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# The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Conflict Resolution Mechanisms and Its Implications for Socio-economic Development in Afar Communities, Ethiopia.

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## Abstract

*This study examines the role of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms and their socio-economic contributions in Afar communities, Ethiopia. Despite increasing recognition of indigenous knowledge systems, their functions within modern legal frameworks remain under-researched in the Afar context. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaires, observation, and document analysis. Findings show that Afar elders (Mekabon) play a central role as mediators by applying customary law (Ma'ada) to resolve inter- and intra-clan conflicts arising from social, economic, and resource-based disputes. These mechanisms are widely preferred due to their accessibility, affordability, and ability to restore social harmony. However, they face challenges such as limited institutional support, governance interference, and reduced inclusiveness of women and youth. The study recommends strengthening, documenting, and integrating indigenous institutions with formal legal systems to enhance sustainable peace and socio-economic development in the region.*

**Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge; Conflict Resolution; Afar Communities; Customary Institutions; Socio-economic Development.**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indigenous knowledge on its part refers to what indigenous people know and do, and what they have known and done for generations – practices that evolved through trial and error and proved flexible enough to cope with change (Melchias, 2001).Indigenous, traditional or local knowledge refers to the knowledge and proficiency unique to a given society or culture, which encompasses 'the cultural traditions, values, beliefs, and worldviews of local people' (Magni, 2016). In rural African communities, indigenous knowledge has been passed on from one generation to another through oral communication practices, with storytelling being one of the most common methods (Sherwani, et al, 2009). Indigenous knowledge is knowledge generated from the lived experiences of a community as a result of interactions with their environment over millennia. Indigenous knowledge covers virtually every field of human endeavor and usually varies from community to community; one unifying factor being that it is aimed at addressing challenges and solving perceived problems specific to each community (World Bank, 1994). According to Brancati (2006) ethnic conflict refers to all forms of small-and large-scale acts of violence between and among ethnic groups. An act of violence or conflict, which is based on ethnicity to gain or share political, economic resources and cultural recognition, are the driving forces of ethnic conflict. The

20th century has been characterized as ‘‘an ethnic century’’. Hutchinson and Smith (2001) call it ‘‘the era of ethnicity’. Farther, Hutchinson and Smith (2001) mentioned examples of ethnic conflict include Nazi Germany’s creation of an artificial German ethnic uniformity and its extermination of Jews, Gypsies and others deemed ‘‘undesirable’’ by the regime, as well as the Nigerian civil war over Biafra, the Malay-Chinese conflict in Malaysia, the ethnic strife in Sri Lanka and Indonesia, the Kurdish question and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in the Middle East, the African-American and Hispanic struggles in the US. The last decade of the last century witnessed the collapse of the USSR as a Soviet Empire and its disintegration into ethno-national sovereign states, the breakup of Yugoslavia, the ‘‘velvet divorce’’ of the bi-national Czechoslovakia, ‘‘ethnic cleansing’’ in Serbia, pogroms in Burundi, and genocide in Rwanda Horowitz (2001). The major reason for ethnic conflict relies on inter-ethnic competition for power, resource or other things, which rotate life’s wheel. Again, ethnic conflict may occur at any level of social interaction from localities and neighborhood to the central government (Esman, 2004).

African countries today face greater challenges to peace and stability than ever before. The countries of sub-Saharan Africa, including Sierra Leone, Liberia Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, are a volatile mix of insecurity, instability, due to continuous armed ethnic conflict (Victor, Reatil, 2004) this is partly due to ineffective conflict management. The conflicts in these countries are mostly between ethnic groups, not between states

Ethiopia is one of the victims of intense and elongated ethnic conflicts. Its projected population is said to be over 91 million, (CSA 2007) growth projection, with a diversity of more than 80 multi-ethnic societies. In Ethiopia the cases concerning conflict over land and water resources covered in different regions those of the Afar and Issa, Sidama and Kambata/Hadiya, Nuer and Anuak, Afar and Amhara (North Shoaw), Afar and Karayu, Gerri and Borena, Berta and Amhara and Amhara and Oromo (Eastern Wollega), Oromo and Benishangul gumeze, Oromo and Sidama. The case of language-related conflict is that of Welayta, Cases of conflict arising out of status including regional centers of Dire Dawa,Harari and Silite. Both economic competition and Boundary cases due to ethnic federalism consist of Borena and Garri,,Gedeo and Gujii, Gurra and Arussi.(Mesfin.G 2006).

Conflicts stemming from natural resource competition between and among different neighboring local communities are not a new trend in Ethiopia (Victor, Reatil.2004).The harsh environmental conditions and the inability of the increasing populations to access the basic resources needed to survive (most importantly land and water) constitute some of the major causes of conflicts between and among local Somali, and Afar ethnic communities. Afar elders strongly underscore that all Afars are governed by the same custom (*Ada)* irrespective of their clan affiliation, area of residence or changes in national politics.

The Afar people have a strong sense of respect to the legendary traditional rules and guidelines that descended to them from their predecessors (Kelemework, 2011).

Indigenous conflict resolution mechanism is a social capital that implies the ‒ability of social norms and customs to grasp members of a group together by effectively setting and making possible the terms of their relationship, sustainability facilitates collective action for achieving mutually beneficial ends‖ (Fred, 2005). Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms focus on the values of empathy, sharing and cooperation in dealing with common problems which underline the spirit of humanity (Murithi, 2006). Comparing with that of formal conflict resolution process, indigenous conflict resolution mechanism takes less time to dispose a single case (Haftom, 2011).

