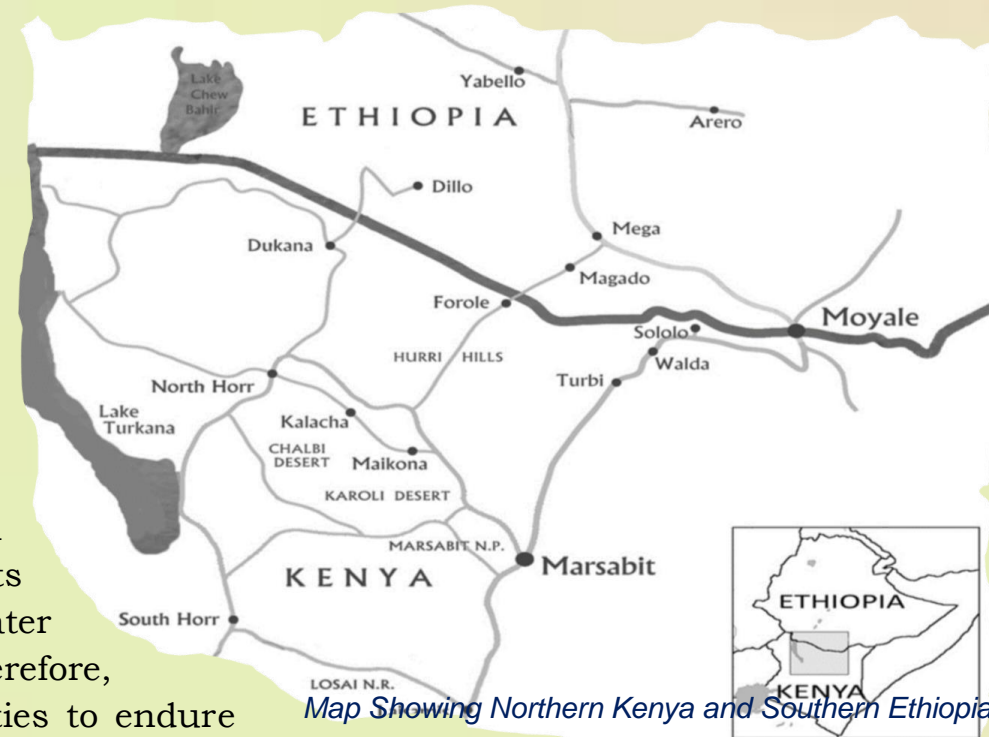
## Strengthening Local Capacities for Peace

Pastoralist communities of southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya share various socio-economic and cultural ties that have existed for centuries through regular interactions through age old customary institutions and systems which have provided a reliable base for social order and virtues of being well understood and respected across their members.

But, life has always been challenging particularly for the Gabra and Borana communities inhabiting the vast lands across Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya, whose lives and livelihoods to the larger extent have continued for decades to depend on traditional livestock production systems that require traveling for long distances in search of pasture and water.

Given the arid climatic conditions in which these pastoral groups inhabit, the areas experience recurrent droughts affecting the availability of resources such as pasture and water which are vital for sustenance of their livelihood. Therefore, mobility has remained a vital strategy for both communities to endure their mode of livelihood base.

As pasture and water are the two key factors that influence mobility of pastoralists in the areas, for Gabra of Kenya often it requires crossing over to Southern Ethiopia, an area which is occupied by Borana where water exists in large quantity, similarly, the situation demands that the Borana of Ethiopia travel to the



lowlands of Northern Kenya, an area largely inhabited by Gabra to access pastures that exists in abundance in the area.

Besides the availability of the natural resources across the border area, accessing them require close communication, collaboration and above all peaceful interactions among the communities living in the area.

This very important human element, i.e. peace, which determines the food security status and resilience of pastoralists of Borana and Gabra, repeatedly has been challenged due to frequent community conflicts that have occurred between them.



