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# The Social Contract in Situations of Conflict and Fragility in Northeastern Part of East Wallaga

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## Abstract

This review focuses on the importance of the social contract in addressing conflict and fragility in East Wallaga, Ethiopia. In situations of conflict and fragility, the social contract is often weakened or broken, leading to a breakdown in trust and legitimacy between citizens and the state. This review utilized a qualitative approach. Data was collected through key informant interviews and focus group discussions with individuals such as teachers, local health workers, and community leaders who were selected for their knowledge, access, and credibility. In addition Rapid Response Assessment was conducted on a monthly basis to gather real-time data on displacement and the host community. The study finds challenges, it is crucial to understand the specific dynamics of the region, including ethnic tensions and lack of basic public services and infrastructure. The study recommends implementing a social contract can promote inter-ethnic cooperation and reconciliation, provide a framework for the provision of public goods and services, and encourage democratic participation and accountability. Engagement of a range of actors in the peacebuilding process and addressing underlying causes of conflict are necessary for the success of the social contract.

**Keywords:** Social Contract; Conflict Fragility; East Wallaga; Ethiopia

## Introduction and Background

The theory of the social contract is a political concept that asserts that individuals surrender some of their natural rights to a government or ruler in exchange for protection and security. This concept has been explored by numerous philosophers throughout history, with varying interpretations and implications.

One of the earliest examples of the social contract theory can be found in Plato's Republic, where he proposes a social structure for an ideal society. In this society, individuals are divided into three classes, with each class responsible for different tasks and duties. The rulers are responsible for governing and ensuring the well-being of the society.

According to Plato, the social contract is based on the idea that individuals surrender some of their freedom and autonomy in exchange for the protection and guidance of the rulers.

In the seventeenth century, English philosopher Thomas Hobbes developed a more explicit version of the social contract theory in his book Leviathan. Hobbes believed that in a state of nature, individuals were in a constant state of war and conflict. He argued that the only way to escape this state of war was to surrender individual rights to a strong, centralized government. The social contract, according to Hobbes, was an agreement between individuals to surrender their natural rights to a ruler in exchange for protection and security.

Another prominent philosopher who contributed to the theory of the social contract was John Locke. In his book Two Treatises of Government, Locke argued that individuals have certain natural rights, including the right to life, liberty, and property. He believed that individuals enter into a social contract with a government to protect these rights, but that the government's power is limited and must be based on the consent of the governed. Locke's ideas had a significant influence on the American Revolution and the drafting of the United States Constitution.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a French philosopher of the eighteenth century, also contributed to the social contract theory. In his book The Social Contract, Rousseau argued that individuals in a state of nature were free and equal, but that the development of society led to inequality and oppression. He believed that individuals must voluntarily surrender their rights to a collective body, or "general will," in order to achieve true freedom and equality. The theory of the social contract has been a subject of debate and interpretation throughout history, with different philosophers emphasizing different aspects of the concept. However, it remains a significant idea in political philosophy and has influenced the development of modern democratic societies.

The concept of social contracts in the context of development theory gained prominence in the 1990s and early 2000s. While some scholars have offered supportive views on the topic, others have contrasting opinions. On the supportive side, scholars have argued that social contracts can lead to more inclusive and sustainable development. For example, in his book "Social Contracts and Economic Markets", economist Samuel Bowles [1] argues that a social contract can help to reduce inequality and promote economic growth. He suggests that a social contract can provide a framework for cooperation between citizens and the state, leading to more effective public policies and a stronger social safety net.

Similarly, political scientist James Scott [2] argues in his book "Seeing like a State" that social contracts can facilitate development by providing a framework for cooperation between citizens and the state. He suggests that a social contract can help to overcome the limitations of centralized state planning by allowing for more decentralized decision-making and local knowledge.

However, there are also contrasting views on the effectiveness of social contracts in development. Some scholars argue that social contracts can be difficult to implement in practice and may not lead to sustainable development outcomes. For example, political scientist Khan [3] argues that social contracts can be undermined by corruption and rent-seeking behaviors. He suggests that social contracts must be based on a strong institutional foundation to be effective.

Additionally, Rodrik [4] has argued that social contracts may not be appropriate for all countries at all stages of development. He suggests that social contracts are most effective in middle-income countries with a strong state capacity, while in low-income countries with weak institutions, social contracts may not be feasible or effective.

