The practices, effectiveness and challenges of communal resource conflict management along north Wollo Amhara and neighboring afar in Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

Context and background

Violent conflict is one of the society's problems for economic development and stability by diverting labour away from normal economic activities into conflict activities in Ethiopia. The area along North Wollo Amhara and neighbouring Afar regional states have been exposed to small scale prolonged violent communal resource conflicts. Many factors drive and triggers for these violent conflicts which includes institutional, political, economic, and environmental change.

Goal and Objectives:

The objective of the research is to explore the practices, effectiveness and challenges of the communal resource conflict resolution and management institutions in the border of north Wollo Amhara and Afar communities.

Methodology:

The research used case study research design. Survey, interview, and Focus group discussion were used to collect data. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from 354 household heads, 3 focus group discussions, 43 key informants, and analyzed the data through descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.

Results:

The research result confirmed that both the customary and statutory institutions show low achievements in inter-community negotiation, facilitation, inter-community conflict analysis, and inter-community communication, strikethrough they are good in mediation. The luck of conflict resolution skills has been playing to continue the conflicts as protracted one. Further, the unresolved resource use and ownership claim of water and grazing land between the two communities; government development program without local community consultation in the contested land; illegal arms circulation; violence culture; and the existing ethnic politics in the country have created a great challenge to strikethrough to solve the violent resource conflicts at the early stage. To calm the situations, the research recommended well defined resource and regional boundaries of the two people, creating strong conflict resolution institutions.

Keywords

Afar, Conflict management, North Wollo, Institution, Resource

1. INTRODUCTION

Violent conflict is one of the society's problems for economic development and stability by diverting labour away from normal economic activities into conflict activities (Maxwell & Reuveny, 2000). According to Blattman and Miguel (2010) on average, violent conflict in sub-Saharan Africa lowers 3% annual growth. Lai and Thyne (2007) consider that violent conflict may destroys the state education system through the loss of personnel and infrastructure up to reallocation of resource away from education system to other (military) spending. Additionally, this potentially decrease trust among conflicting parties and have wide-ranging environmental and other socio-economic costs to society (Lars-Erik & Yannick, 2019).

Customary Institution, court-related Institution, and the mixed of these two are the major institutions to manage the negative consequence of violent conflicts (Fisher, 2008; O'Leary & Bingham, 2003). Even though such divers conflict resolution approaches exist, more empirical literature, and media and daily life experience confirm that communal conflict on resource is common and have been creating negative consequence (Admasu, 2016; Blattman & Miguel,2010; Maxwell & Reuveny, 2000). If the institutions lack capacity especially the local ones to manage conflicts, low level violence will automatically change to confrontation and crisis.

The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) recorded 2,706,509 violent related deaths globally from 1989 to 2020. The International displacement monitoring center (IDMC, 2018) has shown that 5.2 million new internal displacements associated with conflict and violence occurred during the first half of 2018 from 10 worst-affected countries in the world. Five of these countries are from Africa (Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia, Central African Republic, and South Sudan). Similarly, Oxfam International (2019) shows 7.6 million people were displaced by conflict and another 2.6 million by extreme weather conditions in the first six months of 2019 across Africa. These conflicts constitute undermine human security and socio-economic development (World Bank, 2014).

From the communal resource conflict perspective, Ethiopia is the epicenter. Data shows that more than 23,000 people fled their homes in Southern Ethiopia following clashes triggered by disputes over land ownership between neighboring ethnic groups in June 2006 (Oxfam International, 2006). According to the same source, the Konso and Borena tribes in southern Ethiopia were engaged in conflict over territory, water resources and cattle- grazing land ownership (Daniel, 2009). In other regions of Ethiopia, rampant local community conflicts between pastoralist and farmers as well as between pastoralists and pastoralists in the boundaries of Afar; Afar-Tigray, Afar- Amhara, Afar-

Oromo, Afar-Somali affected the security situation of the country (Belay,2020; Admasu,2016; Hundie,2010).

