



PRACTICES, ROLES AND CHALLENGES OF CUSTOMARY CONFLICT
RESOLUTION MECHANISMS AMONG GEDEO PEOPLE SOUTH ETHIOPIA
CASE OF DILLA ZURIA WOREDA

MA. THESIS

BY

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FEBRUARY , 2025

DILLA UNIVESITY

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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ETHIOPIA: THE CASE OF DILLA ZURIA WOREDA

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BY

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FEBRUARY , 2025

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APPROVAL SHEET OF THESIS
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We, the under signed members of the Board of examiners of the final open defense by Asnake Gabiso Garjafa have read and evaluate his thesis entitled "Practices, Roles and Challenges of Customary Conflict Resolution Mechanisms Among Gedeo People South Ethiopia: *The Case of Dilla Zuria Woreda*" and examined the candidates. This is there for to certify that the thesis has been accepted in partial fulfillment requirements for the degree masters of Peace and Conflict Studies.

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Dilla University, Dilla,

Abbreviations And Acronyms

CT – Conflict transformations

DU – Dilla University

FGDs – Focuses group discussions

NGO's – Nongovernmental organization's

SEPR---Southern Ethiopia People Region

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The author was born on may 19, 1994 in Kindo didaye woreda, Wolayta Zone of SEPRS. He attended his primary education at Koffe Primary School and completed his secondary education at Dilla Secondary and Preparatory School . After successful completion of his high school education, he joined paradize valley colleague in September 2012 and graduated with a BA degree in Sociology and Social Anthropology in June 2015. Right after graduation, the author was employed in Gedio Zone, Dilla Town Ethiopia Red Cross Society. He joined Dilla University to study for an MA in peace and Conflict studies program in January 2023

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Abstract

This study examines the practices, roles, and challenges of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms among the Gedeo people, focusing on Dilla Zuri Woreda. Using a qualitative research approach, data were collected from two sub-groups. The first sub-group comprised 28 participants representing customary elders, Abba Geda leaders, local justice and security officers, religious leaders, women, youth, and community members, with data gathered through key informant interviews. The second sub-group included 12 participants from police officers, local social court judges, kebele administrators, culture and tourism officers, and mixed community representatives, with data collected through focus group discussions. The findings reveal that conflicts in Gedeo range from minor interpersonal disputes to severe cases such as homicide. Common conflict types include theft, robbery, family disputes, inheritance issues, arson, and abduction. Customary conflict resolution mechanisms, led by key actors such as elders, religious leaders, and clan leaders, are preferred for their efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and ability to restore lasting peace. These mechanisms also complement modern institutions and help mitigate revenge. The study emphasizes the importance of preserving and supporting these institutions through collaborative efforts by the government, NGOs, and researchers to ensure their sustainability for future generations.

Key Words: *Practices, Roles, Challenges, customary institutions, mechanisms*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Conflict is a natural phenomenon in the life of human beings that occurs in the relationship of interaction for socio-cultural, economic and political purposes. As Brock (2001:13) points out, “conflict is an integral part of our lives”. According to Osaghae (2000), there could be conflict between people from different communities regarding the determination of rights, ownership of natural resources and livestock raiding. As human beings, we all face conflicts in our daily lives at home, at work and school, in personal and business relationships. In today's complex society, it is common to see communication breakdown, differences grow, and conflicts arise. However, what is important is how to reconcile our differences (Osaghae, 2000).

Conflict resolution is essential to everyday coexistence because human beings are constantly in a state of constant search for a conflict resolution mechanism (Getachew, 2008:13). Different societies of the world have therefore developed their own conflict resolution mechanisms. Like other parts of the world, Africa also has developed indigenous institutions of its own. In African traditional societies, conflict management through indigenous institutions serves a healing function (Turner, 1957). It provides an opportunity to explore alternative positive decisions to resolve differences. As a result, the roles of actors such as elders, clan chiefs, and prominent leaders accept and respect the council of elders, royal court, people's assemblies, etc. to resolve disputes and deliver justice (Nebiyu, 2011). This is because elders can have wisdom, knowledge and respect as trusted mediators. Traditional institutions play a proactive role in promoting social cohesion, peace, harmony, coexistence; and a reactive role in resolving disputes that have already occurred (DJCD, 2008:9).

The customary conflict resolution mechanism is important for rebuilding social capital that is damaged as a result of conflict. In addition to the above idea, customary conflict resolution has become quick and cost-effective (Fred, 2005). Assuming that Annette (2009 elaborates that customary conflict resolution is important by solving the problem while saving the relationship and minimizing revenge killing), customary conflict resolution mechanisms vary greatly from

community to community, region to region, society to society (Volker, 2007) This customary conflict resolution plays a very significant role in the daily life of many ethnic groups and tribes, especially for poor and marginalized societies (Meron, 2010).

In the African context, people of different backgrounds, cultures, classes, ages, etc. come into conflict. Conflict parties can be individuals, groups, families, clan or ethnic group. To resolve their conflict, Africans created their own customary institutions (Getachew, 2008). Customary conflict resolution processes in Africa are part of a well-structured, time-tested social system aimed at reconciling, maintaining and improving social relations (Osei-Hwedie and Rankopo, 2012). For example, Akan Customary Court in Ghana (Okrah, 2003); Tswana culture in Botswana (Ngcongco,

In the Ethiopian context, they can be broadly classified as indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms and formal state-provided conflict resolution mechanisms (Pankhurst and Getachew, 2008:45). Even today, these mechanisms are widely practiced and deeply rooted to varying degrees among different ethnic groups in the country. Also in the Ethiopian context, Mellese (2008:44) states that as a multicultural society there are different social groups that live together in harmony, cooperation and sometimes in conflict. Regarding the situation where conflict arises within or between social groups, Abera (2000:3) notes that different types of conflict resolution methods have been used in different parts of the country and among different population groups.

Assefa (2005:18) conducted a study on indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in the Oromo. He defined some mechanisms in different categories. These include: *ilafi-ilame*, *Jarsumma*, *Waqeffana* and *Siiqe*. According to this study, these mechanisms were mainly practiced by the Oromo to resolve conflicts found in their respective areas. *Aba"la* in Afar, *Shimagille* in Amhara region, *Nemo* in Shinasha, *RuecWec Ring* and *Guk* among Nuer of Gambela, *Korefinie* among Gamo are also some of the many indigenous systems of conflict resolution mechanisms in Ethiopia (Pankhurst and Getachew, 2008:23). Thus, Ethiopians, like their African counterparts, used their own indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in the process of conflict resolution. These different ethnic groups have the usual conflict resolution mechanisms in the different ethnic groups of Ethiopia (*ibid.*).

Similar to this, the Gedeo people have created a number of institutions that control its members' day-to-day lifestyles. To settle disputes between these institutions, it employs the standard dispute settlement procedure. Therefore, the overall goal of this study was to investigate the Gedeo people's usage, function, and challenges with traditional dispute resolution techniques, specifically as it relates to. Dilla Zuria Woreda, located in the Gedeo Zone of the Southern Ethiopia, Peoples' Region (SEPR) of Ethiopia, has several unique attributes that might justify its selection over other woredas: Geographical Significance: Dilla Zuria is strategically located, bordered by Wanago, the Oromiya Region, the Sidama Zone, and Blue. This central positioning makes it a vital area for regional connectivity and development Therefore, the study investigated and recorded the ceremonial,

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In various parts of the world, especially in Africa, ordinary chiefs and elders are the real representatives of their people, accessible, respected and legitimate, and are therefore still essential to politics on the continent and especially to building democracies based on authority. of Asmarom elders, (2006).

According to Dejen (2002), societies in different parts of the world apply customary laws in the administration of justice to solve socio-economic and political problems. In the process of solving social and economic problems using the customary method, all conflicting parties are willing to accept and adhere to their customary cultures; ignoring these traditions would mean exclusion from social norms and neglect by society. Mechanisms are the usual components that would be tolerated in any social interactions. In each ethnic community, customary principles are followed and are considered a customary initiative

In large parts of the world, social, customary rules, institutions of elders, indigenous customary social courts, councils of elders and similar customary authorities play a central role in conflict resolution and management of their social values and all social cultures share common features especially in Africa. Their relations with state institutions are in many cases perceived by local residents as legitimate institutions, especially if they are formally recognized (Flavier, 1995).

As part of Africa, Ethiopia has also developed its own means of dealing with various conflicts between its communities. Ethiopia is considered a country of more than eighty ethnic groups that have their own languages and cultures. These diverse ethnic groups have developed their own distinctive political, administrative, economic, social and customary justice systems. These diverse groups lived in cooperation and conflict for a long time. They also developed and used their own mechanisms to resolve various conflicts that arise due to divergence of interests and other factors Assefa, (2001).

Various research works have been carried out in the southern nations and peoples region have also shown that the nations, nationalities and people of the region have applied their own methods of conflict resolution practice. For example, Yewondwossen (2006) explains the customary Yejoka conflict resolution practices among the Gurage people. examines the nature of Sekacho conflict resolution practice in the Bench Maji Zone. In addition, Numerous studies have been carried out

in southern Ethiopia, where a variety of ethnic groups have adopted their own distinctive methods for resolving conflicts. Yewondwossen (2006), for example, explains the Gurage people's ancient Yejoka conflict resolution techniques. Sileshi (2016) examines the core of Sekacho conflict resolution procedures in the Bench Maji Zone. Furthermore, Temesgen (2016) talks about the former Gamo-Gofa zone's Doko-Gamo ethnic group's conflict settlement practices (Gebre et al., 2011). Ambaye (2008) describes the Sidama people's customary conflict resolution process. Documenting the function and use of traditional dispute settlement techniques used by the Gedeo in Dilla Zuria Woreda will thus be the aim of this study. All of these earlier studies, however, have not gone far enough in examining the functions and varieties of common conflict resolution techniques in the field of study. These gaps present opportunities for future research to contribute to the development and well-being of the Dilla Zuria community Is there a specific area you are interested in exploring further.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1.3.1. General Objective

The general objective of this study will be to explore the practice, roles and challenges of customary conflict resolution mechanisms among Gedeo people: The case of Dilla Zuria Woreda.

1.3.2. Specific Objective.

- ❖ To describe the types of conflict and role of customary institutions of conflict resolution in Dilla Zuria Woreda.
- ❖ To identify key practices of customary institutions of conflict resolution in Dilla Zuria Woreda.
- ❖ To examine the challenges facing customary institutions and mechanisms of conflict resolution in the study area.

1.4. Research questions

Based on the above objectives of the study, the following main research questions are formulated and the aim of this research is to answer the following questions.

- ❖ What are the roles of customary conflict resolution mechanisms in the Dilla Zuria Woreda?
- ❖ What are the key practices of customary conflict resolution in Dilla Zuria Woreda Dilla Zuria Woreda?
- ❖ What are the main challenges facing customary conflict resolution institutions in Dilla Zuria Woreda.?

1.5. Significance of the Study

The study will be significant from the following perspectives. First, it will provide valuable information on the practice, role and challenges of the customary conflict resolution mechanism among the Gedeo people. Second, it reveals people's preferences related to conflict resolution mechanisms and the rationale behind them. Third, the results of the study can be used by relevant authorities (e.g. legislative) to consider and preserve indigenous knowledge and values. Further, this study will help the concerned authority who wants to conduct further study of the same or different functions of the usual institution as an input. In addition, it can serve as an important commentary on the role and challenges of the customary institution in the practice of conflict resolution and its different approaches to conflict resolution.

1.6. Definition of the study

This study thematically focuses on the roles, practices and challenges of the customary conflict resolution mechanism. Geographically, this study will be delineated by Dilla Zuria Woreda on Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanism. It is limited to only four kebeles out of seventeen kebeles of the woreda; namely: Gola, Sisota, Tunticha and Handida. However, due to time, finance and other constraints, it was difficult to cover 17 kebeles in the woreda. This study was negatively affected by lack of time, funding and other constraints such as lack of access to transport, topographical limitations.

1.7. Definition of key terms

The following definitions will be used to ensure a common understanding of the terms used in this study

Conflict: is an expression of hostility, negative attitude, antagonism, aggression, revelry and misunderstanding. It is associated with a situation involving conflicting interests between opposing parties

Conflict resolution practices: develop procedures that are effective, enable groups to satisfy their interests, and that minimize suffering and control unnecessary conflict.

Customary: conflict resolution mechanisms are the customary procedures used to resolve conflicts and maintain peace and stability in the community.