Furthermore, some scholars have raised concerns about the potential for social contracts to reinforce existing power structures and inequalities. Rothstein [5], argues that social contracts can create a "moral hazard" where elites can use their power to extract resources from the state without contributing to the common good. He suggests that social contracts must be based on principles of reciprocity and trust to avoid reinforcing existing power imbalances. Scholars have raised concerns about the potential for social contracts to reinforce existing power structures and inequalities, particularly in the African context. In Ethiopia, for example, the government has attempted to implement a social contract through its developmental state model, but critics argue that this has reinforced existing power structures and limited democratic participation. For example Oestigaard [6], argues that the Ethiopian government's developmental state model has created a "political settlement" that reinforces the power of the ruling party. Oestigaard suggests that the government's emphasis on economic growth and state-led development has led to limited democratic participation and a lack of accountability. He argues that the social contract in Ethiopia is based on a "bargain" between the state and citizens, where the government provides economic growth and services in exchange for political loyalty.

Similarly, Woldemariam [7] argues that the Ethiopian government's developmental state model has led to a concentration of power in the hands of the ruling party. He suggests that the social contract in Ethiopia is based on a "patron-client" relationship, where the government provides goods and services to loyal supporters in exchange for political support.

These findings are consistent with broader concerns about the potential for social contracts to reinforce existing power structures and inequalities in the African context. Khan [3] argues that social contracts can be undermined by corruption and rent-seeking behaviors, particularly in countries with weak institutional foundations. He suggests that social contracts should be based on principles of reciprocity and trust to avoid reinforcing existing power imbalances.

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In the case of Ethiopia, some scholars have suggested that a more inclusive and participatory social contract could be developed through greater political liberalization and democratization. Some scholars argue that the current political system, which is dominated by a single party, has contributed to the exclusion of certain groups from the political process and limited their ability to participate in the development of the social contract.

For instance, Asnake [8] argues that Ethiopia's political system is characterized by a "participatory deficit" that limits the ability of citizens to participate in decision-making processes. The author suggests that a more inclusive and participatory political system could help to address this deficit and promote greater social cohesion.

Similarly, Fantu Cheru and Mammo Muchie [9] argues that democratization and political liberalization could help to address the underlying causes of conflict in Ethiopia, including issues of identity, marginalization, and inequality. The authors suggest that a more inclusive and participatory social contract could be developed by promoting greater political representation and participation, as well as by addressing the root causes of conflict through policies that promote economic development, social inclusion, and human rights.

Furthermore, Zegeye [10] argues that Ethiopia's current political system is characterized by a "predatory state" that is focused on maintaining power rather than promoting the public good. The author suggests that greater political liberalization and democratization could help to address this problem by promoting accountability, transparency, and good governance. While, Lyons and Ottaway [11] argue that Ethiopia's developmental state model has led to limited democratic participation and a lack of accountability. They suggest that a more inclusive social contract could be developed through greater political pluralism and a more open political system.

These studies suggest that greater political liberalization and democratization could help to promote a more inclusive and participatory social contract in Ethiopia. By addressing issues of political exclusion and promoting greater representation and participation, it may be possible to develop a social contract that is more responsive to the needs and aspirations of all citizens, and that promotes greater social cohesion and stability.

## The Rationale for the Review

The rationale of the review is to understand the functioning of the social contract in a context of conflict and fragility. This is particularly important in light of the fact that situations of conflict and fragility can have significant impacts on social cohesion, governance, and the relationship between the state and society. The northeastern part of East Wallaga is a region that has experienced significant levels of conflict and fragility in recent years, including ethnic tensions, resource scarcity, and political violence. Understanding how the social contract operates in this specific context could provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities for promoting social cohesion and stability in similar settings. Moreover, by examining the impact of conflict and fragility on the social contract, this study could contribute to the development of effective strategies for promoting inclusive governance, building resilience, and addressing the root causes of conflict and fragility. This could have important implications not only for the northeastern part of East Wallaga, but also for other regions facing similar challenges.

## Objective of the Review

The objective of this review is to examine the functioning of the social contract in a situation of conflict, with a specific focus on how conflict and fragility shape and influence it. This involved investigating various historical, political, and socio-economic factors that have contributed to the current situation in the area, as well as analyzing the responses of different actors to these challenges. Additionally, the review aims to analyze how conflict and fragility have impacted the social contract by examining their effects on the relationship between the state and society, the roles of local institutions and community organizations, and the experiences of different groups within the population.