In the same manner, the north Wollo Amhara and Afar ethnic border communities have experienced recurrent distrust and violent. Many Amhara sedentary agriculturalists admitted that at one time or another they did come into dispute with agro-pastoral and pastoral communities of Afar when their animals damaged the crop land of the farmers (Admasu, 2016). The reverse is also true, and the pastoralists and agro-pastoralists of Afar also reported that land use conflicts with farmers are frequent, i.e. when sedentary agriculturalists have encroached on the grazing land of the pastoral communities (Admasu, 2016). The escalation, frequency, and magnitude of these conflicts have increased since 2010 (Amhara Regional Agriculture Bureau, 2018). As of 2011, 2014 and 2017, four major conflicts occurred between major rival pastoral and sedentary agriculturalist groups of Afar and Amhara respectively (Amhara Regional Agriculture Bureau, 2018). In spite of recurring conflicts between the Afar and their close Amhara neighbours, all conflicts could not be resolved by the existing conflict resolution approaches (Admasu,2016; Bealy,2020).

Mohammed & Beyene (2015) argued that conflict management in Ethiopia tends to be reactive and crisis driven rather than being proactive. Such ineffectiveness of both the traditional and modern conflict resolution institutions for regulation of local resource access, and management of the resultant use conflicts was the headache of the then government (Hundie,2010).

So, this research assesses the conflict resolution practices in this part of Ethiopia. Based on this framework, the following research questions are posed:

1. What conflict Resolution and Management Practices are implementing in North Wollo Amhara and neighboring Afar communities.

2. How effective are of the existing conflict management practice to manage resource based communal conflicts along these border communities?

3. What challenges are facing the conflict resolution institutions to manage the resource-based conflicts?

2. PROFILE OF THE STUDY AREA

Under the current federal administrative structure of Ethiopia, there are ten ethno-linguistically divided regional states and two chartered cities. The Afar and Amhara regions are among these member states within the Ethiopian federation. These two neighbouring ethnic groups inhabit the north and north-eastern parts of the country and have with a long history of cooperation, interdependence, friendship, and conflicts.

A vast majority of Afar are transhumant; practicing both short-distance and long-distance movement. Mobility is fundamental to pastoralists' strategies of coping with unpredictable rainfall, livestock diseases, and use of scarce natural resources (Alifnur & Van Reisen, 2019) while north Wollo Amhara are agriculturalist. It is the hot spot in terms of resource-based inter- community conflicts. Due to long history of close neighbour of the two people with sharing natural resource as of water, grazing land and forest, they have developed a conflict resolution institution to reduce active violence (Belay, 2020)
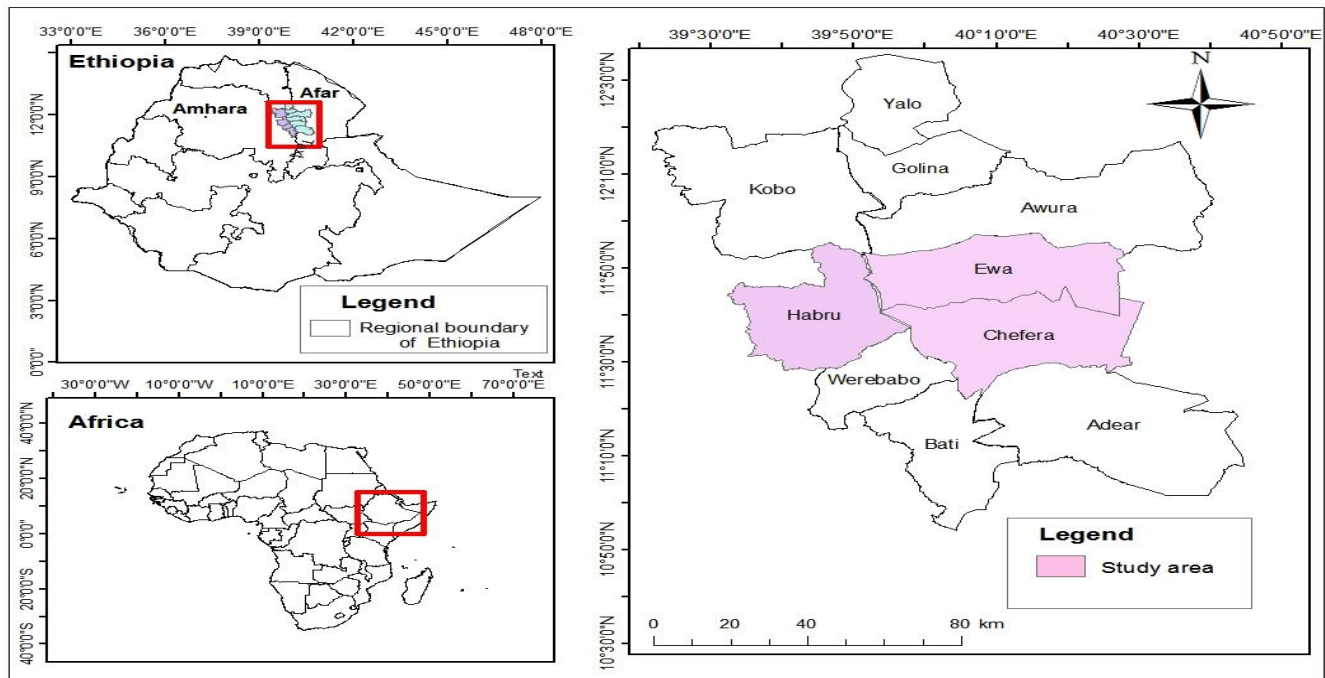

