

Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms among Ambo Woreda Communities

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Abstract

Conflicts in ambo are emanated from various sources. These factors, inter alia, are associated with competition over grazing land and water resources, boundary conflicts on farm lands, problems of access to water irrigation, sense of superiority, and women's abduction. These multifaceted natures of conflicts have been solved by different traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. Accordingly, conflicts have been resolved through knowledgeable and respected elders, religious leaders, marriage relationships, ceremonies observed by the community, women reconciliation mechanisms, and highly respected and feared clan leaders. However, for better resolution of conflicts in the communities the study calls for better encouragement, support and duly recognition of traditional mechanisms.

Keywords: Ambo; Elders; Oromiya; Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms

Introduction

Many scholars in the field of conflict resolution and peace building process have defined conflict in a way that enables us to understand its meaning. Hence, Fisher [1] defined conflict as an incompatibility of goals or values between two or more parties in their relationship combined with attempts to control the antagonistic feelings of each other. Conflicts are meant to solve and avert complete fission; thereby preserving some kinds of unity [2]. It is a relationship between two or more parties in which each party perceives the other's goals, values, interests or behaviors as antithetical to its own advantage. According to "Galtung" full conflict involves contradiction, attitudes, behaviors and the roots of conflict are contradictions [3]. According to him, contradictions are the actual or perceived incompatibility of goals between the conflicting parties and attitudes are the perceptions and misperceptions that the parties pose towards self and others. Behaviors are the actions and measures that the parties take in the pursuit of their goals (ibid). Conflict is a process towards change rather than an incident and as a process it has its own stages and levels of development [4]. According to the scholars' definition it is concluded as, it is a social situation in which a minimum of two parties (actors) strive to acquire at the same movement in time, an available set of scarce resources, which is difficult. Existence of incompatible goals is, essential for the outbreak of conflict. Conflicts are common phenomenon across the world; Africa is not an exception in this respect. Most importantly, Horn of Africa region is one of the most conflict ridden areas in the continent. As member of the region, Ethiopia experienced different kinds of conflicts. Ethiopia was engaged in a number of armed conflicts inside and out of its territory. Internally, there was a political crisis in the empire, especially from 1906 to 1930. This crisis was caused by internal power struggle that was begun with the illness of the emperor [5]. The internal struggle was held between the Shoan nobility and different political figures or factions that brought challenges to their political supremacy. Internal challenges had continued until the end of imperial system in Ethiopia. Similarly, the Derg faced serious opposition internally from Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and externally from Somalian invaders. The Derg crushed the opposition of EPRP by the red terror campaign with different assistances from different countries (ibid; 870).

The Horn of Africa is one of the identified areas of conflict in Africa. Ethiopia had experienced conflict among the strongest rival groups

in the Horn of Africa. Putting it differently, conflicts were manifest problems in Ethiopian empire in the Horn of Africa [6]. The sources and dynamics of conflict in the Horn of Africa region were different and less predictable. The sources of conflict in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa include, inter alia, centralization of power, misallocation of resources, uneven economic development and border lines [6]. The process of modern state formation in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa and the nature of the distribution of resources were the root causes to the problem (ibid). Most conflicts in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa were caused by boundary demarcation and power struggle between the leaders and regional lords [5]. Ethiopia experienced various conflicts across different parts of its entire territory. Regional state of Oromiya is the largest region of Ethiopia and has experienced various aspects of conflicts. Economy, land ownership, border lines, inheritance of property, political tensions and the breakdown of public peace were the main manifestations of conflict in this area. Thus, this paper examines the role of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms among Ambo Woreda communities in West Shewa Zone of Oromiya.

Traditional conflict resolution institutions in Ethiopia

Among the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, Gada is the first one in the regional state of Oromiya. Gada is a system of classes (Luba) that succeeded each other every eight years in assuming military, economic and spiritual responsibilities. One gada institution that could be mentioned as an indigenous conflict resolution mechanism was the traditional judges who adjudicate under a tree called *dhaddacha*, one aspect of Accra tree [7]. During the adjudication, the traditional judges sit according to their seniority of age and knowledge of customary laws of Oromo people because there is a belief in the Oromo traditional society that senior person have more knowledge accumulated over time than juniors. The *dhaddacha* institution solved conflict by providing

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the right to select five elders for the plaintiff (the accuser) and four elders for the defendant. The defendant has the right to oppose any elder or judges and the same is true for the accuser [8].

