



Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanism among Wollega Oromo: The Case of Jaarsummaa in East Wollega Zone, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to illustrate indigenous knowledge of conflict resolution mechanism among Oromo nation of East Wollega zone with particular emphasis on Jaarsummaa conflict resolution mechanism. The study explores indigenous knowledge of conflict resolution mechanism and their roles in restoring and harmonizing the previously broken relationships among the community due to conflict come up with social interaction. To realize its intended objectives, the study employed qualitative research approach. Relevant data for this study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Interview, focus group discussion and non-participant observation were utilized for collecting primary data depending on the objectives of the study. The data obtained from both primary and secondary sources were organized thematically and analyzed qualitatively. The findings of this study reveal that Jaarsummaa conflict resolution mechanism of indigenous mechanisms among the study community was the preferable measurement to solve problems between the communities before arriving on legal court. Jaarsummaa as indigenous institutions of conflict resolution are functional in conflicts which involve within the communities. The study reveals that, despite the changes in the contents and variations throughout the Oromo land, these indigenous institutions of conflict resolution are still functional in Wollega Oromo more than formal legal system. Lastly, the findings of this study verified that conflicts arise from different sources in Wollega Oromo community are a collective concern of the community. As recommendation transferring this indigenous system of solving conflict is the best method to overcome problem existed due to conflict rise between societies in case of current political problem in our country.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge; Indigenous conflict resolution; Conflict; Jaarsummaa; Political problem

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inevitable feature of human interaction. Conflict occurs across all social levels; interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup, international and international. Conflict can be of various types such as, personal, racial, class, political, values and interests, communal and non-communal, ethnic, ideological, cultural, economic and social. Conflict can arise because of differences in personal preferences, group interests and aims. It can take different forms like quarrels, disputes, feuds and armed fight. Throughout the human history, there have been different kinds of conflicts in different societies, culture and civilization

and it differs from place to place over a time period such as conflict over resource, territory, power, culture, religion, ethnicity, ideology etc. Therefore, in order to resolve conflict, one must come up with innovative and creative ideas to manage and transform it in ways that prevent its escalation leading to destruction. The mechanism which solves the conflict is called conflict resolution [1].

The types and causes of conflicts vary from one society to another. The conflicting parties may be individuals, families, communities, clans, persons, lineages. But, human societies have mechanisms to manage conflicts. Various mechanisms are

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employed throughout the world to heal breaches of peace. These mechanisms range from traditional procedures to formal judicial system. The types of conflict management mechanisms are subject to the cultural diversity of communities. Africa is the home of diverse societies. In most African societies, elders are respected mediators and reconcilers. African people use to have their own traditional mechanisms to deal with conflicts.

Traditional conflict management institutions emulate peaceful coexistence, maintain and preserve social harmony among the society. Like other traditional African countries, different ethnic groups in Ethiopia have developed and practiced their own customary codes and traditional institutions to manage conflicts. Among the different ethnic groups of Ethiopia, the Oromo, as the major ethnic group in the country, with large number of population size and settlement area, hold variety of traditional knowledge and culture. Similarly to the other Oromo communities, the value and belief systems of the Wollega Oromo community remain important in their social, cultural and political lives. Lanek (1999:31) states that the indigenous methods and their rationale must be thoroughly researched, analyzed and documented. Ways of adopting them to current situations and realities should be sought. Therefore, a traditional conflict management mechanism is an important area to be explored. Accordingly, this paper aims to describe and analyze indigenous conflict resolution mechanism among the Wollega Oromo community, particularly the case of Jaarsummaa institution [2].

Indigenous conflict resolution is traditional way of resolving conflict based on culture, practices beliefs, faiths and rituals in a holistic manner. It refers to institutions that are created outside western influences or communities that are encapsulated into modern states as marginalized and subordinate populations. The term indigenous means local, folk, traditional which is emerged or originate from the multiple sources, including traditional teaching, empirical observation and its culture that carries historic experience of people, adapts to social economics, environmental, spiritual and political change. Indigenous means holistic, relational and spiritual. Indigenous people are aboriginal groups, mountain people, tribal clans, cultural minorities, hill tribes and highland dwellers [3].