**1.1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Conflict is an unavoidable and an inseparable part of the social structure. However, violent conflict often leads to loss of life and property wreckage and hence traditionally African societies have been keen to contain, regulate and resolve conflicts to ensure that peace and stability is restored and communities are not divided by blood feuds. The *Afar* pastoralists are no exception (Kelemework Tafere, 2013). In applying indigenous conflict resolution mechanism to solve conflicts, traditional customs and practices are seriously respected and carefully practiced. Ordinary people in villages still trust the advice of elders in resolving local conflicts for two obvious reasons (Chandra, 2008). First, their advices are politically neutral with social sensitivity and second they are less expensive in nature and can provide direct decision. Several conflict management activities carried out at the local level are based on values and customs, which play a crucial role in binding people together for collective action and holding wrongdoer accountable to their actions. Indigenous conflict resolution method plays an important role as it emphasis on the role of parties themselves to reach at mutually satisfactory resolutions and it plays crucial role to restore the relationship of the victim and the offender and maintain social fabric (Melissa, 2011). There are many unbearable cost to solve conflicts while using the formal conflict resolution mechanism like; court charge, filling cost, expenditure for lawyers, and other costs (Dejene, 2002). Contrary to the above idea, indigenous conflict resolution mechanism consumes lower cost and the process takes greater speed, the reason for this is solving conflicts through this mechanism normally requires the permission, and commitment of the parties involved in the process (Bendeman, 2007). The use of indigenous dispute resolution methods outside of the formal criminal justice system is important in maintaining close and continuing relationships in every community (Julie, 2007). It has been practiced for a long period of time even today, particularly in many developing countries, indigenous conflict resolution process dealing with victims and criminal offenders are widely practiced and deep rooted with different degrees among

the different ethnic groups. A study by Julie (2007), elaborates that, in many countries particularly in Africa formal justice system is inefficient and because of this it takes the second place to informal systems in many parts of the continent. Using formal institution to settle disputes especially for rural peoples is very difficult because these rural people expending more time in these justice system and administrative institutions that led them to economic disaster (Fekadu, 2009). This formal justice system is not only affecting their income but also deteriorates the social relationship of the rural society. In addition to this, the decision render by court system does not consider the background of conflicting parties. Therefore, the kinship relation becomes hostile and relatives' relationship is highly affected by it and encountered by tension. Despite the importance of the mechanisms to avoid conflict and to consolidate social relationship, indigenous approaches to conflict resolution have not been adequately addressed by scholarly research and political practice (ibid). The Afar believes that all disputes within their ethnic group should be settled peacefully and according to the long standing customary laws (*Mad'aa). Mad'aa* consists of specified guidelines and rules on how to handle dispute cases. This is a tradition followed from the time of Hamadu Sirat, whom informants identified as their apical ancestor and the father of all Afar in the area. According to Afar customary law, the amount of compensation depends on the type of the offence and its context. In case of a minor wound, there are special steps to follow before reconciliation can be achieved through the involvement of clan leaders. A wound is considered minor by a traditional healer if the bones are not exposed. In such a case, the person who caused the injury has to give the wounded a goat in order to ‒wash his blood.‖ Then after a day or two he again offers another to ‒heal the wound‖. This payment is called *Maldino*. Finally, there will be a compensation payment (*Morrusso*) ranging from 12 Birr to a camel depending on the seriousness of the injury (ibid). Therefore, the researchers assessed common causes and the role of indigenous conflict resolution mechanism for socio- economic development and weaknesses in the study area.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

### 2.1. General Objective

The general objective of this study was assessing the role of indigenous conflict resolution for socio-economic development in the Afar selected woreda, Afar region.

### 2.2. Specific Objectives

- To identify the common types and causes of conflict in the study area
- To assess current practices of indigenous Conflict Resolution in the study area
- Examine whether indigenous conflict resolution is merit full or not in terms of economy.
- Inspect the effect of indigenous conflict resolution systems in terms of social relationship.

# 3. METHODOLOGY

## 3.1.Description of the Study Area

The Afar Regional State is located in the North Eastern part of the country bordering with Tigray region and Eriteria in the North, Oromiya region in the South, Somali region in the South East, Amhara region in the South west, Tigray region in the North west and with Djibouti republic in the East, respectively. It has an area of 95,265.67sq.km. The region is divided in 5 administrative zones , consists of 29 Woredas .The largest zone is Zone 1 which covers 34.58% of the regional area and the smallest one is zone 5, it cover 5.78 % of the region area. The population size of the region is 1,411,092 and out of this 86.6 % reside in rural area and 13.4% (BoFED, 2007).




## *3.2.* Research design and Research approach

Since the main objective of the study was to assessing the role of indigenous conflict resolution for socio-economic development in the study area, descriptive research design was used. Through this method, the role of indigenous conflict resolution mechanism for socio-economic development in the afar communities was deeply studied and findings were qualitatively described, since the study will focus on the role of indigenous conflict resolution for socio-economic development in the Afar communities most

likely the qualitative description was better to discuss the issue. In addition, quantitative methods were used to describe the data collected by using questionnaire and the was presented in the form of tables, percentage, graph and charts , and analyzed.

### 3.3. Data Type and Source

For this study both quantitative and qualitative type of data were employed. The quantitative type of data employed to gather information related with common types and main causes of conflict in the study area and the socio-economic advantage of indigenous conflict resolution systems and practices in the form of semi-structured questionnaire. The qualitative type of data was also employed to get reliable information to support the quantitative data regarding the specific objectives of the study through focus group discussion and interview. In this research basically, primary data source employed to gather first-hand information to achieve the objectives of the research.

The sources of primary data were household heads, local elders, religious leaders, police force, and individuals from Kebele social court.

In the secondary data, woreda court files were reviewed in detail, special emphasis was given to documents in which conflicts settled through indigenous conflict resolution system and accepted as a binding rule by woreda court in the study area. Additionally documents and reports related to the common types and causes of conflict in the study area and the practice of indigenous conflict resolution system which available from Kebele social court and in the woreda court office was also reviewed. With regard to data sources, both primary and secondary sources of data were used.