## Methodology and Methods of the Review

This study utilized a qualitative approach and collected both primary and secondary data sources. The Rapid Response Assessment was conducted on a monthly basis to gather real-time data on displacement and the host community. Data was collected through key informant interviews and focus group discussions with individuals such as teachers, local health workers, and community leaders who were selected for their knowledge, access, and credibility. Additionally, document analysis and archive materials were used to supplement the data. Unstructured interviews were also conducted to obtain the necessary information.

## Results and Discussion

East Wallaga is a region in Ethiopia that has experienced conflict and fragility due to various factors such as political instability, ethnic tensions, and poverty. In this context, the concept of a social contract can play an important role in addressing the underlying causes of conflict and promoting sustainable peace and development. A social contract is a

theoretical concept that refers to the implicit agreement between citizens and the state, whereby citizens agree to give up some of their individual freedoms and rights in exchange for the protection and provision of public goods and services by the state. In situations of conflict and fragility, the social contract is often broken or weakened, leading to a breakdown in trust and legitimacy between citizens and the state.

In Ethiopia, the concept of a social contract has been used to understand the relationship between citizens and the state, particularly in situations of conflict and fragility. In such contexts, the social contract is often weakened or broken, leading to a breakdown in trust and legitimacy between citizens and the state.

According to a study by the Overseas Development Institute, the social contract in Ethiopia has been weakened by a range of factors, including political instability, poverty, and ethnic tensions. The study notes that the state has often failed to deliver basic public goods and services to citizens, leading to a lack of trust and legitimacy. In addition, the study highlights the role of ethnic tensions in undermining the social contract, with some groups feeling marginalized and excluded from the political process.

Similarly, a study by the International Crisis Group, highlights the role of political repression and authoritarianism in undermining the social contract in Ethiopia. The study notes that the government has often used violence and intimidation to suppress dissent and opposition, leading to a breakdown in trust and legitimacy between citizens and the state. In addition, the study notes that the government has often failed to address the underlying causes of conflict and fragility, leading to a cycle of violence and instability. These studies highlight the challenges facing the social contract in Ethiopia, particularly in situations of conflict and fragility. To address these challenges, scholars have suggested the need for a more inclusive and participatory social contract that addresses the underlying causes of conflict and fragility, promotes democratic participation and accountability, and ensures the provision of basic public goods and services to all citizens.

To address this issue in East Wallaga, it is important to first understand the specific challenges and dynamics of the region. One key factor is the presence of ethnic tensions and conflicts. In such situations, a social contract can help to promote inter-ethnic cooperation and reconciliation by providing a framework for cooperation and collective action [12]. Another factor is the lack of basic public services and infrastructure in the region. This can lead to a lack of trust and legitimacy in the state, as citizens do not see their basic needs being met. A social contract can help to address this issue by providing a framework for the provision of public goods and services, such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. In addition, political instability and weak governance can undermine the social contract by creating a sense of impunity and a lack of accountability for those in power. To address this issue, a social contract can help to promote democratic participation and accountability, by ensuring that citizens have a voice in the decision-making processes of the state and that those in power are held accountable for their actions.

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The Overseas Development Institute's observation that the social contract in Ethiopia has been weakened by political instability, poverty, and ethnic tensions is supported by a range of academic literature. Many scholars have noted that Ethiopia's social contract has been strained by a history of conflict, inequality, and political repression, which have contributed to a lack of trust and legitimacy in the state. For instance, Tronvoll [8] argues that Ethiopia's social contract has been undermined by a lack of political openness and accountability, which has led to a culture of fear and repression. The author notes that the state has often failed to deliver basic public goods and services, particularly in areas affected by conflict, leading to a lack of trust and legitimacy among citizens. In addition, the study highlights the role of ethnic tensions in undermining the social contract, with some groups feeling marginalized and excluded from the political process.

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In countries ravaged by violent conflict such as Ethiopia, national social contracts are often weak, and in countries torn apart by civil war, they have all but vanished. Establishing a new, inclusive social compact, as well as reconstructing infrastructure and resuming economic activity, are all part of the process of rebuilding countries following civil conflict. Rebuilding countries after civil conflict is a complex and multifaceted process that requires a range of interventions, including establishing a new, inclusive social compact,

reconstructing infrastructure, and resuming economic activity. These interventions are critical to addressing the underlying causes of conflict and promoting sustainable peace and development.

