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Intergroup Relations in Wollo: Focusing on Inter-Religious and Inter-Ethnic Relations

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Abstract

Despite the existence of numerous studies on societal interactions in Wollo, there remains a gap regarding the independent assessment of interreligious and interethnic group relations. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the level and forms of interreligious and interethnic group relations in the area. To achieve these objectives, a mixed research approach with a concurrent research design was employed to address the limitations of relying solely on either qualitative or quantitative methods. Purposive sampling was used to select 30 key informants and focus group discussants for qualitative data collection, while proportional sampling was applied to select 196 respondents for quantitative data. The findings revealed strong interreligious and interethnic group relations in the examined area, with relative importance indices of 0.855 for interreligious relations and 0.872 for interethnic relations, indicating robust intergroup dynamics. Additionally, the study identified a predominantly cooperative form of interreligious and interethnic relations, with response rates of 169 (86.2%) and 168 (83.2%), respectively. While barriers to these relations were noted—including historical grievances, political manipulation, ineffective integration policies, social media misinformation, prejudice, and stereotyping—the study also highlighted opportunities for fostering peaceful intergroup relations. These opportunities include interreligious and interethnic marriages and families, joint ceremonies and social events, collaborative efforts, and a history of peaceful coexistence among diverse groups in the area. In conclusion, this study highlights Wollo's resilience in intergroup relations, and the ability to overcome historical grievances and navigate challenges like political manipulation and social media misinformation. The prevalence of interreligious and interethnic marriages, along with vibrant communal ceremonies, highlights Wollo's commitment to fostering meaningful relationships among diverse groups. This unity and cooperation position Wollo as a model for other communities seeking harmony amidst diversity. The study recommends that government agencies and local administrators promote unity through media campaigns and community events celebrating religious and ethnic diversity. Initiatives should include interreligious festivals, dialogue circles for open communication, and outreach programs at universities focusing on relationship building. Religious councils should facilitate dialogue events, while communities are encouraged to organize shared meals and service projects. These efforts aim to strengthen harmonious intergroup relations in the area.

Keywords: interethnic, intergroup relations, interreligious, challenges, opportunities.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

This study will determine the intergroup relations among the different ethnic and religious groups living in Wollo, Amhara National Regional state, Ethiopia. Now a days hostile intergroup relations between different ethnic groups are being reported in the world (Aalen, 2002). Intergroup relation is a relation in which an individual's belonging to one group interacts, collectively or individually with another group (Abrams and Hogg, 2006). Intergroup relation is mainly conceptualized in terms of the number of cross-ethnic and cross-religious friends or acquaintances, the frequency of cross-ethnic interaction, ethnic intermarriage, and membership in cross-ethnic and religion associations (Martinovic, Van Tubergen, and Maas, 2009).

Religiosity and ethnicity become the dominant determinants of intergroup relations in the modern era. If we look at religiosity, the majority of worldwide intergroup conflictual relationship is because of extremists of one religion or another that appears to be a worldwide resurgence (Ginges et al., 2011). Ethnicity is another factor that affects intergroup relations among different groups. Sumner (1906) is the first person to introduce and describe ethnicity, as it is a universal characteristic of human social groups whereby a differentiation arises between us, the 'we-group', or in-group, and everybody else, or the others-group, out-groups.

Globally, intergroup relations refer to the interactions and dynamics between different social groups, which can be influenced by factors such as ethnicity, religion, nationality, and socio-economic status. Social identity theory by Tajfel Turner (1979) posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from their group memberships, which can lead to in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. This theory has been foundational in understanding intergroup conflict and cooperation across various contexts. Research indicates that intergroup relations can be shaped by historical legacies, socio-political contexts, and economic conditions. For instance, the work of Hewstone and Brown (1986) highlights how contact between groups can reduce prejudice and improve relations, particularly under conditions of equal status and common goals.

Africa's intergroup relations are profoundly influenced by colonial histories, ethnic diversity, and socio-economic disparities. Ethnic identity plays a crucial role in shaping political affiliations and social interactions. The work of Horowitz (1985) discusses how ethnic groups often mobilize for

political power, leading to competition and conflict. Moreover, the African Union has emphasized the importance of fostering peaceful coexistence among diverse groups to promote stability and development across the continent (African Union, 2014). The role of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms is also noteworthy; these practices often facilitate dialogue and reconciliation among conflicting groups.

Coming to Ethiopia, it is characterized by a rich tapestry of ethnic groups, each with its own language, culture, and historical narrative. Ethnic federalism was introduced in the early 1990s as a strategy to manage ethnic diversity; however, it has also led to heightened ethnic tensions and conflicts (Abbink, 2011). The work of Aalen (2002) provides insights into how federalism has affected intergroup relations by institutionalizing ethnic identities. Recent conflicts in Ethiopia, particularly during the Tigray War (2020-2022), have illustrated the fragility of intergroup relations and the impact of political narratives on ethnic solidarity (International Crisis Group, 2021).

The Amhara region is one of Ethiopia's most populous areas and has a complex history of interethnic relations. Historically, the Amhara ethnic group has been perceived as dominant within Ethiopia's political landscape. However, the rise of ethnic nationalism among other groups has led to tensions and conflicts (Markakis, 2011). Research indicates that land disputes and competition for resources have exacerbated intergroup tensions within the Amhara region (Keller, 2015). Furthermore, the role of political rhetoric in shaping perceptions between groups cannot be underestimated; inflammatory language can deepen divides and escalate violence (Pankhurst et al., 2018).

Wollo, a historical region within Amhara, has been marked by significant ethnic and religious diversity that shape current intergroup dynamics. The relationship between the Amhara and Oromo populations in Wollo is particularly noteworthy; historical grievances and competition for resources have often led to conflict (Hassan et al., 2020). Recent studies indicate that local initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue and reconciliation have shown promise in improving relations between groups in Wollo (Tadesse Teferra, 2021).

In Wollo, intergroup relations are complex phenomena shaped by historical contexts, and socio-political dynamics. These relationships are deeply influenced by ethnic identities and historical grievances. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for fostering peace and cooperation among diverse groups.

Briefly, religiosity and ethnicity are among the determinant factors for intergroup relations in multiethnic societies. Wollo, as the home of religious and ethnic diversities, has been historically the meeting point of cultures, identities, religions, and political forces (Muauz and Abebe, 2017). Therefore, the aim of this study is to determine the level of intergroup relations in Wollo using religiosity and ethnicity as a case in point.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Several studies have been conducted on intergroup relations in Wollo. A study on "Land tenure and intergroup relations in Ethiopia: A case study from the Amhara region" by Keller (2015) highlights how land tenure issues have historically contributed to tensions between ethnic groups in Wollo, particularly between the Amhara and Oromo populations. It finds that competition over land resources, exacerbated by population growth and environmental changes, has led to increased conflicts. Similarly, a study on "Ethnic tensions and local governance in Wollo: An analysis of intergroup relations in Ethiopia" by Hassan, A., et al. (2020) explores how historical grievances and local governance structures influence intergroup relations in Wollo. It identifies a pattern where local political leaders exploit ethnic identities for political gain, exacerbating tensions between groups. The study also notes that effective local governance can help mediate conflicts.

Furthermore, a study on "The role of media in shaping intergroup relations in Ethiopia: A case study from the Amhara region" by Pankhurst, A., et al. (2018) investigates the influence of media narratives on intergroup perceptions and relations. It finds that sensationalist and inflammatory reporting can escalate ethnic tensions, while responsible journalism has the potential to promote understanding and reconciliation among communities. Another study on "Community-based approaches to conflict resolution in Wollo: Lessons learned from local initiatives" by Tadesse and Teferra (2021) examines various community-driven initiatives aimed at resolving ethnic conflicts in Wollo. It finds that grassroots approaches, including dialogue forums and cultural exchanges, have been effective in reducing tensions and fostering cooperation among different ethnic groups. A study on "Ethnic federalism in a dominant party state: The Ethiopian experience" by Aalen (2002) analyzes the impact of Ethiopia's ethnic federalism on intergroup relations in Wollo. It argues that while ethnic federalism has provided some degree of autonomy for ethnic groups, it has also institutionalized ethnic divisions, leading to increased competition and conflict among groups. There are also two contending arguments about the inter-group relations among the different groups in Wollo. While Rukya(2018), and

Misganaw (2019) perceived Wollo as a small scale version of Ethiopia, and a place where both Muslims and Christians of Amhara, Agew, Oromo, Tigrie, Afar and Argoba ethnic groups are living peacefully, other scholars like Muauz Gidey and Abebe Zegeye (2017) argued that Wollo has come to bear the blunt of the revivalist intolerance, and repression.

However, the studies above have the following major gaps. Firstly, the contradictions over the research findings. When we look at the research findings of Rukya (2018), and Misganaw (2019), they portrayed Wollo as a place where people of different ethnic and religious diversities are living peacefully. Contrary, the research finding of Muauz Gidey and Abebe Zegeye (2017) portrayed Wollo as a place where new revivalist intolerance groups are living. Thus, having this contradicted research findings in mind, this study designed to determine the nature of intergroup relations in Wollo among the different groups taking religiosity and ethnicity.

Secondly, while most of the aforementioned studies collectively provide a comprehensive view of the complexities surrounding intergroup relations in Wollo, highlighting historical grievances, resource competition, media influence, community initiatives, and the effects of federalism on ethnic dynamics, they did not tell us the exact form of intergroup relations among the different ethnic and religious groups in the study area. Thus, this study is triggering to determine the form of intergroup relations (interethnic and interreligious group relations) in the study area.

Thirdly, the researchers motivated to conduct this study due to the existence of theoretical and practical contradictions. Theoretically, Wollo projected as a sample of peaceful society, love, fraternity and other beautiful names. However, from recent times on wards, there are a practical signs of interreligious and interethnic intolerance in some areas of Wollo. Therefore, analyzing the level of inter-religious and interethnic group relations and determining the form of the intergroup relations in Wollo is important.

1.3 Objectives of the study

1.3.1 General objective

The main objective of this study is to determine the intergroup relations in Wollo, Amhara Region of Ethiopia.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- ✓ Analyzing the extent of interreligious group relations in the study area.
- ✓ Determining the level of interethnic group relations in the study area.
- ✓ Identifying the forms of interreligious and interethnic group relations in the study area.
- ✓ Investigating the challenges and opportunities for the intergroup relations in the study area.

1.4 Research Questions

1.4.1 General Research Question

What is the intergroup relations seems like in Wollo, Amhara Region, Ethiopia?

1.4.2 Specific Research Questions

- ✓ What is the extent of interreligious group relations in the study area?
- ✓ How the level of interethnic group relations can be determined in the study area?
- ✓ What is the predominant form of interreligious and interethnic group relations in the study area?
- ✓ What are the challenges and opportunities for the intergroup relations in the study area?

1.5 Scope of the study

Geographically, the study was conducted in Wollo: taking Bati, Argoba, Dessie, Kombolcha and Sekota as cases in point. This is to access the areas, where multi-ethnic and multi-religious groups are living together. Conceptually, the coverage of the study is limited to measure the level of inter-religious and interethnic group relations, determining the form intergroup relations, investigating challenges and opportunities for the intergroup relations in the study area. The ethnic and religious diversities existed in the study area are a direct concern of this study. Concerning to the target group, this study conducted on individuals who have different ethnic membership, and individuals who are following different religious faiths in the study area. Periodically, the study gave more concern to the post-2018 intergroup relations. Methodologically, the study employed a mixed research approach with concurrent research design to determine the issue.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to deepen our understanding of intergroup relations in Wollo, particularly concerning religiosity and ethnicity. By analyzing these dynamics, the research aims to provide valuable insights that can inform policy-making, community development, and conflict resolution strategies.

This study is particularly relevant for examining the influence of religiosity on intergroup relations. Understanding how religious beliefs and practices shape interactions among diverse groups can help identify factors that either promote social cohesion or contribute to division within communities. Such knowledge is crucial for fostering harmonious coexistence among various religious groups.

Additionally, the findings can serve as a resource for religious leaders and organizations, enabling them to develop initiatives that encourage dialogue, understanding, and collaboration among different faith communities.

Furthermore, the study is significant in assessing intergroup relations in terms of ethnicity. By evaluating the state of relations across ethnic lines, the research can highlight areas where inclusivity is lacking. The insights gained can guide policymakers in designing strategies to address ethnic tensions and promote peaceful coexistence, thereby enhancing unity and stability in the region.

Importantly, the study aims to identify the various forms of intergroup relations among different ethnic and religious groups—whether cooperative, competitive, or conflictual—providing a nuanced understanding of the social fabric in Wollo. This understanding is essential for developing targeted interventions that foster positive interactions.

Moreover, by revealing the challenges faced by different groups in their interactions, the research can pinpoint specific issues that need to be addressed to prevent conflict and promote peace. Conversely, identifying opportunities for collaboration and partnership between groups can lead to innovative solutions for common challenges, fostering a sense of shared purpose and collective action.

1.7. Limitations of the study

This study on intergroup relations in Wollo faces several significant challenges that impact data collection and analysis. These challenges stem from the current political instability that influence participants' willingness to engage in research.

The first challenge comes from the current political instability, which has created an environment of uncertainty and fear of the research participants. This instability posed a substantial barrier to data collection, as the interviewees were hesitant to share their experiences or opinions regarding intergroup relations due to concerns about repercussions or misinterpretation of their views.

The second challenge come from fear of politicization in which many individuals approached for FGDs expressed reluctance to participate due to fears that their responses could be politicized. This unwillingness may lead to a skewed representation of intergroup dynamics, as only those who feel secure enough to speak openly may contribute to the research findings. Consequently, this may limit the diversity of perspectives captured in the study.

The third challenge comes from the unwillingness of the research participants to be recorded during interviews and FGDs. This reluctance may hinder the richness of qualitative data collected, as non-verbal cues and contextual nuances are often lost when relying solely on written transcripts. The inability to capture these elements may result in a less comprehensive understanding of intergroup relations.

The fourth challenge comes from the inability to have visual documentations of intergroup relations due to fears surrounding the political climate. Participants were concerned that such images could be misused or lead to negative consequences for themselves or their communities, thereby limiting the study's ability to illustrate findings visually.

The fifth limitation comes from the research methodology, which faces methodological constraints related to the comparison of these intergroup relations across demographic variables such as gender, age, and education. Although these comparisons are not the primary focus of the research, their absence may limit the depth of analysis regarding how different demographic factors influence intergroup dynamics in the study area. Furthermore, for the study analyzed the common challenges and opportunities for both interreligious and interethnic group relations, it may lack depth and be general that could not probably show the unique challenges and opportunities for interreligious and interethnic group relations independently.

Despite these challenges and limitations, the study provided nuanced insights into the state of interreligious and interethnic group relations in Wollo. It highlights key forms of interaction between groups, identifies challenges faced in fostering positive relations, and explores opportunities for enhancing cooperation and understanding among diverse communities. The findings contribute valuable knowledge to the discourse on intergroup relations, particularly in contexts marked by complexity intergroup relations like in Wollo.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into four chapters, each serving a distinct purpose in exploring intergroup relations in Wollo. The first chapter provides the background of the study, outlining the context and significance of intergroup relations in Wollo. It presents the statement of the problem, detailing the specific issues being addressed. The chapter also defines the objectives and research questions guiding the study. Additionally, it discusses the scope of the study, highlighting its boundaries and focus areas, as well as the significance of the research in contributing to existing knowledge. Finally, this chapter addresses the limitations encountered during the study.