Customary Institutions: Customary/customary refers to the set of values, rules and norms, practices and enforcement institutions that have evolved in the socio-political context of the modern state to govern the relationships, actions and reflection, attitudes and behavior of members at various levels of social life. organization

1.8. Organization of the Study

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter contains the background of the study, statements of the problems, objective of the study, research question, significance of the study, scope of the study and limitations of the study. The second chapter summarizes the literature relevant to the research. The third chapter is focused on research design and methodology, the fourth chapter contains results and discussion, the fifth chapter contains conclusion and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes and integrates previous work related to conflicts and their resolution mechanisms. The chapter discusses the definition of conflict, types of conflicts, causes of conflicts, theories, consequences and mechanisms of conflict resolution. Furthermore, the chapter also summarizes previous works on the usual conflict resolution mechanisms and their strengths and weaknesses.

2.1.1. Conceptualization of terms

2.1.2. concept of conflict

In the academic conflict literature, there are different ways of explaining the concept of conflict. The word conflict itself is derived from the Latin word “confligere” which literally means “to strike together” or “to collide, engage in combat” (Schmid, 2002). Accordingly, conflict occurs when various opposing groups compete with each other to achieve intended goals. In other words, it refers to a confrontation between individuals or a group resulting from opposing or incompatible ends or means.

Conflict is not a new phenomenon in the history of human beings. It always exists as long as human beings live together and is an inevitable part of human experience or existence (Francis, 2006). Assefa (2001) also notes that if there is a concept of society and the very existence of nations, there is undoubtedly conflict regardless of its scale and source. In fact, it is very difficult to separate conflict from humanity. It is impossible to see them independently; they are always two sides of the same coin together. It is unthinkable to think about a society without conflicts. Historically, individuals, social groups, and societies have argued and competed with each other for scarce commodities and resources. They even fought among themselves and bitterly sought to eliminate and/or subjugate their rivals in order to control these resources and commodities (Baxi and Gallanter 1979; Moore 1985). The realization of these needs and interests by people can lead to conflict. When two groups or individuals pursue incompatibility

2.2. Conflict Resolution

Conflict seems to be present in all human relationships and in all societies. From the beginning of recorded history, we have evidence of strife between different groups. Because of the pervasiveness of conflict, and because of the physical, emotional, and resource costs that often result from disputes, people have always sought ways to resolve their differences. In an effort to resolve the differences, they have tried to develop practices that are efficient, that allow them to satisfy their interests, that minimize suffering, and that control the unnecessary expenditure of resources (Moore, 1996).

According to Jeong (2000), conflict resolution is defined as the long-term settlement of an underlying long-term conflict. It needs a long-term commitment by actors to resolve their differences, as deep-rooted conflicts have arisen over non-negotiable issues. The main objective of this mechanism is to resolve the root causes of the conflict. Conflict resolution requires a more analytical and problem-solving approach and must go through complex processes. It would enable the contestants to understand their differences comprehensively if they are interested in recognizing the root causes of the conflict.

IPRA (1994) also defines conflict resolution as “a decision-making process aimed at managing, managing, settling or resolving conflicts”. In such conflict resolution, the conflicting parties enter the conflict resolution process either through a conscious effort to reach an agreement, or they may enter by other means; for example, environmental change, influence of third parties, victory of one party, conflict resolution is about resolving the sources of conflict and restoring former relations between the disputing parties. During conflict resolution, Rams Botham (2005) emphasizes that behavior should not be violent, attitudes should not be hostile, and the structure of conflicts should change.

2.3. Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

Conflict seems to be present in all human relationships and in all societies. From the beginning of recorded history we have evidence of strife between different groups. Because of the pervasiveness of conflict, and because of the physical, emotional, and resource costs that often result from disputes, people have always sought ways to resolve their differences. In an effort to resolve differences, they have tried to develop practices that are efficient, that enable them to satisfy their

interests, that minimize suffering, and that control unnecessary expenditure of resources (Moore, 1996:88).

The overall field of conflict management is full of conceptual and definitional vagueness. The terms conflict resolution, conflict management, dispute resolution and conflict transformation are often used loosely and interchangeably (Reimann, 2006:102). However, for the purposes of this study, the concept of conflict resolution is used as a mechanism to approach conflict management in the research area.

2.3.1. Conflict prevention

When it comes to conflict prevention, it focuses on preventing, reducing and limiting potential violent conflicts or preventing them from re-emerging. Although conflict prevention literature and approaches have been developed, they tend to be categorized into central areas such as direct or operational prevention, structural prevention, and systemic prevention. The goal of direct or operative prevention is to control and eliminate the immediate causes of violent escalation; accordingly, it emphasizes short-term strategies and does not follow any comprehensive prescribed method. Systemic prevention, a new approach applied by the United Nations system, seeks to reduce conflict on a global basis through mechanisms that do not target any particular state. However, conflict prevention (CP) is a concept that is controversial and debated today; raises many questions regarding its definition and operation.

Although conflict prevention is increasingly discussed and its concepts contested, it increasingly spans all levels and covers different dimensions of conflict. Such an increase in its use seems to be based on some kind of consensus. At the global and individual level, the consensus in the field of conflict prevention refers to a pre-existing normative structure based on ethical and moral principles as well as the values of humanism summarized in the general saying "prevention is better than cure". At the international level, the normative context of the United Nations and the mandate of the United Nations concern norms related to conflict prevention. This will to prevent violent conflict and to take collective action to eliminate threats to peace is clearly expressed in the Charter of the United Nations, in various declarations, declarations and resolutions of the United Nations; it is also part of the famous "responsibility to protect" (Nations, 1992:76). The points show that conflict prevention aims to prevent the outbreak of violent conflict.

2.3.2 Conflict Management

Conflicts can be managed so that they do not escalate and lead to a crisis. Conflict management differs from peace building, which seeks to prevent conflicts from developing in the first place by engaging all stakeholders in processes that facilitate peaceful coexistence. The spiritual dimension of conflict resolution refers to creating and restoring a broken relationship with a supernatural force, spirits, ancestors, family and possibly neighbors. This is crucial for reestablishing other relationships on a physical level. In this context, rituals play an important role in the reconciliation process. They help connect people to the past, present and future. Its aim is to reduce and avoid future violence by promoting positive beneficial changes in the parties involved (SNNPRS & GIZ, 2002:22). So managing conflicts means eliminating them, which is impossible managing conflict by erasing or timing conflict; make it harmless. In other words, conflict management refers to trying to regulate conflict and avoid its disruptive aspects.

2.3.3 Transformation of conflicts

Conflict transformation (CT) emerged in the 1990s, when scholars began to label conflict resolution with terms such as conflict transformation and peace building aimed at promoting constructive conflict outcomes for all parties. While conflict resolution wants to end something that is not desirable, conflict transformation wants to end something destructive and build something desirable. It focuses on capacity development and structural change rather than facilitating outcomes or providing solutions.

Conflict transformation (CT) attempts to address the different dimensions of conflict: from micro-to macro-conflicts, from local to global levels, from local to elite actors, from short-term to long-term time horizons, from pre-violence to phases to violence, from the causes of violent conflicts to their consequences and so on. Mainly five types of transformations are described: contextual transformations, which generally take place within a global or regional environment; structural transformations that often happen at the level of the state or society; transformations of actors and themes that occur at the level of conflicting parties and elites; and personal transformations that require competence at the individual level. In general, transformation focuses on the wider social and political source of conflict and seeks to transform the negative energy of war into positive social and political change (Maies, 2003:21).

2.4 Causes of Conflicts

Any problem or factor that contributes to people's grievances can be considered a cause of conflict. There are many causes of conflicts. These may include conflict of material interests, lack of material advantages, differences in identity, ideology, stereotypes and prejudices, etc. (Fisher, 2000). In order to develop the link between conflict and the mechanism of its resolution, it is necessary to understand the various causes of conflict. An effective understanding of the causal factors initiating conflict is also paramount to adopting and creating a mechanism to resolve conflict. It is often believed that understanding the problem is half the way to resolving the conflict. The solution in this context begins with understanding the causative factors of the conflict.

Various social conflict theories attempt to provide frameworks for understanding conflict, particularly the causes or sources of conflict, the conditions under which conflicts occur, and sometimes the conditions for their resolution. The following are among the various conflict theories that describe the sources of conflict.

2.5. Theories of Conflicts.

There is no single theory of conflict that can be widely accepted. Each theory explains the analysis of the causes of the conflict. The following theories are theories that have told us the causes of conflict.

2.5.1 Human needs Theory

When human needs cannot be met within existing social relations and institutions, individuals and groups seek to enter into conflict. A lack of institutional responses to basic needs or even a rejection of development demands creates conflict. This theory assumes that human needs are essential elements for survival. Therefore, according to this theory, the struggle to acquire identity, basic needs, is the cause of conflict. According to this theory, when we sought to fulfill our needs, we should not fulfill our needs at the expense of others. Because others need to be fulfilled. Therefore, we should also recognize the interests of others, unless otherwise, if we could not recognize them, it is obligatory to provoke conflict (Burton, 1990).

2.5.2 Economic theory

According to this theory, conflict is the result of greed (the intent to gain something) or grievance (anger arising from feelings of injustice. Therefore, for this theory, grievance is due to the absence

of something such as food, justice, equality, etc.). him) and greed (self-centered behavior) are causes of conflict (Florin, 2005).

2.5.3 Frustration Aggression Theory

According to this theory, human beings are goal-oriented. If we miss something that we need to achieve, then we will be mentally frustrated, then it becomes frustration. The intensity of the frustration depends on whether or not the goal has an opportunity to achieve. Then individuals think that aggression is the ultimate solution to frustration. This means they need to find solutions through aggression or violence (Dollard et al, 1939) cited in Berkowitz, 1989)

2.5.4 Realist theory

Proponents of this theory argue that conflict is rooted in forces inherent in human nature, and because human nature is selfish, individualistic, and inherently conflictual, that states will always pursue their national interests defined as power, and that such interests will enter into conflict with the latter leads to the inevitability of conflict (Florin, 2005). Therefore, according to this theory, the problem comes from the nature of human beings.

2.5.5 Relative deprivation Theory

This theory states that conflict occurs when the expected ability to satisfy basic material and social needs increases disproportionately to what society is capable of and provides. The failure of political systems to consistently meet people's social and material expectations can translate into negative sentiment that spurs political action. Continued improvements in living conditions may eventually begin to decline, involving rising unemployment, declining material production, and a disproportionate tax burden. Despite deteriorating conditions, expectations based on wishes and aspirations usually remain stable. People's expectations are not easily suppressed or sustained for long, and this leads to their frustration. The shift from social and economic progress to a state of recession is thus met with high levels of uncertainty and anxiety. Relative deprivation arises from the gap between people's expectations and their actual acquisition, especially in proportion to ability. That is, conflict arises as a result of a gap between expectation and reality or reality. According to this theory, when expectation is high and reality is low, there is a high probability of creating conflict (Jeong, 2008).

2.5.6 Structural Conflict Theory

This theory has two main sub-orientations; the first one is Marxist structuralism theory. According to this school of thought society is organized in the form of different classes, upper, middle and lower classes. As a result of the division of the society, we can get different divisions based on economic, political, social etc. Then, when some of them are benefited from the division, the other also harmed. This brings a strong fraction leads to conflict. According to Marxist theory, Capitalization brings a conflict because there are rich and poor societies and this will lead to conflict. Therefore, according to this theory, as a result of unequal distribution of wealth in those classes revolution will be created. This is a reason for the creation of conflict (Florin, 2005).

The second school of thought is Liberal structuralism. According to this theory, the problem is not in class division rather it is because of policies. The problem is not about the ideology rather the structural problem must be avoided by adjusting a policy (policy reform) (ibid).

2.5.7 Conflict Transformation Theory

The central point of view for this theory is that certain transformation capacity must be present among the conflict parties involved. To bring a harmonious relationship among individuals or groups, they should transform their relation. They have to be avoided the bad mentality (Miall, 2007).

2.5.8 Cultural Conflict Theory

For this theory, culture is the means or as a driven force to conflict. Those cultural based conflicts may be taking a long period of time to tackle those conflicts (Florin, 2005).15

2.6. Customary Conflict Resolution Practices

The customary conflict resolution mechanisms are customary practices used to resolve conflicts and maintain peace and stability in the community. These customary practices are deeply rooted in different ethnic groups of and arise from age-old practices that have regulated the relationships of the peoples in the community (Regassa et al. 2008). They are associated with the cultural norms and beliefs of the peoples, and gain their legitimacy from the community values instead of the state (Jembere, 1998). In other words, the customary conflict resolution practices of function on the basis of local customary practices or cultural norms.

However, due to the multi-ethnic composition of the country, the customary laws of Ethiopia are different from ethnic group to ethnic group and as a result they do not have uniform application all over the country. In relation to conflict resolution, the agents of customary modes of dealing with disputes, the sanction to be imposed and decision-enforcing mechanisms are important points that have been emphasized by scholars. In customary societies varieties of institutions and personnel may function as agents of conflict resolution. However, (Evans-Pritchard, 1940), (Gluckman, 1956) and Ember, 1977) they argue that these agents lack coercive force to support their decisions.