Fig 1. Map of the study area

The areas have had a long history of traditional conflict resolution institutions to manage communities' conflicts. Additionally, the government (through the joint effort of federal and local government) implement a joint peace committee to create a smooth relation and Managing conflict. Even though such efforts have been implementing in the area, violent conflict is one key societal challenge in the area (Admasu, 2016; Belay, 2020).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study follows a pragmatist research philosophy with a case study research designs and used both survey, interview, and focus group discussion. The study employs both quantitative and qualitative data. A multi-staged sampling technique was employed for the survey. The districts were split into three clusters. These were Raya kobo- Ewera cluster, Habru-Ewa-Chifra cluster, and Raya Kobo-Golina cluster. Through random selection, the Habru-Ewa-Chifra cluster emerged.

Three Kebeles were purposively chosen from Habru-Ewa-Chifra cluster. One from each Woredas. The reason for the purposive selection of kebeles (wards) were geographic proximity to neighbouring ethnic groups and high exposure to conflicts. The sampling frame consists of household heads in the kebeles who have information about the communal conflict, and the conflict resolution practices. The 2017 population projection data (Central Statistics, 2013) was used to obtain the population and household heads of the study area. It shows that the total population of the three kebeles was 17,500 (Central Statistics, 2013). Out of this 3450 were heads of the household (961 from Chifra district, 1346 from Habru district, and 1144 from Ewa district). Using Yamane (1967) formula with 5% margin of error, 359 household heads were selected.

The questionnaire captured data on socio-economic characteristics of the household such as education, age, livelihood and gender. Questions related to their understanding of community resource conflict and conflict resolution management were also asked using the Likert scale to measure their agreement with the questions around. Household respondents were asked to prioritize the possible sources of community resource violent conflicts. The rates were then ranked based on the five scale Likert scale. The weighted values were summed up and divided to give the mean value of 3. Any item with a mean value 3 and above was regarded as major factor responsible for conflict, while the mean values < 3 were regarded as minor causes of conflict.

Qualitative data was collected through focus group discussions and key informant interviews. Three group discussions were held across the study area. Each focus group had between 5-10 people based on Krueger and Casey recommendations (Krueger & Casey, 2002). Participants were drawn from community leaders, conflict resolution committees, teachers, religious leaders, elders, youth and nurses. Key informants' interviews were held with Judiciary officers, development agents, natural resource management officers, land administration officers; local government leaders at Kebele, woreda, zonal (province) levels from both regions, regional and federal experts. Those who that participated in communal conflict resolution, NGO personnel, development agents, and community leaders were also included.