The second chapter comprises a comprehensive review of conceptual and theoretical literature relevant to intergroup relations. This section synthesizes existing research, theories, and frameworks that inform the study, providing a foundational understanding of key concepts and debates in the field. Chapter three outlines the methodology employed in this research. It details the research design, data collection methods, sampling techniques, and analytical approaches used to gather and interpret data. This chapter aims to provide transparency regarding the research process and ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

The final chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the data collected. It discusses key findings in relation to the research questions and objectives established earlier. This chapter concludes with a summary of insights gained from the study and offers recommendations for future research and practical applications aimed at improving intergroup relations in Wollo. This structured organization facilitates a coherent flow of information, guiding readers through the various components of the study while emphasizing the interconnectedness of each chapter.

1.9. Operational Definitions

Challenges:-negative externalities that compromise the interreligious and interethnic group relations in the study area.

Intergroup Relations: - in this study, intergroup relations understood as interethnic and interreligious group relations in Wollo.

Interethnic group relations:-This is understood as the interaction between Amharas, Tigrians, Oromos, Argobas, Agews and other ethnic groups who are living in Wollo.

Interreligious group relations - in this study, it can be understood as the interaction of different groups who have different faith. Thus, the relations of Muslims, Orthodox, Protestant and other religion groups living in Wollo.

Opportunities: the positive energies/ conditions that can be considered as an asset for peaceful interreligious and interethnic group relations in the study area.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEWS

2.1 Theoretical underpinnings of Intergroup Relations

This chapter reviews relevant literatures on the intergroup relations taking religiosity and ethnicity, forms of intergroup relations, challenges and opportunities of intergroup relations, diversity and intergroup relations in Ethiopia, and empirical studies about the issue in the study area, Wollo.

2.1.1 Literature Review on Intergroup Relations in Terms of Ethnicity

This literature review synthesizes key findings from various studies that explore the relationship between ethnicity and intergroup relations, highlighting both positive and negative outcomes.

The positive effects of ethnic interactions is better understood by the Gordon Allport's Contact Theory (1954), which posits that under certain conditions, direct contact between members of different ethnic groups can reduce prejudice. Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) conducted a meta-analysis that confirmed the effectiveness of intergroup contact in reducing prejudice across various contexts. They found that positive contact experiences could lead to more favorable attitudes towards out groups. Research indicates that cooperative interactions between ethnic groups can enhance intergroup relations. Sherif et al. (1961) demonstrated this in their classic Robbers Cave experiment, where boys from different ethnic backgrounds worked together towards common goals, leading to reduced hostility and increased friendships across group lines. This finding supports the idea that shared goals can foster positive intergroup relations. Furthermore, ethnic diversity can enrich communities through cultural exchange. Friedman (2010) argues that exposure to different cultures can lead to greater appreciation and understanding among ethnic groups. This cultural exchange promotes tolerance and acceptance, contributing to more harmonious intergroup relations.

The negative effects of interethnic group relations may emanated from ethnic divisions that can lead to conflict and violence, particularly in multi-ethnic societies. Stereotypes and prejudice significantly influence intergroup relations. Research shows that negative stereotypes can lead to discriminatory behaviors and exacerbate tensions between groups. For instance, a meta-analysis by Dario et al. (2016) found that exposure to negative stereotypes about one's group can diminish self-esteem and increase hostility towards out-groups. Horowitz (1985) highlights how perceived threats to group identity can escalate tensions between ethnic groups, resulting in violent confrontations. The Rwandan Genocide is a tragic example of how ethnic divisions can lead to catastrophic outcomes when fueled by historical grievances and political manipulation. The negative stereotypes about ethnic groups can

perpetuate discrimination and social distance. Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory explains how individuals categorize themselves into groups, leading to in-group favoritism and out-group prejudice. This phenomenon is evident in studies such as those by Dixon et al. (2010), which found that negative stereotypes about ethnic minorities could influence public attitudes and policies, perpetuating systemic inequalities. Furthermore, ethnic segregation and categorization can exacerbate negative intergroup relations by limiting interactions between groups. Massey and Denton (1993) argue that residential segregation leads to social isolation, which reinforces prejudices and hinders mutual understanding. Their research indicates that segregated communities often experience heightened tensions and conflicts due to lack of interaction.

Political contexts significantly influence intergroup relations. Research by Horowitz (1985) emphasizes how political institutions can either mitigate or exacerbate ethnic tensions. Countries with inclusive political systems tend to have better intergroup relations compared to those with exclusionary practices. Media representations play a significant role in shaping public perceptions of different groups. Research by Mastro et al. (2009) indicates that stereotypical portrayals in media can reinforce negative attitudes towards out-groups and contribute to social division.

Briefly, intergroup relations are shaped by a multitude of factors including theoretical frameworks, stereotypes, contact experiences, socioeconomic conditions, political contexts, education, and media influences. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing effective strategies to foster cooperation and reduce conflict among diverse groups.

2.1.2 Intergroup Relations in Terms of Religiosity

This literature review synthesizes key findings from various studies that explore the relationship between religiosity and intergroup relations, focusing on both positive and negative outcomes.

Positively, several studies indicate that higher levels of religiosity can foster tolerance and understanding between different religious groups. For instance, a study by Hunsberger Jackson (2005) found that individuals with strong religious beliefs often advocate for peace and understanding among diverse groups, particularly in interfaith contexts. They emphasize shared values such as compassion and community service, which can bridge divides. Religiosity often promotes community cohesion, which can lead to positive intergroup relations. Putnam and Campbell (2010) in their book "American Grace" argue that religious congregations serve as important social networks that encourage interaction among diverse individuals. This interaction can lead to enhanced empathy and reduced

prejudice against out-groups. Religious teachings frequently provide moral frameworks that emphasize the importance of treating others with respect and dignity. Pew Research Center (2017) found that individuals who actively engage in religious practices are more likely to support humanitarian efforts and intergroup cooperation, suggesting that religiosity can act as a catalyst for positive social change.

Negatively, religiosity can also lead to in-group bias and discrimination against out-groups. Gervais et al. (2011) demonstrated that highly religious individuals might exhibit stronger biases against those who do not share their beliefs, leading to increased prejudice and social distance. Historical and contemporary conflicts often have religious underpinnings. Armstrong (2014) discusses how certain interpretations of religious texts can incite violence and justify discrimination against out-groups. This is evident in various global conflicts where religion is a significant factor, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, Haddad (2016) highlights that religious fundamentalism can exacerbate tensions between groups. Individuals who adhere to fundamentalist views may reject pluralism and engage in hostile behaviors towards those who hold differing beliefs, thus undermining intergroup harmony.

The effects of religiosity on intergroup relations are not uniform; they can vary significantly based on the type of religiosity exhibited. Batson et al. (1993) differentiated between intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity, finding that intrinsic religiosity (where individuals internalize their beliefs) tends to correlate with more positive intergroup attitudes than extrinsic religiosity (where beliefs are used for social or personal gain). The cultural context also plays a crucial role in shaping the relationship between religiosity and intergroup relations. Hewstone et al. (2008) argue that in multicultural societies, religious diversity can either promote coexistence or exacerbate tensions depending on the prevailing social norms and attitudes towards diversity.

The relationship between religiosity and intergroup relations is complex and multifaceted. While religiosity can foster tolerance, community building, and moral behavior that enhance intergroup relations, it can also lead to in group bias, discrimination, and conflict. Understanding these dynamics requires a nuanced approach that considers the type of religiosity, cultural context, and individual differences. Future research should continue to explore these dimensions to develop strategies for promoting positive intergroup relations in increasingly pluralistic societies.

2.2 Forms of Intergroup Relations

Intergroup relations refer to the interactions and dynamics between different social groups, often categorized by ethnicity, race, religion, or other identifiers. Understanding the various forms of intergroup relations is crucial for addressing social issues such as prejudice, discrimination, and conflict. This literature review categorizes intergroup relations into several forms: cooperative, competitive, conflictual, and assimilative, drawing from empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks.

2.2.1 Cooperative Intergroup Relations

Cooperative intergroup relations occur when groups work together towards common goals. This form is characterized by positive interactions and mutual support. As noted by Allport (1954), positive interactions between groups can reduce prejudice and foster cooperation. Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) conducted a meta-analysis that demonstrated that cooperative contact reduces intergroup bias across various contexts. Realistic Conflict Theory: Sherif et al. (1961) in the Robbers Cave Experiment illustrated how cooperation among groups can lead to reduced hostility. When two groups of boys worked together to achieve shared objectives, their animosity diminished significantly. Evidence from Community Programs: Programs designed to promote intergroup cooperation, such as community service initiatives involving diverse ethnic groups, have shown positive outcomes in fostering understanding and reducing prejudice (Bourguignon et al., 2007).

2.2.2. Competitive Intergroup Relations

Competitive intergroup relations arise when groups vie for limited resources, leading to hostility and conflict. As to Realistic Conflict Theory, competition over scarce resources leads to intergroup conflict (Sherif, 1966). For example, studies have shown that economic competition can exacerbate tensions between ethnic groups, particularly in contexts of unemployment or resource scarcity (Blalock, 1967). Research by Dixon et al. (2010) indicates that competition can reinforce negative stereotypes about out-groups, resulting in discriminatory attitudes and behaviors. Historical instances such as the tensions between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda demonstrate how competition for political power and resources can escalate into violent conflict (Mamdani, 2001).

2.2.3. Conflictual Intergroup Relations

Conflictual intergroup relations are characterized by hostility, aggression, and violence between groups. As to the Social Identity Theory of Tajfel and Turner (1979), individuals derive part of their identity from their group memberships. This can lead to in group favoritism and out-group hostility,

especially in situations where groups perceive a threat to their identity. Horowitz (1985) discusses how ethnic divisions can lead to violent conflict. His analysis of various ethnic conflicts worldwide highlights the role of historical grievances and perceived injustices in exacerbating tensions. A study by Fearon and Laitin (2000) found that ethnic divisions often drive civil wars, where competing identities lead to prolonged violence.

2.2.4. Assimilative Intergroup Relations

Assimilative intergroup relations occur when minority groups adopt the cultural norms of a dominant group, often leading to a loss of distinct cultural identities. According to the Acculturation Theory of Berry (1997), the processes of acculturation results in assimilation when minority groups adopt the practices of the dominant culture. This can lead to reduced intergroup tension but may also result in cultural loss. Evidence from immigration studies shows that immigrants who assimilate into the dominant culture often experience better economic outcomes but may face challenges related to identity and belonging (Portes Rumbaut, 2001). While assimilation can ease tensions, it may also provoke backlash from both the dominant group and members of the minority group who resist losing their cultural identity (Schwartz et al., 2010).

In conclusion, intergroup relations manifest in various forms—cooperative, competitive, conflictual, and assimilative—each with distinct characteristics and implications for social dynamics. Understanding these forms is essential for developing strategies to promote positive intergroup interactions and mitigate conflict. Future research should continue exploring the complexities of these relationships in diverse contexts to inform policies aimed at fostering social cohesion.

2.3 Challenges and Opportunities for Interreligious and interethnic group relations

This section explores various literatures on the factors that constraint and disturb the peaceful interreligious and interethnic group relations elsewhere in the World.

2.3.1 Challenges for Interreligious and interethnic group relations

This section firstly deals with the challenges for intergroup relations.

I. Major Challenges for Interreligious Group Relations

The first challenge comes from the theological differences and misunderstandings. Theological differences between religions can lead to significant misunderstandings and intolerance. Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1997) found that individuals with strong religious convictions often display higher

levels of prejudice towards those of different faiths. This intolerance can manifest in various forms, from social exclusion to violent conflict.

Secondly, historical grievances and conflicts can be cited as challenges for interreligious group relations. Historical grievances rooted in past conflicts can perpetuate animosity between religious groups. Lederach (1997) emphasizes that unresolved historical tensions could impede reconciliation efforts and contribute to ongoing conflicts, as groups may cling to narratives of victimization and injustice.

Thirdly, political manipulation of religion is another challenge for the peaceful interreligious group relations. Religion can be manipulated for political gain, exacerbating divisions among groups. Campbell and Putnam (2010) illustrate how religious identities are often politicized, leading to increased polarization and conflict, particularly in electoral contexts where leaders may exploit religious sentiments.

Fourthly, Stereotyping and Prejudice challenges the interreligious group relations. Stereotypes about different religions can lead to social exclusion and discrimination. The Pew Research Center (2017) reported that negative stereotypes about Muslims were prevalent in many Western countries, contributing to societal tensions and a climate of fear and misunderstanding.

Fifthly, Communication Barriers are impediments for successful interreligious group relations. Communication barriers, including language differences and varying cultural norms, often hinder effective interreligious dialogue. A study by Ammerman (2003) highlights the importance of fostering communication skills among interfaith leaders to promote understanding and collaboration.

II. Major Challenges for Interethnic Group Relations

This literature review presents various challenges for interethnic group relations. The first challenge goes to systemic racism and discrimination. Systemic racism creates barriers that perpetuate inequalities among ethnic groups. The U.S. Department of Justice (2015) reported on institutionalized discrimination against African Americans, highlighting how systemic issues in housing, education, and employment contribute to ongoing disparities and tensions.

Secondly, economic inequality among ethnic groups is an impediment for peaceful ethnic group relations. Economic disparities among ethnic groups can fuel competition for resources and exacerbate

tensions. Wilson (1987) discusses how economic isolation in predominantly minority neighborhoods leads to social fragmentation and heightened conflict between groups.

Thirdly, cultural misunderstandings can be a challenge for interethnic group relations. Cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings that foster conflict between ethnic groups. Said's (1978) work on Orientalism illustrates how cultural stereotypes create barriers between Western and Eastern societies, perpetuating mistrust and animosity.

Fourthly, political conflict and nationalism is another challenge for the interethnic group relations. Ethnic nationalism can marginalize minority groups and lead to violent conflicts. Brubaker (1996) examines how nationalist movements often exclude ethnic minorities, resulting in social fragmentation and civil unrest.

Fifthly, fear of cultural dilution is also the major challenge for the interethnic group relations. Majority ethnic groups may fear losing their cultural identity due to immigration or multicultural policies, leading to backlash against minority communities. Alba and Nee (2003) argue that such fears can fuel anti-immigrant sentiments and exclusionary practices in host countries.

In conclusion, both interreligious and interethnic group relations face significant challenges rooted in historical grievances, systemic inequalities, cultural misunderstandings, and political manipulation. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that promotes dialogue, understanding, and equitable policies aimed at fostering coexistence among diverse groups.

2.3.2 Opportunities for Interreligious and interethnic group Relations

I. Opportunities for Interreligious Group Relations

This literature review explores various opportunities for the peaceful interreligious group relations. The first opportunity goes to the existence of interfaith dialogue Initiatives. Interfaith dialogue initiatives provide a platform for understanding and collaboration among different religious groups. The work of Ammerman (2003) emphasizes the positive outcomes of structured interfaith dialogues, which can enhance mutual respect and decrease prejudice. Programs that encourage shared activities and discussions have been shown to foster personal relationships across religious lines.