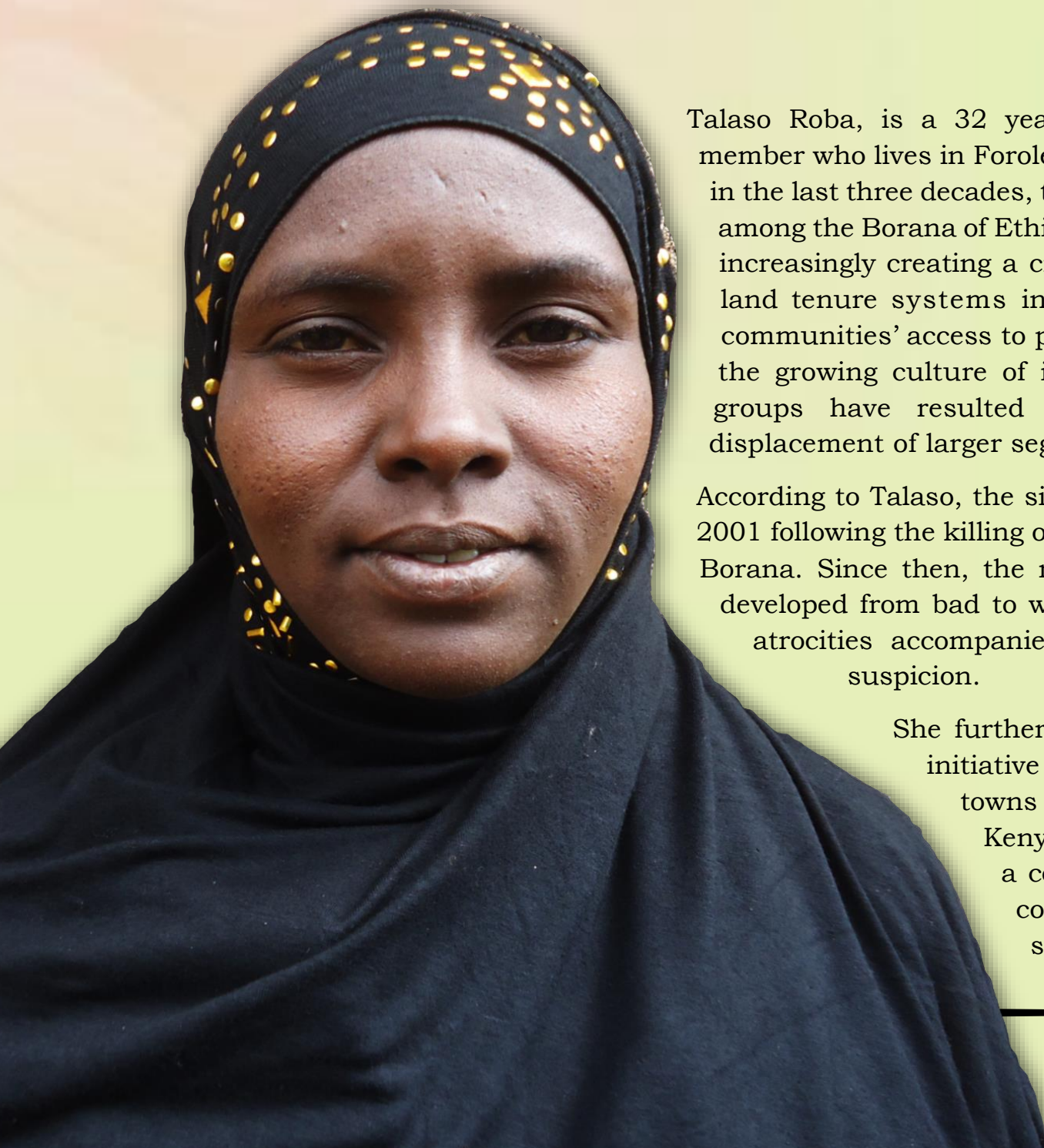
*Cattle drinking Water-Bake area*

Wako Kanchora, is a 70 years old Borana elder who currently lives in Dillo town on the Ethiopian side of the border say:

“Historically the relationship of the Borana of Ethiopia and the Gabra of Kenya has been characterized both by relative peace and dispute. Looking back to the historical causes of conflicts among Borana and Gabra, in the past, both communities have gone to war due to competition over natural resources such as pasture and water; over disputes among individuals from both groups triggering attacks and revenge attacks; livestock raiding; and killing for fame (to be considered as hero by fellow community members-particularly by women)”.

Wako argues that, both communities used to resolve such disputes through dialogues according to their traditional negotiation systems, facilitating reconciliation and payment of compensations, which has contained the escalation of conflicts.





Talaso Roba, is a 32 years old Gabra pastoralist community member who lives in Forole-Kenya on her part says, “Particularly, in the last three decades, the intensity and magnitude of conflicts among the Borana of Ethiopia and the Gabra of Kenya have been increasingly creating a crisis in the security of the customary land tenure systems in the grazing lands and has restricted communities’ access to pastures and water points. In addition, the growing culture of intolerance and hostility among both groups have resulted in the loss of human lives and displacement of larger segments from both communities”.

According to Talaso, the situation has reached its climax around 2001 following the killing of Gabra schoolchildren allegedly by the Borana. Since then, the relationship between both groups has developed from bad to worse and resulted in more bloodshed, atrocities accompanied by growing mistrust, enmity, and suspicion.

She further explains that “Even though, a peace initiative has started between elders from the towns of Dillo in Ethiopia and Dukana in Kenya that has resulted in an agreement for a ceasefire and reached a mechanism for compensating those whose livestock was stolen. However, a shaky truce remained

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due to weak follow-up and lack of local structures which could help in facilitating the realization of the agreement, the agreement was barely implemented as well as the culture of mistrust, revenge attacks, and enmity between both communities continued until OPA's recent cross border peace project in the area.”

In response to the frequent community disputes affecting lives and livelihoods of pastoralist communities in the area, the Oromia Pastoralist Association (OPA) through the financial support from CAFOD, SCIAF and Trōcaire (CST) launched a project entitled, “Pastoralist community dispute resolution and peace building project” in December 2013. The project has primarily aimed at enhancing culture of peaceful coexistence through traditionally negotiated and codified customary dispute settlements among the pastoralist communities engulfed in conflicts in and around Borana zone.

The launching of the project has brought hope to various communities including the Borana and the Gabra communities inhabiting the vast area along the Ethio-Kenyan border who have been affected by conflict and lack of security for a long period.