However, the conflicting party who opposes the eldest judges should have concrete evidence for his accusation, unless he proves his allegation, he will pay a fine of about nine cattle for defamation (ibid). In Oromo society, women do not directly participate in conflict resolution mechanisms. However, in *gada* institution there was a way that allows women to participate in some conflict resolution activities and influence law making and election [4]. For instance, if a husband unreasonably beats his wife repeatedly and harms her, the wife goes to the leader or the peer group (*hirriya*) in the vicinity and informs them about the matter. Then the women of the locality take *siqqe* with them, the stick that they keep from the date of their marriage to the date of their death and get the residence of the husband where they investigate the case through their representatives called *Shane*, a committee of five elders and if the husband is found to be guilty, they penalize him by taking one or two oxen from him to slaughter for the peer group to eat (ibid). Though it is indirect, the Oromo women also have a great role in solving conflicts among Oromo clans by intervening and requesting for reconciliation by using the institution called *siqqe*. They also have the right and power to reconcile Oromo people to their God called *waqa* by praying to God for them [8]. The other constitutionally recognized and most important traditional conflict resolution mechanism, in Gurage, was *yajoka*. This is an institution which incorporates all the *sebate-bet* Gurage people and has the task of providing traditional system of conflict prevention and resolution to ensure social stability and maintain good social relations among the people [7]. The decision of *yajoka* assembly is final and effective. The ability of *yajoka* to maintain internal order depends up on the strength of its own personality, public opinion, the moral ideas held by his people and ritual sanctions which he ultimately applied (ibid). The council of elders in Somali was the other traditional conflict resolution mechanism that the government provides constitutional recognition. The elders investigate the issue presented before them and decide. If both conflicting parties agree with the decision given, the blame worthy person pays the fine for the wrong that he committed [9]. Then after, the final decision was made and compensation or fine is paid, there will be no enmity between the two parties over the particular issues (ibid).

Other most prominent and traditional institution of the ritual Amhara in resolving conflict was *shimiglina* (elder of the land) by which the service of third party is used as a means of helping the conflicting parties to reduce the extent of their differences and disagreements to arrive at an amicable settlement. *Shimiglina*, as the most prominent institution has always been employed to settle serious disagreement that rapture to threaten peaceful relationship between friends, neighbors, spouses and communities and the law that the samples apply is known as *yabat hager hig* (law of the land) [3].

Background of the study area

This study is carried out in West Shewa Zone, particularly Ambo woreda. Ambo woreda is one of the nineteen woredas of west shewa zone which is found between the astronomical grades of 8° 47' N- 9° 21' N and 37°32'E (Ambo woreda finance and economic development, 2005). Ambo is the capital city of West Shewa Zone which is about 114km away from Addis Ababa. Ambo woreda has a total of 35 Kebeles and 34 of these are rural and the remaining one is urban. The total area of the district covers 81674 hectors. The elevation varies from 500 to 3200 above sea level. Ambo woreda is bounded in north by *Jeldu*, *Gindabarat* and *Ilfata*, in south by *wanci*, in west by *Toke kutaye*, and

in east by *Dandi*. The mountains found in the district are *Goromitii*, *Hillo*, *Kulit* and *Miesse* whereas the perennial rivers of the district are *Hulluqa*, *Abbay*, *Dabis*, *Qaale* and *Taltale* (Ambo district finance and economic development, 2005).

Ambo woreda has a mean annual temperature ranging between 23-25°C and the mean annual rain fall of 1300 to 1700 mm (west shewa zone bureau of economic development, 2005). The low land, middle land and high land covers 17, 60 and 70 per cent respectively. The altitude of agro climatic Zone in the district falls between 500 to 3200 m above sea level representing the lowest point of low land and highest of middle land respectively. The district covers different climatic zones which account Dega (high land), Woinadega (middle land) and kola (lowland) 35.29, 50 and 14.7 percents respectively. This indicates the agro climatic zone of the district is favorable for agricultural activities. The temperature of Ambo woreda was hot during day time and cool at night. The range of temperature is 15-29°C and average is 22°C. According to the data obtained from Ambo woreda finance and economic development office, Ambo has a dominant crop types such as cereal crops and pulse crops. The cereal crops of the area include barely, wheat, teff, maize, sorghum and pulse crops which are bean and field pea. There are also livestock types such as, cattle, donkey, sheep, goats and chickens. The dominant economic activities are agriculture, craft man, mining factory, trade and most of the populations were engaged in agricultural activities.

According to the data obtained from Ambo woreda central statistical agency office, the total population of the district accounts 121,261 of which male and female are 60,609 and 60,652 respectively. On the other hand, when the population was categorized into male and female headed house hold their numbers are 11211 and 10530 respectively accounting a total of 21741 household head (Ambo woreda central statistical agency office).