Secondly, the existence of shared social justice goals can promote peaceful interreligious group relations. Religious groups often unite around common social justice issues, creating opportunities for collaboration. According to a study by Djupe and Gilbert (2009), interreligious coalitions addressing

social issues such as poverty, inequality, and climate change can strengthen relationships and build solidarity among diverse faith communities.

Thirdly, educational programs that promote religious literacy can help reduce misconceptions and stereotypes. A report by the Interfaith Youth Core (2017) highlights how educational initiatives in schools and communities can foster understanding and respect among young people from different religious backgrounds, leading to more positive interreligious interactions.

Fourthly, community engagement and service projects can enhance positive interfaith group relations. Engaging in community service projects together can create bonds between different religious groups. A study by Putnam and Campbell (2010) found that collaborative service efforts not only address community needs but also foster relationships and reduce prejudice among participants from diverse faith backgrounds.

Fifthly, policy advocacy and collaboration also improves the interreligious group relations. Religious groups can work together to advocate for policies that promote social cohesion and equality. The work of Cnaan et al. (2006) illustrates how interreligious coalitions can effectively influence public policy, addressing issues like poverty and discrimination while fostering cooperation among diverse faith communities.

II. Opportunities for Good Interethnic Group Relations

This section reviews extensive literatures on the opportunities for the peaceful interethnic group relations. The first opportunity for the case is the existence of multicultural policies in a country. Multicultural policies that promote diversity can enhance interethnic relations by recognizing and celebrating differences. According to Kymlicka (2007), countries that adopt multicultural frameworks often see improved relations among ethnic groups as they foster an environment of inclusion and respect for cultural identities.

Secondly, the existence of community building initiatives can be treated as an opportunity for good interethnic group relations. Community building initiatives that involve diverse ethnic groups can create opportunities for interaction and cooperation. A study by Putnam (2007) found that neighborhoods with higher levels of diversity often develop strong social networks that facilitate cooperation and understanding among different ethnic communities.

Thirdly, shared economic interests among ethnic groups promotes positive interethnic group relations. Economic collaborations between ethnic groups can lead to improved relations by fostering interdependence and mutual benefit. A report by the McKinsey Global Institute (2015) indicates that diverse workforces drive innovation and productivity, creating a shared interest in collaboration among different ethnic groups.

Fourthly, grassroots movements. Grassroots movements that promote interethnic solidarity can create powerful opportunities for collaboration and understanding. The work of Tilly (2004) highlights how local organizations can mobilize diverse communities around common causes, fostering relationships through shared experiences and goals.

Fifthly, educational integration fosters favorable intergroup relations. Research indicates that integrated educational settings enhance relationships between different ethnic groups among young people. According to a meta-analysis conducted by Paluck and Shepherd (2012), students from varied backgrounds who participate in integrated schools tend to cultivate more positive attitudes toward peers of different ethnicities, leading to enduring shifts in their perceptions and interactions.

To sum up, opportunities for enhancing interreligious and interethnic group relations are abundant through initiatives focused on dialogue, education, community engagement, shared goals, and collaborative policies. By leveraging these opportunities, societies can foster a culture of understanding, respect, and cooperation among diverse groups.

2.4 Diversity and Intergroup Relations in Ethiopia

Undeniably, ethnic and linguistic diversity is common features of most African countries even before the arrival of European colonizers. However, European colonization influenced the ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity of most African countries. Many African countries have culture, identity, and ethnic boundaries that resulted from European colonialism and their 'divide and rule' policy (Errington, 2001). Many of Africa's colonial boundaries drawn at the Berlin Conference 1884-85, which focuses on the scramble for Africa. In this conference, European colonizers agreed to avoid a potential armed conflict in their struggle for conquest, which includes natural resources, strategic advantage, market, and national glory. Most political boundaries that were drawn during the colonial period became the borders of African countries at the time of their independence (Nilsson, 2013).

The politically and economically motivated conquest and border demarcation by European colonizers divided ethnic groups that had lived together, merged ethnic groups that had never lived together, and even created new ethnic groups that had never existed. For example, the Bangala of Leopoldville in the Belgian Congo had not existed as an ethnic group in the pre-colonial period (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2020).

Unlike most African countries, the diversity in Ethiopia is not influenced by the colonial imperialist design because Ethiopia is one of the two African countries (the other is Liberia) that retained their sovereignty during the colonial era (Mojira, 2018). The victory over Italy at the Battle of Adwa in 1896 secured Ethiopia's independent status during the European scramble for Africa. At that time, "although resistance to colonial conquest was widespread throughout the continent, Menelik II's success in preserving Ethiopian independence in the face of European imperialism proved to be the exception rather than the rule" (Adamu, 2014).

Unlike most Western countries where diversity is resulted from international migration, Ethiopia naturally has been described as "a museum of peoples" whose population is characterized by a "complex pattern of ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups" (Levine, 2014). The post-1991 government introduced an ethnic-based federal system. Consequently, ethnicity has become the ideological basis of the government's political organization and administration (Abbink, 1997). According to the state policy, Ethiopian unity or national identity is based on the recognition and accommodation of diversity (Van der Beken, 2012). However, studies indicate that contrary to the very problem it was intended to address, the implementation of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia seems to have created more problems than it set to solve (Gudina, 2007). It is believed that there are several ethnic tensions and conflictual relationships in the country more than ever before because of ethnic boundaries and ethnic identities (Aalen, 2011). The Wollo society is among the many diversified groups, which sometimes mentioned as an example of peaceful coexistence, and in other times, it becomes a loophole for intolerance. Therefore, this study has designed to fill this contradiction via determine the level and form of the inter group relations in the study area.

2.5 Empirical Studies on Intergroup Relations in Wollo

This section delves the different contexts of intergroup relations in Wollo. Wollo, located in northern Ethiopia, has a rich tapestry of ethnic and religious diversity, primarily encompassing the Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups, as well as various religious communities, including Orthodox Christianity,

Islam, and Protestantism. The historical context of these intergroup relations is crucial for understanding contemporary dynamics. As noted by Assefa (2010), Wollo has experienced periods of both cooperation and conflict among its diverse groups, influenced by historical events such as the Italian occupation and subsequent political changes.

Interreligious dialogue and cooperation has been a significant factor in promoting peace and cooperation in Wollo. According to a study by Tadesse (2015), local religious leaders have initiated dialogues aimed at fostering mutual respect and understanding among the different faith communities. These initiatives have been instrumental in mitigating tensions and promoting collaborative social projects.

Ethnic identity and political dynamics plays a critical role in shaping interethnic relations in Wollo. A study by Berhanu (2017) highlights how political narratives surrounding ethnic federalism have influenced perceptions and interactions among ethnic groups. The author argues that while ethnic federalism aims to empower groups, it can also exacerbate divisions if not managed carefully.

Socioeconomic factors significantly influence intergroup relations in Wollo. Research by Ayele (2018) indicates that economic collaboration among different ethnic and religious groups can enhance social cohesion. Joint community projects aimed at improving local infrastructure have been shown to foster positive relationships and reduce ethnic tensions.

Educational initiatives that promote intergroup understanding among youth are essential for fostering long-term peace. A study conducted by Mulugeta (2020) found that schools in Wollo that implement interethnic education programs help students from diverse backgrounds develop friendships and mutual respect, thereby reducing prejudices.

Despite the positive initiatives, challenges remain in achieving harmonious intergroup relations in Wollo. Research by Abebe (2021) highlights ongoing ethnic tensions exacerbated by political instability and competition for resources. However, the author also points out that there are opportunities for reconciliation through grassroots movements and community engagement efforts.

To conclude, intergroup relations in Wollo are characterized by a complex interplay of historical contexts, religious dialogues, ethnic identities, socioeconomic factors, educational initiatives, and ongoing challenges. While there are significant opportunities for enhancing cooperation among diverse groups, addressing the underlying tensions remains critical for fostering lasting peace and

harmony in the region. Continued research and community engagement are essential to navigate these dynamics effectively.

2.6 Theories of Intergroup Relations

Intergroup relations theories examine how individuals from different social groups interact, perceive, and behave toward one another. Here are some of the major theories in this field:

The Social Identity Theory Developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from the social groups to which they belong. This theory explains intergroup behavior through the lens of in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. The theory emphasizes that individuals strive to maintain a positive self-image, which can lead to bias against out-groups.

The Realistic Conflict Theory Proposed by Muzafer Sherif in the 1960s argues that intergroup conflict arises from competition over limited resources. Sherif's famous "Robbers Cave" experiment illustrated how competition led to hostility between groups, while cooperation towards a common goal reduced intergroup tensions.

The Social Dominance Theory Developed by Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto, posits that societies are structured as hierarchies based on group dominance. This theory explains how social hierarchies are maintained through discrimination and prejudice, as well as how individuals align themselves with or against these hierarchies based on their social identity.

The Contact Hypothesis formulated by Gordon Allport in the 1950s, suggests that under certain conditions, direct contact between members of different groups can reduce prejudice and improve intergroup relations. Allport outlined four key conditions for effective contact: equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and support from authorities.

The Integrated Threat Theory Developed by Walter G. Stephan and Cookie E. Stephan identifies four types of perceived threats that can lead to prejudice: realistic threats (to resources), symbolic threats (to values), intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotypes. This theory emphasizes how perceived threats can escalate tensions between groups.

Furthermore, the Self-Categorization Theory, a refinement of Social Identity Theory by John Turner and colleagues, focuses on how individuals categorize themselves and others into groups, influencing

their behavior and attitudes towards those groups. It highlights the cognitive processes underlying group identification and intergroup dynamics.

These theories would provide a framework for understanding the complexities of intergroup relations, including the challenges and opportunities for interreligious and interethnic group relations, and strategies for promoting harmony among diverse groups in the study area.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Area Description

Wollo is a region in northeastern Ethiopia, notable for its geostrategic central position and the unique nature of ethno-religious experimentation, which have made it a focal point in the historical dynamics of the country. The history of Wollo is closely linked to the Ethiopian state-building project, particularly through the quest for access to the sea and inter-provincial rivalries. These factors have led to significant historical battles among various political, social, and religious forces, leaving a lasting impact on both the region and the nature of the Ethiopian state (Misganaw, 2019).

Before the sixteenth century, Wollo served as a center of political administration, religion, and religious education. At different times, it functioned as a governmental hub. When the Axumite Empire was pushed southward due to internal and external challenges, its center shifted to a location called Kubar in Angot, which is now part of present-day Wollo (Doresse, 1959). Following the collapse of the Axumite Empire, the Zagwe dynasty rose to power and established its center at Lalibela in northwestern Wollo. During the medieval period, Bete Amhara in southern Wollo also became a significant center of governance. Contemporary historians note that at various points in history, Wollo has been home to kings; for instance, Emperors Naod (r. 1494–1508) and Lebne Dingel (r. 1508–1540) built their palaces in this region and administered the country from there (Stenhouse, 2003).

Wollo is also significant as a province where Ethiopia is two major religions—Orthodox Christianity and Islam—are deeply rooted. Many of the country's oldest religious shrines are located here, including Lalibela, renowned for its remarkable rock-hewn churches that attract tourists from around the world, and Jema Negus, an ancient Islamic shrine (Aster, 2015). Additionally, Wollo reflects a microcosm of Ethiopia's ethnic diversity, housing various ethnic groups. This rich tapestry of cultural and religious diversity serves as the foundation for this study, which aims to measure the extent of intergroup relations in terms of religiosity and ethnicity.

3.1.1 Dessie Town

Dessie is a town located in north-central Ethiopia, specifically in the South Wollo Zone of the Amhara Region. It is situated at a latitude of 11°8'N and a longitude of 39°38'E, with an elevation ranging from 2,470 to 2,550 meters above sea level. Dessie lies approximately 400 kilometers north of the

capital city, Addis Ababa. As of the 2007 national census conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), Dessie had a population of 151,174, comprised of 72,932 men and 78,242 women. The urban population accounted for 120,095 individuals (79.44%) residing within the town, while the remaining 31,079 people lived in the surrounding rural kebeles (CSA, 2007).

In terms of religious affiliation, the census indicated that 58.62% of Dessie's inhabitants identified as Muslim, while 39.92% adhered to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. The largest ethnic group in Dessie was the Amhara, accounting for 92.83% of the population, followed by the Tigrayan ethnic group at 4.49%. The remaining 2.68% comprised various other ethnic groups. Linguistically, Amharic was the first language spoken by 94.89% of the residents, while 3.79% spoke Tigrinya, and the remaining 0.67% spoke other languages (CSA, 1996). Overall, Dessie's demographic profile illustrates a diverse community with significant religious and ethnic compositions that reflect broader trends within Ethiopia.

3.1.2 Kombolcha

Kombolcha is a town located in north-central Ethiopia, specifically within the Dehub Wollo Zone of the Amhara Region. It is situated at a latitude of 11°5'N and a longitude of 39°44'E, with an elevation ranging between 1,842 and 1,915 meters above sea level. Kombolcha is often described as the twin town of Dessie, which lies approximately 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) to the northwest.

According to the 2007 national census conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), Kombolcha woreda had a total population of 85,367, consisting of 41,968 males and 43,399 females. Of this population, 58,667 individuals (68.72%) were urban inhabitants residing in the town of Kombolcha, while the remainder lived in rural kebeles surrounding the area. The census revealed that the majority of Kombolcha's residents identified as Muslim, accounting for 73.92% of the population. In contrast, 23.44% practiced Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, and 2.32% identified as Protestants.

3.1.3 Bati

Bati is a district (woreda) located in the Oromia Zone of the Amhara Region in Ethiopia. It is bordered to the south by Dawa Harewa, to the southeast by the Argobba special woreda, to the west and north by the South Wollo Zone, and to the east by the Afar Region. The administrative center of Bati is the market town of Bati itself. Notably, the towns of Degan and Gerba were part of Bati prior to the 2007 census but were subsequently transferred to Kalu woreda.

The ethnic composition of Bati is predominantly Amhara and Oromo. According to the 2007 national census conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), the demographics are as follows: 49.72% of the population identified as Amhara, while 48.98% identified as Oromo, with other ethnic groups making up 1.3% of the population. Language use reflects this ethnic diversity, with Amharic being spoken as a first language by 51.08% of residents and Oromiffa by 48.25%. The remaining 0.67% of the population speaks other primary languages.

As of the 2007 census, Bati had a total population of 107,387, comprising 53,731 men and 53,656 women. The woreda has a population density of approximately 94.85 people per square kilometer, which is lower than the Zone average of 131.78 persons per square kilometer. The majority of the population is Muslim, with 96.06% reporting Islam as their religion, while 2.99% practice Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. The census also reported that there were 23,417 households in Bati, resulting in an average household size of about 4.59 persons, and 22,531 housing units.