Establishing a new, inclusive social compact is a key element of post-conflict rebuilding efforts. This involves creating a new social contract between the state and citizens, one that addresses the grievances and concerns of all groups in society. This may require promoting inter-ethnic reconciliation, addressing inequality and marginalization, and promoting democratic participation and accountability. Establishing a new social compact can help to build trust and legitimacy between citizens and the state, and promote a sense of shared responsibility for the future of the country.

Reconstructing infrastructure is another important element of post-conflict rebuilding efforts. The importance of reconstructing infrastructure as a key element of post-conflict rebuilding efforts is widely recognized in academic literature, as it is seen as crucial for promoting stability, economic growth, and social development. Ahmed and Greenhill [13] argues that the rebuilding of infrastructure is essential for restoring the functioning of a society, as it helps to create a sense of normalcy and stability in the aftermath of conflict. The authors suggest that rebuilding infrastructure can also create jobs and stimulate economic growth, which can contribute to long-term stability and development. Similarly, Collier and Hoeffler [14] notes that infrastructure reconstruction is an important element of post-conflict recovery, as it can help to promote economic growth and development. The authors suggest that rebuilding infrastructure can lead to improvements in productivity and competitiveness, which can help to create long-term economic growth and reduce the risk of future conflicts.

Moreover, a study by World Bank [15] argues that the reconstruction of social infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, is crucial for promoting social development and building resilience in the aftermath of conflict. The authors suggest that investing in social infrastructure can help to improve the health and education outcomes of populations affected by conflict, which can contribute to long-term stability and development.

Overall, these studies suggest that the reconstruction of infrastructure is an essential element of post-conflict rebuilding efforts, as it can help to promote stability, economic growth, and social development [16]. By investing in physical and social infrastructure, it may be possible to create a foundation for long-term stability and development, and reduce the risk of future conflicts.

Resuming economic activity is also critical to post-conflict rebuilding efforts. This may involve creating new economic opportunities, such as through job creation programs and small business development initiatives. Resuming economic activity can help to address poverty and inequality, promote social stability, and create the conditions for sustainable peace and development [17]. Rebuilding countries following civil conflict requires a range of interventions and a long-term commitment from the government, civil society, and international community. These interventions must address the underlying causes of conflict and promote inclusive and participatory approaches to rebuilding. In addition to establishing a new social compact, reconstructing infrastructure, and resuming economic activity, other critical interventions may include promoting human rights and the rule of law, addressing the root causes of conflict, promoting transitional justice and reconciliation, and strengthening democratic institutions [18].

For example, in Rwanda, after the genocide in 1994, the government implemented a range of interventions to rebuild the country and promote sustainable peace and development. These interventions included establishing a new social compact that emphasized national unity and reconciliation, promoting economic growth and development through policies such as the Vision 2020 plan, and implementing transitional justice measures such as the Gacaca court system.

Similarly, in Liberia, after years of civil war, the government implemented a range of interventions to promote post-conflict rebuilding. These interventions included promoting inter-ethnic reconciliation through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, rebuilding infrastructure such as roads and schools, and promoting economic growth and development through programs such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy [19].

In both cases, the process of rebuilding required a long-term commitment from the government, civil society, and international community, and a comprehensive approach to addressing the underlying causes of conflict. By promoting inclusive and participatory approaches to rebuilding, these countries were able to establish a foundation for sustainable peace and development.

To summarize, in situations of conflict and fragility, the social contract is essential to promote sustainable peace and development. However, this contract is often weakened or broken, causing a breakdown in trust between citizens and the state. To address this, it is crucial to understand the specific dynamics of the region, including ethnic tensions and lack of basic public services and infrastructure [20]. By implementing a social contract, inter-ethnic cooperation

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and reconciliation can be promoted, basic public goods and services can be provided, and democratic participation and accountability can be encouraged. To achieve this, it is important to engage a range of actors in the peace building process and address underlying causes of conflict.

In conclusion, establishing a new, inclusive social contract is critical to rebuilding countries following civil conflict, and it is an ongoing process that requires a long-term commitment from the government, civil society, and international community. By promoting inclusive and participatory approaches to rebuilding, and addressing the underlying causes of conflict, East Wallaga can establish a foundation for sustainable peace and development.

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