### 3.4. Target population and Sampling

The study area consists of three kebeles from two zones (zone1 &2), and the researchers selected three (3) out of 28 Kebeles from both Wereda through lottery method. This was because the process of settling conflict through indigenous method is exercised almost in a similar manner across the study area, and thus taking these Kebelles through such method does not create difference. Therefore, the target populations of the study are residents of Aba'lla and Asayta weredas. From zone 1& 2, the study focused on Aysaita Woreda and Abala werada. From Aysaita Woreda the researchers purposively selected only two kebeles namely Kalbuda from agro pastoralists and Galifage from pastoralists kebeles. Because these kebeles are the most vulnerable to conflict compared to other kebeles in Asayita woreda. From Aba'ala wereda, carramali were selected purposively from eight municipality kebeles

Based on the 2007 Census conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), the total populations of the three kebeles are 9798 and from this population 1964 householders are living in these

three kebeles. Whether Male-headed or female-headed households, 322 households were selected from 1964 total households using simplified formula provided by (Yamane, 1967)

To find the sample of the community members (household)

If confides interval 95% and the error 0.05 or 5%

To determine the sample size the researchers used this formula $n= \frac{N}{1+N(e2)}$

Number of population N= 1,964

Confides interval = 95%

Error = 5% or 0.05

$n= \frac{1964}{1+1964\ (0.0025)} = 322$

### 3.5. Research Strategy

In this study, a combination of approaches, qualitative and quantitative, was employed. The quantitative approach was used to understand the perception and outlook of household heads about the situation of conflict in their local area using semi-structured questionnaire. The qualitative approach was employed to grasp the attitude of respondents regarding the common types, causes of conflict and the role of indigenous conflict resolution systems and practices for socio economic development, because using different research strategies in the same study to collect data is advantageous to ensure validity and reliability of the findings and to control possible data bias. These days mixed method is considered as a tool to triangulate the result of single approach through multiple methods (Johnston, 2010). Therefore, the researchers adopted mixed method in order to make the study more reliable through triangulation.

### 3.6. Sampling Design and sample frame

Household is the unit of analysis in this study, in which, household heads were contacted to fill up the questionnaire. The study was conducted by using snow ball sampling technique. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that is used by researchers to identify potential subjects in studies where subjects are hard to locate. In snowball sampling method, members of these populations have not all been previously identified and are more difficult to locate or contact than known populations (Sara, 2009). To select the household respondents through snowball sampling technique, the first step was identifying a group of individuals who are known members of the population to create a –seed. From 1964 household heads that have used indigenous conflict resolution systems and registered in Kebelle social courts; the researchers took 322 village residents by using simple snowball sampling technique. Thus, the lists of household respondents were the sample frame of the study.

### 3.7. Data Collection Instruments and Field Work

**Data Collection Instruments**

**i. Questionnaire:** The process of data collection was completed when the researchers get 1964 household heads and to be distributed 322 questionnaires. To collect data, semi structure questionnaire was developed in English language and translated in to Afar because Afar language is the only means of communication for residents in the study area.

*ii.* ***Informal interviews****:* Before detailed and well-structured interviews were conducted, an attempt was made to conduct informal discussions on some general issues relating to their modes of living and socio-economic conditions. In the course of these discussions, different categories of *Afar* (old and young as well as men and women) were asked about their perceptions of the institutions of conflict resolution, their views on the decisions made, and their evaluation of the effectiveness of the decisions in restoring peace in the area. Informal interviews also were open a window of opportunity for the identification of appropriate key informants and opinion leaders for more structured interviews.

*iii.* ***Key informant Account:*** Twenty four elderly and resourceful key informants were approached for the semi-structured interviews within the *Afar selected weredas*. Fully structured interview was not preferred because the elders were expected to supply ample and valid information if allowed to speak with minimum guidance. The semi- structured interviews were intended to access information on conflict, local tradition, and trends in conflict resolution across time.

*iv.* ***Focus Group discussion:*** Two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) was held base on purposive based selection with the assistance of the reputed elders of the two target study groups' lineages so as to have particular knowledge on the issue of ethnic conflicts in the regions. The key informants representing the ethnic conflicts prone pastoralist groups consisted of elders, clan and lineage leaders, elderly women, and the young as well as pastoralists association leaders in the study sites.

*v.* ***Participant Observation****:* Researchers partially observe and participated in some dispute processing activities that took place at various levels. Apart from being an instrument for data collection, participant observation was also a tool for developing rapport with community members, thereby helping us gain trust among ordinary people. Participant observation was particularly useful to harness data on kinship based relations and identify the social and economic support networks which had repercussions for the occurrence of conflicts and their resolution.

### 3.8. Data Processing and Analysis

The information collected from data sources were organized and statistical computations was conducted to explore the inherent relationships among the different variables. The qualitative data obtained through

interview and focus group discussions was described qualitatively in sentence form. Responses from questionnaire were fed into a computer and analyzed using SPSS(version 20) software. Finally, the results was summarized into tables so that the analysis and meaningful interpretation of results to be made to draw conclusions and implications.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the data collected using questionnaire, interview and focus group discussions in the study area major findings were analyzed and discussed in this chapter. During data collection the researchers used four enumerators to collect data through questionnaire, and there was no as such serious problem that the researchers faced. Sometimes there was a problem of reluctance from some household respondents because of lack of awareness about the issue. But after making the issue clear, respondents became Volunteer and work cooperatively with data collectors. All household respondents are disputants who have used indigenous conflict resolution and selected through snowball sampling technique. Among the 322 questionnaires distributed to household respondents, 310 the questionnaires were returned meaning there was 96.3% response rate. The demographic information collected through the questionnaires was classified into five categories; gender, age, marital status, and education

Here, in the first-place general respondents 'characteristics using age, educational status and their household type were presented as an introductory part. Next to this, the common types of conflict in the study area were analyzed by considering the household respondent's age.

