Jigjiga University

Conflict Resolution through Indigenous Knowledge System :The case of Gumuz Community, North West Ethiopia

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Introduction

- Conflict is part of human society, which exists in various forms, be it religious, political, cultural, social or economic(Innocent, 2014).
- Conflict exists to some degree in every community. The form and intensity of conflicts vary widely by place, and over time within each community.
- The ways in which communities and their members respond to conflicts also vary considerably. Significant diversity often exists within communities in terms of knowledge, opinion, material wealth, power, and status. Therefore, **conflicts and the way they are handled should be examined from a social and historical perspective, with an understanding and appreciation of the range of local viewpoints** (Alfonso et al 1996).

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- In African traditional societies, **Conflict Management CM** through indigenous institutions perform a healing function.
- The prime actors are elders, clan chiefs, prominent leaders, acceptable and respected persons, council of elders, king‘s court, peoples assemblies, etc for **dispute settlement and justice dispensation** (Nwosile, 2005;Tasew,2016).
- **CM:** the **interference** in an on-going conflict process in such a way as to **contain** and **if possible reduce** the **level of violence and destruction, prevent** the **vertical escalation towards the use of weapons to mass destruction** and prevent the **horizontal expansion into other theatres**.
- As to Muhabie (2015) aims of **CM** is to limit and avoid future violence by promoting positive behavioral changes in the parties involved.

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- **Conflict Resolution(CR)-**implies **approaching the conflict in a problem-solving, constructive and non-violent way**, **recognizing the value of the identities of all parties in the relationship**, their human needs and interest, rather than a violent, destructive solution or a mere settlement that freezes the current power distribution between opponents (Schmid, 1998:26).

- The aims of **CR** *is* to address the causes of conflict and seeks to build new and lasting relationships between hostile groups (Muhabie, 2015).

1.2. Indigenous Knowledge (IK)

Knowing the concept of indigenous knowledge system is important to examine its **diverse relevance in a societies**.

Academician use different terms to reflect the concept of IK in literatures.

According to Tasew(2016) traditional African societies give different names based on their traditional life and purpose.

- For instance **Juran (2016)** used **different term** to refer to **indigenous knowledge** such as

- ✓ local knowledge, indigenous technical knowledge,
- ✓ traditional knowledge, indigenous skill,
- ✓ people's knowledge, folk knowledge,
- ✓ rural people's knowledge, ethno-science ,
- ✓ oral tradition and cultural science

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So What is Indigenous Knowledge?

- ✓ IK is the knowledge a community possesses, and experiences generated over a long period of time by people living in that community or communities, and is usually passed on from generation to generation, through word of mouth (Juran ,2016).
- ✓ it is a large body of knowledge and skills which developed outside the formal system including development planning, environmental assessment, resource management, local conservation of biological resources, and conflict resolution(World Bank,1998) .
- ✓ Hence this article is to **examine** how **Indigenous Knowledge is being used among the Gumuz ethnic group in Ethiopia for Conflict Resolution.**

2. Statement of the Problem

- Africa is represented by a diversity of cultural and religious practices. This diversity affects the approaches to dispute and conflict resolution in the traditional setting.The approaches tend to differ from the western alternative dispute resolution in several respects. In Africa itself, the approach may also differ from one culture to another(Umunadi,2011*)*.
- In nearly all African societies and the world at large, there is a preference for the peaceful settlement of dispute along the lines prescribed by the institutions and values of the community(Umunadi,2011).

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- Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in Africa are generally closely bound with socio-political and economic realities of the lifestyles of the communities.These mechanisms are **rooted in the culture and history of the African people**, and are in one way or another **unique to each community.** The **customary courts rely on goodwill** of the society to adhere to its ruling(Rabar and Karimi,2004,cited in Desalegn et al,2005).

Traditional Conflict Resolution in Ethiopia

- According to **Alula and Getachew,2008;cited** in Daniel,2016), **conflict resolution mechanisms in Ethiopia** can be broadly classified as **indigenous conflict resolution** mechanisms and **formal conflict resolution** mechanism (state justice system).The formal conflict resolution mechanism (which is provided by the state) in Ethiopia is mainly **European origin** (Ayalew, 2012:8,cited in Daniel,2016).

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- Ethiopia is the home for **various ethnic groups**. Almost all ethnic groups have developed indigenous mechanisms of conflict resolution.
- The different ethnic groups develop their own indigenous mechanisms of conflict resolution with **certain peculiar features**. These features, which **comprise social traditions, values, norms**, **beliefs**, **rules**, and **laws**, communicated and accepted among the respective communities for **peaceful co-existences** (Daniel,2016).
- Gumuz, an ethnic group in BG region with their own indigenous conflict resolution mechanism ,***Mengehacha***, *which* is being used by the community to **resolve conflicts** (intra-and inter-ethnic group). But there is **little research conducted** particularly on this Indigenous Conflict Resolution **mechanism,*Mengahacha***.