In addition, according to (Hamer 1980), there is little evidence from the literature that settling dispute within customary institutions is in any way encouraged by the governments. Nevertheless, customary agents of conflict resolution impose sanctions. In line with this, (Redfield, 1967) who divided sanctions into the secular and the sacred or supernatural argues that the latter is more effective and often used than the former among the pre-literate societies.

However, (Pospisil, 1967) asks whether, really, the form of sanction or the effect of a sanction is more important. Appealing to functional approach, Pospisil suggests that what actually qualifies sanction is its effective social maintenance. He further discusses that though psychological sanctions such as ostracism, ridicule, avoidance or denials of favors are, sometimes very subtle and informal, they are effective sanctions. Pospisil substantiates his stand by referring to the Kapuak among which reprimand is the favorite and effective sanction.

Various ethnographic works suggest that both the sacred and the secular sanctions are effectively employed in different customary societies. Dillon (1980, cited in Otterbein, 1994) shows that the Meta of Western Cameroon execute their fellow villagers, kinsmen and friends for their wrong doings. Boehm (1985, cited in Otterbein, 1994) also reveals that a troublesome member of a community is denied clan protection, and is thus isolated and even executed among the Montenegrins. (Shack, 1966) in his writings on the “Yagoka” the high court of the Gurage of southwestern Ethiopia discusses that agent of customary conflict resolution use social sanctions of ridicule, opprobrium, ostracizing and supernatural sanctions v as enforcing mechanisms.

Hamer (1972) presents similar culture of the Sidama of southwest Ethiopia. Among the Sidama, Elders enforce their decisions by ostracizing a person who refuses to accept a verdict. The ostracizing goes to the extent of total exclusion of the person from all social and ritual contact. Cursing is also the severest sanction to which they finally resort. Likewise, (Evans Pritchard, 1940) documented that among the Nuer of the Sudan, the leopard skin chief plays a mediating role between the disputants by using his power to curse as an enforcing mechanism.

2.7. Strengths and weaknesses of customary conflict resolution mechanisms

According to Boege (2006), there are a number of limitations in traditional approaches to conflict resolution; few among them are, firstly, he points out that traditional approaches do not terminate conflicts which erupt out of the elders' authority. This refers to conflicts in the modern world where the legitimacy and acceptance of elders is minimal. Secondly, he puts that the practice of indigenous conflict resolution mechanism often contradicts universal declaration of human rights. For example, the practice restricts the participation of children's and woman's right. The third disadvantage is according to him are that the applicability of traditional mechanisms is confined to a specific group such as a specific community, family, lineage or neighborhood. The other disadvantages are meant only to restore the status quo and are always open to abuse

The indigenous customary conflict resolution mechanism, on the other hand, has also its own strengths. ICRMs, according to Assefa (2001), are it quickly responds to crisis in terms of time, they contribute to the reduction of regular court case loads, they contribute to saving of the public money, it also minimizes the problem in shortage of judges who work in the regular courts, and budget constraints, they are complementary to modern government structures and are not substitutes or competitors as some government officials think and worry about. They give access to many people who do not find modern system of conflict resolution comfortable, affordable or suitable to their needs, disputants are satisfied with their operation and view their outcomes as fair, and the like.

One important features of traditional conflict resolution mechanism are their use of ritual symbols and interpretation of myths to bring conflicts to an end (Enaba cited in Birgit 2001). The rituals and interpretation of myths have psychological impacts on the parties in conflict. First, parties

obey summons and other orders in order to attend meetings for reconciliation and respect other proceedings of the process. Second, parties tell the truth to elders in fear of bad consequences that may result from curses. Thirdly, it makes parties respect solutions rendered by elders and discharge their respective duties accordingly without the need for other coercive means. On the top of that, ritual performances lubricate the function between the conflicting parties and accelerate the peace-making process.

The other significant feature of indigenous conflict resolution mechanism is that they consider wrong doings and offence as violence against the whole community than against the individual victim alone. Thus, in resolving conflicts, offenders have to be reconciled to the individual victim and the community at large. The immediate objective of such conflict resolution mechanism is amending broken or damaged relationships and rectifying wrongs and restoring justice to ensure the full integration of parties in to their societies again (Enaba cited in Birgit 2001:8). Boege (2006:14) in his part identifies the following advantages of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms. Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms; fit situations of state fragility and failure; are not state-centric and hence credited with legitimacy; take the time factor into due account and are process-oriented; provide for comprehensive inclusion and participation; focus on the psychosocial and spiritual dimension of conflict transformation (2006:405).

In general conflict resolution institutions in each and every nation, nationalities and ethnic groups of Ethiopia. From these to list at least some, as Yewondwossen (2006:31) explains the YeJoka indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms among the Gurage people; Sileshi Abate examines the nature of Sekacho conflict resolution mechanism in Bench Maji Zone, Ambaye (2008:32) describes the traditional conflict resolution mechanism of the Sidama people of Wondo Genet woreda, MeleseMada (2008:53) explains about the role of elders in resolving conflicts among the Wolayita people. Similarly, this study will reviews to explore the customary conflict resolution mechanism among Dill ZuriaWoreda people in Gedeo Zone.

2.8. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Conceptual framework of this study was based on the review of the concept of Customary conflict resolution mechanisms discussed above. The framework shows how, in different contexts, conflict resolutions are achieved through a range of combined strategies. Central theme to the framework is the analysis of the range of structures and functions of indigenous institutions which are

entrenched to resolve culturally deep rooted conflicts. In this vein, Gulliver (1979) cited in AbebeDemewoz (2016) states that every society has its own mechanisms of handling dispute.

According to Governance Encyclopedia (2007), indigenous governance defined as the myriad ways in which indigenous peoples continue to formulate, organize, and actualize their self-rule in formal and informal settings. In this pursuit, for Ereksten (2010) indigenous people means a non-state people always linked with a non-industrial mode of production that represent a way of life that often renders them vulnerable to encroachment by the influences of modernization and the modern state. In the spirit, Kendie and Guri (2005) stated that indigenous institution includes practices such as the rituals and rites of the people, the funerals, the dowry system, festivals, and the shrines or the places of worship of the people.

In the contemporary Ethiopian context, traditional institutions refer to those informal institutions that serve the community at local and grassroots level dealing with Socio-economic and political matters. In Sidama, there are indigenous social and political institutions whose influences have been declining since the end of 19th century in regulating Socio-economic and political lives of the society (MarkosTekile, 2014). Gedeo was an egalitarian society in which the role of elders was very crucial in providing leadership in representation indigenous institutions such as mainly elders' council and traditional religion (Ibid).

Broadly, this ideal framework also states outcomes such as mechanisms conflict resolution and social cohesion. Specifically, conflict resolution outcomes are increased interpersonal trust, reduced social inequality, increased commitment to social value, increased perceived fairness, increased inter group trust, etc. Thus, the framework provides a conceptualization is appropriate to conceptualize types, structures and roles of indigenous institutions, actors in the conflict, influences of the institutions and outcomes of conflict resolution.

Based on the literature review of this study, a number indigenous institutions were viewed to employ the blend of negotiation, mediation, and arbitration mechanisms to resolve culturally rooted conflict as well as any other conflicts depending on the contexts though there is no written state of procedure to be followed by these institutions. This study, therefore, deals with how the Gedeo society in the study areas employs the different mechanisms for conflict resolution

mechanisms with different types of traditional institutions within the framework of the available literature on conflict resolution mechanisms.

Actors in the conflict resolution are all those engaged in or being affected by the processes. In conflict resolution, there are different actors that differ as to their goals and interests, positions and capacities (Norwegian Church Aid, 2012). Thus, the actors of conflict resolution are varied across different countries/societies, which include internal and external actors. Conflict resolution roles of indigenous institutions are influenced by in a number of ways. In most cases any conflict resolution role is influenced by social, economic and political dynamics in the society (University for Peace, 2011).

To this end, indigenous ways of conflict resolution mechanisms aimed at building social cohesion and belongingness of the people who were in dispute one with another for themselves through peaceful and good relationship within themselves and their neighboring societies. Jenson (1998) identifies that social cohesion has five constituent dimensions such as belonging/isolation, inclusion/exclusion, participation/non-involvement, recognition/rejection, and legitimacy/ illegitimacy. Similarly, Bernard (1999) suggests a typology of three categories such as economic (inclusion and equality), political (legitimacy and participation) and socio-cultural (recognition and belonging). This implies that social cohesion includes a number of indicative components that are considered in this study.

Hence, taking the above conflict resolution institutions into consideration, this paper deals with how the Gedeo society in the Dilla Zuria Woreda employ the different customary conflict resolution mechanisms for conflict settlements with different types of indigenous institutions within the framework of the available literature on conflict settlement mechanisms. Based on that, the decision will be made under which category of dispute resolution mechanism these indigenous institutions belong. Therefore, this study assumed to investigate the effects of customary conflict resolutions mechanisms.

Conceptual frame work of the study

Customary Conflict Resolution

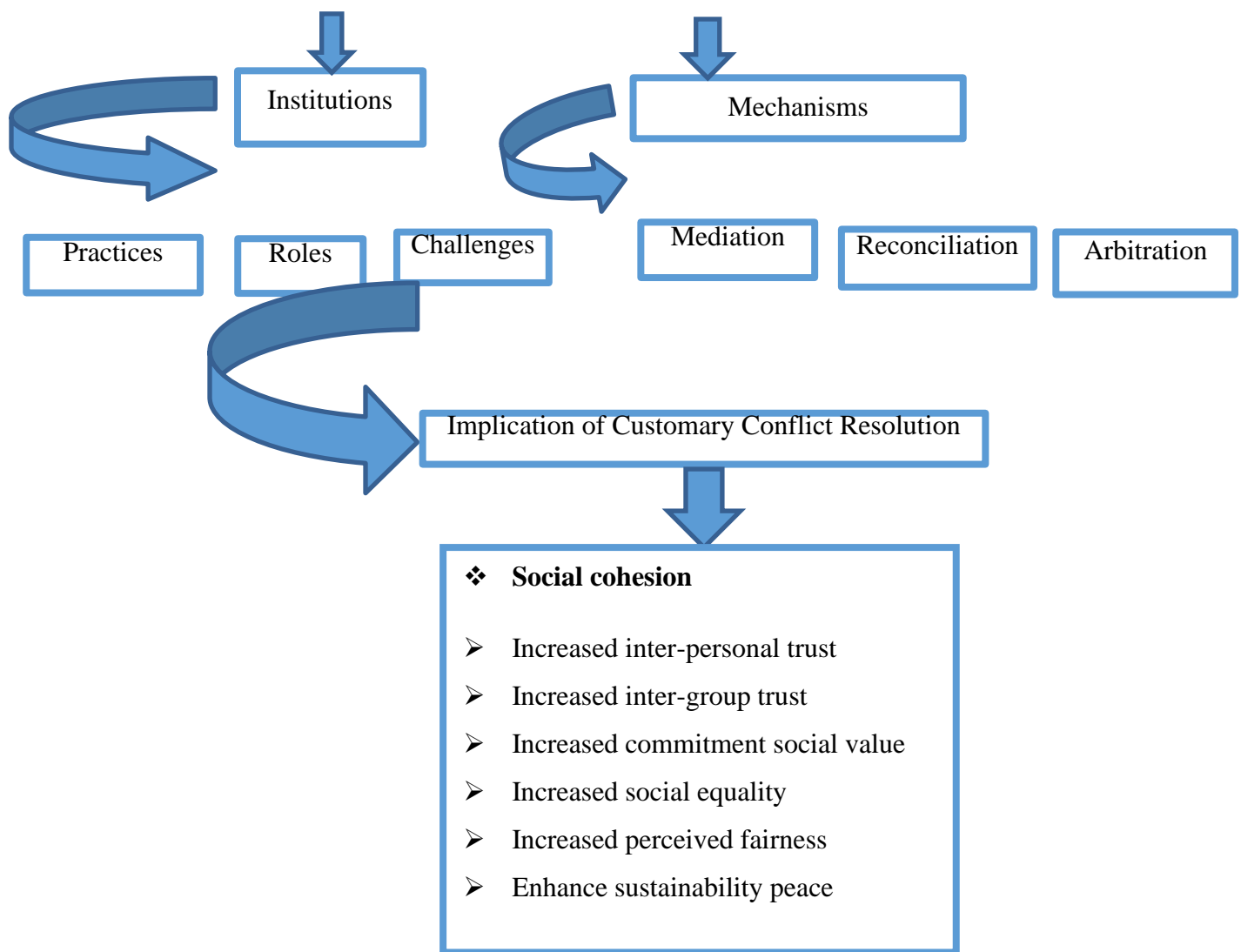


Figure 2. 1 Conceptual Frame work of the study

CHAPTER THREE

3.METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research design, study area, sampling techniques, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures employed in the study. The purpose of this chapter is to