The study further analyzed the role of indigenous conflict resolution system for economic development of the community by considering the role of these conflict resolution systems with saving of money and time for disputants during resolving their conflict. The paper also analyzed the role of indigenous conflict resolution system for restoring social relationship of the community in the study area. Finally, the paper gives emphasis on the challenges and weakness of indigenous conflict resolution in the study area.

The total numbers of household respondents used for this study were 322. The data gained from 310 household respondents analyzed using simple quantitative analysis techniques such as percentage and frequency distributions to show the common types as well as causes of conflict and the role of indigenous conflict resolution system for socio-economic development. In addition, the data collected through interview and focus group discussions were analyzed descriptively.

### 4.1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

**Table 4.1: Household Type * Age * Educational Status tabulation**

| Variables | Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Age** | 25-35 | 131 | 42.3 |
| | 36-45 | 92 | 29.7 |
| | 46-55 | 57 | 18.4 |
| | above 55 | 30 | 9.7 |
| **Sex** | Male | 230 | 74.2 |
| | Female | 80 | 25.8 |
| **Household type** | male headed | 219 | 70.6 |
| | female headed | 91 | 29.4 |
| **Educational status** | Illiterate | 180 | 58.1 |
| | can read and write | 58 | 18.7 |
| | Diploma | 52 | 16.8 |
| | Degree | 20 | 6.4 |
| **Total** | | **310** | **100.0** |

*Source: Filed Survey, 2019*

As depicted table 4.1, a large number of household respondents were in the age of 25-35. The age of 25-35 are highly involved in to conflict 131 (42.3%). Next to this, the age of 25-35 also involved in to conflict those account 92(29.7%). Thus, adults (25-45 years) were more likely involved to disputes than age between 46-55 and elders (above 55 years) in the study area.

According to the data shown above table, from the total respondents, 230 (74.2%) were male and the remaning 80(25.8) were female, and more than double, household type were male headed households that were were in conflict than the female headed households. Furthermore, the focus group participants replied that female headed households in the study area were less participant disputes.

Table 4.1 above also indicated that more than 58% (180) of the household respondents were illiterate. There are only few household respondents who can read and have diploma and degree. Based on the data obtained from focused group discussions and interview, the household respondents who are illiterate and have lower educational background had direct relationship with that of conflict involvement.

Education has the potential to prevent conflict and helps to bring peace in a given society. The more people educate less involve in to conflict and the less people educate more likely to involve in to conflict, but education sometimes aggravates conflict especially in political areas (Smith, 2011).

The finding of Smith is similar with that of the study area. The more people educate less to involve in to conflict. The illiterate household respondents are highly involved in conflict which is 180 (58.1%) than diploma and degree holder household respondents. But education does not aggravate conflict in the study

area against the finding of Smith. Therefore, education has a great contribution to manage and control local conflicts.

### 4.2. Common Types and Causes of Conflict

Conflict is natural and cannot avoid but possible to minimize it. The type of Conflict is varying from place to place, from society to society and it is also different based on the type of socio-economic activity of a given society. The cause of conflict in one area may not become a cause for other area. But there are common issues that become causes of conflict elsewhere. This includes political, social and economic issues.

**Table 4.2: Common Types and Causes of Conflict**

| Variables | Cases | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Common types and Causes of Conflict** | insults | 89 | 28.7 |
| | Quarrels | 137 | 44.2 |
| | grazing land | 51 | 16.5 |
| | Homicide | 33 | 10.6 |
| **Total** | | **310** | **100.0** |

Table 4.2 above gives detail explanation about the common types and causes of conflict in the study area. The common types and causes of conflict based on household respondents' insults and quarrels related issues which accounts 226 (72.9 percent). The data gained from the focus group discussion participants and interviewees indicated that, disputes that occurred intra-clan usually arise from minor conflicts such as insults and quarrels that may result in bodily injury. Conflict over grazing land and homicide rarely occurbetween members of the same clan. Any member of a clan who comes across conflict between two or more individuals has the moral obligation to try to reconcile the disputants.

When conflict occurs between members of different clans, the *makaban* of one of the disputant clans bring his case to the *makaban* of a neutral clan before the conflict can cause serious damage; in the case of inter-clan homicide, the intention is to resolve the issue amicably before the clan of the deceased can seek revenge. If the issue is not resolved members of a deceased's clan are duty-bound to kill any member of the offender's clan, including an innocent person, in vengeance. A prominent personality whose death would hurt the clan of the offender is usually selected as the victim.

The *makaban* of the neutral clan announces to both parties the date of the hearing and orders both parties not to take any measures that can harm the amicable resolution of the case. Both parties, and members of the injured clan, are expected to refrain from taking vengeance and respect the words of the *makaban*.

Depending on the gravity of the case, the *makaban* may ask the help of other *makaban*s of different (neutral) clans and select elders from different clans to resolve the dispute brought to him. *Makabans* of disputant clans represent their clans and explain their version of the disputed issue to the *makaban*s of the neutral clan. After this the dispute goes through the procedures employed to resolve intra-clan disputes.

### 4.3.Economic Advantage of Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanism

Conflict is an inevitable phenomenon since human beings exist on earth. The cost of conflict is also varied on the systems that the conflicting parties used to settle their dispute.