Nature of conflict in ambo woreda

According to the community elders of the study area, even if conflicts have been raised between intra clans, they are temporal and occasional. According to the elders' response, conflicts between clans in the last many years were mainly for access and uses of resources such as farm, grazing lands, water points and sometimes looting of animals. Most of these conflicts were temporal and occasional. According to the respondents, in times of drought and long dry season's solidarity and cooperation between the boundary areas were common. The previous conflict got resolved through traditional mechanisms lead by elders of the two clans (Focus Group Discussion, 2014). However, the conflict becomes frequent and changing to violent having the nature of both economic and political motivated conflicts in last situations. These are due to increased competition and control over the scare resources as well as the need to prolong the individuals in power.

Sources of conflict in ambo woreda

According to the data obtained from interviews, conflict in land borders, grasslands, law income especially between spouses (wife and husband), double marriage, religious difference, intoxication and pastoral areas are apparent in West Shewa Zone particularly in Ambo woreda and have been a common phenomenon. The communities are characterized by competition over grazing land, water resources, and livestock riding, and looting of animals. Resource scarcity pertaining to grazing lands and water resources has increased levels of violent competition and tension between local communities [10]. Besides conflicts arising out of the scarcity of available natural resources (water points and farming land), conflicts also erupted because of female's

abduction. Boundary conflicts on farm lands and problems of access to water irrigation are also bones of contention among the communities. Generally, conflicts could be intra or inter clan, enter ethnic and inter personal in nature [11]. Best examples, in this regard, are intra clan conflicts between the *takka*, *dayyaa* and *daqa* clans due to competition over scarce natural resources and sense of superiority of one clan over the other [12].

Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in Ambo Woreda

Conflict in Ambo Woreda has been resolved through different traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. Those traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are discussed herein under vis-à-vis the actors involved in it.

The community elders

Based on the data obtained by Interviews, when the disputes raised over the matters such as grazing land, water resource, abduction and political influence, they are solved through the council of elders. The council deals with relations between groups in conflict time and peace time and lays down the laws and principles by which members of conflicting parties act while all adult men are entitled to participate and hear the council of elders. Reaching an agreement was usually delegated to the elders who are drawn from all levels of the society. An elder was usually a man who gains religious knowledge and power of oratory. The council of elders emphasizes the interests of conflicting parties in their decision making process.

Elders monitor and influence grass root opinions of the disputants and they act as mediators operating in open assembly not secretary. They work on the basis of enlightened conflicting parties' interest to produce necessary and crucial results through their collective institution and this rule bound to bring behavioral and social change thereby maintaining their relations and managing the conflict. Furthermore, large scale conflicts, typically dispute over grazing land and irrigation of water service are solved by negotiation and the formation of friendship than by war fare.

Religious leaders (Fathers)

As per the information obtained from focus groups discussion, religious leaders are visible as other actors in resolving conflict. The society considers religions leaders as those who can act on behalf of the will of God and who could argue for truth. No one expects them to speak false because they are God envoys who are respected, trusted and have got high position by the society. Leaders of each religious institution thought the society about the disadvantage of conflict. That means they thought their followers as conflict was bad and that killing or wishing to kill a person and take the property of other persons were strictly forbidden in the eyes of God and this isolates them from heaven. Finally, such leaders bring the conflicting parties into agreement to reconcile their antagonistic idea.

Marriage as a tool of peace

Based on the finding from the focus group discussion, in Oromo society marriage across woredas, clans and sub clans is very common. Marriage is a contract between families and lineage and young people are encouraged to marry when new relationships can be established. Marriage relationships are binding force among different levels and could help them to develop close relationship and solve any disagreements through peace full means. Clan marriages create diplomatic relations between groups and are therefore treated

with respect. Marriage strengthens bonds between lineages and often creates basis for interaction among different groups of conflicting parties [10]. Thus, a cross clan marriage relations could be used to solve disagreements among communities. People who have marriage communications from different areas could play crucial role in the communities through working together towards lasting peace (ibid).