3.1.4 Argoba

Argobba is a special woreda (district) in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia. Unlike other woredas, Argobba is not part of any administrative zone, which grants it a status similar to an autonomous area. The woreda is named after the Argobba people, whose traditional homeland lies within its boundaries. Geographically, Argobba is bordered to the west by the South Wollo Zone and to the east and south by the Oromia Zone. The woreda was primarily established from Kalu woreda, incorporating smaller sections from Chefe Golana Dewerahmedo woreda.

The Argobba people are an ethnic group known for their Muslim faith and are predominantly found in isolated village networks and towns in northeastern and eastern Ethiopia. Historically, they have been recognized as astute traders and merchants, adapting to the economic trends in their regions.

According to the 2007 Census conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), Argobba Special Woreda has a total population of 34,998, comprised of 17,710 men and 17,288 women. The census revealed that the two largest ethnic groups in the woreda are the Argobba (95.6%) and the Amhara (4.3%), with other ethnic groups making up just 0.1% of the population. In terms of language, 86.21% of residents speak Amharic as their first language, while 9.39% speak Argobba and 4.31% speak Oromiffa. The religious composition indicates that 96.62% of the population identifies as Muslim, while 3.31% adhere to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity.

3. 1.5 Wag Himra

Wag Hemra is a zone located in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia. The name "Wag Hemra" is derived from the historical province of Wag and the dominant local ethnic group, the Kamyr (or "Hemra") Agaw. This zone is bordered by North Wollo to the south, South Gondar to the southwest, North Gondar to the west, and the Tigray Region to the north and east. The principal town in Wag Hemra is Soqota.

According to the 2007 Census conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), Wag Hemra has a total population of 426,213, reflecting a significant increase of 54.64% since the 1994 census. The population comprises 213,845 men and 212,368 women. With an area of 9,039.04 square kilometers, Wag Hemra has a population density of approximately 47.15 people per square kilometer. Urban inhabitants make up 7.03% of the population, totaling 29,951 individuals. The census recorded 102,098 households in this zone, resulting in an average household size of 4.17 persons and a total of 98,222 housing units.

The ethnic composition of Wag Hemra is predominantly Kamyr Agaw (52.92%) and Amhara (45.45%), with Tigrayan residents constituting 1.39% of the population. Other ethnic groups account for just 0.24%. In terms of language, 56.27% of residents speak Amharic as their first language, while 41.82% speak Kamyr and 1.67% speak Tigrinya; the remaining 0.24% speak other languages. A striking 99.62% of the population practices Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity.

Focusing specifically on Soqota, the major town in Wag Hemra, the 2007 national census reported a population of 22,346, comprising 10,760 men and 11,586 women. The religious demographics indicate that the majority of residents (95.98%) are Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, while 3.8% identify as Muslim. This represents a substantial increase from the 1994 census, which recorded a population of 7,922 in Soqota, with 3,476 males and 4,446 females.

The ethnic breakdown for Soqota town reveals that Agaw/Kamyr individuals make up 74.24% of the population, followed by Amhara at 22.57%, Tigrayan at 3.06%, and other ethnic groups at 0.19%. The religious affiliation remains consistent with the broader trends observed in Wag Hemra, where Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity is predominant. Thus, it is the aim of this study to explore the group relations of diverse communities in the study areas.

3.2 The Research Design and Approach

This research aims to explore intergroup relations in Wollo, Ethiopia, with a specific focus on inter-religious and inter-ethnic interactions. Thus, the overall research design for this study will be a concurrent research design, in which qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analyzed side by side. This design has been chosen due to the nature of the study's objectives, all of which aim to measure the level of interreligious and interethnic group relations, identify the major forms of these relations, and analyze the challenges and opportunities for intergroup interactions in the study area. Therefore, to analyze the quantitative data first and supporting it by qualitative investigation, this research design is preferable.

Coming to the research approach, a mixed-methods approach was employed; combining qualitative and quantitative research methods for it is helpful to cover the failures of either side. Moreover, using mixed approach helped to increase the validity and reliability of the research findings. Therefore, the researchers employ this approach to enhance the credibility of the research finding under investigation.

3.2.1 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The study areas for this study were selected purposively for their diverse ethnic and religious groups are living. This result in to access the diversity dimensions including linguistics, religious and culture, ethnic group diversity. Furthermore, purposive sampling technique was employed to select key informant interviewees from intellectuals, ethnic, and religious groups based on the merit of knowledge about the issue, experience and religious teachings in the study areas. Therefore, the study has 30 key informants for the qualitative data.

In addition, in order to select sample respondents for the quantitative data, the sample size was determined using Kothari's (2004) sample size determination formula (Eq. 1) because the population is large and a large sample size is required to analyze the proportion. The formula is:

$$n = \frac{z^2 \cdot p \cdot q \cdot N}{e^2 (N - 1) + z^2 \cdot p \cdot q} \quad 1$$

Where n represents sample size, z is confidence level, p stands for estimated proportion, q is 1 – p, N is population size, and e stands for allowable error. As noted by Cochran (1963), cited in Israel (1992), if no study is taken in the empirical locations, it is recommended to give a 50% chance (0.5) as the maximum sample proportion, and the range of acceptable errors that can be tolerated comprises

1%, 2%, 3%, 4%, 5%, 6%, 7%, 8%, 9%, and 10%. Thus, a 50% (0.5) maximum sample proportion (p), a 7% (0.07) maximum allowable error (e), and z = 1.96 (as per the table of area under the normal curve for the given confidence level of 93%) were computed to get the study's total sample size as follows: $n = \frac{1.96^2 (0.5)(1-0.5)(401,272)}{0.07^2 (401,272-1) + 1.96^2 (0.5) (1-0.5)} = 196$. This total number of sample was divided for each sample study area according to the size of the population based on proportional sampling technique. The proportion of respondents from each study area was calculated with the formula as:

$$p = \frac{\text{Number of population in each study area}}{\text{Total number of population in all study area}} \times Y, \text{ where } Y \text{ is the total sample size of all study areas.}$$

Thus, 11 for Sekota, 74 for Dessie town, 42 for kombolcha town, 52 for Bati town, and 17 for Argoba town were calculated (Table 1).

Table 1: Sample study areas, and number of total and samples in each study area

Study areas	Total population in each study area	Sample in population in each study area
Sekota town	22,346	11
Dessie town	151,174	74
Kombolcha town	85,367	42
Bati town	107,387	52
Argoba town	34,998	17
Total	401,272	196

Source: Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (2007)

3.2.2 Data Sources and Methods of Data Collection

This study relied on both primary and secondary sources of data. While the former was accessed from key informant interviewees, FGDs, and personal observations, the latter taken from journals articles, thesis works, and reports focused on the issue in concern. Obviously, the data collection methods for this study were interviews, focus group discussions, observations, document reviews, and survey questionnaire.

I. Key-Informant Interviews

Interview is a means of gathering the experience, opinion and feelings of people using questions and interactive dialogues. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with key informants,

including community leaders, religious leaders, and members of various ethnic groups with a sample size of 30 participants. Informants were taken from the selected study areas for their special knowledge, experience and concern regarding the issue. The interviewees, therefore, were scholars in the issue (2), community representatives (*Qirie Dagnas*) (13), town administrators (3), and religious fathers of different religions (12) in the study areas. During the interview process, note taking methods were used for the participants were not voluntary to be recorded.

II. Focus Group Discussions

In this study, FGD was one of the research tools for collecting the data. Each FGD was consist of nine participants from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. The FGDs were important to supplement and confirm the information that were collected via other means. The members of the FGDs were men, women, and youth of different religious and ethnic groups. Hence, there has been two FGDs (different religious groups, and the other ethnic groups) per the five selected study areas. The researchers used kebele administrators, youth structure, and women associations at local levels to accesses and communicate the FGD participants. The time for each group discussion was one hour. The researchers were serving and acting as a moderator during the discussion. Notes taken from the discussion were summarized in the same day to minimize illusion and confusion; and in return, to secure the real essences of points.

III. Document Reviews

This study extensively explored documents to truss and to lock in every themes of the study. Documents were context oriented and exploited in consistent with the case under study. Journals, articles, thesis, and dissertations, and books were wittingly reviewed to triangulate and confirm the information- that provided by the primary data.

IV. Personal Observations

There researchers have observed community events, religious gatherings, and cultural festivals to observe interactions and relationships in natural settings. The researchers employed non-participant observation to collect the needed primary data. Preparing a checklist regarding the interreligious and interethnic intergroup relations, and arranging the observation program in the market and social event days, the researchers were able to collect the qualitative data.

V. Questionnaire

The study used survey questionnaire to gather relevant data from communities of different ethnic and religious groups in the study areas. A close-ended Likert-scale items questionnaire was designed as an instrument to gather data from 196 respondents. This was done to quantify the level of interreligious and interethnic group relations in the study areas. The close-ended Likert scale questionnaires contained a 5-point set of ordered categories: strongly Disagree, Disagree, Not sure, Agree and Strongly Agree response options, in which one represents the minimum value and five represents the maximum value in the Likert scale to indicate the level of the respondents' particular judgments on the issue under investigation. In doing so, the questionnaire was helpful to obtain the necessary data that can fully answer the research basic question: the level of interreligious and interethnic group relations in the study areas. Furthermore, the study used multiple response items to identify the major forms of interreligious and interethnic group relations, and to analyze the major challenges and opportunities for the inter group relations in the study areas.

3.2.3 Methods of Data Analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed based on the study objectives. While the qualitative data were analyzed using qualitative method, thematic data analysis method, the quantitative data were analyzed quantitatively using the SPSS software, Version 22. The analyses techniques that were used in this research are descriptive statistics such as percentages, and frequencies to see the level of intergroup relations, to identify the major forms of inter group relations, and to analyze the major challenges and opportunities for the inter group relations in the study area. Furthermore, the Relative Importance Index analysis method was employed to summarize the intergroup relations in terms of religiosity and ethnicity in the study areas. This is due to the reason that the RII has the ability to ranking factors in the intergroup relations, making comparisons, and help to make conclusion.

The researchers used close-ended survey questionnaire developed from literature reviews. Thus, both intergroup relations were measured based on 5 points Likert scale in which 1=strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Not sure, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree responses. In addition, the study has identified the major interreligious and interethnic group relations in the study area. To achieve this, a multiple-response items survey questionnaire was utilized to identify the complex forms of intergroup relations, as well as the challenges and opportunities associated with them. The questionnaire aimed to provide respondents with the opportunity to propose new forms of intergroup relations, along with any additional challenges and opportunities they may perceive in the study area.

3.3 Reliability and Validity of the study (Quality assurance Mechanisms)

By any means, the questions were consistent, because, these questions were prepared based on the main strand of data collection. For assuring the validity of the study, the researchers executed multiple source of information, established a chain of evidence with the concerned bodies and documents. A copy of interview guide was sent to our best colleagues to get comments on the items, and the contents. Thus, some useless, repeated or redundant and ambiguous items were omitted and items were in line with the standards in terms of adequacy, structuring and sequence of ideas. In fact, the interview and FGD guides were developed in line with the objectives of the study in all issues in concern. To ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative data, the researchers member checking methods. Importantly, the study has been examined and reviewed by experts. This ensured dependability of the study that made the research replicable and a reference to other researchers. To ensure the reliability of the study, the researchers used pre-testing or pilot testing. To this effect, all the questioners were distributed to 20 sample respondents. As a result, the Cronbach alpha value for the instrument was 0.8014, indicating that the questionnaires were consistent and reliable.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Starting from the proposal writing up until the completion of the findings, the researchers were considering and respecting the ethical considerations of conducting research. Firstly, upon getting permissions from Woldia University to conduct on the issue raised, we have started the process. On the process of the study, the researchers confirmed the informed consent of participants/respondents by stating the purpose of the study. The interviews and questionnaire data collection were conducted upon the consent of the informants and in their chosen places. Their privacy were respected and all the data collected from them kept secret. The personal address and names of the participants area coded as KII1....KII30 for different reasons. The rights of participants not be a sample of the study were also honored for two key informant interviewees.

3.5 Expected Deliverables (Outputs and Outcomes)

The finding of the research will be presented in different conferences, seminars and public gatherings. The researchers will also subject to public defense on the auspices of Woldia University at the completion of the research. After the completion of the research, the result of the study will be published in reputable journals for addressing the academic world.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

This chapter analyzes and interprets the qualitative and quantitative data that were collected through different data collection methods. Firstly, the chapter presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents just to give a highlight for readers about from whom the survey data is collected. Secondly, the chapter deals with the level of intergroup relations in the study area: interreligious and interethnic group relations independently. The third section of the chapter is depicting the forms of intergroup relations in the study area: interreligious and interethnic group relations. Fourthly, the chapter identifies the existing challenges and opportunities for the inter group relations in the study area. Finally, the chapter presents concluding remarks and possible recommendations based on the findings of the study.

4.1 Respondents' demographic characteristics

The age distribution of respondents across the study towns reveals some notable trends. Sekota town has the highest mean age at 46.27, with a relatively large standard deviation (8.320), suggesting more age variability. Dessie town follows with a mean age of 42.73 and a moderate standard deviation (7.453), indicating a diverse age range. Kombolcha town has a slightly younger population with a mean of 40.67 and a lower standard deviation (6.920), reflecting less age variation. Bati town has a mean age of 43.85 and moderate variability (7.149), while Argoba town shows the youngest mean age of 40.53 and the least variation (4.432). Overall, the total mean age of respondents is 42.59, with a standard deviation of 7.194, highlighting a moderately aged group with varying age distributions across the towns (Table 2).

Table 2: Respondents age distribution

Respondents living town	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Sekota town	46.27	11	8.320
Dessie town	42.73	74	7.453
Kombolcha town	40.67	42	6.920
Bati town	43.85	52	7.149
Argoba town	40.53	17	4.432
Total	42.59	196	7.194

Source: Survey data (2024)

Across all studied agro-ecologies, 87.8% of respondents were male and 12.2% female. In terms of respondents' educational attainment, education levels in all study areas vary: 9.1% are illiterate, while 16.4% can read and write. 32.1% completed grades 9-12, and 9.2% earned a first degree. Lower educational levels are more prevalent, with 3.6% having a certificate and 6.6% having a diploma. In addition, the marital status data reflect a predominantly married population (91.8%), with 4.5% single, 3.7% divorced, and no widowed individuals. The religious distribution among respondents reveals that 62.7% were Muslim, 34.1% were Orthodox, and 3% were Protestant (Table 3).