The term both indigenous and traditional are used as interchangeably as they similar connotations. Traditional approaches do not mean opposite to modern that include simple, savage or static rather it is a certain approach which do not belong to western and modern institutions that claim to be an alternative to modernity. Indigenous people are capable of adopting new techniques and sometime it has been forced to adapt to changing circumstances and engage in processes of conflict resolution to survive or prosper. Indigenous conflict resolution mechanism as social capital, defined as the capability of social norms and customs to hold a members of group together by effectively setting and facilitating the terms of their relationships. Sustainability facilitates collective actions for achieving mutually beneficial ends. Indigenous conflict resolution is the healing processes in which all stakeholders individuals, families and communities involve to re-establish or

re-build social harmony. Indigenous conflict resolution involves key elements like.

- Family representation of the individual.
- Ritualistic symbolizing respect and humility towards the offended family.
- The use of respected elders or chiefs as mediators.
- The payment of institution of inquiry or harm.
- A symbolic agreement between the families in an effort to restore peace.

Among the indigenous people, conflict resolution not only mean to resolve violence between two parties but also to mend the broken or damaged relationship, and rectify wrongs and restore justice where dispute is not only between the disputants but community as a whole [4].

Conflict is viewed as a communal concern. Conflict resolution followed conflict patterns as embedded in the norms and customs of a society. Resolution processes, therefore, were culturally prescribed. Emphasis was placed on reconciling the protagonists with each other, rather than on establishing right and wrong, winner or loser. Thus punishment was not aimed at retaliation, but at restoring equilibrium, usually through the mechanisms of restitution, apology and reconciliation. There was emphasis on justice and fairness, forgiveness, tolerance and coexistence. The approach thus emphasizes healing of emotional wounds created by conflict and restoration of social relationships [5].

The negotiation or reconciliation process in the traditional setting was seen as a re-establishment of relationships between people where elders play critical roles in promoting and containing social cohesion, peace and order in societies. In contemporary society, respect for the elders, customs and values have been diluted through westernization. Indigenous conflict resolution has been supported and encouraged by mainstream funding agencies and research institution to make the conflict resolution more effective and to assist the people to achieve a range of justice, social, cultural and economic goals. There has been a different type of traditional conflict resolution which differs from context to context, because people are diverse and distinct across the continent [6].

The objective of the study is to investigate the nature, types of conflicts, causes of conflicts and the role of Jaarsummaa system to manage conflicts existed within Wollega community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Qualitative research approach was used primarily focusing on first-hand information from primary sources. Researcher built, holistic picture of the issue understudy, analyzed words and detailed views of informants in the natural setting and in context of Wollega Oromo [7]. The basic instruments informant interviews, focus group discussions and non-participant observation were employed to collect data. The researcher purposively selected sample respondents for this study based on the judgment that the data obtained from these purposively selected respondent's on the basis of their experience in

indigenous conflict resolution will meet the purpose of the study (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The role of Oromo Gadaa system in peace building.

Indigenous conflict resolution among Wollega Oromo

Indigenous method of conflict resolution is a traditional mechanism of resolving conflicts in the form of local culture, symbolic values, rituals, dialogue, mediation, relationship and community based approach and that operate outside the purview of modern process. This mechanism mostly operates through traditional socio-political institutions of the community.

Traditional institutions are founded upon customary practices or laws; hence their attendant norms and values are often transmitted from generation to generation, while being lived through every day experiences. Traditional institution of conflict resolution is known by various names indigenous mechanism or indigenous approaches, tribal court, traditional or indigenous justice system.