OPA's Board Chairperson, Nura Dida says, "In order to achieve the Project's overall aim of promoting culture of peaceful coexistence among the various pastoralist communities affected by conflict, including among communities of the Gabra in Northern Kenya and the Borana in Southern Ethiopia, through the financial and technical support from CAFOD, SCIAF and Trócaire (CST), and GIZ-CPS OPA has undertaken various activities. The establishment of local community led peace structure across the intervention areas was the initial activity undertaken by the project in June 2014 in five project target areas including two areas where the Borana of Ethiopia and the Gabra of Kenya encounter each other."

He further explains, "Based on past lessons learned, unlike previous approaches of establishing peace committees that engage within their own borders, the project has applied a strategy of establishing joint peace committee structures where representatives from the rival groups form a single joint peace structure. As the result, up to seven such local community joint peace committees each with

up to 20 members were formed. For the first time, these joint local and cross border community peace structures have included essential community segments such as women, and youth in their structures.”

Of course, Nura has not denied the dilemma and suspicion observed among the communities and government representatives of the Borana and the Gabra, when the idea of forming a joint peace structure was first tabled due to the long-standing tensions and mistrust that existed between them. After detail and continuous dialogues among key and influential community leaders from both sides who realized the limited contribution of ethnic/clan based peace committees and understanding the importance of joint efforts among rival groups they have finally agreed to form joint structures.

Above and beyond facilitating the establishment of joint community peace structures, the project in the last four years (2014-2017), has:

- Facilitated a series of consultation sessions among traditional/customary institutions leaders and local government law enforcement structures on values of collaboration in local conflict resolution and join hands to uphold rule of law and human security.
- Assisted and supported a number of local and cross-border community



*A Borana-Gabra cross-border community peace dialogue-Magado*

peace dialogues and discussion sessions which allowed for local community representatives from the rivalry groups to assemble and engage in dialogue and peacefully resolve cases of disputes according to their locally agreed principles and procedures.

- Provided a series of capacity building trainings and awareness raising workshops for local and cross-border peace committee members; women peace forums members; youth and local government security personnel on various topics such as conflict early warning monitoring, early response and DO-NO-HARM; culture of peace and tolerance; women's constitutional and customary rights of participation and decision making in local dispute resolution.

- Provided communication equipment to all local and cross-border community joint peace structure members to improve timely and regular local dispute early warning information exchange and response capabilities.



*A Borana-Gabra cross-border joint peace committee members' follow-up meeting-Magado*

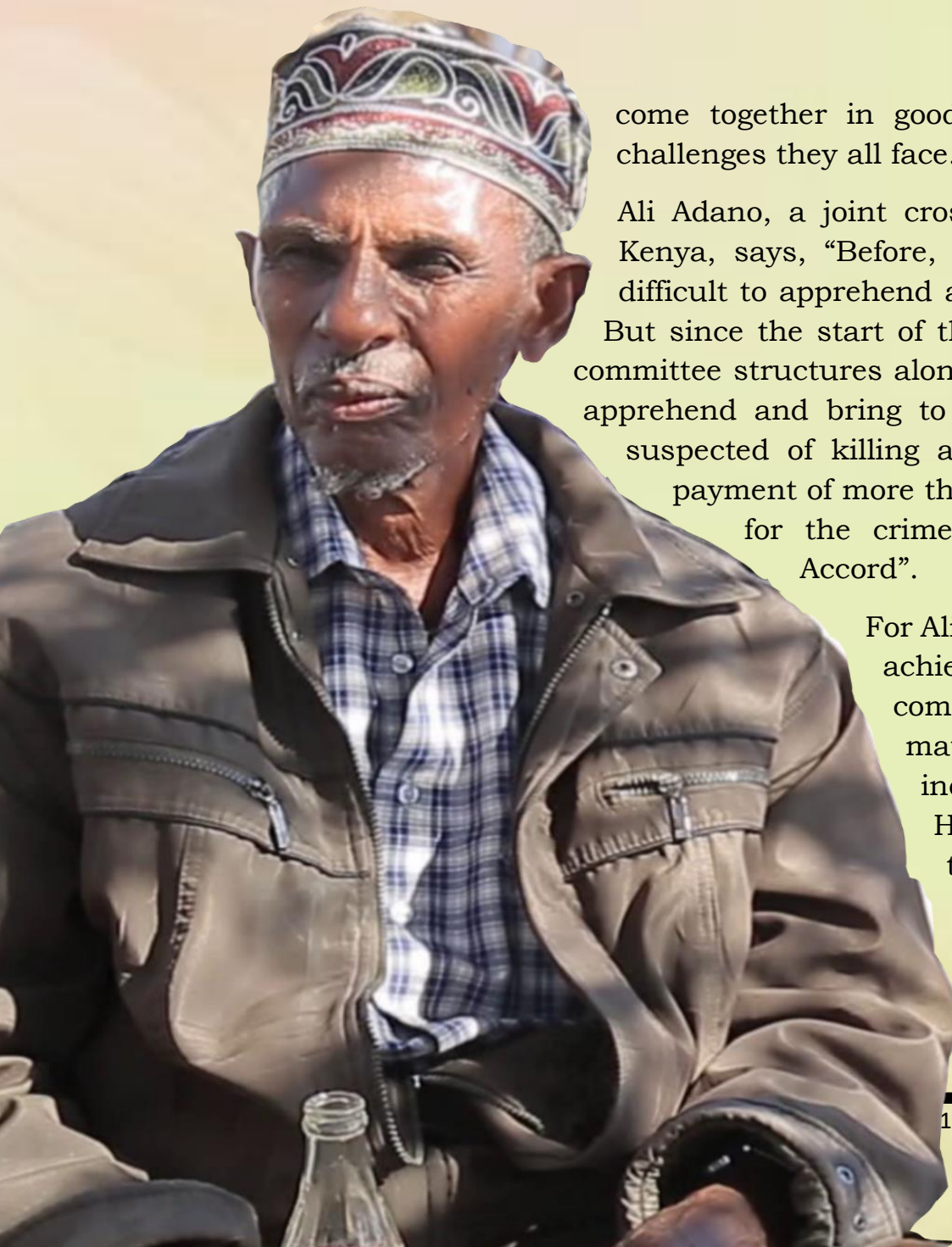
- Arranged local learning and experience sharing opportunities for members of the local community peace committee members to further enhance their response capacity and knowledge.
- Organized local peace day celebrations and community members' peace champions' recognition and awarding events.