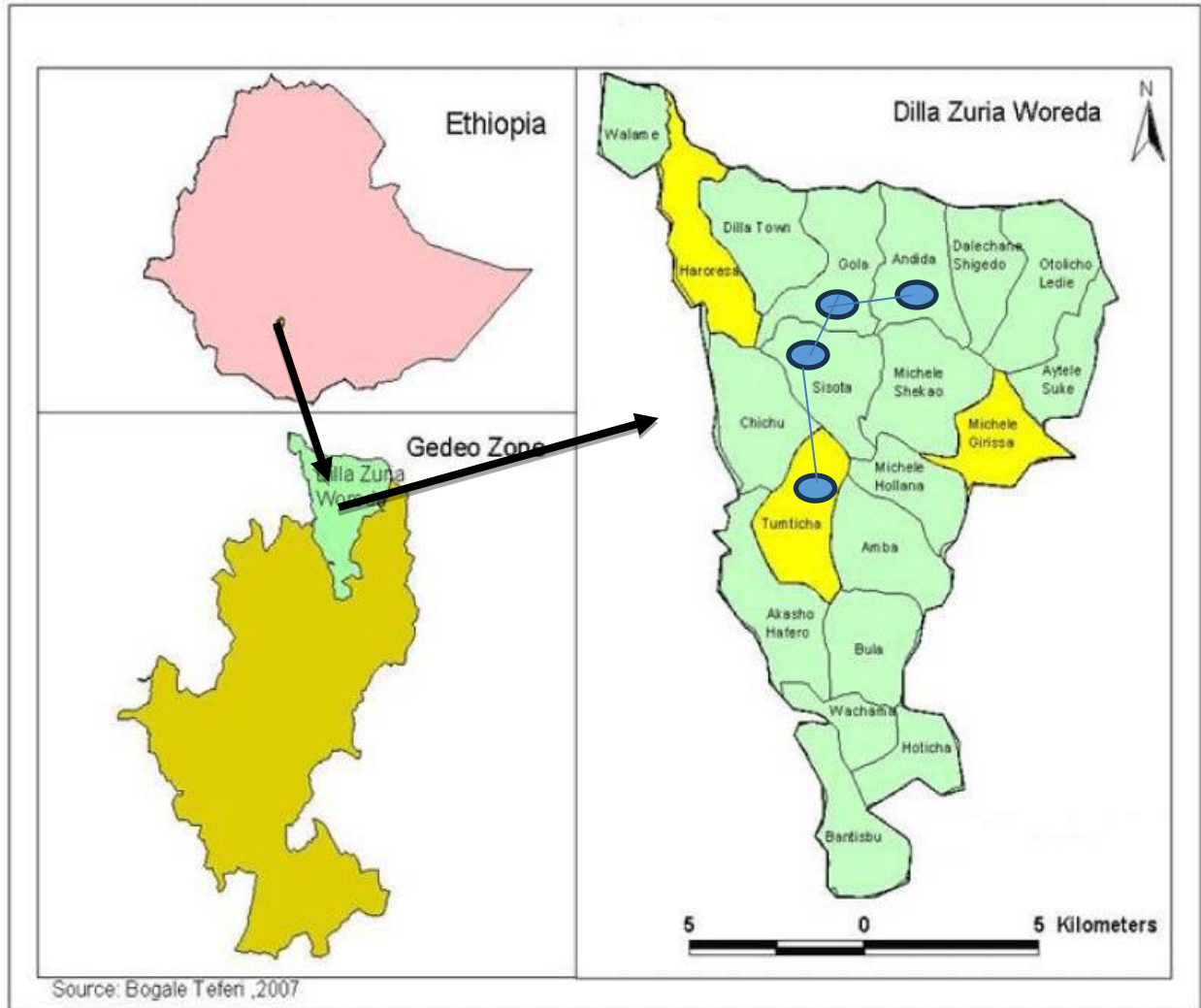
provide a detailed account of how the research was conducted to explore the roles, practices, and challenges of customary conflict resolution mechanisms among the Gedeo people in Dilla Zuria Woreda. The qualitative approach was adopted to ensure an in-depth understanding of the socio-cultural context and the perspectives of key stakeholders involved in conflict resolution.

3.2. Description of the Study Area

Dilla Zuria Woreda is one of the six districts within the Gedeo Zone, located in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR). Covering an area of approximately 248 km², the district lies to the south of Addis Ababa, approximately 368 km away along the highway to Moyale. It is subdivided into 17 peasant associations and one urban dwelling association. Dilla Zuria shares borders with Dilla to the north and northwest, Bule to the east (adjacent to Oromia Region), and Gelana Abaya Woreda to the south and southwest (Dilla Zuria Woreda Administration Office, 2012).

According to the 2007 census, the total population of Dilla Zuria Woreda is 117,630, with 58,522 (49.75%) males and 59,108 (50.25%) females. The population density stands at 702 persons per km², with a national growth rate of 1.07%. The Gedeo people make up 74% of the population in the Woreda (Dilla Zuria Woreda Administration Office, 2012). Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for most of the residents. The Woreda has a total land area of 24,790 hectares, of which 22,871 hectares are suitable for agricultural activities. The land usage consists of 5.03% annual crops, 84.77% perennial crops, 0.65% uncultivable land, and 3.52% other uses.

Dilla Zuria Woreda is characterized by three main agro-climatic zones, with its topography varying from wide flat valley bottoms to steep mountain slopes. The area's rainfall pattern is bimodal, with the main rainy season occurring from June to September ('Kiremt' or 'Mahar'), and a shorter rainy season from February to April ('Belg'). The average annual rainfall is 1,077.20 mm, and the annual average temperature is 20°C (Dilla Zuria Woreda Agriculture and Rural Development Office, 2012).



Figures. 3.1 Study area map

3.3. Research Approaches

Social research generally employs two dominant approaches or paradigms: quantitative and qualitative. For this study, a qualitative research approach has been chosen. The primary reason for selecting this approach is its ability to provide in-depth and detailed information about the

practice of customary conflict resolution mechanisms in the study area. As noted by Strauss and Corbin (1998), as cited in Yewubneh (2016), qualitative methodology is a research approach that generates data which cannot be easily produced by statistical methods or other quantification techniques. Qualitative research is particularly useful for exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups attach to human or social problems (Lincoln, 2000, as cited in Yewubneh, 2016). Additionally, qualitative research is ideal for studying human life, experiences, behaviors, emotions, cultural phenomena, and their interactions with the environment (ibid). This approach allows for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter in the context of the study.

3.4. Research Design

This study will adopt an exploratory research design. The rationale behind selecting this design is that the objectives, research questions, and the nature of the problem require an in-depth exploration of indigenous conflict resolution practices within their natural context (Creswell, 1998, as cited in Yewubneh, 2016). Exploratory research is particularly valuable for gaining practical knowledge from individuals who have direct experience with the issue under study, helping to generate new insights and ideas related to the research problem (Kothari, 2004). Therefore, this study specifically aims to explore the experiences, ideas, perspectives, relationships, and the systemic and cultural interactions of the Gedeo people, particularly those in Dilla Zuria Woreda.

3.5. Sample size and sampling techniques

The study employed non probability sampling techniques particularly purposive sampling to select the study area and the respondents of the study. Why the researcher selected purposive sampling is that purposive sampling is selecting by some arbitrary method because it is known that it would produce well matched groups. As Kruger and Newman (2006) cited in Yewubneh, 2016, explained in purposive sampling the researchers select a sample with a purpose in mind. Moreover, purposive sampling is important to peak out the sample in relation to some criterion which is considered important to the particular study. Accordingly, the study area was selected the using purposive sampling procedure because Dilla Zuria Woreda is an area where the researcher is well familiarized and the researcher believe that this area gives a good opportunity in finding research participants to have good understanding of the environment in which this research would conduct.

The researcher takes four kebeles through purposive sampling from 17 kebeles. These kebeles are Gola Sisota, Tumaticha and Handida. The reason why the researcher selected those kebeles from the rest kebeles is that those kebeles have more comfortable access of transport than others and the researcher is familiarized with those kebeles because the work place of the researcher is nearer to those places than others.

The researcher used non probability sampling particularly purposive sampling to select the respondents of the study. Accordingly, the researcher selected 40 participants purposively from the four kebeles. To select those respondents the researcher collected information from customary elders, traditional leaders (Abba Gadas,), local government officials, and religious leaders, women, youths, police officers, local social court judges, kebele administrators, culture and tourism officers and members of the community. Therefore, the total number of the respondents are 40 this is because of that sample sizes are typically smaller in qualitative research. Determining adequate sample size in qualitative research is ultimately a matter of judgment and in evaluating the quality of the information.

3.6. Types and Sources of Data

This study utilized two types and sources of data: primary and secondary data.

Primary Data: Primary data sources were collected from the selected 40 participants of the study. The selected 40 participants were sub- grouped in to two groups. The first sub-group comprises 28 participants from customary elders, traditional leaders (Abba Gadas,), local government officials, and religious leaders, women, youths, and the second sub-group consists 12 police officers, local social court judges, kebele administrators, culture and tourism officers and members of the community. Through conducting key informant interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) the necessary data for the study were collected. The focus group discussions provide collective insights from a group of participants, while key informant interviews involved in-depth conversations with individuals who possess specific knowledge or experience related to the study. These primary sources would allow the researcher to gather firsthand information directly from the community and key stakeholders involved in the conflict resolution process.

Secondary Data: Secondary data were collected from existing sources, such as government reports, academic articles, and other relevant published materials. These secondary sources

provided background information on the historical and contextual factors that influence conflicts in Dilla Zuria Woreda, complementing the primary data and helping to situate the study within a broader framework of knowledge.

3.7. 1. Data Collection Methods

The study employed two primary data collection methods: **Key Informant Interviews** and **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**. In addition, secondary data were reviewed to provide context and support the findings from primary sources

3.7.2. Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted with 28 participants, including customary elders, traditional leaders (Abba Gadas), local government officials, religious leaders, local justice and security officers women, and youth. These individuals were selected based on their roles and experiences in customary conflict resolution processes. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility to probe deeper into specific aspects of conflict resolution practices, challenges, and evolving roles. This method provided in-depth insights into individual perspectives and experiences.

3.7.3 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

One focus group discussion was conducted with 12 participants, including police officers, local social court judges, Keble administrators, culture and tourism officers, and community members. The FGD facilitated a dynamic discussion, enabling participants to share and reflect on their collective experiences and perspectives on customary conflict resolution mechanisms. This method allowed the researcher to explore group dynamics, consensus-building, and differing viewpoints within the community.

3.7.4 Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data were collected from various existing sources, including government reports, academic articles, and other published materials. These sources provided historical and contextual information about conflicts and their resolution in Dilla Zaria Worde. By analyzing secondary

data, the researcher was able to complement and triangulate the findings from the primary data, situating them within a broader academic and policy framework.

Sub-group	Participants	Number of Participants	Data Collection Tools
1st Sub-group	Customary Elders	4	Key Informant Interviews
	Traditional Abba Geda Leaders	4	Key Informant Interviews
	Local Justice and Security Officers	4	Key Informant Interviews
	Religious Leaders	4	Key Informant Interviews
	Women	4	Key Informant Interviews
	Youths	4	Key Informant Interviews
	Community Members	4	Key Informant Interviews
Total for 1st Sub-group		28	
2nd Sub-group	Police Officers	2	Focus Group Discussions (FGD)
	Local Social Court Judges	2	Focus Group Discussions (FGD)
	Kebele Administrators	2	Focus Group Discussions (FGD)
	Culture and Tourism Officers	2	Focus Group Discussions (FGD)
	Community Members	2	Focus Group Discussions (FGD)
	Customary elders and Abba Geda.	2	Focus Group Discussions (FGD)
Total for 2nd Sub-group		12	
Grand Total		40	

3.7.5 Table 1. Participants of the study

3.7. 6 Methods of Data Analysis

The data collected through key informant interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. This approach was selected because it enables the identification, analysis, and interpretation of patterns or themes within qualitative data. The goal

was to uncover the practices, roles, and challenges of customary conflict resolution mechanisms among the Gedeo people

CHAPTER FOUR

4.RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Roles of Customary Conflict Restoration Mechanisms

4.1.1. Types of Conflicts

Types of Conflicts Interviews: Conduct in-depth interviews with various stakeholders, including community elders, religious leaders, and affected families. This provides detailed insights into the nature and causes of the conflict.

Focus Groups: Organize focus group discussions with different demographic groups (e.g., youth, women, and elders) to gather diverse perspectives on the conflict. **Traditional leaders (AbaaGeddas)** reinforced the significance of land in conflicts but also noted disputes over cattle grazing and farmland access.

Religious selected observed that, in addition to land and family disputes, religious differences have begun to fuel conflicts, particularly when people of different faiths compete for shared resources like water. This emerging complexity in community dynamics points to a growing intersection of spiritual and material concerns. While land disputes were central, the role of religious differences underscores the evolving nature of conflicts in communities where multiple belief systems coexist, reflecting broader societal trends.