Traditional approaches do not have universal application; rather it is context-specific with specific techniques of dispute resolution or reconciliation that involves rituals symbolic and functional practices. Furthermore, indigenous conflict resolution mechanism is practicing both formally and informally across the globe depending upon recognition by the state. Indigenous conflict resolution is typically quick, inexpensive or free, and supplied in local language. It enjoys high legitimacy in indigenous communities and rarely results in serious conflict. It provides a legitimate and practical solution to common interpersonal and intra-community conflicts such as theft, land disputes and physical abuse etc among others.

Formal and indigenous conflict resolution mechanism

In the study area the traditional and formal legal systems play a significant role to manage conflicts. However, the community has various reasons for preferring the traditional way of resolution. The first reason is that there is full and free discussion of the case before a settlement is reached. There is negotiation involving the disputants, their elders and other close kin. The conflicting parties might gradually come to accept the collective opinion of the mediators and the elders. The peace

making abilities of the traditional judges are respected and believed among the community [8].

The Wollega Oromo has common language, culture, ritual settings, religion, customary and spiritual law. The villagers in each kebele know each other and have kinship, neighborhood and marriage ties. The social and cultural interactions and kinship ties of the community force them to see their cases in private court without the interference of external formal authority. Managing conflicts outside legal court system would keep secrets from the general public. The people who serve in the traditional institutions have high values of moral and ethical standard. They are highly transparent in their decision making process, process in which even the community participate. A judicial process and decision in modern legal courts is considered superficial and not confidential. Factors like lower cost, confidentiality, easy access, etc. encourage the conflicting parties to come to the local negotiation more than to the formal legal court system. Therefore, the confidential nature of the traditional court system is preferable to formal court. They don't want to expose their secret to external authority.

The cost of the defendant and other expenses in the formal courts are indeed too high. Moreover they believe that traditional courts are flexible but the formal ones follow rigid legal court procedures, which results unfamiliar to their culture and norms. They serve the community towards restoring, maintaining and mending social harmony and relationships in an environment quite opposite from the formal court system. In modern court, conflicting parties simply terminate their social relation [9].

The importance of these traditional institutions is deeply rooted in the customs and traditions of the Wollega Oromo people. These institutions play a significant role in the maintenance of peace and security in respect to spiritual and customary law of the community and to the central role of spiritual leaders and elders. Unlike the ordinary courts, the local elders are concerned with reaching a morally acceptable decision capable of restoring the amicable relationship between parties. Therefore, the majority of the community prefers the traditional courts to the formal system.

The modern judicial approaches do not consider or allow little room for values, culture and belief system of a community. They apply modern laws and rules. We are not free to present our belief and custom in the formal courts. Our elders are experts of our culture. We are familiar with the traditional court procedures and rules more than with the formal one. Formal courts apply rigid rules and procedures without considering our feelings, customs and belief system. Modern legal courts never maintain social harmony and satisfaction between parties. Elders understand the feelings of the parties because they apply their own creativity and knowledge.

Partialities, corruption, tendency towards one's side are considered unethical approach in traditional institutions because elders respect the spirits/Waaqa. They render services equally and fairly. Parties also never plan to revenge each other after reconciliation because they fear and respect the elders and the spirits. Once a case is in the traditional court, the

conflicting parties don't pay money for the court because these courts are cost free but the formal ones need money. The preference to use traditional courts also lay on accessibility and confidential nature of the courts. It makes them more preferable than modern courts. We have the chance to access easily the traditional courts than the formal legal ones. We live very far from the town. In the traditional courts both parties and elders have no legal obligation. They respect their cultural values. Cases in modern legal courts may take months or even years to get decision. They are time taking because they follow lengthy litigation procedures [10].

DISCUSSION

The Jaarsummaa system

Jaarsummaa system is one of the most widely used institutions of conflict resolution in in the study area. The term Jaarsummaa refers to the process of conflict resolution through the use of jaarsa. The setting in which Jaarsummaa process takes place is also called Jaarsummaa. Here, Jaarsa are those elderly individuals of the society who mediate and solve conflict cases.