The opportunity created by the project for the local community representatives who have formed a local peace structure in their respective areas on one hand has improved their recognition both by their respective communities and local state structures to engage in local peace building activities. While on the other hand, it provided them with a responsibility to engage with local government authorities, mobilize the wider communities for peace agenda, engage in constructive dialogue among themselves, facilitate community dialogues and follow-up smooth implementation of agreements reached at each dialogue, as well as keep regular communication and exchange information and update each other on state of peace and conflict in their areas.

The intervention has also created huge opportunities for the communities from the different ethnic backgrounds who used to perceive each other as enemies and rivalries to



*A joint peace committee members' experience sharing visit to Konso*

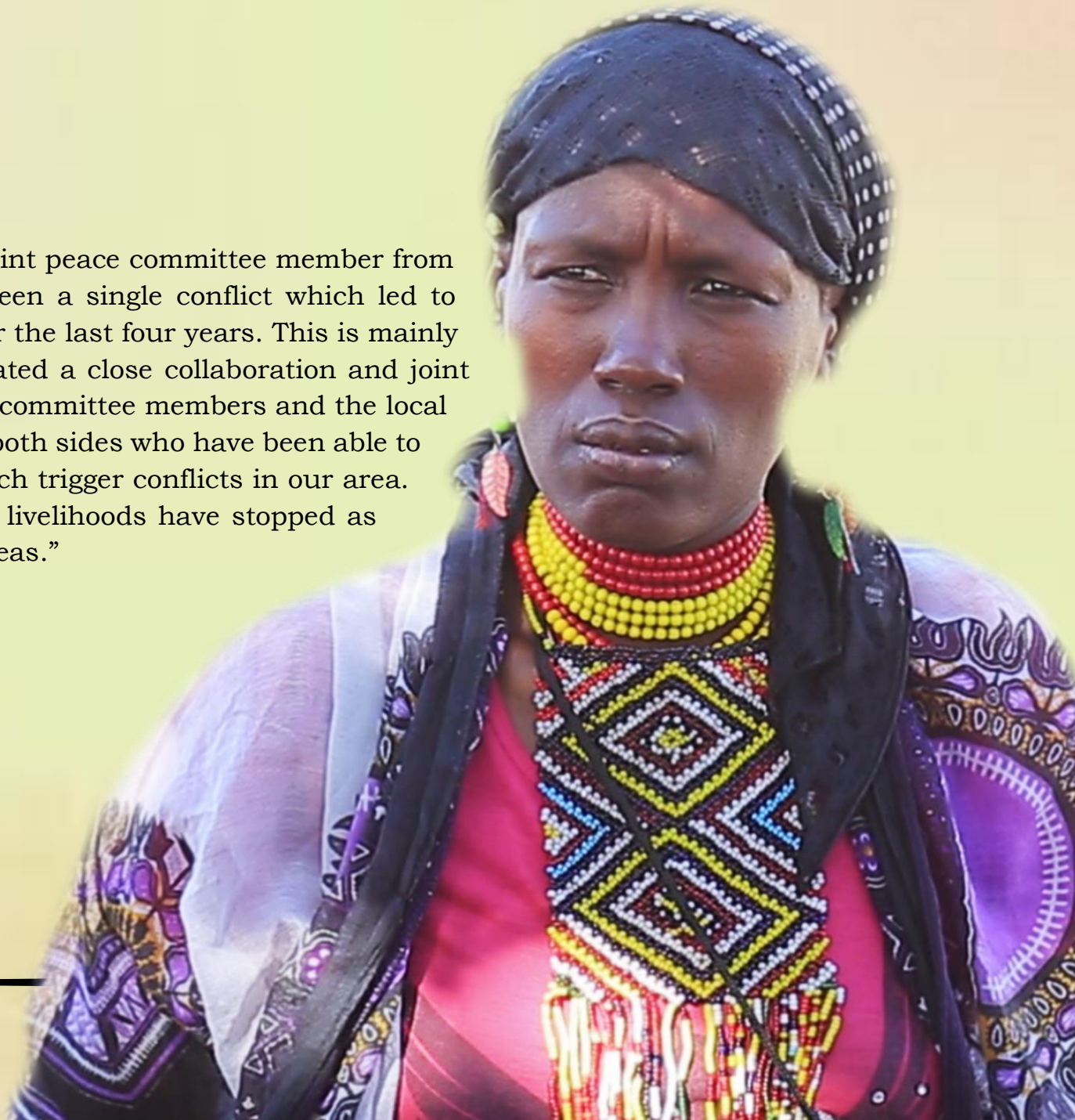


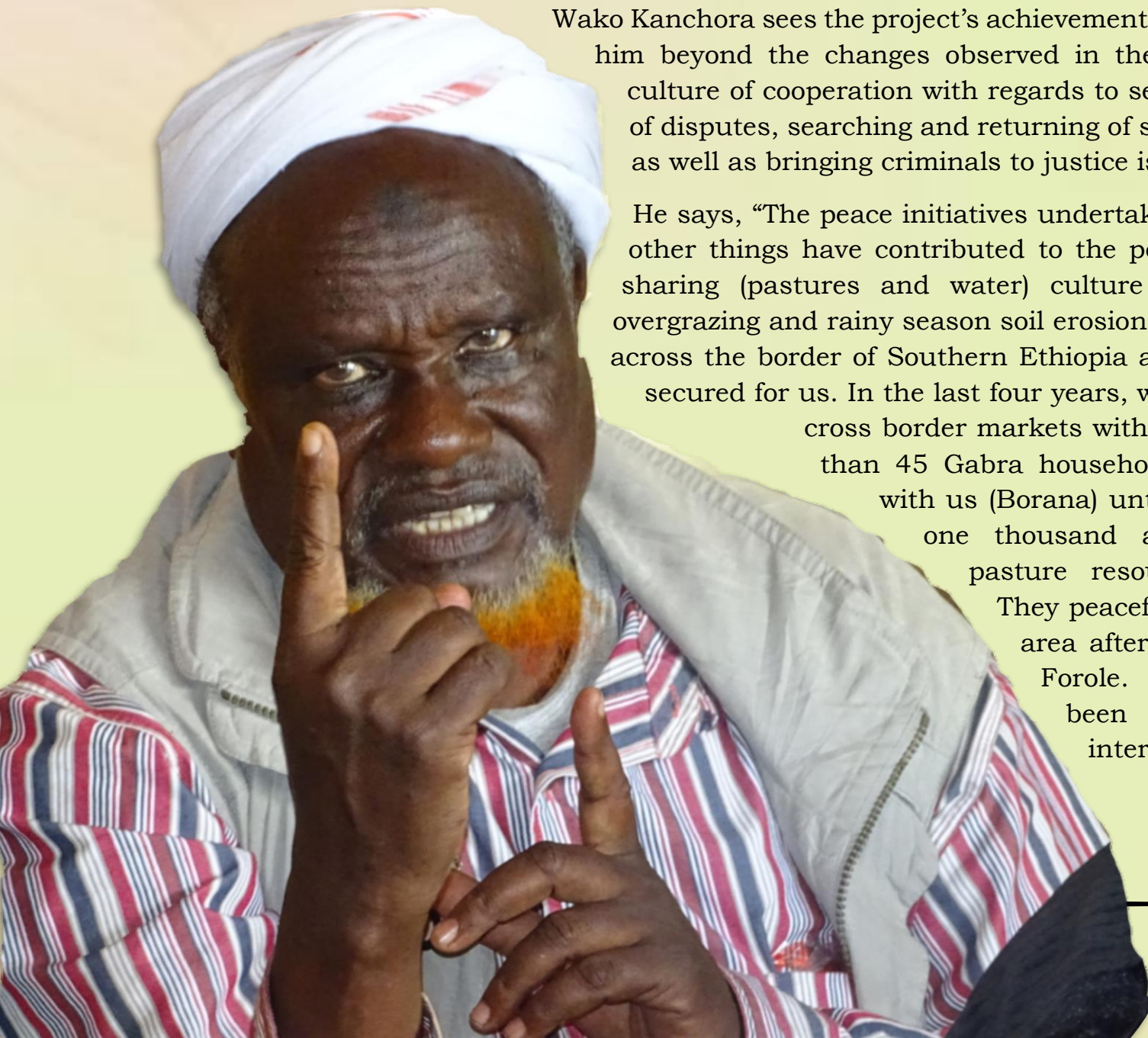
come together in good faith and commitment to jointly solve common challenges they all face.

Ali Adano, a joint cross-border peace committee member from Dukana-Kenya, says, “Before, the intervention it had not been possible or very difficult to apprehend and bring to justice individuals who commit crimes. But since the start of the project and establishment of cross-border peace committee structures along the Dillo-Dukana corridor, it has been possible to apprehend and bring to justice more than 20 individuals who have been suspected of killing and injuring people from both sides including the payment of more than 375 livestock as a form of fine and compensation for the crimes committed as per the Maikona-Dukana Peace Accord”.

For Ali, this indicates the improvement in the commitments achieved through the contribution of the project among communities from both sides that have started to materialize through their decision and differentiate individual criminal acts from their affiliated clans. Hence, they are now openly exposing criminals from their own clans showing the level of awareness of the community about peace issues and the growing sense of trust, cooperation, and peaceful interaction among the communities in the area.