Table Table 3: Respondents' demographic characteristics

Demographic variables		<i>Sekota</i> N= 11		<i>Dessie</i> N= 74		<i>Kombolcha</i> N = 42		<i>Bati</i> N = 52		<i>Argoba</i> N = 17	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender	Male	9	4.6	64	32.7	38	19.4	46	23.5	15	7.7
	Female	2	1	10	5.1	4	2	6	3.1	2	1
Education	Illiterate	1	0.5	6	3.1	5	2.4	6	3.1	0	-
	Read & write	-	-	8	4.1	8	4.1	11	5.6	5	2.6
	Grade 1-8	1	0.5	14	7.1	9	4.6	15	7.7	5	2.6
	Grade 9-12	7	3.6	30	15.3	10	5.1	12	6.1	4	2
	Certificate	1	0.5	4	2	-	-	2	1	1	0.5
	Diploma	1	0.5	7	3.6	1	0.5	3	1.5	1	0.5
	1 st Degree	-	-	5	2.6	9	4.6	3	1.5	1	0.5
Maritalstatus	Single	0	-	2	1	4	2	1	0.5	2	1
	Married	10	5.1	72	36.7	35	17.9	51	26	12	6.1
	Divorced	1	0.5	-	-	3	1.7	-	-	3	1.5
	Widowed	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Religion	Muslim	2	1	40	20.4	30	15.3	38	19.4	13	6.6
	Orthodox	9	4.6	30	15.3	10	5.1	14	7.1	4	2
	Protestant	-	-	4	2	2	1	-	-	-	-
Ethnicity	Amhara	3	1.5	52	26.5	25	12.8	27	13.8	5	4.5
	Agew	6	3.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Tigre	2	1	10	5.1	5	2.6	-	-	-	-
	Oromo	-	-	3	1.5	5	2.6	23	11.7	-	-
	Argoba	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	100
	Afar	-	-	6	3.1	7	3.6	2	1	-	-
	Others	-	-	3	1.5	-	-	-	-	-	-

Language	Amharic	11	3.9	74	26.4	42	15	52	18.6	17	6.1
	Hametagna	7	2.5	2	0.7	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Tigrigna	2	0.7	10	3.6	5	1.8	-	-	-	-
	Oromgna	-	-	3	1.1	5	1.8	23	8.2	-	-
	Argoba	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	4.3
	Afargna	-	-	6	2.1	7	2.5	2	0.7	-	-

Source: Survey data (2024)

In terms of ethnicity, the Amhara people make up the majority, accounting for 57.1% of the population across all study towns. Agew people (3.1%) are primarily found in Sekota town, while Tigre people (8.7%) reside in Sekota town, Dessie, and Kombolcha towns. Oromo people (15.8%) and Afar people (7.7%) are lived in Dessie, Kombolcha, and Bati towns. Argoba people (6.1%) live mainly in Argoba town, and 1.5% belong to other ethnic groups in Dessie town (Table 3). The study towns exhibit a diverse linguistic landscape, with Amharic as the dominant language, spoken by 70% of the sample population. Hemtana (3.2%) is primarily spoken in Sekota town. Additionally, Tigrigna (6.1%) is spoken in Sekota, Dessie, and Kombolcha Towns. Furthermore, Oromigna (11.1%) is spoken in Dessie, Kombolcha, and Bati towns. Argoba (4.3%) is exclusive to Argoba town, while Afargna (5.4%) is spoken in Dessie, Kombolcha, and Bati towns. Despite Amharic's prevalence, the presence of these languages highlights the study region's rich cultural and linguistic diversity (Table 3).

4.2 Interreligious group relations in the study area

The data presents a comparative analysis of interfaith relationships, cooperation, social interactions, coexistence, support, and dialogue among respondents from different towns: Sekota, Dessie, Kombolcha, Bati, and Argoba.

The percentage of respondents who strongly agreed that they had good communication and close friendships with people from other religious groups is (4.1%) in Sekota, and (21.4%) in Dessie. This indicates that Dessie has a more robust interfaith relationship network. Kombolcha (14.8%), Bati (17.3%), and Argoba (4.6%) show moderate levels of agreement, suggesting that while there are some interfaith friendships, they are not as prevalent as in Dessie.

The data shows that cooperation with individuals from other religious groups in Sekota (3.6%), whereas Dessie reports a significantly higher percentage (24%). Kombolcha (10.2%), Bati (20.4%),

Communication	Strongly agree	8	4.1	32	16.3	10	5.1	17		5	2.6
	Agree	3	1.5	42	21.4	29	14.8	34	8.7	9	4.6
	Not sure	-	-	-	-	1	0.5	-	17.3	-	-
	Disagree	-	-	-	-	2	1	1	-	2	1
	Strongly disagree	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.5	1	0.5
									-		
Working cooperatively	Strongly agree	7	3.6	27	13.8	19	9.7	11	5.6	3	1.5
	Agree	4	2	47	24	20	10.2	40	20.4	11	5.6
	Not sure	-	-	-	-	1	0.5	-	-	-	-
	Disagree	-	-	-	-	2	1	1	0.5	2	1
	Strongly disagree	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.5
Eating together	Strongly agree	6	3.1	32	16.3	22	11.2	18	9.2	5	2.6
	Agree	5	2.6	40	20.4	20	10.2	32	16.3	11	5.6
	Not sure	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	-
	Disagree	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Strongly disagree	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.5
	Strongly agree	3	1.5	24	12.2	17		11	5.6	4	2
	Leisure time	8	4.1	47	24	24	8.7	41	20.9	13	6.6
	Agree	-	-	1	0.5	-	12.2	-	-	-	-
	Not sure	-	-	1	0.5	1	-	-	-	-	-
	Disagree	-	-	1	0.5	-	0.5	-	-	-	-
	Strongly disagree						-				
Living peacefully	Strongly agree	3	1.5	24	12.2	17	8.7	11	5.6	4	2
	Agree	8	4.1	47	24	24	12.2	41	20.9	13	6.6
	Not sure	-	-	1	0.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Disagree	-	-	1	0.5	1	0.5	-	-	-	-
	Strongly disagree	-	-	1	0.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
Time of trouble/ happiness	Strongly agree	5	2.6	19	9.7	8	4.1	21	10.7	6	3.1
	Agree	6	3.1	53	27	34	17.3	28	14.3	11	5.6
	Not sure	-	-	1	0.5	-	-	1	0.5	-	-
	Disagree	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.5	-	-

	Strongly disagree	-	-	1	0.5	-	-	1	0.5	-	-
Discuss on	Strongly agree	3	1.5	20	10.2	13	6.6	15	7.7	7	3.6
Different issues	Agree	8	4.1	52	26.5	29	14.8	33	16.8	10	5.1
	Not sure	-	-	2	1	-	-	1	0.5	-	-
	Disagree	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	-
	Strongly disagree	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.5	-	-

Source: Survey data (2024)

However, the data presented above shows the interreligious group relations in each studied area separately. Thus, it does not show the cumulative aspect of interreligious group relations in all study areas. To do this, the study used the relative importance index model. The study revealed strong intergroup relations among religious groups in the studied towns, with various aspects ranked based on their relative importance. As indicated in Table 5, the highest-ranked aspect was eating together (RII = 0.875), indicating that shared meals played a significant role in fostering interreligious group harmony. This is followed by good communication and close friendships (RII = 0.859), highlighting the presence of strong interpersonal bonds across religious lines. Working cooperatively (RII = 0.854) was ranked third, showing that collaboration among different religious groups was common. Respondents also reported spending time peacefully and maintaining close relations (RII = 0.852), further emphasizing social harmony. Additionally, many individuals had helped each other in times of need (RII = 0.850), demonstrating mutual support and solidarity. Engaging in peaceful and sincere discussions (RII = 0.848) was another important aspect of intergroup relations. Lastly, living peacefully with individuals from other religious groups (RII = 0.841) was also acknowledged, reflecting broader interreligious coexistence. These findings suggest that interreligious relationships in the study area are characterized by cooperation, communication, and shared experiences, contributing to a harmonious social environment. It should be noted that in all studied towns, the overall relative importance index regarding intergroup relations in terms of religiosity is high (RII = 0.855), indicating that there is high interreligious group relations.

Table 5: The RII of intergroup relation in terms of religion in Wollo

Likert items	Likert-scale														
	SA(5) ⁺		A(4)		NS(3)		D(2)		SD(1)		Total score			RII	Rank
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	Total	Total (N)	5*N		
Good communication	72	36.7	11	59.7	1	0.5	5	2.6	1	0.5	842	19	980	0.859	2 nd
Working cooperatively	67	34.2	12	62.2	1	0.5	5	2.6	1	1.5	837	19	980	0.854	3 rd
Eating together	83	42.3	10	55.8	2	1.0	2	1.0	1	0.5	858	19	980	0.875	1 st
Leisure time	59	30.1	13	67.9	1	1.5	2	1.0	1	0.5	835	19	980	0.852	4 th
Living peacefully others	48	24.5	14	73.4	2	1.0	1	0.5	1	0.5	825	19	980	0.841	7 th
Time (trouble/happiness)	59	30.1	13	67.3	2	1.0	1	0.5	2	1.5	833	19	980	0.850	5 th
Discuss on d/t issues	58	29.6	13	67.3	3	1.5	2	1.0	1	0.5	832	19	980	0.848	6 th
Average score	64	32.5	12	65.7	2	1	2	1	1	1	838	19	980	0.855	-

Source: Survey data (2024)

The qualitative investigation also shows that the interreligious group relations in the study area is promising. A key informant interviewee argued the case in the following way:

Wollo has a long history of coexistence between different religious communities. The area has been a melting pot of cultures and beliefs, with both Muslims and Christians living side by side for centuries. The communities in Wollo often engage in cultural exchanges that transcend religious boundaries. Festivals, weddings, and communal gatherings frequently see participation from both Muslim and Christian communities, fostering a sense of shared identity and mutual respect. Despite occasional tensions,

Wollo's religious communities often collaborate on social issues. While Wollo has experienced periods of conflict related to religious differences historically, many local leaders and community members actively work to resolve tensions through dialogue and mediation. Grassroots initiatives often focus on promoting peace and understanding, emphasizing shared values over differences (KII5, 2024).

Analogously, another key informant interview explained the issue in the way forward:

For the peaceful interreligious group relations, the role of religious fathers, particularly Memhir Akalewold and Shek Hussien Jibril, are unforgettable. The two religious fathers played a crucial role in fostering interreligious peaceful interactions in Wollo. The two religious leaders were the mediators of conflicts and promoted messages of peace and tolerance within their communities. Their influence today help the communities to mitigate tensions and encourage collaboration. Furthermore, the two fathers thought and interfaith education emphasizing respect and understanding makes Wollo the area where different religious peoples are living in a good and peaceful way (KII 7, 2024).

According to Misganaw Tadesse (2022), Wollo is a province in Ethiopia where many religious groups live in harmony. The religious demography of the province, which has an almost equal number of Muslims and Christians living together intermingled, made social interaction inevitable. As a result, the community has a unique history of tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and a strong sense of togetherness. This show, irrespective of religious differences or other grounds, the people have special value regarding to respecting and loving others. This culture is still intact. Despite some challenges, the culture to live in harmony with others is still strong among the different religious groups in Wollo.

In Wollo, despite their differences, different religious communities, particularly Muslims and Christians, have coexisted for centuries. Interfaith communal associations historically served as platforms for dialogue, conflict resolution, and collaborative social initiatives. These associations often involved leaders and members from various faith backgrounds working together on community development projects, mediating disputes, or celebrating cultural events (KII3, 2024).

In summary, interreligious group relations in Wollo is characterized by a complex interplay of historical context, cultural interactions, social cohesion, conflict resolution, and the active role of religious leaders. The region serves as an example of how diverse religious communities can live together.

4.3. Interethnic group relations in Wollo

The survey data present a nuanced picture of interethnic relations across different towns, highlighting significant variations in communication, cooperation, and social interactions among ethnic groups.

In Sekota town, 3.1% of respondents strongly agreed that they have good communication with people from other ethnic groups and have close friendships with them. Additionally, in Dessie town, 21.4% of respondents agreed with this statement, followed by 11.3% in Kombolcha, 15.8% in Bati, and 6.6% in Argoba. These findings indicate varying levels of agreement across the towns, with Dessie having the highest percentage of respondents who acknowledged positive interethnic communication and friendships. In Sekota town, 3.6% of respondents agreed that they work peacefully and cooperatively with people from other ethnic groups. In Dessie town, this agreement was notably higher at 25.5%. Similarly, 11.2% of respondents in Kombolcha and 15.3% in Bati also agreed with this statement. Meanwhile, in Argoba, 4.6% of respondents strongly agreed, indicating a strong sense of peaceful cooperation in that town. These findings suggest that the level of interethnic cooperation varies across the towns, with Dessie showing the highest agreement.

In Sekota town, 3.1% of respondents agreed that they had experienced sharing meals and drinking tea or coffee peacefully with people from other ethnic groups. In Dessie town, a higher percentage (19.4%) of respondents agreed with this statement, followed by 10.7% in Kombolcha, 18.4% in Bati, and 6.6% in Argoba. These findings indicate varying levels of interethnic social interactions across the towns, with Dessie and Bati showing the highest levels of agreement. In addition, the level of intergroup relations in terms of spending leisure time together, living peacefully with others, supporting each other in times of trouble or happiness, and engaging in discussions on various issues is generally positive across all the studied towns (Table 6). These findings suggest a strong sense of social cohesion and cooperation among different ethnic groups in the region.

Table 6: Intergroup relations in terms of Ethnicity

	<i>Sekota</i>	<i>Dessie</i>	<i>Kombolcha</i>	<i>Bati</i>	<i>Argoba</i>

Options		<i>N= 11</i>		<i>N= 74</i>		<i>N = 42</i>		<i>N = 52</i>		<i>N = 17</i>	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Communication	Strongly agree		3.1	30	15.3	16	8.2	20		4	2
	Agree	6	2.6	42	21.4	26		31	10.2	13	6.6
	Not sure	5	-	-	-	-	11.3	1	15.8	-	-
	Disagree	-	-	1	0.5	-	-	-	0.5	-	-
	Strongly disagree	-	-	1	0.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
		-				-	-	-	-		
Working cooperatively	Strongly agree	4	2	24	12.2	19	9.7	19	9.7	9	4.6
	Agree	7	3.6	50		22	11.2	30	15.3	7	3.6
	Not sure	-	-	-	25.5	1	0.5	2	1	-	-
	Disagree	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.5
	Strongly disagree	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.5	-	-
					-						
Eating together	Strongly agree	4	2	33	16.8	21	10.7	16	8.2	4	2
	Agree	6	3.1	38	19.4	21	10.7	36	18.4	13	6.6
	Not sure	1	0.5	1	0.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Disagree	-	-	1	0.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Strongly disagree	-	-	1	0.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
Leisure time	Strongly agree	2	1	24	12.2	15		16	8.2	4	2
	Agree	9	4.6	47	24	27	7.7	35	17.9	13	6.6
	Not sure	-	-	-	-	-	13.8	1	0.5	-	-
	Disagree	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Strongly disagree	-	-	1	0.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
						-					
Living peacefully with others	Strongly agree	4	2	24	12.2	12	6.1	18	9.2	9	4.6
	Agree	7	3.6	48	24.5	30	15.3	34	17.3	7	3.6
	Not sure	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.5
	Disagree	-	-	1	0.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Strongly disagree	-	-	1	0.5	-	-	-	-	-	-

At times of trouble/happiness	Strongly agree	4	2	27	13.8	11	5.6	20	10.2	4	2
	Agree	7	3.6	46	23.5	31	15.8	31	15.8	12	6.1
	Not sure	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.5
	Disagree	-	-	1	0.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Strongly disagree	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.5	-	-
Discuss on different issues	Strongly agree	5	3.1	24	12.2	14	7.1	14	7.1	6	3.1
	Agree	5	2.6	47	24	28	14.3	34	17.3	11	5.6
	Not sure	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.5	-	-
	Disagree	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	-
	Strongly disagree	-	-	3	1.5	-	-	1	0.5	-	-

Source: Survey data (2024)

However, still the data presented above shows the interethnic group relations in each studied area separately. Thus, it does not show the cumulative aspect of interethnic group relations in all study areas. To do this, the study used the relative importance index model. The study highlights strong intergroup relations among different ethnic groups in the studied towns, as reflected in the high overall Relative Importance Index (RII = 0.862). Various aspects of interethnic relations were ranked based on their relative importance. The highest-ranked aspect was eating together (RII = 0.872), indicating that shared meals played a key role in fostering interethnic group relations. This was followed by good communication and close friendships with people from other ethnic groups (RII = 0.871), emphasizing the presence of strong interpersonal ties. Working cooperatively (RII = 0.868) ranked third, showing that collaboration across ethnic lines was common. Respondents also reported spending time peacefully with people from other ethnic groups and maintaining close relationships (RII = 0.861), further reinforcing social harmony. Additionally, helping each other in times of difficulty or happiness (RII = 0.859) was an important aspect of interethnic relations. Spending leisure time together (RII = 0.854) was ranked sixth, showing that ethnic groups also engaged in social activities beyond formal cooperation. Lastly, engaging in peaceful and sincere discussions on various topics (RII = 0.847) ranked seventh, indicating that while dialogue existed, it was relatively less emphasized compared to other forms of interaction. Overall, the findings suggest that interethnic relationships in Wollo are strong, with shared experiences, cooperation, and communication playing significant roles in promoting peaceful coexistence.