Although the term Jaarsa literally mean elderly refers to old age, in the context of conflict resolution one should not necessarily be of old age to be recruited as Jaarsa. Instead, the term Jaarsa is used more as a symbol here. Therefore, a young adult man could be considered by the society as Jaarsa as there is no restriction of age to be Jaarsa. The Jaarsa know the norms of the society, they are impartial and have a wealth of experience. They also hold fair public hearing and make decision. First the Jaarsa call upon the participation of the public and wise people. They use this participation to make their decision that largely follows certain procedures to find out the possible solution. Among Wollega society, Jaarsummaa system can take different forms based on the nature of the Jaarsa involved in the process. Accordingly, there are two types of Jaarsa, Jaarsa araara (elders of reconciliation) and Jaarsa waldaa (church elders) that give the service of conflict resolution.

The Jaarsa araara

The phrase Jaarsa araara comes from two terms Jaarsa literally means elderly and araara literally means reconciliation. The phrase, thus, means elders of reconciliation. Hence, Jaarsa araara refers to respected elders who have the right and capacity to deal with conflict cases and give decision. They are those Jaarsa who are well experienced in conflict resolution and decision making practices. Sometimes, the two seemingly interrelated terms, Jaarsa araara and Jaarsa biyyaa, are interchangeably used by the society, despite the slight differences between them [11].

According to the interview with the district court officials, the court itself has the responsibility to encourage the society in establishing institutionalized Jaarsa biyyaa what the court termed restorative justice. According to them, such types of Jaarsa biyyaa work cooperatively with the court and should be given legal recognition like legal stamp from the district court.

Besides, they added that this type of Jaarsa should have permanent place, date and time of dealing with conflict.

Role of Jaarsa araara in conflict resolution

Jaarsa araara are selected from the society on the bases of their knowledge of the societies culture, honesty, oratorical skill, knowledge of customary law, ability to convince some one and to understand others idea. They hold Jaarsummaa meeting when called upon by the conflicting parties or their relatives, by their

own initiatives or when the formal court refers the case to them.

Into this, Mamo (2005:131) identified two types of the Jaarsa araara, what he termed as volunteer Jaarsa and solicited Jaarsa. Accordingly, volunteer Jaarsa resolve conflicts between individuals or groups through its own initiatives. It arbitrates either on the spot when and where a conflict happens or receives the case up later. Solicited Jaarsa, on the other hand, is Jaarsa araara that either of the parties in conflict approaches and solicits to get help to resolve the conflict. He also stated that the two categories of Jaarsa araara are not mutually exclusive.

In the Jaarsummaa process, the Jaarsa araara apply the customary law of the society. Unlike the formal court which depends on written statements of charge, personal witnesses and written evidences to win cases, Jaarsa araara might not need these forms of proof. Rather, they depend on their own knowledge of cases and personal experience to make their judgments. They also put cases in contexts and consider events, circumstances, relationships, expectations and values to resolve cases [12].

The main feature of Jaarsummaa system is the presence of Jaarsa araara who are chosen by virtue of their good reputation, their extensive and good knowledge of custom, precedent and seera (law) of the Oromo. Besides, the individual talent and experience in dealing with conflict and willingness to give his time to reconcile the disputants are also other qualities expected of Jaarsa. Most conflict cases are therefore resolved locally using customary conflict resolution mechanisms in the study area. After all, the role of Jaarsa araara is to achieve reconciliation through a search for truth.

The process of conflict resolution in Jaarsummaa system

The nature of Jaarsummaa and the process of dealing with conflict may vary depending on space and time. In the context of Wollega Oromo the following procedures are common. First, once agreement to reconcile is reached, each conflicting party solicits members of Jaarsa of his/her own. A specific Jaarsa selected by the plaintiff should be accepted or approved by the defendant and vice versa. Otherwise one party is obliged to solicit another Jaarsa to whom the other party is interested.