Orge Jarra, a Borana woman and a joint peace committee member from Magado area says, “There has not been a single conflict which led to violence between us and the Gabra for the last four years. This is mainly due to the project’s success that created a close collaboration and joint engagement of the community, peace committee members and the local government security structures from both sides who have been able to timely identify and address cases which trigger conflicts in our area. Displacement and destruction to our livelihoods have stopped as the result of peace prevailed in our areas.”



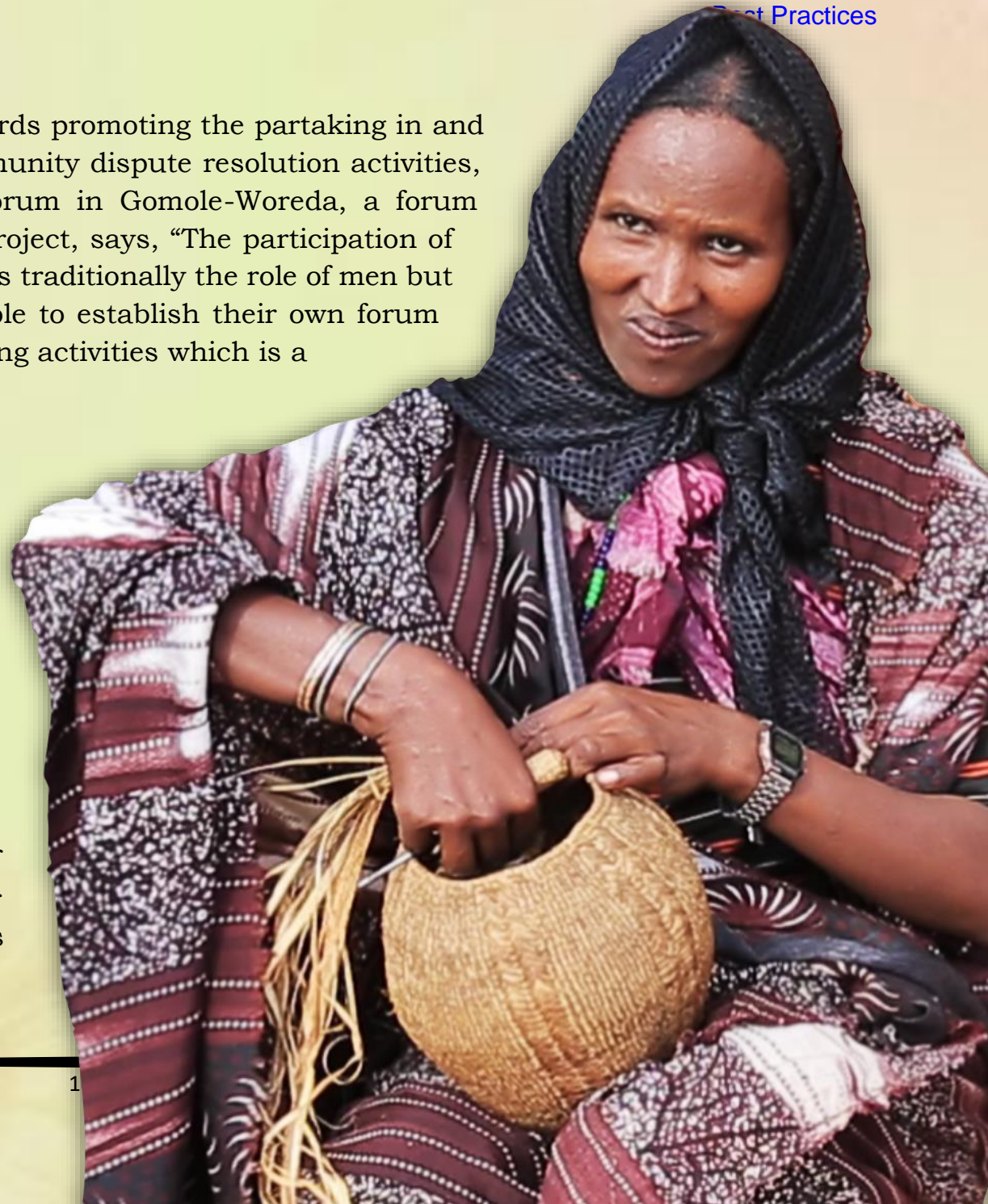


Wako Kanchora sees the project's achievements from a wider perspective. For him beyond the changes observed in the area through the improved culture of cooperation with regards to seeking for resolutions to cases of disputes, searching and returning of stolen animals to their owners, as well as bringing criminals to justice is the most important one.

He says, "The peace initiatives undertaken by OPA in his area among other things have contributed to the peaceful cross border resource sharing (pastures and water) culture which reduced dry season overgrazing and rainy season soil erosion as free movement of livestock across the border of Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya has been secured for us. In the last four years, we are able to access local and cross border markets without any fear of violence. More than 45 Gabra households from Forole- Kenya were with us (Borana) until last month with more than one thousand animals sharing water and pasture resource from Magado-Ethiopia. They peacefully returned recently to their area after the rain has started around Forole. Such coexistence had never been expected before the intervention by OPA."