By addressing the socio-economic challenges, gender inequalities, and resource distribution issues, policies can help resolve conflicts in ways that reflect the evolving needs of the community while preserving the vital role of traditional conflict resolution. **Multiple Data Sources:** Collect data from various sources, including community leaders, religious leaders, and local residents, to understand how different conflicts intersect. This helps in capturing a comprehensive view of the conflicts.

Mixed Methods: Use a combination of qualitative methods (interviews, focus groups) and quantitative methods (surveys) to explore the intersections of conflicts. This approach ensures that all relevant themes are thoroughly investigated.

Cross-Referencing: Cross-reference findings from different data sources and methods to identify common patterns and themes. This helps in verifying the intersections of conflicts and understanding their complexities.

4.1.1. Mediation by Elders and Community Leaders

According to the participants of the interviews and focus group discussions (FGD), the most commonly used method to resolve conflicts in Dilla Zuria Woreda is mediation, specifically through the Abaa Gadaa system. This system, led by respected elders such as the Abaa Geddas, plays a pivotal role in maintaining social order by mediating disputes. The Abaa Geddas are deeply trusted by the community and are seen as impartial figures who uphold traditional norms and values.

Participants highlighted that these customary mechanisms prioritize dialogue and reconciliation. Elders facilitate negotiations between conflicting parties, creating an environment where each side can express their grievances and perspectives. This inclusive approach ensures that all voices are heard, fostering mutual understanding and agreement. The mediation process often includes rituals and symbolic acts, such as oath-taking or animal sacrifices, which hold significant cultural and spiritual meaning. These acts serve not only as a formal commitment to peace but also as a means to restore broken relationships, reinforcing the community's social fabric.

The preference for traditional conflict resolution mechanisms over formal legal systems was a recurring theme among participants. They emphasized that these customary methods are cost-effective, eliminating the financial burden associated with formal legal proceedings. Additionally, the processes are culturally relevant, deeply rooted in the community's traditions and values. Unlike formal systems that often focus on punitive measures, the AbaaGadaa system emphasizes restorative justice. This approach seeks to mend relationships and rebuild trust between conflicting parties, contributing to long-term social cohesion.

The participants underscored that the restorative focus of traditional mechanisms not only resolves the immediate conflict but also prevents future disputes by addressing underlying issues and fostering a sense of communal responsibility. This holistic approach is instrumental in maintaining peace and stability within the community, particularly in a socio-economic context where formal legal systems may be inaccessible or perceived as less effective. The enduring reliance on the Abaa

Gadaa system illustrates its central role in conflict resolution and its adaptability to the evolving needs of the community.

The findings of this study underscore the central role of the Abaa Gadaa system in conflict resolution within Dilla Zuria Woreda. This customary approach, which relies on mediation by respected elders known as Abaa Geddas, carries significant practical and policy implications for both the community and broader governance systems. The findings suggest that the system's focus on dialogue, reconciliation, and restorative justice is highly valued, making it a critical tool for fostering social cohesion.

The widespread use of the Abaa Gadaa system suggests that traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are deeply integrated into the daily lives of the people in Dilla Zuria Woreda. One of the key practical implications is the importance of strengthening these traditional systems as they are culturally relevant and trusted by the community. The system's reliance on dialogue and reconciliation creates an environment of mutual understanding, which is essential in preventing the escalation of conflicts. It emphasizes the need for local authorities and traditional leaders to continue supporting restorative justice processes that address both the immediate disputes and underlying tensions. This holistic approach can be particularly valuable in a context where formal legal systems are either difficult to access or perceived as less effective.

Moreover, the cost-effectiveness of the Abaa Gadaa system is another significant advantage. As participants pointed out, customary methods do not carry the financial burden associated with formal legal proceedings, making them more accessible, especially for people from low-income backgrounds. This affordability highlights the need for continued investment in training and supporting traditional mediators such as the Abaa Geddas, ensuring that they have the skills and authority to address a wide range of disputes. Such support could also involve reinforcing the capacity of Abaa Geddas to handle more complex cases, thereby expanding their role in peacebuilding within the community.

Additionally, the Abaa Gadaa system's use of symbolic acts like oath-taking and animal sacrifices plays an important cultural role. These rituals strengthen the commitment of parties to the resolution and symbolize the restoration of relationships. Practical implications for policy include

preserving these rituals while adapting them to modern conflict contexts, ensuring that they retain their cultural significance while being accessible to all community members.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that there is a need for greater integration of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms like the Abaa Gadaa system with formal legal systems. This would create a hybrid model where the strengths of both systems can complement each other. While the Abaa Gadaa system is highly trusted at the community level, formal legal systems offer enforceability and the potential for more structured oversight. A collaborative approach could involve recognizing the legitimacy of customary mediation within the broader legal framework, ensuring that resolutions reached through traditional means are honored and upheld by formal institutions.

The restorative justice focus of the Abaa Gadaa system could inform national and regional policy frameworks, especially in areas of community justice and social cohesion. Policy initiatives could incorporate restorative practices from the Abaa Gadaa system into community-level dispute resolution programs, encouraging more inclusive, non-punitive responses to conflict. This approach would emphasize healing and relationship-building rather than punishment, thus aligning with the broader goals of peace building and stability.

Additionally, the findings highlight the adaptability of the Abaa Gadaa system to evolving community needs. Policy-makers could look to empower traditional leaders, providing them with the resources and authority necessary to continue performing their roles effectively. This could include training on conflict mediation, leadership skills, and gender inclusivity to ensure that emerging issues, such as gender-based violence and youth disengagement, are addressed within the traditional system.

Finally, the study suggests that the restorative justice model of the Abaa Gadaa system could play a role in addressing social division and disintegration in rapidly changing communities. By promoting dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation, this system helps to maintain community unity and could provide a strong foundation for nation-building efforts that prioritize social cohesion and collective responsibility. Government initiatives could support this by creating platforms for dialogue between traditional leaders and formal legal authorities, ensuring a unified

and holistic approach to resolving conflicts. In conclusion, the findings emphasize the enduring importance of the Abaa Gadaa system in conflict resolution in Dilla Zuria Woreda. The practical implications suggest that supporting and strengthening this traditional system through training, resources, and legal recognition can improve its effectiveness in resolving disputes. At the same time, policy implications point to the potential for integrating traditional practices into formal governance structures, ensuring that both systems complement each other to foster social cohesion and stability. Ultimately, the Abaa Gadaa system's emphasis on restorative justice, community participation, and cost-effectiveness makes it an invaluable tool in maintaining peace within the community.

4.1.2. Restorative Justice Practices

In conclusion, the restorative justice practices in Dilla Zuria Woreda offer an insightful model for community-based conflict resolution. The practical implications suggest a need for supporting traditional systems through training and legal recognition while ensuring that these systems are inclusive and adaptable to modern societal changes. Policy implications emphasize the integration of restorative justice into broader legal frameworks, creating a balanced approach that combines the best of both traditional and formal conflict resolution systems. Ultimately, the focus on accountability, reconciliation, and social harmony in restorative justice practices could contribute to long-term peace and cohesion within communities

4.1.3. Preservation of Cultural Norms and values.

According to the participants, the customary conflict resolution mechanisms and practices in Dilla Zuria Woreda play a pivotal role in preserving cultural norms and values. These mechanisms, led by respected elders such as the Abaa Geddas, ensure that conflicts are resolved through culturally relevant processes rooted in the community's traditional values of respect, reconciliation, and social cohesion. The participants emphasized that these practices are more than just conflict resolution tools; they serve as a foundation for maintaining the community's moral fabric and reinforcing communal bonds.

The rituals, sacrifices, and public apologies integral to these processes are not only means of restoring peace but also vehicles for transmitting cultural norms and ethical codes. These acts serve

as powerful reminders of the community's shared values and responsibilities, particularly to younger generations. Through their involvement, younger members learn about the importance of accountability, respect for elders, and the value of reconciliation. This inter generational transmission of values ensures that the community's cultural heritage is preserved even as societal dynamics evolve.

Participants also highlighted that the focus on restoring relationships rather than punishing offenders reflects core values of forgiveness and solidarity, which are central to the Gedeo way of life. By prioritizing reconciliation and social harmony, the community fosters a sense of collective responsibility and unity. This approach not only resolves immediate conflicts but also strengthens social ties, contributing to long-term stability and cohesion.

Furthermore, the practice of customary conflict resolution reinforces the community's cultural identity in the face of modern influences and challenges. By adhering to these traditional mechanisms, the Gedeo people maintain their unique way of life, ensuring that their customs and values remain relevant and impactful. This continuity of tradition supports the community's resilience, helping it navigate the complexities of an evolving society while staying true to its cultural roots.

The findings from this study illustrate the central role that customary conflict resolution practices play in preserving the cultural heritage and social cohesion of the Gedeo community in Dilla Zuria Woreda. These mechanisms, led by respected elders, such as the Abaa Geddas, offer not just a means for resolving conflicts but also a way to transmit cultural values and maintain the moral fabric of the community. The practical and policy implications of these findings are significant, both for strengthening community dynamics and ensuring the preservation of cultural identity in an increasingly modernized world.

The practical implications of these findings suggest that customary conflict resolution mechanisms, rooted in cultural practices like rituals, sacrifices, and public apologies, are vital for maintaining community social order. These mechanisms offer a more inclusive and culturally relevant way of addressing disputes, which is often more effective than formal legal processes in the eyes of the local population. The role of Abaa Geddas and other community leaders in these

processes highlights the importance of leadership that is deeply connected to cultural values and traditions. Given the resilience of these practices, there is a need for the community to ensure intergenerational transmission of these values. Younger members of the community, through direct involvement in conflict resolution, are given the opportunity to learn and internalize core values such as accountability, respect for elders, and the importance of reconciliation.

The emphasis on reconciliation over punitive measures has practical advantages, especially in terms of long-term community stability. It fosters an environment where relationships are restored and social ties are strengthened, reducing the likelihood of future conflicts. Therefore, a practical step for enhancing these practices could involve establishing more structured programs to engage youth in community-based conflict resolution. This could include training young leaders and encouraging youth participation in traditional processes, ensuring that they not only preserve but also revitalize these practices in the face of changing societal dynamics.

Additionally, there is a need for supporting the Abaa Geddas and other community leaders by providing them with training in mediation, conflict management, and leadership skills to improve the effectiveness of these traditional conflict resolution practices. This will ensure that they are better equipped to handle the complexities of modern disputes while staying true to the values of community harmony.

The policy implications of these findings point to the importance of recognizing and legitimizing traditional conflict resolution systems within the broader framework of national governance. Since these systems are deeply entrenched in the community's social fabric, policies should aim to formalize and integrate these customary practices into local governance structures. For example, collaborative partnerships between traditional leaders and local government officials can create a hybrid system that draws from both traditional practices and formal legal frameworks, providing a more comprehensive approach to conflict resolution. This will not only maintain the relevance of traditional practices but also ensure that they align with national laws and human rights standards, especially in cases involving gender equality or economic justice.

Policy-makers should also consider ways to support and protect the cultural practices that underpin these conflict resolution mechanisms, particularly as the community faces pressures from

modernization and external influences. This could include funding for community-led initiatives, such as ritual ceremonies and educational programs that teach younger generations about the significance of restorative justice in maintaining community identity. Incorporating customary practices into school curricula or community workshops could further bridge the gap between traditional wisdom and modern education, creating a more culturally aware and engaged youth population.

Moreover, as the community continues to navigate modern challenges, gender inclusivity and representation should be addressed within the customary conflict resolution frameworks. Policy reforms could focus on ensuring gender equality in decision-making processes, ensuring that women's voices are adequately heard in both conflict resolution and cultural practices, especially when it comes to issues like inheritance or domestic violence.

In conclusion, the findings highlight that the customary conflict resolution mechanisms and restorative justice practices in Dilla Zuria Woreda are not just tools for dispute settlement but are essential in preserving cultural identity and maintaining social cohesion. The practical implications suggest that by engaging youth and supporting community leaders, these practices can be enhanced to address the evolving needs of the community. The policy implications advocate for formal recognition and integration of these traditional practices within the local governance framework, ensuring that they remain relevant and effective in promoting peace and harmony in an increasingly complex society. Ultimately, these practices contribute significantly to community resilience and the preservation of the Gedeo way of life amidst modernization.

4.2. Practices of Customary Conflict Restoration Mechanisms

4.2.1. The Gedeo people local customary conflict resolution institutions.

According to the participants in this study, the Gedeo people rely on the traditional conflict resolution mechanism called "Gechuma," which is deeply rooted in their cultural and spiritual practices. The Gechuma system is designed to promote peace, justice, and social harmony within the community. Central to the Gechuma process are the elders, including respected figures like the AbaaGeddas, who are entrusted with mediating conflicts. These leaders are selected based on their wisdom, moral integrity, and understanding of the Gedeo cultural and spiritual beliefs. Their role

is crucial in guiding the community toward peaceful resolutions, and their approach is highly valued for its cultural relevance.