The number of Jaarsa sit for Jaarsummaa meeting varies based on the complexity of the conflict. But, most of the time, five Jaarsa are solicited to undertake Jaarsummaa. These include two Jaarsa from both the plaintiff and the defendant side, which are commonly known as Jaarsa mirga (elders of the right) and Jaarsa bitaa (elders of the left). However, there is no actual

distinction between which side is referred as right and which one is left. Instead, it simply refers to elders from both sides. Though they represented and are solicited by each party, Jaarsa araara are considered as representative of the interest of both parties. The fifth Jaarsa is the one who is solicited by the joint effort of both parties. He is called barreessa (secretary) and his role is writing the reconciliation agreement, in addition to the mediation role he plays with members of Jaarsaa. However, in case of homicide, the selection criteria and number of Jaarsa involved in Jaarsummaa is different from other ordinary conflicts. In this case, Jaarsa araara are selected from the clan of slayer, the clan of the victim and from neutral clans and their number could be large [13].

As the two parties select the members of Jaarsa araara, they decide the date, time and place of Jaarsummaa. Each party is responsible to take the Jaarsa he/she has already solicited to the place on time. The preferred place for Jaarsummaa session is usually an open air in hilly areas or under big tree found away from village. The centrality of the place for the parties in conflict as well as for Jaarsa araara is the major criteria for selection of the Jaarsummaa setting. The actual Jaarsummaa proceedings start with the coming together of Jaarsa araara of the two parties. Although opening the Jaarsummaa process with the blessing of the elders is common in other Oromo societies among Wollega Oromo it is not regularly practiced. Once the deliberation is started, the Jaarsa araara stipulate the parties in conflict to be honest in presenting information and to be logical in claiming and counter claiming. The Jaarsa araara have certain procedure of hearing cases.

The plaintiff and the defendant come in front of the Jaarsa araara and present their case by standing there. The plaintiff stands on the right side and presents his/her case first. While one party is speaking the other party is expected to listen carefully for which he/she responds later and not to speak against. The defendant, who stands on the left side, is the second to presents his/her case. After hearing the cases, the Jaarsa araara may ask both parties turn by turn for clarification. Besides, if the case needs further investigation and one or the two parties conceal the truth, the Jaarsa araara try to convince one party by sending the other away. In this process, they use their personal skills and knowledge of cultural norms, values and custom and warn the party by referring to customary laws.

As they identified the basic cause of the conflict, Jaarsa araara require both parties to stay away from them for a moment. During this time, they discuss what they have observed, including what they knew before and propose the possible solution. Then, the parties are called and the proposed decision is presented to them, with detail explanation and advice. If the parties are satisfied with the decision, the reconciliation process would take place. The reconciliation process often involves oath-taking rituals, making of pledges to honor agreement reached and payment of compensation by the wrong-doer. Finally, the Jaarsa araara (reconciliation elders) write the reconciliation agreement which include the whole content of the reconciliation (date, name and signature of Jaarsa araara and conflict parties and amount of compensation). The agreement also includes how much birr each party has to pay for the

government as well as for individual if he/she disobeys the decision, appeal the same case to other institutions or repeat the same act another time. At the culmination of the reconciliation ceremony the Jaarsa araara let the two parties to shake hands with each other and kiss one another. Then, the conflict parties swear oaths as a sign of joint commitment to peace and reconciliation [14].

Jaarsummaa conflict resolution mechanism

Jaarsummaa institution is one of the most applicable traditional conflict management institutions at the local level. In this traditional judicial institution, the judges apply the customary law of the community. To some extent, the procedures may vary from one kebele Jaarsa biyyaa institution to another. However, the whole traditional court procedures are based on the social, cultural and economic life of the community. All types of conflict cases except homicide, serious injuries, ritual offences and hidden crimes can be taken to this traditional court.