With regards to the projects contribution towards promoting the partaking in and decision-making roles of women in local community dispute resolution activities, Dadi Kala, Chair of a local women peace forum in Gomole-Woreda, a forum established in 2015 with the support of the project, says, “The participation of women in public affairs to raise their voices was traditionally the role of men but now beyond mere participation women are able to establish their own forum and engage in local mediation and peace making activities which is a major success in the history of the area.”

She notes, “Before we established our own forum, OPA has done a tremendous work towards raising the awareness of customary leaders and influential community members through workshops and discussion sessions on the relevance and benefit of allowing women in local peace building activities. Finally, 62 courageous women from Gabra, Guji and Borana clans from Rika village have established our own forum and started to actively engage in facilitation of community dialogues among community representatives of the three community groups living in our locality who have been engaged in an endless dispute in the recent past.

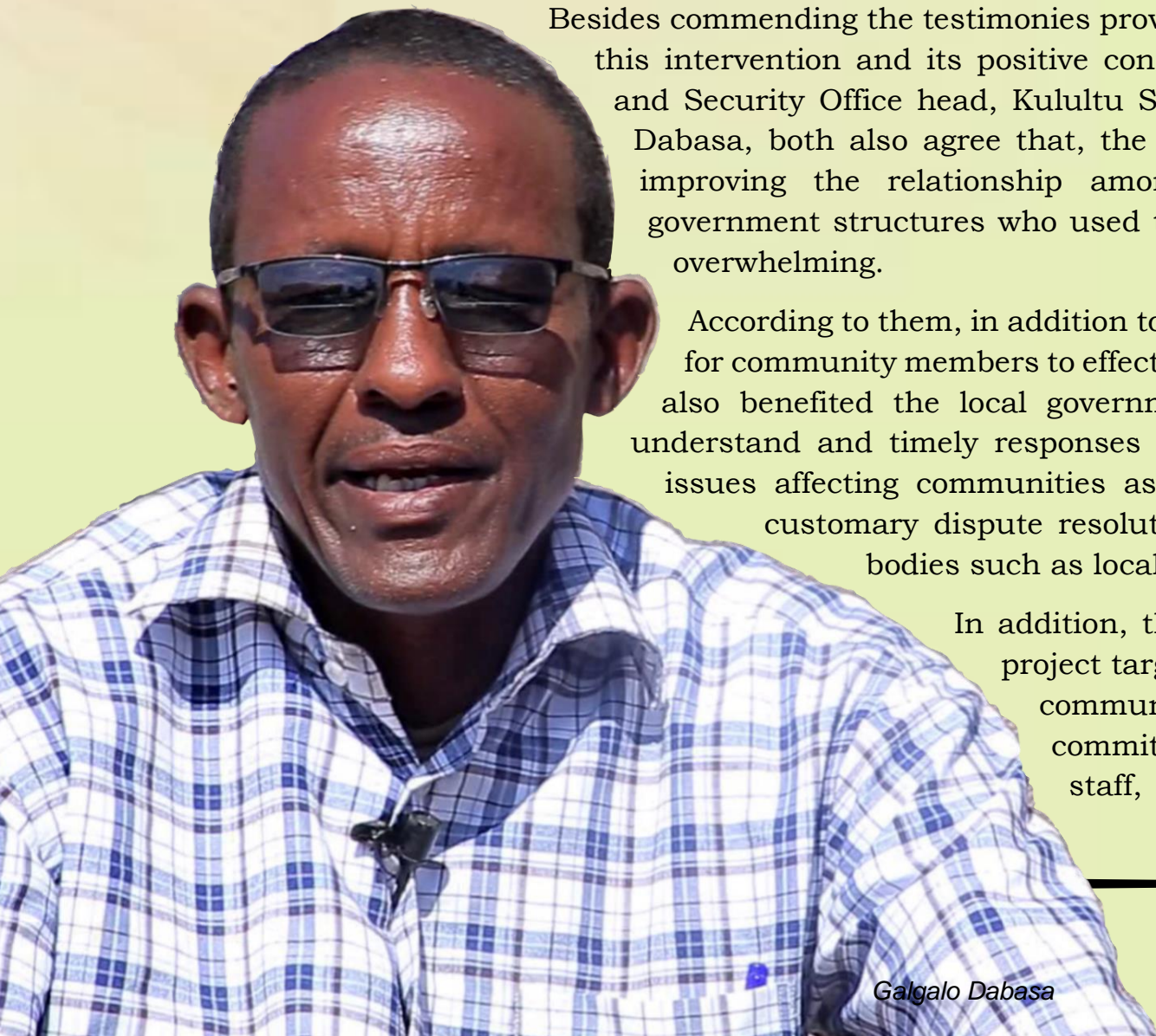


She further says, “Since the engagement of the forum in dispute resolution activities, we have been able to resolve various cases of disputes which occurred in our area including some cases which the local elders were not be able to resolve”.

Besides commending the testimonies provided by a number of stakeholders about this intervention and its positive contributions, Dire Woreda Administration and Security Office head, Kulultu Sara and Dukana District Chief Galgalo Dabasa, both also agree that, the achievement of the project in terms of improving the relationship among customary institutions and local government structures who used to perceive each other as foes has been overwhelming.