Table 1: The RII of intergroup relations in terms of ethnicity in Wollo

Likert items	Likert-scale														
	SA(5) [`]		A(4)		NS(3)		D(2)		SD(1)		Total score			RII	Ran k
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	Total	Total (N)	5*N			
Good communication	76	38.8	117	59.7	15	0.5	15	0.5	15	0.5	854	196	980	0.871	2 nd
Working cooperatively	75	38.3	116	59.2	35	1.5	15	0.5	15	0.5	851	196	980	0.868	3 rd
Eating together	78	39.8	114	58.2	20	1.0	15	0.5	15	0.5	855	196	980	0.872	1 st
Leisure time	61	31.1	131	66.8	15	0.5	20	1.0	15	0.5	837	196	980	0.854	6 th
Living peacefully others	67	34.2	126	64.3	15	0.5	15	0.5	15	0.5	844	196	980	0.861	4 th
Time (trouble/happiness)	66	33.7	126	64.3	15	0.5	20	1.0	15	0.5	842	196	980	0.859	5 th
Discuss on d/t issues	64	32.7	125	63.8	15	0.5	20	1.0	40	2.0	831	196	980	0.847	7 th
Average score	69.6	35.5	122.5	54.5	1.4	1.4	1.4	0.6	1.6	1.1	845	196	980	0.862	-

Source: Survey data (2024)

Interethnic group relations in Wollo exhibit a complex tapestry of interactions that encompass cooperation. The experiences outlined in this study highlight the multifaceted nature of interethnic group relationships in Wollo. Key aspects include effective interethnic communication, peaceful and cooperative collaboration, and the sharing of meals and beverages such as tea or coffee. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of leisure activities enjoyed together, harmonious coexistence, and mutual support during both challenging times and moments of joy. Furthermore, it underscores the value of engaging in peaceful discussions on various issues with individuals from different ethnic

backgrounds. Collectively, these elements illustrate the richness of interethnic interactions in the study area.

Regarding to communication with other ethnic groups concerned, the study found that many individuals in Wollo have formed friendships across ethnic lines, indicating a willingness to communicate and engage with others. This communication often occurs through community gatherings, markets, and social events where people from different ethnic backgrounds come together.

The survey results in this regard have shown that a significant percentage of respondents report having friends from other ethnic groups, highlighting the importance of interpersonal relationships in fostering understanding and reducing prejudice among the different ethnic groups in the study area.

Coming to the interethnic group relations in terms of working peacefully and cooperatively, the study found that in various sectors, including agriculture and trade, individuals from different ethnic groups collaborate for mutual benefit. Shared economic interests often lead to cooperative ventures, which can help bridge ethnic divides in the study area. The study finds community projects, such as local cooperatives, frequently involve members from diverse ethnic backgrounds working together. These cooperative efforts can enhance social cohesion and economic resilience.

The study found that there are several cases, which explain the interethnic shared meals and socializing group relations in Wollo. The tradition of sharing meals, such as *Enjera* or coffee ceremonies, plays a crucial role in fostering interethnic relationships. There is an Amharic saying that can explain the value of eating together for durable relationships: አብሮ የበላን ቅዱስ የሃንስ አይሽረዉም. These shared experiences create opportunities for bonding and understanding among different ethnic groups. There are instances where families invite neighbors from other ethnic backgrounds for meals, leading to stronger interpersonal ties and cultural exchange that enhances the positive interethnic group relations in the study area.

It is common to find individuals from different ethnic groups, in Wollo, spending leisure time together. Engaging in leisure activities with individuals from other ethnic groups fosters friendship and breaks down barriers. Whether it is playing sports, attending cultural events, or participating in community festivals, these interactions promote unity among the different ethnic groups in the area. The researchers observations from local cultural festivals show diverse participation, where people

from different ethnic groups come together to celebrate traditions, thus reinforcing social bonds across ethnic lines.

Regarding to the interethnic peaceful coexistence, much of the respondents of the study reported living harmoniously with individuals from other ethnic groups, emphasizing many shared aspects as neighborhoods. This relationship is often marked by mutual respect and understanding. The study indicated that mixed neighborhoods in Wollo are common, with residents highlighting their positive interactions and collaborations in daily life.

The study found that there are mutual supports in times of need among the different ethnic groups in Wollo. For instance, during crises or celebrations, such as weddings or funerals, it is common to see people from different ethnic backgrounds come together to support one another. This solidarity is vital for community resilience and positive interethnic group relations in the study area. The survey data for this study illustrates how neighbors of various ethnicities unite during emergencies, providing assistance regardless of ethnic affiliation.

The study also founds the existence of peaceful discussions among the different ethnic groups on various issues in the study area. The qualitative result for this study explains the existence of open dialogues about community issues, politics, or social challenges often occur among individuals from different ethnic groups. These discussions can lead to greater understanding and collective problem solving in the study area. Interviews made with town administrators explained that there have been forums and community meetings that include diverse ethnic representation to foster constructive conversations, contributing to local governance and peace building initiatives in the study area.

To be particular, the study found that, in the post-2018 period, interethnic relations in Wollo characterized by both tension and cooperation, influenced by broader national political changes and ethnic dynamics. The ethnic federalism system, which emphasizes ethnic identity in governance, has exacerbated tensions among various ethnic groups in Wollo, including the Amhara and Oromo, and the Amhara and Tigrie populations.

There have been several incidents of violence between these ethnic groups, leading to displacement and loss of life. For instance, clashes between Amhara and Oromo communities have been reported, often triggered by political rhetoric or local grievances particularly in Kemissie town. The significant displacement from different regions of the country to Wollo due to interethnic violence disturbs the

peaceful interethnic relations in the area. The rise of regional political movements has also affected the interethnic relations. Political leaders often mobilize support based on ethnic identity, which can either exacerbate divisions or encourage cooperation depending on their rhetoric and policies. Analysis by scholars such as Aalen and Muriaas (2020) suggests that political discourse plays a crucial role in shaping interethnic relations, with some leaders promoting unity while others may incite division.

Overall, while the interethnic relations in Wollo are characterized by numerous positive interactions that reflect a desire for cooperation and coexistence, interethnic relations in the post-2018 are marked by a complex interplay of conflict and cooperation. While challenges exist due to historical tensions and political dynamics, experiences of communication, cooperation, shared meals, leisure activities, mutual support, and open discussions highlight the potential for harmonious relationships among diverse ethnic groups. These interactions not only enrich individual lives but also contribute to the broader social fabric of the area. Therefore, the interethnic group relations in Wollo remains dynamic, influenced by both local and national political developments. This duality of conflict and cooperation underscores the resilience of communities in Wollo as they navigate their interethnic group relationships in an evolving landscape.

4.4. Forms of Intergroup relations in the study area

This study understood intergroup relations in terms of cooperative, competitive, and conflictual relations. Based on this category; the study has identified the common forms of intergroup relations in Wollo taking interreligious and interethnic group relations independently.

4.4.1 Forms of interreligious group relations in the study area

The survey data presents the frequencies and percentages regarding different forms of interreligious group relations based on responses collected from surveyed respondents. As to the data presented in table 8, cooperative form of interreligious group relationship is the most prevalent, with 169 responses (86.2% of total responses). This indicates that a significant majority of respondents perceive their interreligious interactions as cooperative, which usually suggests a willingness to collaborate and engage in positive dialogue among different faiths.

The survey shows that there is a smaller segment of competitive interreligious group relations in the study area with a response rate of 19 (9.7%). This indicates that some respondents view interreligious interactions as involving rivalry or competition, which could suggest underlying tensions among

different groups. Furthermore, though insignificant, six responses (3.1%) were categorized under conflictual interreligious group relations in the study area, indicating that very few participants perceive their interreligious experiences as involving direct conflict. This could imply a relatively harmonious environment, at least from the perspective of the majority.

In addition to the above forms, the survey data depicts the existence of other form of interreligious group relations in the study area. Here, 2 responses (1.0%) categorized the interreligious group relations as "tactical," indicating that the relationship is depending on the immediate results rather than long-term commitments, and it can be adjusted or dissolved as circumstances change.

Considering the survey data, the notable dominance of cooperative relations (86.2% of responses) suggests a generally optimistic view towards interreligious engagement. This may indicate efforts towards collaboration and mutual understanding among diverse faith groups within the surveyed population. The low percentages of competitive (9.7%) and conflictual (3.1%) interreligious group relations suggest that these dynamics are less common, which may reflect effective interreligious dialogue or a focus on common ground among differing religious communities. It could also indicate effective conflict-resolution mechanisms or initiatives promoting understanding and respect among various faiths. The small number of responses indicating tactical relations (1.0%) suggests that while some respondents view their interreligious relations through a strategic lens, this perspective is not widespread among the surveyed individuals.

Overall, the data suggests a predominantly positive outlook on interreligious group relations in the study area, emphasizing cooperation over competition or conflict. This indicates a sociocultural environment receptive to interfaith dialogue and collaboration, which is important for fostering peace and understanding in diverse faith communities. Future initiatives could focus on maintaining and enhancing cooperative relationships while being mindful of the minority competitive and conflictual perceptions that exist, ensuring that those views are addressed constructively.

Table 2: Forms of Interreligious group Relations Frequencies

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Inter religious relations	cooperative	169	86.2%	88.5%
	competitive	19	9.7%	9.9%

	conflictual	6	3.1%	3.1%
	Other (Tactical interreligious group relations)	2	1.0%	1.0%
Total		196	100.0%	102.6%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1. The total percentages exceed 100% (102.6%), which is likely due to the multiple response nature of the data, allowing respondents to choose more than one type of relation.

4.4.2 Forms of interethnic group relations in the Study area

As shown in table 6, a significant majority of the responses (83.2%, or 168 individuals) reflect a cooperative relationship among interethnic groups in the study area. This suggests that, predominantly, respondents experience or perceive interethnic interactions as collaborative and constructive, indicating a positive atmosphere for coexistence and cooperation among different ethnic groups. However, there are still minor competitive (11.4%) and conflictual (3.0%) interethnic group relations in the study area. This denotes that while competition and conflict exist, they are not the primary forms of interaction compared to cooperation. The fact that only a small percentage report competitive and conflictual interactions suggests that these negative forms of relations are less common or less emphasized within the context studied.

Furthermore, the lowest frequency (2.5%) response rate explains the existence of tactical interethnic group relations, indicating that aside from the main forms identified, there are few alternative ways in which interethnic relations are perceived. Respondents may have thought of these as specific strategies of living together for a time being rather than general forms of group relations in the study area.

In conclusion, the data indicates a largely positive view of interethnic group relations in the study area, with cooperation being the overwhelming response. This could suggest that Wollo, the study area, is an environment that fosters understanding and collaborative efforts among diverse ethnic groups. However, the existence of competitive and conflictual relations, albeit minor, suggests that tensions or challenges do still exist and should not be overlooked. Efforts to further enhance cooperative interethnic group relations and reduce competition and conflict could focus on promoting dialogue, mutual understanding, and community-building initiatives. Additionally, further exploration

into the nature of the “Other” category could yield insights into specific tactical strategies that encompass cooperation or competition.

Table 3: Forms of interethnic group relations Frequencies

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Forms of Interethnic group relations	cooperative	168	83.2%	86.2%
	competitive	23	11.4%	11.8%
	conflictual	6	3.0%	3.1%
	Other (tactical interethnic group relations)	5	2.5%	2.6%
Total		202	100.0%	103.6%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1. The total percentages exceed 100% (102.6%), which is likely due to the multiple response nature of the data, allowing respondents to choose more than one type of relation.

4.5 Challenges and opportunities for Intergroup Relations in Wollo

This section, analysis and interprets the major challenges that may compromise the cooperative form of interreligious and interethnic group relations, and exploring opportunities that can enhance the peaceful interreligious and interethnic group relations in the study area.

4.5.1 Challenges for interreligious and interethnic group relations

In this section, the study analyzed the various challenges that disturb the long lived peaceful interreligious and interethnic group relations in Wollo, As shown in Table 10, this study identified historical grievances, political manipulation, a lack of effective integration policies, social media and misinformation, prejudice, and stereotyping as significant barriers to interreligious and interethnic group relations in the studied areas. In this regard, across all studied towns, we identified 120 responses related to historical grievances, 168 concerning political manipulation, 102 addressing the lack of effective integration strategies, 141 regarding social media and misinformation, 69 focused on prejudice and stereotyping, and 38 on other topics. These other topics included religion-based neighborly relations, the influence of external factors such as the spread of global jihadist ideologies, and resource competition. While respondents acknowledged all of these difficulties, they focused on the factors related to political manipulations and historical grievances.

Table 4: Respondents responses on challenges for intergroup relations

			Challenges						Total
			Historical grievances	Political manipulation	Lack of integration policies	Social media	Prejudice	Others	
Respondents living in town	Sekota town	Count	7	11	4	8	7	3	40
	Dessie town	Count	44	68	33	58	31	16	250
	Kombolcha town	Count	23	37	23	33	12	8	136
	Bati town	Count	34	41	32	34	12	6	159
	Argoba town	Count	12	11	10	8	7	5	53
Total		Count	120	168	102	141	69	38	638

NB: Percentages and totals are based on multiple respondents.

Similar to the survey data, a key informant interview explains how political manipulation disturbs peaceful inter-religious group relations in the way that “in some contexts, religious communities may become pawns in political dynamics, where politicians or leaders exploit sectarian sentiments for their own agendas. The lack of interfaith dialogue can exacerbate this, making it easier for divisive rhetoric to take hold and become entrenched in the community”.