1.3. Objectives

The objectives were to assess :

- The causes of conflicts
- The way how they resolve conflicts through Indigenous means &
- The integration of such institution with other traditional and governmental institution.

Research Design

- According to Beverley H. and et al, 2009), **Ethnography is qualitative research methodology for descriptive studies of cultures and peoples**.
- The cultural parameter is that the people under investigation have something in common such as in **geographical-a particular region** or country, **religious**, **social/familial** and **shared experience**.
- **Hence Ethnographic** research design was appropriate to conduct this research.

Sampling Techniques

- Data were collected from **districts** of Mandura ,Guba and Dibati(from Metekel Zone) and from Kamashi,Agalo meti,Yaso and Sirba Abay districts (from Kamashi Zone).
- The districts were selected **purposively** as **firstly** the districts **predominantly domiciled** by the **Gumuz** and the **researcher's previous research experience in the area**.

Data Collection tools:

The data were collected from both **primary** and **secondary** sources.

- ❖ Primary sources:
  - ✓ non participatory observation
  - ✓ key informant interviews
  - ✓ Focus group discussion
- ❖ Document analysis:

3. Results and Discussions

3.1.Sources of conflict were:-

Conflicts and their causes vary according to culture, security or season.

The causes of conflict among communities are diverse, reflecting the geographical, socio-economic and political differences of the regions (Wassara, 2007).

- ✓ According to the data obtained from interviews from Security Administration head of **Metekel Zone** , Security Administration head of Mandura,Guba,Dibatie,Yaso,Sedal, Agalo meti , Kamashi district, **key informants** and **Community elders**, **sources of conflict** were related with:

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- **Conflict over competition of natural resource-land** at **boundary** which might be **needed for settlement**, **grazing**, **arable** for **crop cultivation** and **water sources** upon which the **livelihood of communities depends**.

Conflict due to **competition of land** among (intra Gumuz between clan of Gumuz-and inter ethnic-Gumuz with Oromo at border (**Yaso District** of Kamashi Zone visa **Haro Limu District** of **East** Wollega Zone of Oromiya Region) is the source of conflict between Gumuz of Benishangul Gumuz and Oromo.

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- This finding is supported by **Kelemwork's (2004, P:41) -** competition over natural resources such as land, cattle and water points are a **sources of** conflict between Afar- Tigray in Northern Ethiopia.
- It also supported by the finding of **(Wassara,2007**) in his article entitled 'Traditional Mechanisms of Conflict Resolution in Southern Sudan' **Disputes over natural** resources include **ownership and use of arable land**, **trespassing of animals into agricultural land** and **use of water** sources, and **occupying plots of the people** are responsible for **inter ethnic conflict in South Sudan.**

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- **exchange marriages-**exchanging the sister or relatives for marriage.

The cause of **abduction** among the Gumuz ethnic group is due to, if the boy has no sister or relatives for exchange marriage, he will be forced to abduction.

This finding is also supported by the findings of (Abebe (2017).

- **Blood feud:** It is relationship that emerges from homicide within or outside the community.

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- extramarital sexual relationship with married woman.
- belief in an evil eye.
- inter personal, revenge, failurity to pay loan, theft have been a **common sources of conflict** among the Gumuz in Benishangul Gumuz.

3.2. Process of Indigenous Conflict Resolution

- Gumuz,one of Nilotic Ethnic group in Ethiopia have their own way of resolving disagreement emanated from various reason as do other community.
- Gumuz's Indigenous Conflict Resolution process begins with ***Temba*** ends with ***Mangahacha*** **process**. It is a mechanism of indigenous conflict resolution which has two phases: ***Temba*** and ***Mengehacha***.

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- *Temba* is an intial stage of indigenous system of governance,which exists in every area where the Gumuz resides. According to the data obtained from interview, ***Temba*** means **an argument or discussion betweeen the disputants in the presence of known community elders/council of elders,or it is bringing the issues to council of** elders.
- To other informant it means the process of appealing or presenting and discussing any cases or types of conflict to council of elders,***Temba***.

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- if the victim presented the issue to the council of elders or community elders,it passes different process until it finalized with **aritual process** ,**reconcilation process,** which is known as ***Mengehacha***.

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- Selected community elders from differnt clan will reconcile the disputants,its process start selecting the places of reconcilation,especially at river where both sides stands the oppposite side of the river.