Formation of the Jaarsummaa system

Among the Wollega Oromo community, kinsmen tie is very strong and help each other when ever conflict arises. Before the conflict escalates, neighbors, relatives or kinsmen of the parties who wish reconciliation and peace take the initiative to call up on the Jaarsa. The plaintiff or the defendant can also take the initiative for the formation of the institution. Nomination of Jaarsa biyyaa is considered as the most important phase of any Jaarsa biyyaa court procedures. The Jaarsa biyyaa institution established heavily depends on the free will and approval of the two parties as it is a voluntary institution. The parties have the right to choose their own Jaarsa from their close relatives or people who know the parties very well. They have also the right to change the Jaarsa if there is hostility between them.

The number of elders chosen to judge case varies in number depending on the seriousness of the case. Usually the number of Jaarsa angafa were arranged from three to five. The selection of Jaarsa biyyaa should be administered upon the free will of the parties. We need to get acceptance and approval from both parties before we start hearing their case. Otherwise the parties may be unwilling to accept the decision. If there is complaint or a tendency of siding towards one of the litigants, the other party has the right to change the jaarsa. Therefore, to be nominated as a member in the Jaarsa biyyaa institution, elders should be accepted by both parties.

Criteria to be elected (being elders) in Jaarsummaa system

Parties are expected to choose effective and responsible elders, usually being in a better socio-economic status and influential personality to be elected as Jaarsa biyyaa member. Among the community, active participation in social and ritual ceremonies will create high social status. Therefore, the community gives more emphasis to social and ritual participation if anyone wishes to get high social status. Age is another decisive requirement to be selected in the Jaarsa biyyaa institution. The community believes that, the angafa (old) acquires the wisdom

and experience of the culture which help him to bring peace and reconciliation. Therefore, an old person is perceived as a reconciler, mediator and peace maker of the community. Knowledge of the customary law and the ability to handle conflict cases are among certain attributes required. Deep knowledge of the customary rules of the community is the most important criterion to be chosen as Jaarsa biyyaa. However, members of the Jaarsa biyyaa may also be appointed on account of their traditional religious knowledge. Their expertise and fairness is considered because the failure or success of the decision depends on the knowledge and capacity of the elders.

Persons who frequently serve as traditional judges in different Jaarsa biyyaa courts are influential among the community and have a chance of being elected in several conflict cases management. This is because they are expected to acquire the necessary wisdom and experience to manage conflicts. Therefore, prominent socio economic status, age, wisdom in the customary law of the community and experience of the Jaarsa biyyaa are among the most important attributes one needs to have for be elected as a member in the Jaarsa biyyaa court [15].

Causes and types of conflict among the Wollega Oromo

Causes and types of conflicts vary from one community to another depending on their socio-economic, cultural, political and geographical conditions. The Wollega Oromo community share common socio-cultural and economic system. They experienced different types of conflict cases among themselves (intra-ethnic conflicts) caused by various factors. Both the Wollega Oromo community and other neighboring groups respect each other and live peacefully. However, conflict is an inevitable feature of all social relations; it may arise at any level of human interactions. Individuals of the neighboring woredas may come into conflict deliberately or unintentionally with persons from the Wollega Oromo. Even if, conflict is inevitable, conflict with the other neighboring groups is very rare. When it happen elders from both communities play a decisive role to bring reconciliation and peace, since, the Wollega Oromo community has more or less similar conflict management mechanisms with the neighboring groups. Therefore, except some interpersonal conflicts, there is no inter-ethnic or clan conflicts between the Wollega Oromo and the neighboring groups in the study area.

Causes of conflict

Conflicts have different causes, different effects and dynamics. It arises from a multitude of sources. Economic interest is the primary and root cause of conflicts among the Wollega Oromo. Economic resources include land related resources, livestock and other properties. The statistical reports of formal courts and the field data confirmed that land resource is one of the most common sources of conflicts in the study area. Since land is a highly regarded asset and economic resources for the community, is a measure of wealth and status. However, it is important to note that next to economic interest, land policy exacerbates the conflict and it could be taken as the second principal cause of conflict. Key informants and other

community members confirmed that the implementation of the unrevised land policy of the Derg by the present government is the major problem. Land resource conflicts before 1991 continued after the fall of the Derg regime because of the policy pursued by the present government.