According to them, in addition to the opportunities created by the Project for community members to effectively engage with decision makers, it has also benefited the local governments on both sides of the border to understand and timely responses to good governance and accountability issues affecting communities as well as recognition and upholding of customary dispute resolution practices by local law enforcement bodies such as local courts.

In addition, the recognition and making use of local project target communities’ indigenous knowledge; community ownership, as well as the commitment and effort excreted by the project staff, local government and customary



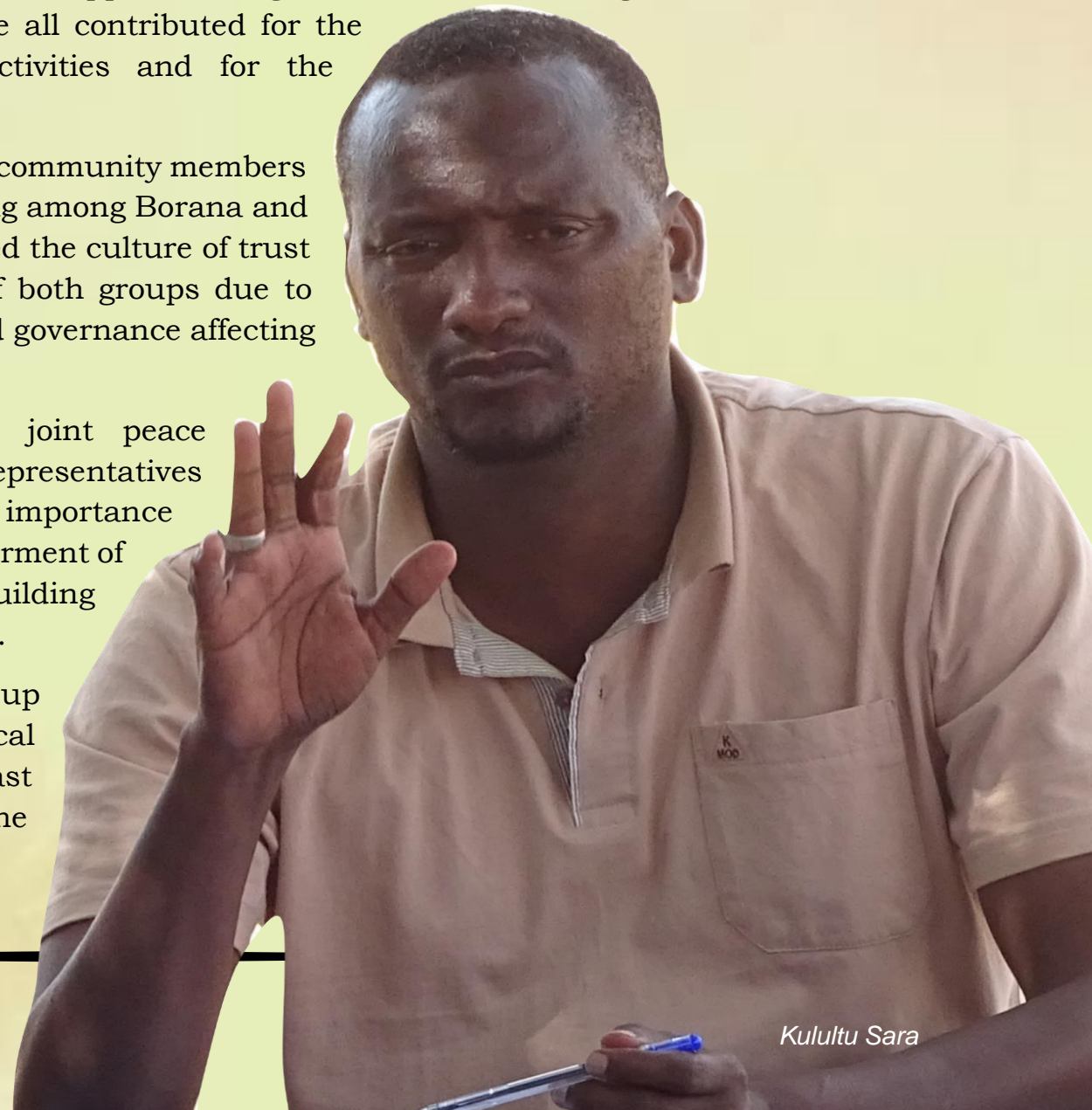
*Galgalo Dabasa*

institutions in the area including the close backing provided by CST's Civil Society Development Program which included a close support to target communities through regular visits made to the project sites have all contributed for the smooth implementation of the project activities and for the achievements registered.

As a key challenge to peace in the area, some community members mention the recent trends of conflict occurring among Borana and neighboring Somali communities that battered the culture of trust built in recent years among communities of both groups due to politicized ethnic boundaries and lack of good governance affecting the traditional ways of conflict resolution.

Members of the local and cross-border joint peace committee members and local government representatives from the project target areas, all agree on the importance of continued support towards further empowerment of youth and women to play a strong role in building culture of tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

In addition, strengthening follow-up mechanisms for smooth application of local community peace accords reached in the past between Borana and Gabra by building the



capacity of local community peace structures to further secure sustainability of the immense achievements made through the project so far.






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