The decision-making process in Gechuma is collective and inclusive, ensuring that all parties involved in a conflict have the opportunity to voice their concerns. This inclusive approach fosters a sense of fairness and mutual respect, which are central values in the Gedeo community. Participants noted that the elders facilitate open dialogue, allowing conflicting parties to understand each other's perspectives and work toward a solution that is mutually acceptable. In this context, the emphasis is not on punishing the wrongdoer, but on restoring balance and strengthening unity within the community. This emphasis on restorative justice rather than retributive justice is a defining feature of Gechuma, as the focus is on reconciliation and community cohesion.

The Gechuma process is typically conducted in public spaces, ensuring transparency and active community involvement. This openness allows the wider community to engage in the resolution process, either by contributing to the discussion or by supporting the resolution. This public nature of the process helps ensure accountability and reinforces the collective responsibility of the community to maintain peace. The community's participation in conflict resolution fosters a shared sense of ownership over the process and outcomes, which strengthens social bonds and reduces the likelihood of future conflicts.

Another key aspect of the Gechuma system is its spiritual dimension. The conflict resolution process is often accompanied by rituals and ceremonies aimed at restoring spiritual balance and cleansing the individuals involved in the conflict. These rituals are typically conducted in sacred spaces, such as sacred forests or ritual grounds, and may involve sacrifices, prayers, or the invocation of ancestral spirits. The purpose of these rituals is to remove any ill will or negative energy, ensuring that both the individuals involved and the community as a whole are in harmony with the natural world. The spiritual component of Gechuma highlights the interconnections of social, spiritual, and environmental harmony, which is integral to Gedeo cultural values.

Restitution and compensation are also critical components of the Gechuma process. When harm or damage is caused, the elders may suggest compensation, typically in the form of livestock, goods, or other material reparations. This practice is viewed not as a punishment, but as a way to repair relationships and reaffirm social ties. The restitution process helps both parties move forward without lingering resentment, thereby fostering long-term harmony. This approach to compensation also reflects the community's emphasis on restoring balance rather than emphasizing punitive measures.

Finally, the Gechuma system places significant importance on reconciliation and reintegration. Once a conflict is resolved, a public acknowledgment of the wrong done is made, often accompanied by an apology or symbolic gesture of goodwill. This public act of reconciliation demonstrates the willingness of the involved parties to restore their relationships and recommit to the values of the community. The reintegration process helps maintain the social fabric of the Gedeo community, ensuring that individuals are not ostracized but instead reintegrated into the social network. This aspect of Gechuma is essential for maintaining community unity and cohesion, as it fosters forgiveness, solidarity, and the long-term stability of the social structure.

In summary, the Gechuma conflict resolution mechanism serves as a vital institution for maintaining social harmony and cultural integrity in the Gedeo community. The practices of mediation, consensus-building, restitution, and reconciliation, along with the spiritual rituals that accompany them, provide a comprehensive approach to conflict resolution. The community's involvement and the emphasis on restorative justice, rather than punishment, ensure that conflicts are resolved in a way that strengthens relationships and upholds the core values of the Gedeo people. This system not only addresses the immediate conflict but also contributes to the long-term social cohesion and cultural continuity of the community.

4.2.2. The Practice of Gechumma System

. In conclusion, both practical and policy implications from the Gechuma conflict resolution system suggest that traditional, community-based, and restorative justice approaches can provide valuable insights for modern conflict management. By integrating cultural, social, and spiritual

elements into conflict resolution strategies, governments and organizations can create more inclusive, effective.

In addition, these songs help to ease tension and encourage emotional release, allowing both sides of the conflict to express their feelings in a constructive manner. Participants highlighted that the melodies and rhythms of these songs are important for setting the right tone during the resolution process, ensuring that the conflict is approached with the right attitude of humility and

One notable example of a song sung during the Gechuma practice among the Gedeo people is "HaroHalaloo" (Let Peace Prevail). This song is often sung during the resolution of conflicts to invoke peace, restore harmony, and cleanse the community spiritually. The lyrics emphasize themes of peace and reconciliation, reflecting the communal values of unity and healing.

"HaroHalaloo" (Let Peace Prevail)

In Gedeo language:

Harohalaloo, harohalaloo,

Harohalaloo, harohalaloo,

Fardakeynazire,

Jireenyasiida,

Harohalaloo, harohalaloo.

Translation:

Let peace prevail, let peace prevail,

Let peace prevail, let peace prevail,

The heart and the land,

Harmony will reign,

Let peace prevail, let peace prevail.

According to the participants of the study, the Gechumma system of customary conflict resolution is intricately linked to specific places where community members gather, and the locations often influence the spiritual and communal significance of the process.

The participants also highlighted that in the context of the Gedeo people's customary conflict resolution practices, a Songo village refers to a designated location within the village where reconciliation and conflict resolution processes, particularly through the Gechumma system, are carried out. The term Songo village specifically refers to the place where the community comes together to resolve disputes, heal relationships, and restore peace, with songs playing a central role in this communal practice.

The findings from this study highlight several important practical and policy implications for conflict resolution in communities. **Practically**, the success of the Gechuma system suggests that conflict resolution should prioritize community involvement and inclusivity. In the Gedeo context, the community-based approach, where local elders such as the AbaaGeddass facilitate the process, creates a setting that encourages transparency, fairness, and mutual respect. This practice of mediation, rooted in cultural norms and values, fosters stronger community bonds and ensures that conflict resolution is not just about legal outcomes but also about social harmony. The practical implication here is that conflict resolution strategies, especially in rural or culturally distinct regions, should be designed to engage community leaders and members in a participatory and culturally relevant manner. This could involve incorporating local customs and community-based forums into formal dispute resolution processes, ensuring they are seen as legitimate and effective by all parties involved.

Furthermore, the emphasis on restorative justice in the Gechuma system offers valuable lessons for modern conflict resolution practices. Unlike punitive systems, which focus on punishment, the Gechuma system aims to restore balance and strengthen relationships. This practical approach can be applied in various contexts, such as schools, workplaces, or even national justice systems, where the focus is on healing rather than retribution. Implementing restorative practices that prioritize mediation and reconciliation, as seen in the Gechuma process, can foster long-term peace and prevent conflicts from escalating.

In addition, the use of public spaces for conflict resolution ensures transparency and community accountability. This finding suggests that open, community-centered spaces should be incorporated into conflict resolution programs, ensuring that the process is accessible and visible to all. When communities can observe and participate in the resolution process, it reinforces the collective responsibility to maintain peace and builds trust in the system. This public approach can be adapted to other settings, such as local government meetings, public hearings, or even online platforms for community mediation.

From a policy perspective, these findings point to the importance of integrating customary conflict resolution systems like Gechuma into formal legal frameworks. Recognizing and supporting traditional conflict resolution practices within national or regional laws can offer an alternative or complementary system for addressing disputes, especially in areas where formal legal structures are less accessible. By incorporating such systems into policy, governments can create more inclusive and culturally sensitive conflict resolution frameworks that resonate with local populations and provide effective dispute resolution in both rural and urban contexts.

Additionally, policymakers could support community-led conflict resolution programs by providing resources and institutional support. This could involve training local leaders, developing community centers, or creating networks that facilitate the sharing of best practices. Supporting the formalization of these systems can ensure their sustainability and effectiveness in resolving both minor and serious conflicts within the community. Such programs could also benefit from policy frameworks that recognize and promote the role of elders in peacebuilding, ensuring that their wisdom and leadership continue to be a central part of conflict resolution.

Another key policy implication is the promotion of restorative justice at the national level. As the Gechuma system focuses on restoring social balance rather than punishing wrongdoers, policymakers could create initiatives that encourage restorative justice practices, such as community-based mediations or reconciliation programs. This could be particularly relevant in juvenile justice, post-conflict settings, or social services, where the emphasis is on healing and reintegration rather than penalization.

Moreover, the integration of spiritual rituals and songs in the Gechuma process highlights the importance of considering the spiritual and emotional dimensions of conflict resolution. Policy approaches that incorporate traditional rituals and ceremonies in dispute resolution could facilitate deeper emotional healing, particularly in contexts where conflict has caused psychological or social trauma. This holistic approach can be adopted in both community settings and national peacebuilding strategies, ensuring that conflict resolution does not only address the legal aspects but also the emotional and spiritual needs of those involved.

In conclusion, both practical and policy implications from the Gechuma conflict resolution system suggest that traditional, community-based, and restorative justice approaches can provide valuable insights for modern conflict management. By integrating cultural, social, and spiritual elements into conflict resolution strategies, governments and organizations can create more inclusive, effective, and sustainable systems that promote long-term peace and social harmony.

4.2.3. Rituals and ceremonies to restore harmony.

The findings from the study on the *Gondoroo* practice of conflict resolution among the Gedeo people reveal a culturally rich and multifaceted system aimed at restoring social harmony, spiritual balance, and community cohesion after conflicts. According to the participants, the *Gondoroo* system encompasses a series of interconnected rituals and ceremonies that go beyond simply addressing the immediate issues of the conflict; they aim to heal the emotional, spiritual, and social wounds caused by the dispute.

The first step in the process, known as *Fala*, involves a cleansing ritual where elders sprinkle sacred water mixed with herbs on the conflicting parties. This act is symbolically significant, as it purifies both individuals and removes any spiritual impurities linked to the conflict. Elders emphasized that the *Fala* ritual is crucial for true reconciliation. One elder noted, “Without Fala, the conflict is not truly resolved. It purifies our hearts and prepares us to live peacefully again.” This finding highlights the important role of **symbolic acts** in conflict resolution within traditional systems, where the spiritual and emotional dimensions of conflict are addressed alongside the social aspects.

After the cleansing, the next important ritual is the **Waada**, a public declaration of forgiveness, where the conflicting parties, in the presence of the community, pledge to never revive the dispute. This step underscores the communal aspect of the **Gondoroo** practice, with the community acting as both witnesses and active participants in the resolution process. One participant explained, “When we stand before the elders and the community, we pledge never to revive the dispute. This is how peace becomes a shared responsibility.” The **Waada** emphasizes **public accountability** and **collective responsibility**, reinforcing that peace is not solely the responsibility of the individuals involved but of the entire community.

Following the **Waada**, the community celebrates a **reconciliation feast** called **Gombore**, where the reconciled parties and the community come together to share food and drink as a sign of restored trust and unity. This feast symbolizes the **restoration of social bonds** and is seen as a celebration of the renewed unity of the community. One participant noted, “The Gombore is more than just a meal. It brings people together in celebration, reminding us that unity is our strength.”

The **Kalla** prayer, a communal blessing performed by religious leaders, is another key component of the **Gondoroo** process. The **Kalla** prayer seeks divine guidance and protection over the reconciled parties and the community at large. This spiritual aspect reinforces the idea that reconciliation is not only a social but also a spiritual process. As one religious leader explained, “The prayer protects our peace. It shows that we are not alone in this journey but guided by a higher power.”

Another unique aspect of the **Gondoroo** practice is the **Worra** ritual, which involves youth planting a tree to symbolize the growth and nurturing of peace. This ritual highlights the importance of **intergenerational involvement** in peacebuilding and underscores the **long-term commitment** required to sustain peace. A youth representative shared, “The tree is a living symbol of our reconciliation. It reminds us that peace must be sustained through our efforts.”

Finally, the role of women in the reconciliation process is highlighted through the **Bunna** (coffee ceremony), which is performed to create a welcoming space for reflection and conversation. A woman participant emphasized, “The Bunna ceremony brings calmness and joy. It’s a beautiful way to close the chapter of conflict and open a new one of peace.” This demonstrates the **gender-**

inclusive nature of the **Gondoroo** process, with women playing an integral role in facilitating peace and fostering community unity.

In summary, the **Gondoroo** system is a multifaceted approach to conflict resolution that incorporates **spiritual, emotional, and social** healing. The practice involves communal participation, ritualistic purification, public declarations of forgiveness, and symbolic acts such as tree planting, which collectively reinforce the values of peace, unity, and collective responsibility within the community. This traditional system provides valuable insights into culturally grounded, **restorative justice** mechanisms that emphasize reconciliation over punishment and collective healing over individual blame.

The **Gondoroo** system of conflict resolution, with its emphasis on communal participation, spiritual rituals, and reconciliation, offers valuable lessons for modern conflict management practices. One practical implication is the **importance of community-based conflict resolution mechanisms**. The active involvement of the entire community in the process, from witnessing and supporting the resolution to celebrating reconciliation through communal feasts, highlights the potential benefits of **community-driven** initiatives in modern societies. These community-centered processes foster stronger social bonds and ensure that conflict resolution is not merely a legalistic procedure but a holistic approach that restores social cohesion and promotes long-term peace. This is particularly relevant for societies experiencing ethnic or communal tensions, where traditional systems may be leveraged to strengthen peacebuilding efforts.