The collected data were analysed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Descriptive analysis was used for quantitative data. This type of data analysis is common to eco-violence related research (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). The analysis of the frequencies, percentages, rating of significant variables to conflict, and other quantitative values paid special attention to determining the extent of the conflicts, and their perception within the community.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 conflict resolution and management practices in north wollo amhara and neighboring afar communities

The result confirmed that both the Afar - Amhara regional border communities have their own traditional institutions called Abegars / Shimagles/ and the Sheh-legas, modern conflict resolution and mixed conflict resolution also known as local joint peace committee to solve their inter-clan and inter-ethnic violence (Belay,2020). The modern conflict resolution is not active in the area even though its structure exists (Focus group discussion at Deri Roka and Chifra district, December,2020). The joint peace committee of north Wollo Amhara and Afar communities is a hybrid of modern and traditional institutions. The members of the peace committees come from the communities appointed through the summit of the local residents. Honesty, maturity, neutrality, age, community recognition, and experience in mediation are the main criteria in the selection process.

These committees have its structure from Kebele to woreda and zone levels. The committee members come from religious leaders, elders, youths, kebele administrators, community policing officers, and woreda security agents. The structure of the committee exists both at the district and the kebele levels. In each district and Kebele, the committees have 15 members and theoretically have a meeting every 15 days. Informants at Deri- Roka explained that there has not been a meeting at all even in six months or more except when violence emerges. Once the committee is established there is no regular support and training from the government officers. Both men and women are encouraged to participate in the committee. However, women are less willing and not active in the instituion because of their burden in home management for their families (A Key informants from a peace-building officer at Woldia city, January, 2020). This has some implications for the conflict resolution and management.

Officials from peace-building office at Ewa and Habru woreda explained the major tasks of the joint committees in the area. These are to facilitate the return of looted properties particularly raided animals to owners, mediate compensation in the time of property damage, animal rustling, human and animal death and helping the victims to receive compensation. Moreover, they organize discussion form and set solutions on the general status of peace and security in the area, identify main and triggering causes of conflict, and develop a conducive environment for fraternity of the two groups. Most of the time these institutions are not successful in all of the aforementioned tasks except mediation and reconciliation which focus on the efforts to compensate victims in the time of property damage, animal rustling, human and animal deaths.

Recent data (2017) show the committees returned 101 stolen animals to the right owners of Amhara from Afar community and 6 camels to the Afar from north Wollo Amhara. In 2019 another 76 cattle were returned to north Wollo Amhara from Chifra (a key informant at Habru district, January, 2020). Belay (2017) noted that in 2016 the Afar's paid 197,400 and 23,380 Ethiopian birr as compensation to a family of deceased and an injured Amhara respectively. In a similar way the Amhara paid 28,485 Ethiopian birr to the injured Afar's as compensation. In 2017, the Afars paid 310,000 Ethiopian birr to the 3 dead and 15 injured persons. This is some of the tasks done by the joint peace committee (Belay, 2017).

Compensation for killing or injuring human being depends on how a person is being killed or injured. They have predetermined rules for crimes against human beings for accidental murders (40,000-birr), cruel murders committed as revenge (60,000-birr), Minor physical injury (15,000-birr), serious physical injury (25,000 birr), hiding a suspected criminal (5000 birr) and sexual assault (20,000 birr) (The Local Joint Peace Committee Minutes, 2011). Regarding animal looting and crop damage the fines area follows: Stealing oxen/ cows 15,000 birr, stealing camel, 25,000 birr, stealing a donkey, 3000 birr, stealing sheep and a goat, or killing an animal are determined by the committee, stealing firearm 35,000 birr and damage to crops will be determined based on the severity of the damage (The Local Joint Peace Committee Minute, 2011). Due to high inflation such rules need to be revised and updated. Additionally local joint peace committees also have sanction imposed on criminals to prevent them from participating in common ceremonies, common grazing areas and markets.

Identifying criminals accused of homicide and looting is a cumbersome task to the local joint peace committees of Afar- north Wollo Amhara (Focus group discussant at Chifra, December 2020). It requires critical investigation procedures. Once a grievance regarding homicide and animal looting from the family of the deceased reaches the local joint peace committee, without any hesitation the investigation begins. They meet together and exchange information about how the investigation procedure should go. Once they agree, they start the investigation with the support of religious persons called shaki as most of the communities are follower of Islam. Public gatherings, discussions, oaths, prayers, hidden information exchange, rituals are used by the local joint peace committee as techniques of crime investigation. After identifying the perpetrator through these techniques, in most cases, it is successful, complex ritual procedures and strong symbolic representation of purification of the 'curse' and reconciliation of conflicting individuals/groups. The focus group discussants state this ceremony as follows:

> "For the ritual ceremony of the reconciliation, the transgressor slaughtering cattle in his house and the Local joint peace committees from the deceased group with the family of the deceased go to the house of the murderer. Then the perpetrator families and the families of the victims swear peace to each other which is called to Zehara. Praying and chewing a traditional plant known as chat continues and the two conflicting parties eat together. The traditional practice of eating together symbolizes a sign of approving the reconciliation by the two parties because it is an indication of sense of love and respect (Focus group discussants at Deri-Roka kebele, January 2020)."

Abegars / Shimagles/ and the Sheh-legas are also the other main types of conflict resolution at both micro and macro level in the north Wollo and neighboring Afar people. Literally Abagar refers to a Muslim elder who is working in mediation and reconciliation between disputants. Abagars had been solving serious crime like Homicide and inter-community violence before the implementation of mixed conflict resolution in the area (key informant at Kul Bayina kebele, 2020). According to the focus group discussants, who are living at Kul-Bayina kebele of Habru district explain the crucial role of Abagars as follows:

> "Abegars are helping us in identifying the wrong doers who are hiding in the society. Even if the wrong-doer runs away and hides somewhere, the Abagars deal with their opposite members of the area for his deportation and for reconciliation. People of the area where a criminal is hiding also do not host such a fugitive for long. They rather arrest him or pressurize him to appeal to the Abagar of his original place for mediation and reconciliation. Such tasks are really great for us (focus group discussion, december, 2020)"

4.2 effectiveness of the conflict resolution institutions along north wollo amhara and neighbouring afar community resource conflicts

Respondents rated the capacities of all the three institutions; traditional, modern and mixed from inter- community conflict analysis, negotiation, and facilitation, mediation, and communication skill. Such perceived effectiveness of conflict management skills measured through a five-point Likert scale as strongly agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2), strongly Disagree (1). The respondents stated that all the institutions were better in mediation and reconciliation. The traditional conflict resolution institution scores a mean of (M=4.1), Modern conflict resolution institution with a mean of (M= 3.6) and mixed conflict resolution institution with a mean (M=4.3).

However, they have minimal achievement in conflict analysis, communication, and facilitation and negotiation skill (See the table 4 below). Conflict analysis helps to know the prediction of the coming conflict to support the early warnings and early response signals which is the backbone of conflict management. When we compare the three practices, the traditional and mixed method approaches were more effective in solving inter-ethnic conflicts than the modern conflict resolution system. This result was also confirmed in the focus group and key informants' discussion.

Table 1. Mean score for the capacities of conflict resolution skills to communal conflict.

Capacities of conflict resolution skills	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Traditional conflict resolution Institution				
Inter-community conflict analysis skill	354	1	5	2.5085
Inter-community communication skill	354	1	5	3.1921
Inter-community negotiation skill	354	1	5	2.661
Inter-community facilitation skill	354	1	5	2.2542
Inter-community mediation skill	354	1	5	4.1384
Modern conflict resolution Institution				
Inter-community conflict analysis skill	354	1	5	2.2994
Inter-community communication skill	354	1	5	3.7429
Inter-community negotiation skill	354	1	5	2.3164
Inter-community facilitation skill	354	1	5	2.2881
Inter-community mediation skill	354	1	5	3.613
Mixed conflict resolution Institution				
Inter-community conflict analysis skill	354	1	5	2.4831
Inter-community communication skill	354	1	5	2.3277
Inter-community negotiation skill	354	1	5	2.1921
Inter-community facilitation skill	354	1	5	2.4689
Inter-community mediation skill	354	1	5	4.316

Source (Author's Field Survey, 2020)

The key informants from the peace building department, at Woldia district have a belief that the weak implementation of conflict management may have a contribution to violent conflicts for the two border communities. Tafere (2013) also noted that the appearance of weak or non-functional institutions is the manifestation and outcome of aggravated violent conflicts. Hundie (2010) highlighted the power of conflict institutions, as conflicts reduce if the conflict handling capacity and effectiveness of the existing institutions is stronger than the institutions of violence.