**Table 4.3: Individual's Involvement in to Conflict and Means of Dispute Settlement**

| Variables | Cases | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| How many times did you Involved in to conflict per year? | One time | 105 | 33.9 |
| | Two times | 95 | 30.6 |
| | Three times | 70 | 22.6 |
| | Four and more than | 40 | 12.9 |
| Tried to Settle Conflict using indigenous conflict resolution system before court | Yes | 280 | 90.3 |
| | No | 30 | 9.7 |
| Way of Settle Dispute In the Local Area. | Local mediators | 72 | 23.2 |
| | Negotiation | 37 | 11.9 |
| | Religious leaders | 80 | 25.9 |
| | Both local mediators & religious leaders | 90 | 29.0 |
| | All in different time | 31 | 10 |
| How many times you have used Indigenous conflict resolution system | One time | 47 | 15.2 |
| | Three time | 93 | 30 |
| | Four and more than | 138 | 44.5 |
| | I cannot decide | 32 | 10.3 |
| **Total** | | **310** | **100** |

*Source: Filed Survey, 2019*

As shown in table 4.3 above, from the total 310 household respondents engaged in to conflict, 105 (33.9 percent) of them involved in to conflict only one time. On the other hand other household respondents involved in to conflict two times and three times which accounts 95 (30.5) percent) and 70 (22.6 percent) respectively, and the remaining 40 (12.9) of respondents involved in conflict.

The table also shows, 90.3% of respondents tried to settle their conflict through indigenous conflict resolution mechanism. According to focused group discussion, customary dispute resolution in Afar involves elders and clans leaders to solve minor disputes in the context of Afar traditional law (mada'a). The law is called afare when it concerns disputes within the Afar and adanle for those with outsiders.

Islamic laws (Shari'a), is secondary to traditional law. Muslim judges (Kadi) are consulted only for civil affairs like marriage and divorce. The rest used different type's local conflict resolution system in different time. Many of the household respondents used local conflict resolution systems more than one time. The focus group discussion participants explained that majority of the local community uses local elders to solve disagreements. The locally accepted elders are the main actors to solve local conflict and the society also accepted these elders. The idea of this focus group discussion is similar with what Kelemework Tafere(2011) who advocates Customary dispute resolution mechanisms of Afar elders and clans leaders to solve minor disputes in the context of Afar traditional law (*mada'a*). It indicates that conflict resolution via local conflict mediators is preferable than using formal one or court in the study area.

The economic crises like money and time wastage are common in conflict resolution. The social crises like the breakdown of social capital and disintegration of social relationships between or among individuals. The table below shows the comparative analysis of the economic cost of indigenous conflict resolution mechanism with that of the formal or court system.

**Table 4.4: Economic Advantage of Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanism**

| Variables | Cases | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cost of Indigenous Conflict Resolution System | High | 41 | 13.2 |
| | Low | 253 | 81.6 |
| | Not known | 16 | 5.2 |
| Cost of Taking the Issue in to Court | High | 274 | 88.4 |
| | Low | 14 | 4.5 |
| | Not known | 22 | 7.1 |
| **Total** | | **310** | **100** |

*Source: Filed Survey, 2019*

According to table 4.4 above, indigenous conflict resolution is more advantageous for rural people to minimize the cost of conflict resolution system. More than 253 (81.6 percent) of house hold respondents replied that the cost of indigenous conflict resolution system become low. Indigenous mechanism of conflict resolution consumes lower cost and the process takes greater speed, the reason for this is solving conflicts through this mechanism normally requires the permission, and commitment of the parties involved in the process. Despite their precarious political, environmental and economic reliability, the Afar have built effective, agile and resilient customary system of law, conflict transformation and social control-the *Mada'a,* governing set of value system it provides a low-cost, empowering means of resolving conflicts within a relatively short time frame. The process is less challenging than formal conflict resolution system and so reduces the likely hood of win or loss mentality and provides a frame work for

the future dispute between the parties. As opposed to formal conflict resolution system, indigenous conflict resolution process is faster, cheaper and less formalized both in terms of process and in tailoring results (Eshetu and Getu, 2009).

Formal conflict resolution systems are expensive; sometimes the cost may go even the amount of making the victory of a party irrelevant or beyond the amount of decision. Conflict resolution through formal legal services is seen as costly, unreachable, slow and not consistent in delivering law. The most common complaint about formal conflict resolution systems or courts is the prolonged nature of their procedures, and the associated belief that taking a very long period of time as many people put it, is the result of either a defendant‘s bribe or a deliberate tactic by judges to provoke the plaintiff to bribe them just to get the case heard (Leonardi, 2010). Judges explain that the very nature of a first-class magistrate court requires it to hear the case over a number of sessions to bring witnesses or other evidence. But for most ordinary people, the inevitable delays and repeated sessions required for some cases in the judge‘s courts are straightforward proof of the judiciary‘s corruption. Most seriously, delays in the judicial system or police investigations are blamed for revenge (ibid).

From the total household respondents of 310, 274 (88%) replied that using formal or court system of conflict resolution system leads to economic crises and time wastage than indigenous conflict resolution mechanism. The data obtained from focus group discussion and interview also assured that using indigenous conflict resolution mechanism has many advantages in relation with saving of money and time. It takes short period of time to solve conflicts and disputants can solve their conflict in their local area. It decreases the cost and time involved in solving conflict like material cost, transportation cost, time and other costs. But using formal or court system takes a very long period of time to solve a single case and leads to economic crises like; court charge, filling cost, and expenditure for lawyers, and other costs. Therefore, indigenous conflict resolution system is more advantageous in terms of saving money and time.