Political manipulation of religion and ethnicity in Wollo, Ethiopia, poses a significant challenge to peaceful interreligious and interethnic relations by fostering division and mistrust among communities. Leaders often exploit religious and ethnic identities to rally support or distract from governance issues, leading to heightened tensions and conflict. This manipulation can mobilize identity politics, marginalizing certain groups and inciting violence. Misinformation further exacerbates these tensions, creating scapegoats and deepening divisions. As a result, the social fabric is strained, making it difficult to achieve lasting peace and cooperation among diverse groups in the region (KIII, 2024).

Analogously, the study on "The Politics of Religion in Ethiopia: The Case of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church" by Hassen (2016) explained that in Wollo, religious differences can be manipulated to create divisions between Muslim and Christian communities. Political

actors may use religious rhetoric to mobilize support, which can escalate tensions and lead to violence. Furthermore, a study on "The Politics of Ethnic Conflict in Ethiopia: the case of Wollo" by Dorman and Farah (2019) argued that the manipulation of ethnic and religious identities has been linked to outbreaks of violence and conflict in Wollo. Political actors for their gain often reignite historical grievances. In recent years, the rise of ethnic nationalism has led to violent clashes between groups in Wollo, particularly between the Amhara and Oromo populations. These conflicts often draw on historical grievances related to land, resources, and political representation (International Crisis Group, 2020). These challenges underscore the complex interplay between politics, ethnicity, and religion in Wollo, highlighting the need for inclusive governance that respects diversity and promotes dialogue among different groups.

Regarding to social media:

Social media can pose significant challenges to peaceful inter-religious and inter-ethnic relations in Wollo by facilitating the rapid spread of misinformation, hate speech, and divisive narratives. Online platforms often amplify extreme viewpoints and can create echo chambers where users are exposed only to content that reinforces their biases. This can lead to increased tensions and misunderstandings between different religious and ethnic groups. Additionally, social media can be used to organize protests or mobilize groups in ways that escalate conflicts rather than promote dialogue and understanding. The anonymity provided by these platforms may also embolden individuals to express hostile sentiments they might not voice in face-to-face interactions, further straining community relations (KII9, 2024).

This is similar with the study on "The Role of Social Media in Ethnic Conflict in Ethiopia" by Tadesse (2018) who argues that the spread of misinformation regarding the intentions or actions of different ethnic or religious groups can exacerbate fears and mistrust. Social media and political discourse often amplify this.

As to the survey data, significant number of respondents responded that historical grievances particularly in relation to religious interactions disturbs the existing interreligious group relations in Wollo. For this case, there are historical contradictions. While Lewis (2008) argues that Ahmed Gagn led aggressive military campaigns against Christian communities in Wollo during the 16th century to expand the Adal Sultanate and spread Islam, employing brutal tactics that resulted in

significant devastation and fear among Christians, Bahiru Zewudie (2002) contends that the reign of Yohannes IV was characterized by conflictual policies toward Muslims in Wollo. This era led to violent confrontations, contributing to a legacy of distrust between the religious communities in the area.

The history of interreligious group relations in Wollo during the reign of Yohannes IV was characterized by conflict, marginalization, and resilience. The policies of the emperor contributed to long-standing grievances that have shaped interreligious relations in Wollo. Emperor Yohannes IV (reigned 1872-1889) had a complex relationship with the Muslim communities in Wollo and other regions of Ethiopia. His reign was characterized by military campaigns aimed at consolidating power and expanding the Ethiopian Empire, which often involved conflicts with Muslim populations. A study on "The Politics of Religion in Ethiopia: The Case of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Islam" by Haggai Eran (2016) argued that the actions taken by Yohannes IV against Muslims contributed to long-standing tensions between religious communities in Ethiopia. The marginalization experienced during his reign had lasting effects on interreligious relations in Wollo.

The survey result of this study reveals that lack of integrative policies and strategies in the country as a whole and in Wollo in particular found to be a disturbing factor for the peaceful intergroup relations. Thus, the lack of effective interethnic and interreligious integration policies in Ethiopia, true in Wollo, has significant implications for intergroup relations, contributing to tensions, conflicts, and a fragmented national identity. The study by John Abbink (2011) on "Ethnicity and Conflict in Ethiopia: A Historical Perspective" revealed that the absence of inclusive policies can exacerbate ethnic rivalries. In Ethiopia, where over 80 ethnic groups coexist, the lack of integration strategies often leads to competition for resources and political power among different groups, fueling tensions and conflicts.

The survey result shows that there are other challenges that disturb the long-lived interreligious and interethnic group relations in the study area. The survey respondents mentioned that religion based neighboring relations are becoming a new threat for the interreligious group relations in the study area. If neighborly relations increasingly based on religious identity, it may strengthen bonds within religious communities. People may find a sense of belonging and support among those who share similar beliefs, potentially leading to greater social cohesion within those groups. However, it may exacerbate group sectarianism and lead to increased division. This might foster an "in-group vs. out-

group" mentality, undermining the peaceful coexistence that has characterized the society in Wollo. Exclusion of non-Religious Perspectives: An overemphasis on religion in community interactions may alienate secular or non-religious individuals. This exclusion could create divides and marginalize those who do not subscribe to any religious belief. Furthermore, in some cases, religious leaders or political factions may exploit heightened religious sentiments to further their agendas, which could lead to unrest and conflict among communities that historically coexisted peacefully.

Generally, the impact of a shift towards religion-based neighborly relations in Wollo could be complex, with potential benefits of strong collaboration within the same religious communities alongside risks of sectarianism and conflict. Therefore, encouraging open communication and understanding across different faith traditions will be crucial in maintaining the peace that has historically characterized the relationships in Wollo.

The other challenge for the interreligious group relations mentioned by the respondents is the influence of external factors like the spread of global jihadist ideologies. The respondents argued that the rise of extremist ideologies by some individuals could exacerbate tensions and lead to violence between religious groups, undermining peaceful group relations. This finding is similar with the study of Hassan (2015) on "The Impact of Global Jihadist Ideologies on Local Conflicts in Ethiopia: The Case of Wollo" which argues that global jihadist ideologies have influenced local conflicts and affected inter-religious relations in Ethiopia, specifically in Wollo.

Competition over resources is a significant factor affecting peaceful interethnic relations in Wollo. This finding is supported by Elias (2016), who argues that resource competition poses considerable challenges to interethnic relations, driven by historical grievances and the scarcity of land and water. Wollo has a complex history characterized by ethnic diversity and competition for essential resources such as land, water, and grazing rights. Historically, the Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups have been predominant in this region, resulting in longstanding rivalries and conflicts over resource allocation (Elias, 2016).

Additionally, Taffese (2019), in his study titled "Water Scarcity and Ethnic Tensions in Ethiopia: The Case of Wollo Region," highlights that in Wollo, where agriculture is the primary livelihood, competition for water sources-especially during droughts-can inflame ethnic tensions, further entrenching divisions.

Briefly, competition over resources can indeed be a significant challenge for interethnic relations in Wollo, a region in Ethiopia characterized by diverse ethnic groups and a history of interethnic tensions. Therefore, addressing these issues through inclusive policies and community engagement is crucial for fostering peaceful intergroup relations among the diverse religious and ethnic groups in the study area.

4.5.2 Opportunities for interreligious and interethnic group relations in Wollo

Despite the existence of contemporary glaring challenges for the interreligious and interethnic group relations, this study also indicated possible opportunities for peaceful interreligious and interethnic group relations in the study area. In the studied areas, 140 responses were recorded regarding interreligious and interethnic marriages and families, 113 concerning interreligious and interethnic ceremonies. Inter-religious and interethnic marriages/families, inter-religious and interethnic ceremonies and social affairs, inter-religious and interethnic cooperation, and historical peaceful interreligious and interethnic relations are manifestations of these opportunities. While 97 responses are on interreligious and interethnic cooperation, 111 related to historical peaceful interreligious and interethnic relations, and 55 addressing other aspects. These other aspects include shared practices such as festivals and celebrations, social gatherings, interfaith dialogue, mutual support during crises, as well as shared customs, rituals, and traditional conflict resolution practices. Based on these findings, a significant proportion of respondents viewed interreligious and interethnic marriages and families as vital opportunities for fostering harmonious relations among different religious and ethnic groups.

Analogously, a study by Misganaw Tadesse (2022) depicted that the Wollo society has a strong blood tie due to the interreligious and interethnic marriages. Misganaw, in his study, further argues that the peaceful coexistence of the society demonstrates that having differences by itself is not a source of conflict as long as people are committed to live together in peace. Thus, the peaceful coexistence of Wollo society may serve as a litmus test that can prove people with diversity can live in harmony.

Table 5: Respondents responses on opportunities for the peaceful intergroup relations

	tunities	Total
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			Inter-religious/ethnic marriages	Inter-religious/ethnic ceremonies	Inter-religious and interethnic cooperation	Historical relations	Others	
Respondents living in town	Sekota town	Count	7	8	9	5	6	35
	Dessie town	Count	55	45	34	39	20	193
	Kombolcha town	Count	32	24	22	23	10	111
	Bati town	Count	35	26	24	34	13	132
	Argoba town	Count	11	10	8	10	6	45
Total		Count	140	113	97	111	55	516

*NB: The total response is due to multiple responses survey questionnaire.

Regarding the interfaith marriage and the peaceful interreligious group relations among the Muslims and Christians in Wollo, *Shik Hussien Jibril* put the following poem:

በወሎ ሀገራችን ክርስቲያንም እስላም
 ተጋብተው ወልደዋል በፍቅር በሰላም።።
 መስጅድና ገዳም ባንድ ስፍራ ሲኖሩ
 ፋሲካና አረፋን ባንድ ቀን ሲያከብሩ
 የምነት አክራሪዎች ከወሎ ይማሩ።።
 በወለጋ አሩሲ ባፋር በሰማሌ በሀረር በባሌ
 ወሎ ክፍለ ሀገር ይቅረብ ለምሳሌ።።

The qualitative investigation of this study also reveals that the shared customary, cultural, and ritual practices between Muslims and Christians in Wollo are the opportunities for positive interreligious group relations in the study area. The qualitative enquiry explains that Wollo offers a remarkable example of interfaith cohabitation and shared practices between Muslim and Christian (primarily Ethiopian Orthodox) communities. Historical and contemporary interactions in Wollo have created unique interreligious cultural overlaps that demonstrate shared customs and rituals.

A key informant interview with a religious leader revealed the instances of religious syncretism at shrines and pilgrimage sites in Wollo. It is not uncommon for individuals from both Muslim and Christian backgrounds to visit shrines dedicated to figures revered in both religions. Pilgrimages to

these sites, such as Haik Istifanos and Tiru Sina Mosque, play a significant role in fostering interreligious cooperation and promoting peaceful relations between the two communities in Wollo.

In Wollo, various festivals and celebrations bring together both Muslim and Christian communities, fostering unity and cultural harmony. For instance, during major holidays like Eid al-Fitr (for Muslims) and Christmas (for Christians), there are notable instances where communities come together to celebrate, share meals, and engage in communal activities. Additionally, festivals such as Meskel (the Finding of the True Cross, celebrated by Christians) and Ashura (commemorated by Muslims) often witness participation from members of both faiths in the region. During religious festivals such as Easter and Ramadan both communities participate in mutual exchanges of goods, and market activities are intensified between them. This not only shows economic interdependence but also leads to social interactions that blend cultural practices.

These interactions during celebrations reflect mutual respect and engagement in each other's customs, highlighting the shared cultural heritage of Wollo. In addition, there are social gatherings, in many parts of Wollo, such as weddings and funerals often include attendees from both faiths. These events are marked by shared customs, such as communal meals, which help to reinforce social bonds. Furthermore, we can understand the historical inter-religious praying that can justify the long-lived peaceful interreligious group relations in Woll from the poems of Shek Hussien Jibril:

ኢትዮጵያ አገራችን ራሷን ተሰርታ ተብላ ልክክ

ተቀብታዋለች በሀምበር በምስክ

ትሽታቸዋለች ለሮማ ለቱርክ

በሰማይ አይሮፕላን በመሬት ላይ ታንክ

እየመጡ ቀሩ እያሉ ልክክ

ሀይለ ስላሴ ነው ባሏማ በልክ

እኛም ዱአ አርገናል ስላሴ ይባርክ።

The existence of interfaith council and elders are found to be the very opportunity for the peaceful interreligious and interethnic group relations in Wollo. There are initiatives and community programs aimed at promoting interfaith dialogue, where leaders from both religions come together to discuss social issues, peace building, and community development. This dialogue often incorporates shared

values found in both Islamic and Christian teachings. A member of interfaith forum in Dessie explained the role of the forum in the following manner:

...our interfaith forum plays a critical role in promoting understanding, respect, and collaboration among the different background communities. By providing a platform for dialogue, our forum allows participants from diverse faith backgrounds to share their beliefs, values, and traditions openly and respectfully. In so doing, we are working to break down misconceptions and preconceived notions, fostering a sense of mutual respect and understanding among the different interfaith groups. Beyond dialogue, our forum often engages in community activities, educational programs, and peace-building initiatives that address common social issues and challenges. Our collaborative efforts not only strengthen community bonds but also demonstrate the practical benefits of interreligious cooperation. So that, our interfaith forums contribute significantly to social cohesion and harmony by encouraging inclusivity and tolerance in increasingly diverse societies in our area (KII12, 2024).

The existence of shared norms, rituals, and values among the people of Wollo is also an opportunity for the positive intergroup relations in the area. These shared values contain themes of cooperation, unity, and moral values that crosscut ethnic and religious lines. An expert interview reveals the issue in the following way:

In Wollo, shared norms and values among the diverse religious and ethnic communities exemplify a unique cultural synthesis and social cohesion. Mutual respect for religious practices and rituals, regardless of one's own faith, is a prime characteristic of Wollo's social fabric. This respect is manifested in shared celebrations of religious festivals and participation in communal events that transcend individual religious identities. Hospitality and generosity are also deeply ingrained values, evidenced by the community's tradition of supporting one another during both celebrations and times of hardship, such as funerals. Honoring elders and communal leaders, showing kindness to neighbors, and participating in communal decision-making processes are other core values that reflect the collective spirit of Wollo. These norms and values foster a strong sense of community and mutual support, which has

enabled Wollo to maintain peace and unity amidst the diverse cultural landscape (KII 15, 2024).

There are shared ritual practices that can justify the existence of peaceful interreligious group relations in Wollo. As to Misganaw (2022), Ye ‘Christina Liğ’ (Godchild) in Christians, and ‘Yayn Liğ’ (Eye’s Child) in Muslims, Wodaja (both Muslim and Christians), and ‘Fatima Qori are the living witness of togetherness and peaceful co-existence in Wollo (Misganaw, 2022).