Therefore, it can be said that competition over land resources is the result of the land policy that causes most of conflicts in the study area. Next to land policy problem, drunkenness/alcohol/is the third principal cause of conflicts among the community. Alcohol is a substance with strong stimulating effect that it can sometimes make people lose their temper and drives them to clashes. Alcohol stimulates conflicts if there is preexisting conflict or also if they is not any previous antagonism. Although there are no recorded data, the majority of the community claims that, alcohol is the root cause of many conflicts. This is because the community experienced so many shocking cases which were the result of drunkenness. Despite this undesirable consequence of drinking alcohol, various religious and cultural ceremonies and festivities are marked accompanied by drinking. People believe that drinking facilitates social interactions and is a good gesture of expressing friendliness to the guests.

Procedures of control conflict cases among Wollega Oromo

Once the Jaarsummaa system is established, the judges fix the date; time and place of the gathering and the parties are informed to appear on the appointment date. The judges usually sit on sunday to hear cases. When the judges are in session, they sit on the rock or on the grass field under tree shed or in the church compound in a rough circle. The Jaarsa biyyaa court is always open to the public, close relatives and distant relatives, friends, even third parties or the passer-by who have an interest in the matter can attend the hearing. The attendants sit in front of the judges. The litigants sit separately in front of the judges. Prior to the hearing, the judges always begin with prayer and blessing. Praying and blessing should always be done by the eldest and followed by the next two elders according to their age and status.

After praying and blessing, the accused call upon a guarantee before starting the case. The guarantee can be a person or some amount of money. The amount of money varies from one kebele jaarsa biyyaa court to another.

The guarantee is aimed to make the offender accepting and be loyal on the decision rendered by the elders. After calling a guarantee, the defendant takes the forum to respond to the case. Both parties present their opinion freely without any interruption. The judges may approach the parties separately or jointly depending on the nature and types of the cases. In a separate meeting, the other party sits at a distance until he/she is called upon by the judges. After the hearing, private discussions are conducted to examine the root causes of the conflict during which judges use their own personal experience and knowledge. If the defendant admits the charge, they directly proceed to the decision and reconciliation process. If not, they proceed to the next procedure, which is a phase of gathering of evidences and witness. On the next sessions, the parties will be

allowed to present their evidence. Evidence can be individual eye witness, written document, material evidences like knife, stick or gun with which the accused committed the damage. Kinsmen, relatives and neighbors are involved and participate by collecting and providing evidences and acting as witnesses. Until the next meetings the judges also gather their own evidences from the villagers and relatives to identify the culprit.

On the second secession, the judges examine all the evidences. The judges have the right to question the parties and the witness to investigate the wrongdoer. Therefore, the forum will be open for discussion and may take repeated meetings until both parties reach a consensus. After hearing the litigation between the contending parties, the decision of the jaarsa biyyaa will be communicated to the parties.

If the decision fails at the Jaarsummaa court, they refer the parties to the qaalluu court depending up on the preference of the parties. Some cases may be referred to the local court if they are related to homicide. If the case is not beyond the capacity of the judges, it may get ever lasting solution. Due to social, cultural and spiritual importance of the elders, the majority of the decisions made would be accepted. However, there are circumstances where the Jaarsummaa court ends up without fruitful results. The parties wait until the elders decide on the case because elders are believed to have come from the custom, tradition and belief system of the community. They are believed to have good knowledge of the custom of the community. Some conflict cases may be referred from one traditional institution to another

Conflict is a natural phenomenon and arises within any human society whether they are culturally similar or not. Human society have developed and practiced various mechanisms to manage conflicts. Traditional African societies developed and practiced well known rules and procedures to maintain peace among them.

Similarly, the Wollega Oromo community developed traditional conflict management institutions. The community applies customary and spiritual laws and regulations in the traditional judicial system to bring peace and reconciliation between the parties. In indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, oratorical processes, proverbs and spiritual powers lead elders in problem framing. The role of spirit is important and has a powerful force in the context of conflict management process. Parties never initiate to revenge against each other's after reconciliation because they respect the elders and the spirits. The community applies different peaceful modes like free discussion, reconciliation, compromise, mediation, negotiation and arbitration at the same time to manage their conflicts.