**Table 4.5: Cases Taken to Court before Using Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanism**

| Variables | Cases | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Used formal or Court system to Resolve conflict | Yes | 80 | 25.8 |
| | No | 230 | 74.2 |
| **Total** | | **310** | **100** |

*Source: Filed Survey, 2019*

Table 4.5 above indicates that from the total 310 house hold respondents, 80 (25.8 percent) of them went to court before using indigenous method of conflict resolution. The remaining 230(74.2) responded that

the dispute has been resolved by clan and religious leaders of indigenous knowledge. According to data obtained from the focus group discussions and interview, the court administrators forced the disputants to go back and to settle their dispute through indigenous conflict resolution system. Because of their significant influential role within the Afar society, Afar elders and clan leaders are important actors during peace-making and conflict. Conflicts within Afar society (between individuals and families) are resolved using customary laws, through mediation, and the direct involvement of elders and clan leaders. The modern state apparatus like the police and courts play a minimal role in resolving conflicts that arise within the Afar society (Kelemework, 2002). According to the informants, Afar elders and clan leaders also play a role in bringing rebellious groups back to a peaceful life by exerting their influence.

### 4.4. Social Advantage of Indigenous Conflict Resolution System

Conflict is not only affecting the economic cost of the community but also it affects the social relationship. The impact of conflict on social relationship of the society depends on the type of conflict resolution system.

**Table 4.6: Termination of social interaction and physical harm because of Conflict**

| Variables | Cases | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Does the conflict terminate social relationship in your area? | Yes | 273 | 88.1 |
| | No | 37 | 11.9 |
| Conflict involve Physical harm | Yes | 246 | 79.4 |
| | No | 64 | 20.6 |
| **Total** | | **310** | **100** |

*Source: Filed Survey, 2019*

Table 4.6 above, gives detail information about social termination and occurrence of physically harm and crime as a result of conflict. Overall, majority of household respondents agree that dispute because of different reasons leads termination of the social interaction of the community. The study revealed that the Afar realized that conflict, although usually mentioned as a bad outcome of social interaction, is unavoidable. Therefore, the above table revealed that, 273 (88.1%) of household respondents agree that conflict accompanied by physical harm and crime .And the interview and focus group discussants explained that as a result of conflict, disputants miss a lot of advantages which are benefits from social interaction and terminates and affects social relationship of individuals

**Table 4.7: Advantage of Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanism to Consolidate Social Relationship**

| Variables | Cases | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Relationship with the Community | Very strong | 142 | 45.8 |
| | Strong | 129 | 41.6 |
| | Weak | 21 | 6.8 |
| | very weak | 18 | 5.8 |
| Advantage of Indigenous Conflict resolution for social relations | Increase social harmony | 20 | 6.5 |
| | Address problems of the community | 43 | 13.9 |
| | Increase tolerance and support | 27 | 8.7 |
| | All | 220 | 70.9 |
| Contribution of local Elders to strength Social relationship | Very high | 132 | 42.6 |
| | High | 154 | 49.6 |
| | Low | 15 | 4.8 |
| | Poor | 4 | 1.3 |
| | Very poor | 5 | 1.6 |
| **Total** | | **310** | **100** |

As table 4.7 above presents, from all household respondents, 142 (45.8%) of them have very strong and 129(41.6%) strong relationship with the community. Whereas the rest of household respondents said that they have weak and very weak relationship with the community. As informants (more than 85%), there is strong relationship within the communities. This point has been supported by other empirical studies. Forename, Leaderach(2003) ensuring long lasting peace through observance of truth, justice, mercy and recognition to reconciliation that resolves immediate conflict episode and transforms future relations. Indigenous conflict resolution system cultivates the relationship of conflicting parties towards the future. This conflict resolution method is necessary for the re-establishment social relationship or bringing together of the society in general and conflicting parties in particular (Volker, 2007).

The table also shown the indigenous conflict resolution system plays great role to consolidate social relationship. According to the respondents, indigenous conflict resolution system is very important means of conflict resolution in increasing social harmony and addressing common problems of communities.

The local elders have strong potential and ability to advice the local people in general and conflicting individuals in particular. Table 4.7 also shows that 286 (92.2%) of household respondents assured that local elders have great role in consolidating social relationship of the community in their local area but

there are few number of household respondents 24(7.8%) who are going to criticize the role of local elders to consolidate social relationship whoever it is insignificant. According to the Volker, (2007) indigenous conflict resolution mechanism can provide us procedures that can resolve disagreements successfully without harming relationships. In indigenous conflict resolution process, the conflicting parties could rather help to learn information that will permit them to work more efficiently to their future life. Indigenous conflict resolution system allows conflicting parties to work cooperatively by minimizing their gap in productive way that does not demolish their relationship.

The data gained from the focus group discussions and interview also supports the data gained from survey method that is directly related with that of Volker's argument in which indigenous conflict resolution system and the local elders play prominent role in consolidating the relationship of the society. Generally the data gained from household respondents, focus group discussion and interview indicates that local elders have great capacity and ability in peace building process and consolidating social relationship of the society by increasing social harmony, addressing common problems of the society and increase support each other and tolerance in the study area. According to informants, the traditional institutions were generally believed to be effective several factors have contributed to such effectiveness. Firstly, the traditional institutions function on the basis of cultural norms that have been very well internalized by community members. Those local elders who handled conflicts were also from within the system and hence well known, trusted and respected by the community at large. Traditional structures have had comparative advantage over the modern courts because they were proved to be more flexible, transparent, democratic and participatory.

**Table 4.8: Individuals' Relationship and Involvement in to Social Activities after Using Indigenous Conflict Resolution Method**

| Variables | Cases | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Relationship with the Community | Yes | 269 | 86.8 |
| | No | 41 | 13.2 |
| **Total** | | **310** | **100** |

*Source: Filed Survey, 2019*

Table 4.8 above revealed that from the total household respondents' 269 (86.8%) of them have relationship with the community after using indigenous conflict resolution method, and individuals have restored their relationship with the community and their conflicting party. This indicates that indigenous conflict resolution has great contribution to restore the relationship of the community. According the focus group discussion participants, local elders who handled conflicts were also from within the system

and hence well known, trusted and respected by the community at large. Traditional structures have had comparative advantage over the modern courts because they were proved to be more flexible, transparent, democratic and participatory. Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms had less to do with restoring justice and more with seeking long term sustainable community peace based on a win-win approach. Therefore, individuals who have used indigenous conflict resolution mechanism have the chance to consolidate their relationship to the community in general and their enemy in particular since the ultimate matter is restoring good relations.