Moreover, the use of **spiritual rituals** such as cleansing (Fala) and prayers (Kalla) demonstrates the powerful role that **cultural practices** and **rituals** play in healing social rifts. These rituals facilitate emotional and spiritual healing, which is often overlooked in formal justice systems. The emphasis on **emotional and spiritual cleansing** could be integrated into modern restorative justice programs, where mediation and reconciliation are prioritized over punitive measures. Communities can adopt such spiritual components to ensure that all dimensions of a conflict are addressed—social, emotional, and spiritual—resulting in more comprehensive and sustainable resolutions.

The **role of women** in the reconciliation process through the **Bunna** ceremony also has practical implications for gender inclusion in peace building. By recognizing and amplifying the role of women in traditional conflict resolution practices, there is an opportunity to promote **gender equality** in peace processes. Involving women in the decision-making and reconciliation processes ensures that their perspectives and experiences are considered, contributing to more inclusive and balanced peace agreements.

Finally, the **symbolic tree-planting ceremony** (Worra) offers a practical model for nurturing **long-term peace** and community commitment to sustainable peace building efforts. Just as the tree symbolizes growth and peace, similar rituals in modern peace building could serve as lasting reminders of the community's shared responsibility to maintain harmony and reconciliation.

From a policy perspective, the Gondoroo practice provides insights into integrating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms into formal governance structures. Governments, particularly in post-conflict or ethnically diverse regions, could consider integrating traditional practices like Gondoroo into their national or local peace building policies. Recognizing the legitimacy of such practices can help bridge the gap between modern legal frameworks and traditional systems, fostering a more inclusive and culturally relevant approach to justice and peace building. This could be particularly beneficial in rural or marginalized communities, where traditional leaders and practices hold significant authority and influence.

One critical policy implication is the potential for hybrid justice systems that combine formal legal processes with traditional practices. Governments could establish mechanisms where customary conflict resolution, like the Gondoroo system, is formalized and supported by the state, allowing for greater legal recognition of community-led reconciliation processes. This could lead to more effective and culturally sensitive conflict resolution strategies that are widely accepted by the community, as they align with local values and traditions.

Additionally, policymakers could look into promoting education and training on traditional conflict resolution systems for both formal legal professionals and community leaders. This training could help modern practitioners understand the cultural and spiritual dimensions of conflict and provide a more holistic approach to conflict management. Furthermore, creating

policy frameworks that support the preservation of cultural heritage and promotion of indigenous practices could help maintain the integrity of traditional conflict resolution systems like Gondoroo, ensuring that these valuable practices continue to thrive alongside modern systems. Lastly, integrating gender-sensitive policies that recognize the role of women in conflict resolution, as seen in the Bunna ceremony, is crucial. Policymakers should create spaces where women's involvement in peace processes is recognized and encouraged, which could enhance gender equality in peace building efforts. This can also contribute to stronger, more inclusive policies that support women's rights and roles in both traditional and formal conflict resolution settings.

In conclusion, the Gondoroo practice provides practical and policy-oriented lessons in community-driven, inclusive, and culturally grounded conflict resolution, which can complement and enhance modern justice and peace building frameworks. By integrating traditional practices into formal systems, promoting gender inclusivity, and preserving cultural heritage, policymakers can foster more sustainable and holistic peace processes that resonate with local communities and contribute to long-lasting social harmony.

4.3. Challenges of Customary Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

According to the participants, while customary conflict resolution mechanisms play a crucial role in maintaining peace, they face several challenges that limit their effectiveness. These challenges stem from social and cultural changes, external influences, and institutional weaknesses.

One of the key challenges is the growing influence of modernization and urbanization. Many participants expressed concern that younger generations are increasingly disconnected from traditional practices. A youth representative explained, "Many young people no longer value the wisdom of elders and prefer to settle disputes through formal courts. They see our customs as old-fashioned and irrelevant in today's world." This shift in attitude undermines the sustainability of customary mechanisms.

Another challenge highlighted by the participants is the decline in the authority of elders. Traditionally, elders held a respected and authoritative position in the community. However, their role has weakened over time. A community member observed, "In the past, the word of the elders

was final, but now people question their decisions and sometimes refuse to accept their judgments.” This erosion of respect for elders reduces their effectiveness in resolving disputes.

The participants also pointed to the interference of formal legal systems as a significant issue. In many cases, disputes resolved through customary mechanisms are later brought to formal courts, which can undermine the authority of traditional leaders. A traditional leader noted, “Sometimes, after we resolve a conflict, the parties take the case to the formal courts, which weakens our role and confuses the community.” This dual system of conflict resolution creates tension and confusion among community members.

Additionally, the lack of documentation and legal recognition of customary resolutions poses a challenge. Without formal records, agreements reached through traditional methods are difficult to enforce. A local government official remarked, “Without documentation, some people deny the agreements they made during the reconciliation process, which leads to further disputes. This makes our work harder and less effective.”

Gender inequality in the decision-making process was another issue raised, particularly by women participants. While women actively participate in rituals and ceremonies, they are often excluded from key discussions and decisions. One woman participant stated, “We contribute to peace building, but our voices are rarely heard when it comes to resolving disputes. This needs to change if we want true harmony in our community.”

External influences, such as politics and religious differences, also complicate the work of customary conflict resolution. Participants noted that political leaders sometimes interfere in disputes for their gain, and religious differences can make it harder to reach a consensus. A religious leader explained, “When politics or religious divisions are involved, it becomes more challenging to resolve conflicts using our traditional methods.”

Finally, resource constraints were identified as a significant barrier. Elders and customary leaders often work without any formal support or resources, which limits their capacity to handle complex disputes. A customary elder shared, “We do this work out of commitment to our community, but without any resources or support, it can be very challenging.”

4.3.1. Influence of modern legal systems on traditional practices

In conclusion, the practical implications of these findings underscore the need for collaboration and integration between customary conflict resolution practices and modern legal systems. Policy interventions that recognize and formalize the role of traditional mechanisms, enhance their enforceability, and promote a more restorative approach to justice could help strengthen both systems. By fostering a cooperative relationship between the two, the community can benefit from the strengths of both traditional and formal legal practices, ensuring that conflict resolution remains effective, culturally relevant, and sustainable in the face of modernization.

4.3.2. The Changing Social Dynamics and Power Structures Influence on Customary Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

In conclusion, the practical and policy implications of these findings underscore the need for supportive frameworks that balance the traditional and modern approaches to conflict resolution. Policies should focus on strengthening community ties, bridging generational divides, de-politicizing conflict resolution, recognizing the role of marginalized groups, and integrating customary and formal legal systems. By adapting to the changing social dynamics and empowering communities, these mechanisms can continue to play a vital role in fostering peace and harmony in the face of modernization and urbanization.

4.3.3. Lack of Formal Recognition and Support from Government Authorities.

According to the participants, one of the major challenges facing customary conflict resolution mechanisms in the study area is the lack of formal recognition and support from government authorities. This absence of legal recognition and institutional support often limits the effectiveness and reach of traditional practices, undermining their ability to fully resolve conflicts in a way that is accepted by all parties involved.

A key concern raised by participants is that customary resolutions are not legally binding, making it difficult to enforce agreements once they are made. Without official recognition, the outcomes of customary conflict resolution are often disregarded, particularly when one party later disputes the decision. A local government official explained, “Customary resolutions can be seen as informal agreements. If someone refuses to abide by the outcome, there is no legal recourse to ensure compliance, which weakens the entire process.”

Participants also highlighted that the lack of support from government authorities often leaves traditional conflict resolution leaders, such as elders, without the resources or institutional backing they need to carry out their duties effectively. A customary elder shared, “We are left to work on our own, without any financial or logistical support from the government. It’s a struggle to maintain the same level of involvement when we have no official backing.” The absence of resources makes it challenging for traditional leaders to facilitate proper conflict resolution, especially in cases involving complex disputes that require additional support.

Furthermore, many participants noted that government authorities, in some cases, undermine the role of customary systems by encouraging people to bypass traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in favor of formal legal channels. A traditional leader explained, “Sometimes, government officials encourage people to take their conflicts to court, even when they could be resolved through our traditional practices. This often leads to division and confusion, and people lose trust in both systems.”

The lack of formal recognition also affects the status of customary leaders within the broader legal and political framework. Without official endorsement, customary leaders often face difficulties when dealing with external authorities or integrating their resolutions with formal legal systems. A community member emphasized, “When we try to bring a matter to the local authorities, they often don’t take us seriously because our system isn’t officially recognized. This diminishes the role of our leaders in resolving conflicts.” This lack of respect for customary authorities further diminishes the legitimacy of traditional practices.

Some participants expressed hope that stronger collaboration between government authorities and customary conflict resolution leaders could improve the situation. A religious leader suggested, “If the government would work with us and recognize our resolutions, it would create a more unified approach to conflict resolution. We are not against the formal system; we just need recognition and support for our work.”

The findings point to significant practical and policy implications regarding the lack of formal recognition and support for customary conflict resolution mechanisms. The absence of legal recognition and institutional backing from government authorities severely limits the effectiveness

and reach of traditional conflict resolution practices, which affects their ability to resolve conflicts comprehensively and in a manner that is universally accepted.

One of the practical implications of these findings is the challenge posed by the lack of enforceability of customary resolutions. As participants noted, traditional agreements are not legally binding, meaning that if one party refuses to comply with the resolution, there is little recourse to ensure enforcement. This creates a situation where customary mechanisms are undermined, as people may disregard the outcomes without fear of consequences. Policy action is needed to bridge this gap by introducing legal recognition of customary conflict resolutions. This could involve integrating customary decisions into the formal legal system, perhaps through legislative reforms that allow for the enforceability of traditional agreements. Such recognition would ensure that resolutions made by traditional leaders are honored, providing a legal foundation for customary systems and increasing their credibility and effectiveness.

Another practical implication is the lack of resources for traditional conflict resolution leaders, such as elders. Many participants expressed frustration over being left to resolve conflicts without any financial or logistical support from the government. The absence of resources limits the capacity of customary leaders to handle disputes, particularly those that are complex or require external assistance. Policy recommendations should include providing financial and logistical support to customary leaders to enable them to continue their vital work. Governments could establish funds or resource allocation programs that assist traditional conflict resolution leaders with tools, training, and administrative support. This would help maintain the integrity of customary systems, particularly in rural or resource-poor areas.

The findings also highlighted that government interference often undermines the role of customary conflict resolution mechanisms. In some cases, government officials encourage disputants to bypass traditional methods and take their cases to formal courts, which can create confusion and weaken community trust in both systems. Policy implications here include promoting better coordination between formal and customary systems. Governments should train officials to recognize the value of traditional conflict resolution and encourage collaboration rather than competition between the two systems. By fostering a complementary relationship between the formal legal system and customary mechanisms, both systems can work together to ensure effective conflict resolution. This could be achieved by creating formalized pathways where parties

can choose to resolve their disputes through customary means, with the option to escalate to formal legal systems if necessary.

Moreover, the lack of respect for customary authorities due to the absence of official recognition diminishes the legitimacy of traditional conflict resolution practices. Customary leaders often face challenges when dealing with external authorities or integrating their resolutions with the formal legal system. Policy action is needed to enhance the status of traditional leaders by offering official recognition and respect for their authority. This could be done through legal frameworks that acknowledge the role of customary leaders in conflict resolution. Establishing formal channels for customary leaders to engage with local government authorities and the judicial system would enhance their authority and improve the integration of customary conflict resolution into the broader legal and political framework.

Finally, there is a glimmer of hope expressed by some participants for collaboration between government authorities and customary leaders. If the government were to formally recognize and support customary conflict resolution practices, it could create a more unified and effective approach to resolving conflicts. Policy implications here include fostering collaboration and mutual recognition between formal legal authorities and traditional leaders. Governments could consider creating joint task forces or committees that include both customary leaders and legal experts, working together to develop strategies for conflict resolution that respect both systems. This would not only improve the effectiveness of conflict resolution but also help maintain the cultural integrity of the community.

In conclusion, the practical and policy implications of the findings suggest a need for legal recognition, resource allocation, and governmental support for customary conflict resolution mechanisms. Policies that integrate traditional practices with formal legal systems, enhance the status of traditional leaders, and support collaboration between the two will strengthen the ability of customary systems to resolve conflicts effectively. By addressing these gaps, policymakers can ensure that customary conflict resolution continues to play a vital role in maintaining peace and harmony within communities.