Social gathering and ceremonies

According to the data obtained, there are ritual practice and ceremonies observed by the community especially when there are ceremonies like Easter and X- mass. The community also contact when there was drought, epidemic disease and catastrophic disagreement between the communities. For such cases, they have come together from different areas and assemble at a place called *malkaa*, where water is available; to appeal to their God called *waqa*. In this ceremony they pray and beg their God by slaughtering cattle. In this social gathering and ceremonies, the disputant parties forgive each other and forget their grievance and become one. According to those informants, rituals are aimed at maintaining social homogeneity. These create a sense of openness among the conflicting figures as they have only one agenda which is to communicate with their God (Focus Group Discussion, 2014). Only those women who have problems such as sickness or infertility are allowed to participate in order to have blessing from the elder and got solution for their problems because they are telling the truth for their God, *waqa*. In this ceremony if there are disputing parties or groups, they should forgive each other through elders because forgiveness offered in a large crowd of people would have the blessing of the elders and their God, *waqa*. This procedure of organizing the community in a wider context helps them to standard for their common goals (good).

The role of women

In the regional state of Oromo, women also have a great role in solving conflicts among Oromo clans by intervene and request for reconciliation by using the institution called *siqqe*. They also have the right and power to reconcile Oromo people to their God called *waqa* by praying to God for them [8]. According to the information obtained from focus group discussion, women have an indirect but important role in conflict resolution process. In the early stages of a conflict they act as peace envoys for their districts and are sometimes used as the first messengers sent between the disputing districts (Focus Group Discussion, 2014). The informant said that, women must be respected as they have pivotal role in traditional conflict resolution process; and further argue that they should involve in peace promotion and peacemaking at the community level. Therefore, women should be empowered in order to be the fore front of any peace efforts in ambo woreda. They should be allowed to participate in future peace and reconciliation conferences and decision making process (ibid).

Clan leaders

According to the information obtained from interviews, clan leaders are other actors that are involved in resolving conflict or participating as mediator. They may be the great descendent of the king line. Thus, they are highly respected and feared by the community. They participate as a mediator for the high level of conflict cases like life losses or killing a person.

Compensation

Based on the information obtained from the respondents, there was a tradition of blood money as compensation for different kinds of offence. The type and amount of the compensation are different for

different conflict cases. For instance for killing of a person for male and female, it approaches from 50 to 60 thousand birr respectively (Focus Group Discussion, 2014).

This is unequal treatment, but, accepted in this way. In each case some amount of the compensation is given to the family of the deceased while the rest are distributed to the elders involved in conflict resolution. It is considered as their insurance. If a girl was raped by someone from another clan intense conflict would follow between the clans. If some parts of a human body were broken during conflict especially for teeth and eye, the amount of compensation was high because it considered as disappearing the beauty of a person. For killings of animals also have their own amount of compensation.

Recommendation

Conflicts are inevitable and unavoidable. What is important is to respond to them properly. According to the data obtained from clan leaders, religious leaders, local elders and other respondents, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are vital in ambo communities in addressing conflicts. However, the presence of those mechanisms is not enough to resolve conflicts in a full manner. As a result of this fact, traditional mechanisms should be encouraged, supported, duly recognized and be given equal treatment with the modern court system. Besides, the effort of religious leaders and elders need to be supported by modern conflict resolution mechanism as it can fill the gap left by traditional mechanisms. It is better to operate them side by side as the way of life of the society is changing through time.

Conclusion

Based on the findings obtained, the following conclusions have been made. The finding in the study indicates that the majority of respondents, namely clan leaders, religious fathers, community elders, local leaders and conflict resolution experts, illustrate that traditional conflict resolution mechanisms have been widely practiced in West Shewa Zone, particularly Ambo woreda. According to the elders, these traditional conflict resolution mechanisms have so many advantages compared with the modern court system in terms of cost effectiveness and time and energy saving as they are undertaken out of work time in the morning and near the residential area. Moreover, they have also relatively a permanent or sustainable solution for conflicting parties.

From the data obtained, a number of conflicts are resolved by clan leaders and the authority of elders because of a high fear and respect

of the community for clan leaders and elders. Loyalty was imposed on the leaders. So, clan leaders and elders are responsible to judge fairly and properly. Even if traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are not legitimized by the government, they have a great contribution for relative peace on the area. Elders are an aged people such as clan leaders, village elders, religious leaders who are elected on the basis of their great knowledge, wisdom and experience.

Elders have a power and ability to persuade others and to reach an agreement as well as natural skill to resolve conflicts because of knowing their culture, beliefs, values, customs and norms. They are respected and feared by the society. They should be an old age because, as the respondents describe, the society thought this stage people became more matured, knowledgeable, wise, and capable of looking things from different dimensions and they are not emotional and partial. The elders are considered as the best persons for creating peace, stability and order. In general, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in Ambo woreda play a significant role in terms of providing peace and stability between and among the communities.

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