### 4.5. Challenges and Weaknesses of Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanism

Even though indigenous conflict resolution has its own socio economic advantage for individuals, groups, societies and communities, it has facing many challenges from different directions. To alleviate these problems, this indigenous conflict resolution system needs support from different governmental and non-governmental organizations. The table below shows the involvement of local government to support indigenous conflict resolution system in the study area.

**Table 4.9: Local Government Involvement to Support Indigenous Conflict Resolution System**

| Variables | Cases | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Indigenous conflict resolution Method is supported by government | Yes | 198 | 63.9 |
| | No | 68 | 21.9 |
| | I don‘t know | 44 | 14.2 |
| **Total** | | **310** | **100** |
| Types of support | Financial Material | 41 | 20.7 |
| | Training for elders | 157 | 79.3 |
| | All | - | - |
| **Total** | | **198** | **100** |

*Source: Filed Survey, 2019*

Table 4.9 above indicates that the local government involved in supporting indigenous conflict resolution mechanism in the study area. From the total household respondents 198 (63.9%) of them agreed that the government provided support for the local elders. This indicates that the government failed to provide financial and material support to consolidate indigenous conflict resolution mechanism in the study area. Pankhurst **A. & Assefa G. (2008)** have **discussed** the relations between the formal and customary justice systems in Afar, and offered recommendations for legal reform. According the above authors, the Afar Regional Government uses the customary dispute resolution mechanisms mainly to resolve disputes resulting from homicide that arise between different clans. The Regional Government allocates budgets

to facilitate the work of the elders. They also stated that the indigenous dispute resolution mechanism is cheap, easily accessible and non-bureaucratic. Besides, it also allows the disputants to actively participate and resolve their conflicts based on customary rules of their own people, which make its decisions acceptable, and important in bringing the disputant clans to reconciliation. Its emphasized reconciliation, rather than punishment of an offender, so that is preferred to the formal justice system in Afar regional state. The focused group participants have confirmed the above ideas.

According to the focused group discussants, even if the regional government offer the support, there are challenges that affect indigenous conflict resolution method are lack of clear legal mandates, limited financial support from different national and international governments and limited capacity for oversight of system performance can all put in danger the effectiveness of the method to improve access to justice for the society. The focus group participants responded that sometimes the woreda administrators failed to select local elder trainees in providing training. The Kebelle administrator selects his close friends and others who have affinity with him sent to the training area, and the females are passive participant decision making in conflict resolution.

Pankhurst **A. & Assefa G. (2008)** had identified some weaknesses indigenous knowledge conflict resolution mechanisms that need to be addressed to improve its performance. The only remedies available under this customary system are compensation given in terms of livestock or money which is mostly paid by the contribution of families or clans of the offender to the injured party or clan. This may leave the offender unpunished and a potential threat to the community. Anther weakness of customary law is some of the rules and procedures applicable may violate fundamental rights of citizens/accused persons, including the right of equal protection of the law. The right of Equality is one of the fundamental principles incorporated under the FDRE Constitution. This principle declares equality of all human beings before the law and guarantees equal protection of the law without distinction of race, nation, nationality, colour, sex, language, religion, politics, property, birth or social origin. This principle is also incorporated under Article 26 of International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The Afar *Mada'a* that provides compensation of 50 camels for intentional killing of a woman and 100 camels for the same crime committed on a man and the application of this rule by *Makaban* violates the principle of equal protection and Article 35 of FDRE constitution that provides equality between women and men in the enjoyment of rights and obtaining protection of the law. For disputes arising at the local community level, women are not allowed to participate in the negotiations (Mablo) and decision-making process. On the cultural ground, it is evident that women are considered weaker than men (Yayneshet T. and Kelemework T., 2004).)

Therefore, based on the data obtained from focused group discussions and interviews as well as empirical data, the weakness of indigenous knowledge conflict resolution mechanisms need to be addressed to improve its performance.

**Table 4.10: Decision Making Process in Indigenous Conflict Resolution System**

| Variables | Cases | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Monopoly of decision making By local elders | strongly agree | 87 | 28.1 |
| | Agree | 122 | 39.3 |
| | Not sure | 30 | 9.8 |
| | Disagree | 42 | 13.5 |
| | Strongly disagree | 29 | 9.3 |
| Participation of youths during Decision making process | strongly agree | 74 | 23.9 |
| | Agree | 89 | 28.7 |
| | Not sure | 43 | 13.9 |
| | Disagree | 68 | 21.9 |
| | Strongly disagree | 36 | 11.6 |
| Participation of women‘s during Decision making process | Strongly agree | 34 | 11 |
| | Agree | 46 | 14.8 |
| | Not sure | 51 | 16.5 |
| | Disagree | 112 | 36.1 |
| | Strongly agree | 67 | 21.6 |
| **Total** | | **310** | **100** |

*Source: Filed Survey, 2019*

Table 4.10 above shows that, from the total house hold respondents, 209 (67.4%) of them replied that the decision making process in indigenous conflict resolution system is dominated by local elders. But 71 (22.8%) of household respondents disagree with the idea that local elders dominated the decision making process. Data obtained from focused group discussions and interview revealed that, any conflict recourse to the modern system of state courts or recourse to the indigenous Afar institutions of conflict management, however, most the Afar generally tend to channel disputes to local mediation where conflicts are addressed. Local elders settling disputes among or between conflict parties and the members of these committee actually consist of old men and youths, but women are excluded in decision making processes. In many developing countries women‘s are victims of indigenous conflict resolution processes because the process of conflict resolution under this method is dominated by males. Exchanging of women between conflict parties or gift of girls as payment or compensation agreed by local leaders to solve the conflict is becomes unsupportable practice by human right principles (Volker, 2007).