4.4.4. Lack of gender inclusivity in customary conflict resolution Mechanisms.

According to the participants, one of the major challenges facing customary conflict resolution mechanisms in the study area is the lack of formal recognition and support from government authorities. This absence of legal recognition and institutional support often limits the effectiveness and reach of traditional practices, undermining their ability to fully resolve conflicts in a way that is accepted by all parties involved. In conclusion, the practical implications of these findings suggest that youth disengagement, gender inequality, and preference for formal legal systems are critical areas requiring targeted interventions. By integrating traditional and formal systems, promoting gender inclusivity, and developing hybrid conflict resolution models, policymakers can create a more inclusive, effective, and relevant conflict resolution system that addresses the evolving needs of both the younger and older generations. Certainly! Here are some secondary data sources that can be used to support the study on conflicts in Dilla Zuria Woreda: Secondary Data Sources Government Reports: Ethiopian Central Statistical Agency (CSA): Provides demographic and socio-economic data on the population of Dilla Zuria Woreda. Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Region (SEPR) Reports: Offers insights into regional development projects, land use, and socio-economic conditions.

4.4.5. The Younger Generations' reluctance to Traditional Conflict Resolution Practices

According to the participants, the younger generation's perception of traditional conflict resolution practices is largely shaped by modernization, education, and exposure to formal legal systems. Many young people view these traditional mechanisms as outdated, ineffective, or irrelevant to their current needs, which has led to a decline in their active participation in or reliance on customary systems.

A significant concern expressed by older community members is that younger people are increasingly distancing themselves from traditional practices. A customary elder shared, "The younger generation is no longer interested in sitting with elders to resolve conflicts. They believe

that our methods are too slow and not as effective as going to the courts.” This shift in attitude stems from the younger generation’s exposure to urban lifestyles, education, and modern media, all of which emphasize individualism and formal legal rights over communal resolution methods.

Many younger participants reported feeling that traditional conflict resolution mechanisms do not align with their expectations of fairness and justice. A youth representative remarked, “Traditional methods often seem to favor the elders' views, and we feel our voices are not heard. We prefer the formal court system, where we feel our concerns will be taken more seriously.” This perception of bias and lack of representation in traditional decision-making processes contributes to the younger generation's reluctance to engage with customary systems.

The role of women in traditional conflict resolution also affects how younger generations view these practices. Many young people, especially women, feel that traditional practices are not inclusive enough. A young woman participant explained, “In the traditional system, women are often not included in decision-making. This makes me feel that our concerns are overlooked. I prefer formal systems where women’s rights are better protected.” The limited involvement of women in key decisions within the customary conflict resolution structure has created a perception of gender inequality, which is increasingly rejected by younger generations advocating for greater gender inclusivity.

Moreover, participants noted that younger people are more inclined to use modern legal systems, particularly courts, to resolve disputes. The availability of formal institutions that promise quick and enforceable outcomes makes them more appealing. A youth leader noted, “We see the courts as offering more certainty and justice. In our view, if someone violates an agreement reached through traditional methods, there’s no real way to enforce it, which is why many people go to the courts instead.” This preference for formal legal systems reflects a growing belief among the youth that the rule of law, rather than traditional practices, is the best way to address conflicts in a modern society.

Despite these challenges, some younger participants acknowledged the value of traditional conflict resolution, especially in fostering community unity and peace. A young community member

reflected, “While I think courts are faster, I do recognize that traditional methods help maintain harmony in the community. People are more likely to work together after a conflict is resolved through our customs.” There is a growing recognition among some young people that, although the formal system offers certain advantages, traditional practices still hold an important place in fostering social cohesion and resolving conflicts in a way that is less adversarial and more focused on reconciliation.

The findings reveal a complex relationship between the younger generation and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, which have significant practical and policy implications. The shift away from traditional practices by the younger generation, driven by modernization, education, and exposure to formal legal systems, presents challenges for the continued relevance and effectiveness of customary conflict resolution in the community.

One practical implication of these findings is the growing disengagement of younger people from traditional conflict resolution practices. This generational divide can create social fragmentation as younger people, influenced by modern values and systems, increasingly reject traditional methods. As younger generations tend to view these mechanisms as outdated and ineffective, there is a need for policy reforms that integrate traditional practices with modern systems to ensure that both generations feel that their needs and expectations are addressed. Training programs, intergenerational dialogues, and community workshops could play an important role in helping bridge the gap between younger and older generations, encouraging mutual understanding and respect for each other's perspectives on conflict resolution.

A second practical implication concerns the perception of bias and lack of inclusivity in traditional conflict resolution systems, especially regarding gender representation. Many younger people, particularly women, feel that traditional mechanisms are inequitable and discriminatory. This perception has driven many young women to prefer the formal legal system, where they believe their rights are better protected and more likely to be acknowledged. This highlights the need for gender-sensitive policies that both empower women within traditional systems and ensure that their voices are heard in decision-making processes. Governments could encourage gender inclusivity within customary conflict resolution by supporting initiatives to increase women's

leadership roles in these systems and ensuring that legal frameworks promote gender equality across both customary and formal practices.

Moreover, the younger generation's preference for the formal legal system, which they perceive as more efficient and enforceable, points to a need for policy interventions that strengthen the integration of customary and formal systems. The younger generation often views the court system as providing quick, binding resolutions to disputes, which contrasts with the perceived slow and unenforceable nature of traditional practices. To address this, policymakers could explore ways to link the enforcement mechanisms of formal legal systems with the community-based approaches of customary conflict resolution. For example, formal recognition of customary resolutions in the legal system could increase their legitimacy and provide more enforceable outcomes.

Despite these challenges, some younger participants acknowledge the value of traditional practices, particularly in terms of community cohesion and the focus on reconciliation rather than punishment. This reflects an opportunity for policy development that builds on the strengths of both systems. Hybrid models of conflict resolution that combine the restorative approach of customary systems with the punitive and enforceable nature of formal legal systems could offer a more comprehensive solution. Policies should encourage dialogue and cooperation between traditional leaders and legal institutions to develop frameworks that foster social harmony while ensuring justice and accountability.

In conclusion, the practical implications of these findings suggest that youth disengagement, gender inequality, and preference for formal legal systems are critical areas requiring targeted interventions. By integrating traditional and formal systems, promoting gender inclusivity, and developing hybrid conflict resolution models, policymakers can create a more inclusive, effective, and relevant conflict resolution system that addresses the evolving needs of both the younger and older generations. This approach could help preserve the cultural values of customary systems while adapting them to the challenges of modern society.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1. CONCLUSION

This study explored the roles, practices, challenges, and opportunities of customary conflict resolution mechanisms in the Gedeo Zone, specifically in selected kebeles of Dilla Zuria Woreda. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with various stakeholders, including elders, community members, youth, women, and local government officials, several key findings were identified that provide important insights into the functioning and evolution of these traditional practices.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

Customary conflict resolution mechanisms remain central to the social fabric of the Gedeo people. These systems emphasize reconciliation, restoring relationships, and fostering community unity rather than punitive measures. Elders, particularly the Abaa Geddas, play a significant role in facilitating the resolution of disputes through rituals and ceremonies that symbolize the restoration of peace. However, the study also identified several challenges facing these systems. The growing influence of formal legal systems has led many community members, especially the younger generation, to favor state-based conflict resolution methods over traditional practices, which are sometimes seen as slow and less authoritative. Gender inequality remains a critical issue, as women's concerns are often overlooked in decision-making processes, limiting the ability of traditional systems to fully address gender-specific conflicts. The lack of formal government support and recognition further undermines the effectiveness and enforceability of customary resolutions, leaving them unenforceable in legal contexts.

Moreover, the study found a growing generational divide, with younger generations increasingly disengaged from traditional practices, influenced by formal education and modern legal structures. Despite this, some youth still recognize the value of traditional practices in promoting community cohesion, suggesting that a hybrid approach combining both customary and formal systems could be beneficial. Additionally, there is an opportunity for improvement in integrating customary conflict resolution with modern legal frameworks, promoting gender inclusivity, and encouraging collaboration between customary leaders and formal authorities.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study present several important implications for policymakers and practitioners involved in conflict resolution in the Gedeo Zone. First, there is a clear need for the formal recognition and integration of customary conflict resolution systems within national legal frameworks. This could include legal backing for customary resolutions, ensuring that they are enforceable and respected by all parties. Policymakers should explore ways to integrate traditional systems with the formal judicial system, fostering cooperation and mutual respect between the two.

Second, gender inclusivity must be prioritized in order to address the marginalization of women within customary conflict resolution. Policies should empower women to take on leadership roles and ensure their concerns are represented in decision-making processes. Gender-sensitive reforms are essential to making traditional practices more inclusive and effective in addressing gender-based conflicts.

Third, the growing disconnect between younger generations and traditional systems calls for policies that bridge this gap. Educational programs that emphasize the value of both traditional and modern systems could help promote greater understanding and appreciation for customary conflict resolution methods. Creating platforms for dialogue between youth and traditional leaders could further strengthen the legitimacy of these practices among the younger population.

Additionally, strengthening collaboration between traditional leaders and government authorities is essential to improving the overall conflict resolution framework. Joint training, shared resources, and open channels of communication can enhance the effectiveness of both systems, ensuring that conflicts are resolved in a way that is both culturally relevant and legally sound.

Moreover, raising community awareness about the importance of customary conflict resolution is crucial for maintaining community support. Public campaigns that highlight the value of these systems, particularly in terms of social harmony and reconciliation, can help reintegrate customary mechanisms into the broader conflict resolution landscape, alongside formal legal approaches.

Finally, any legal reforms aimed at improving conflict resolution in the region should be culturally sensitive. Legal frameworks should be designed in a way that respects local traditions while ensuring fairness and justice for all community members, particularly marginalized groups such as women and youth.

In conclusion, customary conflict resolution mechanisms continue to play a vital role in maintaining peace and social harmony in the Gedeo Zone. However, these systems face significant challenges, particularly due to the growing influence of formal legal systems, gender inequality, lack of government support, and changing social dynamics. The findings of this study suggest that integrating traditional and formal conflict resolution methods, promoting gender inclusivity, and fostering greater collaboration between customary leaders and government authorities are critical

steps toward enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of conflict resolution practices in the region. By addressing these challenges and leveraging the strengths of both systems, policymakers and practitioners can create a more robust, inclusive, and effective conflict resolution framework that meets the needs of the entire community.

5.3. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of customary conflict resolution mechanisms in Dilla Zuria Woreda, Gedeo Zone: Support Capacity Building for Customary Leader Conflict Resolution Mechanisms: Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, such as the use of community elders (Shimageles), play a crucial role in addressing these conflicts. These mechanisms focus on mediation and maintaining social harmony. points highlight the complex interplay between religion and community dynamics in Dilla Zuria Woreda. Would you like more detailed information on any of these aspects or another topic related to Dilla Zuria. Through the Gondoroo process, the Abba Geda facilitated a dialogue that emphasized reconciliation and mutual understanding. They used traditional principles of justice and fairness to determine the rightful owner of the land. The decision was accepted by both parties, and the community's peace was restored.

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APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW ITEMS TO COLLECT DATA FROM INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

(Customary Elders, traditional leaders (Abba Gada, Qaalluu), local justice and security officers, local government officials, and religious leaders, women, youths and local government officials.)

1. Can you describe the common types of conflicts that arise in Dilla Zuria Woreda?
2. What are the customary conflict restoration methods used to resolve conflicts?
3. Who are the main actor involved in conflict resolution?
4. How are decisions enforced and justice is delivered in the customary conflict resolution process?
5. How do customary conflict resolution mechanisms contribute to maintaining peace, harmony and preserving of cultural norms and values in the community?
6. What role do traditional leaders play in conflict prevention?
7. What is called locally the Gedeo people customary conflict resolution mechanisms
8. How, where is customary conflict resolution institution practices are performed by the elders?
9. Is there ritual before and after the traditional conflict resolution practice held by the elders
10. How decisions are passed and implemented by this institution?
11. Are there any rituals or ceremonies to preserve the harmony after decision is made?
12. What are the major challenges faced by customary institutions in resolving conflicts?
13. Is there Influence of modern legal systems on traditional practices
14. Are there instances where the decisions of these institutions are disregarded? If so, why?
15. How does the younger generation perceive these traditional practices?
16. Are women's concerns adequately represented in conflict resolution?
17. What unique challenges do women face in customary conflict resolution practice?
18. What are your views on integrating customary conflict resolution mechanisms with the formal judicial system?
19. What specific improvements or changes could strengthen these traditional institutions?

APPENDIX 2

FGD Discussion points

1. What are the most common types of conflicts in Dilla Zuria Woreda?
2. How are conflicts traditionally resolved in the community?
3. Who are the key actors in customary conflict resolution?
4. How effective are customary mechanisms in resolving different types of conflicts?
5. What challenges do customary conflict resolution mechanisms face?
6. How do customary mechanisms interact with formal legal systems?
7. What roles do women and youth play in customary conflict resolution?
8. What can be done to strengthen customary conflict resolution mechanisms?