Among the Wollega Oromo community there are two types of conflict management mechanisms: The traditional conflict management mechanism and the formal court system. The traditional conflict management institutions of Wollega Oromo community is accessible, flexible, time saving, confidential, familiar to the community, cost effective, maintain and preserve social harmony, reconciliation among the party, not corrupted. These and other attributes made the traditional courts more preferable to the formal system.

Elders are highly respected as trustworthy mediator and reconciler. The belief system of the community in Waaqa (god) and spirits and psychological effects of such practices help the elders to manage conflicts, the parties became willing to accept the decision. The study explored and examined the types and causes of conflicts as well as indigenous institutions of conflict resolution among Wollega Oromo with particular emphasis on Jaarsummaa system. Wollega Oromo has ethical community who respects his culture and tolerates other nation. Thus, the common types of conflicts that usually take place in the district are intra-ethnic in nature. Economic and social/cultural factors are the major causes of conflict in the study area. The primary cause, however, appears to be in the area of economic interest, of which land related causes are the most prevalent. The study reveals that the prevalence as well as complexity of land related conflicts in the district varies between lowland and highland.

Conflict over ownership right of farmland is a complex problem in lowland area, where land is fertile, productive and relatively unoccupied. The study demonstrated that, the currently increasing scarcity of land together with introduction of land measurement and approval of land use right aggravated conflict over grazing land. This is due to the reason that people who obtain the certificate do not allow others to graze it. Besides, the contradiction between the formal and the customary grazing right is also another cause of conflict.

CONCLUSION

Conflict becomes the day to day challenge for many residents in the study area. The source of conflict may vary from individual to individual and from local to local, but there are common causes of conflict that continuously visible in the study area. Since majority of the household respondents living in the rural area, agriculture becomes the dominant source of income almost for all residents. Thus, access to land is important for every household. Because of this, land is the main source of conflict for many households in the study area. The interest of land for many households increases from time to time and similarly conflict on land increase in alarming rate. Residents of the study area are using different types of indigenous conflict resolution methods. Jaarsummaa is commonly practiced method of indigenous conflict resolution which many people used to settle their conflict. This indicates that conflict resolution *via* local conflict mediators is preferable than using formal one or court system in the study area.

There are different reasons that forced the residents to use indigenous conflict resolution mechanism. First, the cost of indigenous conflict resolution system like material cost, transportation cost, time and other costs become low. Second, the process of indigenous conflict resolution system takes greater speed. Thirdly, implementing this approach does not require sophisticated party structures or expensive campaigns; but formal conflict resolution systems are expensive. Finally indigenous conflict resolution system is very important means of conflict resolution by increasing social harmony, addressing common problems of the society and increase support of each other and tolerance. This conflict resolution method is necessary for the re-establishment of social relationship or

bringing together of the society in general and conflicting parties in particular. After using indigenous conflict resolution mechanism, many households invite their conflicting party in different religious ceremonies and other social interactions because indigenous conflict resolution mechanism has great contribution in restoring the relationship of the community. The government also failed to provide financial and material support. During decision making process, the local elders forced the conflict parties to come and discuss their problem; this considered as the domination of decision making process on the eyes of residents. During decision making process youths are actively participated in the decision making process. Indigenous conflict resolution system in the study area become one of the manifestations of culture and the practice does not contradict with that of the existing traditional structure of the society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Transferring indigenous system of solving conflict is the best method to overcome problem existed due to conflict rise between societies in case of current political problem in our country and socio economic conflict between different nation and nationalities. Indigenous conflict management mechanisms of the Wollega Oromo community should be encouraged to serve the needs of the community. The limitation of research works on the study area needs further investigation to revitalize the positive aspects of the traditional institutions of the community.

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