The idea gained focus group participants and interviewee indicates that, during the decision making process the domination of local elders is high and sometimes the local elders forced the conflict parties to use indigenous conflict resolution system instead of formal or court system to solve the conflict. For disputes arising at the local community level, women are not allowed to participate in the negotiations (Mablo) and decision-making process. On the cultural ground, it is evident that women are considered weaker than men (Yayneshet T. and Kelemework T., 2004).).Women, regardless of their remarkable contributions to the socio-economic development, have not be placed at the disadvantaged position with no or weak authority and decision making power, in the control and management of resources, and in social affairs. Such gender based discrimination has negative impact not only on women, but also on national development as a whole, and violates the right of Equality is one of the fundamental principles incorporated under the FDRE Constitution that declares equality of all human incorporated under Article 26 of International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

**Table 4.11: Indigenous Conflict Resolution System, and Universal Human Right Principles**

| Variables | Cases | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Affects universal human right Principles | Strongly agree | 16 | 5.2 |
| | Agree | 126 | 40.8 |
| | Not sure | 79 | 25.5 |
| | Disagree | 27 | 8.7 |
| | Strongly disagree | 62 | 20 |
| **Total** | | **310** | **100** |

*Source: Filed Survey, 2019*

4.11 Above shows that from the total household respondents 142 (46%) of them said indigenous conflict resolution system abuses human right principles. But 89 (28.7%) of disagree or contradict with the above idea. The customary dispute resolution mechanisms are playing an important role in resolving conflicts of any kind and maintaining peace and stability. The customary dispute resolution mechanisms are run by elders; involve reconciliation of the conflicting parties and their respective families using different customary rituals where needed; emphasizes the restitution of victims and reintegration of offenders; and aim at restoring the previous peaceful relationship within the community as well as maintaining their future peaceful relationships by avoiding the culturally accepted practices of revenge. However, despite the fact that Afar's indigenous knowledge resolution mechanisms, in relation to human right principles youths and women may directly affected by the decision of elders made without participating in the process.. Based on the analysis of the relevant data, literatures customary dispute resolution mechanisms, and interviews, as well as focused group discussions; it is found that Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms disadvantages women in decision making power and violates right of participation of

women. Therefore, indigenous conflict resolution system in the study area may contradict with contradict with universal human right principles.

**Table 4.12: Corruption and Indigenous Conflict Resolution Systems**

| Variables | Cases | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Indigenous conflict resolution Is exposed to corrupt practices | strongly agree | - | - |
| | Agree | 21 | 6.8 |
| | Not sure | 58 | 18.7 |
| | Disagree | 183 | 59 |
| | Strongly disagree | 48 | 15.5 |
| **Total** | | **310** | **100** |

*Source: Filed Survey, 2019*

As indicated above table 4.12 above, from the total house hold respondents 183 (59%) replied that elders and clan leaders are not corrupted during resolving conflict through indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms. Focus group participants also assured that there are no corrupt practices by elders during decision making process; rather the elders are really working to end hostility and conflict in their local area. Therefore, there is no corruption while solving conflict using indigenous conflict resolution mechanism in the local area. The customary dispute resolution mechanisms are traditional practices used to resolve conflicts and maintain peace and stability in the community. These traditional practices are deeply rooted in different ethnic groups of Ethiopia and arise from age-old practices that have regulated the relationships of the peoples in the community (Regassa et al. 2008).

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### Conclusion

Conflict remains an inherent feature of the pastoral livelihood system in the Afar Region due to mobility patterns, competition over scarce natural resources, and environmental pressures. The findings of this study demonstrate that indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, particularly the Afar customary law (Ma'ada), continue to play a central role in maintaining social order, managing resources, and resolving disputes within and between clans. Traditional leaders and elders (Mekabon) serve as trusted mediators whose decisions are widely respected and accepted by community members.

The study revealed that pastoral communities generally prefer indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms to formal court systems because they are accessible, cost-effective, timely, culturally legitimate, and

capable of restoring social relationships. Beyond resolving disputes, these mechanisms strengthen social cohesion, promote reconciliation, and contribute to peace and socio-economic stability within the community. The restoration of relationships among conflicting parties through customary practices demonstrates the effectiveness of indigenous institutions in sustaining long-term harmony.

Despite their strengths, indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms face several challenges, including inadequate institutional support, limited participation of women and youth in decision-making processes, resource constraints, and increasing interference from modern governance structures. These challenges may weaken the sustainability and inclusiveness of customary institutions if not properly addressed.

Overall, the study concludes that indigenous knowledge-based conflict resolution systems remain highly relevant and effective in the Afar Region. Strengthening collaboration between customary institutions and formal governance structures, while promoting greater participation of women and youth, can enhance the contribution of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms to sustainable peace, social cohesion, and socio-economic development in Afar communities.

## Recommendation

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- Conflicts that are insults, quarrels, land grazing and homicide often caused by scarcity of resources and the resultant economic frustration. Hence, mechanisms for poverty alleviation should be designed and implemented in order to improve access to basic resources required to sustain production systems and the values associated with them.
- The current support and recognition of indigenous knowledge for conflict resolution mechanisms provided by the national constitution and local government should be further encouraged and strengthened.
- However, beyond support and recognition more practical measures are needed to integrate the two systems in a more systematic manner allowing them to work side by side without the need for duplication of work.
- The dispute-resolution process has to ensure the participation of women and those who are affected by the conflict.
- Like the Afar people, many African nations possess indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms. Harmonizing these practices can help develop common frameworks for

effective conflict management across the continent.

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