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- a goat will be brought to the river by the killers family, and the 2 disputant parties will exchange the position at the river .

Picture 1: goat brought to a river where reconciliation process is going to be takes place

Source: Researcher from field, at Mandura district.

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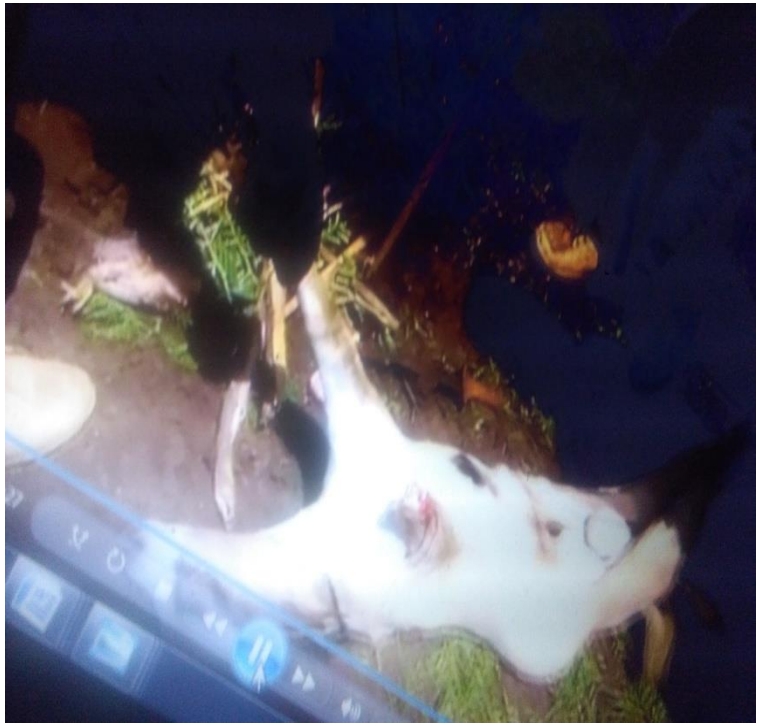
- one of the front leg of goat will be cut and the small intestine of it will be drown out before being slaughtered.



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- Then the goat will be slaughtered and the broken half leg will be broken in to two by the disputant(together) by stones,
- The small intestine of the goat will be stretched until it snapped or came off by the disputant parties by their teeth.

Picture. 2 slaughtering of goat

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- Then, they would reconcile both disputants and make them hug each other and they will go to each other's house and slaughter heifer and drink a local beer, **bordie**.

- Lastly, the community elders will end the meeting or gathering.

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Picture 4:gathering of the community after the reconciliation process has been completed.

Sources: Researcher taken from Mandura District

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3 .3. Interactions between with other institutions- *Temba* vs. customary & governmental

- ✓ **In most African societies, the traditional and the modern systems play complementary roles in ensuring peace and social cohesion.**

The research's finding also shows :

- ✓ H**orizontally** ***Temba***, Councils of elders and its reconciliation system (*Mengehacha)* has interactions with other customary institutions in the study area like **Agew elders**, **Oromo Aba Gada**, **Boru** with the Shinasha peoples.
- ✓ **Governmentally/vertically** this **customary way of resolving** conflict is obtaining support or works together with **state machinery–like security administration office** at **woreda** /**zonal/regional level police**.

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- CR- **inter ethnic conflict**–b/n Gumuz and Oromo in the 2003/2010, the reconciliation process was different.

- Here according to **Nahom James, Administrative Affairs Vice President of Assosa University,** the then zonal level government official and one of the participant in the reconciliation process in 2010 GC stated that:

Aba Gada, Known elders from Oromo(100) and ***Temba*** *,Known elders from Gumuz(100) were recruited or facilitated by* ***Ethiopian Mekane Yesus Church*** *for the reconciliation process.*

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Conclusion and Recommendations

- ✓ Conflicts are inevitable in human history.
- ✓ According to the data obtained from **community leaders** and other **respondents**, Indigenous ways of resolving conflicts are **effective among** the Gumuz community.
- ✓ This doesn't mean it has a potential of resolving it merely in full manner.

Recomendation

- **Hence, it is recomended indigenous system of conflict management has to be.**
- ✓ Financed, encouraged, Supported and duly recognized and be given equal treatment with the modern court system.
- ✓ Exchange marriage--Female Abduction hence the government and other concerned NGOs or others….has to do a lot on it.
- ✓ Further research has to be conducted whether such institutions are successful in resolving **Ethnic Conflict or not.**

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Thank You!