Community-based conflict resolution mechanisms such as *Abbagars* helps the peaceful interreligious and interethnic group relations in Wollo. The *Abbagar* is a revered local leader who often bridges religious divides. The *Abbagars* are respected across both Muslim and Christian communities, serving as a mediator and facilitator of dialogue for their authority stems not only from religious leadership but also from cultural influence. The *Abbagar* can mediate disputes that arise between different religious groups, fostering peace and understanding. By addressing grievances and facilitating discussions, the *Abbagar* cultivates an atmosphere of cooperation and respect. An interview made with an *Abbagar* stated the issue in the way forward:

In Wollo, the role of the Abbagar, a traditional community leader, is pivotal in fostering interreligious and interethnic relations. The Abbagar is deeply respected, serving as a critical mediator and arbitrator in disputes and conflicts that arise within or between different communities. By leveraging wisdom, knowledge of local customs, and moral authority, the Abbagar effectively bridges gaps between Muslims, Christians, and various ethnic groups, ensuring that the cultural and religious diversity of Wollo is both respected and celebrated. This leader actively promotes dialogue and understanding, upholds justice, and maintains peace through fair mediation processes. The effectiveness of the Abbagar significantly contributes to overall social harmony and stability, exemplifying how traditional leadership can successfully navigate and unify the diverse communities in Wollo's multi-ethnic and multi-religious landscape (KIII7, 2024).

Furthermore, the existence of communal social institutions such as *Idir* and *Equb* provides an opportunity for the good interfaith and interethnic group relations in Wollo. A key informant interview argued, “*Idir*, a funeral society common in Ethiopian communities, provides a structured form of communal support during times of bereavement. Members, regardless of their ethnic or

religious backgrounds, come together to support the bereaved. This shared experience nurtures empathy and compassion across different groups”. Similarly, a group discussion conducted in *Seqota* explain the importance of *Idir* for the intergroup relations in the following ways:

Idir, as a traditional social organization in Wollo, plays a crucial role in fostering interreligious and interethnic relations by promoting solidarity, mutual support, and community cohesion. These organizations function primarily as mutual aid societies that provide support during times of crisis, such as mourning or illness, bringing together individuals from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds. By participating in Idir, members engage in collective activities that transcend sectarian divides, facilitating an environment of cooperation and camaraderie. This shared experience enhances understanding and respect among various groups, as Idir fosters dialogue and collaboration on community issues. Additionally, Idir’s emphasis on collective responsibility and social harmony reinforces the notion that despite differing beliefs and backgrounds, community welfare is a shared priority, ultimately deepening intergroup relations and promoting peace in Wollo’s multicultural society (FGD1, 2024).

In addition to *Idir*, *Equb*—a traditional saving and mutual aid scheme—plays a vital role in fostering a sense of community and shared economic goals among members who contribute a fixed amount of money at regular intervals. This collective approach helps alleviate tensions that may arise from economic disparities among various groups in the study area. A discussant in a focus group discussion in Dessie highlighted the significance of *Equb* by stating:

Our Equb grouping, a traditional saving and lending group, exemplifies a unique model for fostering interreligious and interethnic relations among its members, comprising five Muslims and three Christians, with a composition of six Amharas and two Tigrians. This diverse assembly not only facilitates financial cooperation and mutual support but also serves as a platform for building trust and understanding among our members. The inclusive nature of the Equb encourages us to have meaningful interactions. As participants work collaboratively towards common financial goals, we also cultivate a sense of community that transcends our religious and ethnic boundaries. Through regular gatherings and collective decision-making, the

equb promotes dialogue and cooperation, ultimately strengthening our social ties and fostering a spirit of unity among our Equb members (FGD2, 2024).

Overall, *Idir* and *Equb* exemplify how traditional communal institutions can act as catalysts for good interreligious and interethnic relations. They provide frameworks for collective support, promote inclusivity, enhance trust, and facilitate dialogue, thus contributing to a more cohesive and harmonious society. As these institutions bring together individuals from various backgrounds, they help build a foundation for mutual understanding and coexistence. Both *Idir* and *Equb* often include members from varied ethnic and religious backgrounds. The inclusive nature of these institutions encourages participants to engage with one another, fostering interethnic and interreligious dialogue. People learn to appreciate their differences while finding common ground in shared goals and responsibilities.

Cooperation in building worship places such as Churches and Mosques found to be another positive asset for the good interreligious group relations in Wollo. It can be a powerful catalyst for improved interreligious group relations. Evidence suggests that when communities engage in united projects, they foster respect, understanding, and collaboration. This ultimately leads to stronger ties between religious groups, promoting a more peaceful and cohesive society. Interreligious initiatives that emerge from such cooperation can further help mitigate conflicts and enhance community resilience, reflecting the deeper, intertwined fabric of life in Wollo. A key informant interview conducted in Dessie explained the issue in the way forward:

The cooperation between Muslims and Christians in Wollo in building mosques and churches is a testament to the potential for peaceful coexistence and mutual respect despite historical and social challenges. This collaboration not only strengthens community bonds but also promotes a culture of tolerance and understanding, which is increasingly vital in today's diverse society. By working together, both communities can continue to foster an environment where faith and respect for differing beliefs coexist harmoniously (KII16, 2024).

There are lived experiences for the inter-religious cooperation in religious institution constructions in Wollo that can be cited as a good opportunity for the interreligious group relations. Muslims in Wollo participate in the construction of churches, and Christians in turn participate in mosque construction. For instance, when the new St. Gabriel Cathedral, at Dessie, constructed, among the 13 Committee

members who took the initiative of the construction of the Church in 1975, six of the Committee members were Muslims (Misganaw, 2022). This shows not only the interreligious group relations, but also the inter-religious acceptance in Wollo. A key informant put the following for this case:

እስልምናው የኔ ክርስትናው የኔ

በጣም ተደሰትኩኝ ወሎዩ መሆኔ።

In general, the study highlighted several opportunities for enhancing good interreligious and interethnic group relations in Wollo. The data revealed that interreligious and interethnic marriages and families, along with joint ceremonies, play a significant role in fostering understanding and cooperation between different communities. These marriages and family structures often lead to shared values and rituals, which are crucial in bridging gaps between diverse groups. Additionally, the presence of common social institutions supports ongoing interactions and partnerships across religious and ethnic lines. Collectively, these factors contribute to a cohesive social environment where mutual respect and collaborative efforts are nurtured, indicating a robust potential for sustained interreligious and interethnic group relations in Wollo.

4.6 Conclusion and Recommendations

4.6.1 Conclusion

This study reveals a complex and multifaceted landscape that, despite numerous challenges, exhibits a remarkably high level of relative intergroup relations as evidenced by an index over 0.84. This high index underscores the resilience and proactive nature of Wollo's communities in navigating the historical grievances tied to both interreligious and interethnic dynamics. While factors such as political manipulation, social media misinformation, and entrenched prejudices present significant barriers to inter group relations, the prevalence of interreligious and interethnic marriages and communal ceremonies illustrates the potential for good inter group relations in the study area. The cooperative frameworks established through intergroup friendships, familial ties, and community rituals not only mitigate the divisive impacts of misinformation and stereotypes but also cultivate a rich tapestry of shared values that enhances intergroup relations and social cohesion. Furthermore, the role of common social institutions in facilitating ongoing interactions suggests that there exists a foundation upon which more robust intergroup relations can be developed.

Thus, while Wollo faces its set of intergroup challenges, the findings indicate that the existing relationships and cooperative practices among diverse groups could serve as a springboard for fostering a more integrated society. This potential for sustained interreligious and interethnic relations in Wollo calls for targeted policies that reinforce these existing ties and promote dialogue, understanding, and collaboration across identities. Embracing and amplifying these positive intergroup relations can strategically counterbalance the negative influences affecting intergroup relations, paving the way for a more harmonious and inclusive intergroup relations in the study area.

4.6.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings highlighting strong intergroup relations among the different groups, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance and sustain positive interreligious and interethnic group relations, and to mitigate the challenges that may compromise the intergroup relations in the study area.

The government and politicians, the local administrators in particular, has to begin awareness campaigns. These government agencies has to launch campaigns that promote messages of peace, tolerance, and coexistence among religious groups. Utilize local media, social media platforms, and community events to effectively spread these messages. The government bodies should create a conducive environment for celebration of religious diversities and interreligious festivals. This may include interreligious festivals or cultural days. These events can include prayers, music, dance, and food from various religious traditions, highlighting the importance of coexistence and mutual respect. The government agencies build community centers for recreational events such as sports tournaments, cultural festivals, or arts and crafts fairs that encourage participation from all religious and ethnic groups. Such activities can provide informal settings for interaction and relationship building, which in turn promotes leisure time spent together among different religious and ethnic groups. The government agencies are also expected to create and encourage dialogue circles where individuals from different religious and ethnic backgrounds can discuss various topics, share experiences, and address misunderstandings. This can help strengthen relationships through open communication. The government should work on unity than diversity via stipulating effective integration policies and strategies that can sustain good intergroup relations. Those who want to manipulate the diverse nature of the people in the area should not use the community as an instrument for political gain.

Educational institutions and scholars, Wollo and Woldia Universities, have to work on educational outreach programs and trainings about the peaceful intergroup relations. These institutions have to

develop educational and or training materials that focus on the values of different religions that can promote understanding and respect for diverse beliefs. The academic institutions should work to enhance communication and relationship building among the diverse communities in the area. The institutions can organize workshops focusing on effective communication strategies, emphasizing active listening and empathy. This will help deepen interpersonal ties and promote understanding among diverse religious and ethnic groups.

The religious fathers/ councils/ forums must prepare religious dialogue events. Organize panel discussions or forums where representatives from different religious groups can share insights about their beliefs and practices, fostering greater understanding and reducing misconceptions. It is necessary to establish genuine interreligious task forces composed of representatives from various religious communities to address local issues collaboratively, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and cooperation.

The community should promote shared meals and cultural exchange. It is better to keep the good work in organizing community-dining events taking the Muslim and Christian Fasting times as an advantage. This will encourage individuals from different religious backgrounds to come together, share traditional dishes, and celebrate cultural diversity. These events can be themed around specific religious holidays or celebrations. The community should encourage in collaborative community activities, and joint community service initiatives such as neighborhood clean-ups, charity drives, or educational outreach programs. This will strengthen bonds through shared goals and teamwork. The community should strengthen their mutual support networks that facilitate assistance among religious groups during times of need, such as providing help during illness or celebrating significant life events (e.g., weddings, births). This can enhance a sense of community and solidarity that can address prejudice, and stereotyping in the area.

In a nutshell, all stake holders, the government, academic institutions, religious forums, and the community themselves should work together to reduce the minor intergroup relation forms of competitive (9.7%), conflictual (3.1%), and tactical (1.0%) relations before they become a threat for the intergroup relations in the study area. Furthermore, it is important to work on addressing historical grievances, political manipulation, a lack of effective integration policies, social media and misinformation, prejudice, and stereotyping as significant barriers to interreligious and interethnic group relations in the studied areas, and capitalizing the opportunities is very important.

4.7. Further Studies

Depending on the limitations of the current study, the researchers recommend future researchers, who want to conduct studies on the intergroup relations in Wollo, shall focus on:

- ✓ Analyzing the nature of intergroup relations across demographic variables such as gender, age, and education.
- ✓ Identifying the unique challenges and opportunities for the interreligious and interethnic group relations independently.

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Appendixes

Appendix - A

Woldia University

**Department of Political
Science and International
Relations**

Questionnaire prepared for Research

Introduction

The core objective of this questionnaire is gathering data about the situation of intergroup relations in Wollo focusing on interreligious and interethnic group interactions. The confidentiality of the information you provide for this study is highly reliable and kept as secret for any other bodies. The information you provide for this study is highly important for reality and reliability of the findings of the current study, there you are highly requested to cooperate with us by providing true and reliable data for every items in the questionnaire. We would like to present our heartfelt gratitude and thanks for your cooperation.

Notice:

Don't write your name, before you respond for each items think carefully and discussion with other bodies is forbidden.

Part 1: General information about the respondents

1. Living town_____
2. Religion: A. Muslim B. Orthodox C. Protestant D. other (specify)
3. Ethnicity: A. Amhara B. Agew C. Tgre D. Oromo E. Argoba F. Others (specify)

4. Language: A. Amharic B. Hemtana C. Tigrgna D. Oromigna E. Argobigna F. Afargna G. others (specify)
5. Marital status: 1. Married 2. Single 3. Divorced 4. Widowed
6. Sex: 1. Male 2. Female
7. Age: _____
8. Attained educational status: 1. Illiterate 2. Read and write 3. Grade 1-8 4. Grade 9-12 5. Certificate 6. Diploma 6. First degree 7. Second degree and above

Part 2: Intergroup relation in terms of religion

The following item assess the cross religious inter group relations in the study area, so that respond for each items by putting tick mark (✓) in the box for each item on the response you agreed.

No.	Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree
1	I have had good communication with other religious groups of people and had many cloth friends from other religious groups	1	2	3	4	5
2	I am working peacefully and cooperatively with other religious out group people	1	2	3	4	5
3	I have had experienced eating together meal and drinking tea or coffee peacefully with other religious out group people	1	2	3	4	5
4	In my leisure time I spend with other religious out group people	1	2	3	4	5

	peacefully and based on cloth relation					
5	I have had experienced living in one area/surrounding peacefully with other religious out group people	1	2	3	4	5
6	I have had experienced helping each other and being together as the time of trouble or happiness with other religious group of people	1	2	3	4	5
7	Usually, I used to discuss on different issues with other religious groups of people peacefully and Sincerely	1	2	3	4	5

Part 3: Intergroup relations in terms of Ethnicity

The following item assess the cross ethnic inter group relations in the study area, so that respond for each items by putting tick mark (\checkmark) in the box for each item on the response you agreed.

No.	Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree
1	In my life I had good communication with other ethnic groups of people and had many cloth friends from other ethnic groups	1	2	3	4	5

2	I am working peacefully and cooperatively with other ethnic groups of people	1	2	3	4	5
3	I have had experienced eating together meal and drinking tea or coffee peacefully with other ethnic out group people.	1	2	3	4	5
4	In my leisure time, I spend with other Ethnic group of people peacefully and based on cloth relation.	1	2	3	4	5
5	In my village, I had experienced living peacefully with other ethnic group individuals.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I have had experienced helping each other and being together as the time of trouble or happiness with other ethnic group of people	1	2	3	4	5
7	Usually, I used to discuss on different issues with other ethnic groups of people peacefully and Sincerely.	1	2	3	4	5

Part4: Forms of group relations in the study area

3.1 Forms of inter group relations in terms of Religiosity

1. How do you explain the form/s of interreligious group relations in your area?

- A. Cooperative
- B. Competitive
- C. Conflictual
- D. Other(Specify)_____

Part5: Forms of inter group relations in terms of Ethnicity

1. How do you explain the forms of interethnic group relations in your area?
 - A. Cooperative
 - B. Competitive
 - C. Conflictual
 - D. Other(Specify)_____

Part6: challenges and opportunities for the intergroup relations in the study area

4.1 challenges for interreligious and interethnic group relations in the study area

1. Historical Grievances
2. Political Manipulation
3. Lack of Effective integration policies
4. Social Media and Misinformation
5. Prejudice and Stereotyping
6. Others_____

4.2 Opportunities for the peaceful interreligious group relations

1. Inter-religious and interethnic marriages/ families
2. Inter-religious and interethnic ceremonies and social affairs
3. Inter-religious and interethnic cooperation
4. Historical peaceful interreligious and interethnic relations
5. Others_____