Many factors are contributing to the low effectiveness of the conflict management and resolution approaches of traditional institutions -Abegars, Shimagles and the Sheh-legas as well as the modern one. Both discussant groups at Chifra and Deri- Roka talk about the deterioration of traditional

conflict resolution mechanisms due to the reluctance of federal government to demarcate and delineate the regional boundary. Furthermore, they highlighted lack of harmony between traditional and modern conflict resolutions institution on access, withdrawal of resources and handling conflicts may also be a source of violent conflicts. According to them, these situations have been complicated by new regional ethnic politics by creating "US" and "THEM". Frequent droughts, lack of close support of traditional institutions by the local government, lack of human capacity of both the traditional and modern institutions of conflict resolution have also a contribution to the low effectiveness of the approaches.

4.3 challenges of the conflict resolution institutions

Compared to traditional and modern conflict resolution institutions, the local joint peace committee has better work efficiency in the management and resolution of Afar- Amhara resource violence. As mentioned above it has many achievements in compensation and reconciliation which have a short-time solution to de-escalate resource conflicts in the area. Even though, there has been such progress, the prolonged resource conflicts of the two communities still persist. One of the challenges of local joint peace committee comes from the cause of the conflicts.

The cause of conflicts between the two communities emanated from factors directly related to contested regional boundaries, unclear pasture land, water and forest land resource boundaries and weak use and ownership of property (Abebe et al, 2023). Solving these issues needs the efforts and integration of many stakeholders. Shul-gora' and 'Hajo plains which have potential pasture and forest land around Jarra, Zemzem and Akika water resource ownership claims along Habru and Chifra area need a solution from a formal government office (Abebe et al, 2023). This is one critical challenge for the committees to create a long-lasting peace in the area.

Medium scale development projects by the government office without due consideration of the two people is another challenge for the local joint peace committee to terminate the unending communal resource conflicts and overcome mistrust of the two communities once and for all. One good example for this is the Akika irrigation and livestock watering development project. This project was implemented by Amhara regional state along the contested plain of Jarra without public consultation and mutual consent of the two local people. As such types of projects would have a potential to create frustration and rivalry between the two people. It also creates another burden for the local joint peace committees.

Violence culture and proliferation of small arms and light weapons is another hindrance to the local joint peace committees to fulfil their tasks in a satisfactory manner. As mentioned above violence culture as a trigger factor for the community conflicts also affects the work of local joint peace

committees by delaying peace talk, taking more time for criminal investigations and the compensation and reconciliation process. Heroism encourages crime manifested in the form of killing members of rival ethnic groups, looting and burning of property from other communities as the culture of the local communities affects the peace process.

The Local joint peace committees have failed to change the culture of war-mongers. It is beyond their scope. It needs a conflict transformation framework and integrated stakeholder participation from education, NGOs and higher government official. Additionally unrestricted expansion of light weapons in both communities also is a great hindrance for the work to the local joint peace committees. The current government of Ethiopia is unable to address small arms and light weapons trade along the two border communities with non-functional policies and legislations and thus, it gives a chance for criminal acts and lawlessness.

Key informants in both Woldia University and Semera University reveal that strikethrough the local, zonal and sometimes the regional governments have interest in the two regional border land resources and territories. The unclear and confused roles of local, zonal and regional governments have created bias to the conflicts. Due to resource and ethnic ties between local government and parties participate in communal resource conflicts of the two border regions. This government body sometimes has shown interest in de-escalating and stopping the conflict by give and take principle while other times they have shown strong eagerness to expand their border territories at the expense of other regions. This created the government body to support one side in the conflicts. A key informant at Woldia University said "one could not see this interest if they are not real observer of the area." Such hidden second and third-party involvements in the conflicts impede conflict resolution and develop of distrust between people that hinders the local joint peace committees from functioning well.

Lack of adequate trainings in modern conflict resolution is another hindrance for the effectiveness of the local joint peace committee to solve communal violence. It is true that all groups understand the importance of the local joint peace committee in conflict resolution and management issues, however there is lack of support in training from zonal and local administrations and other NGOs. As the survey respondents perceived that there is low inter-communal facilitation, communication, negotiation and conflict analysis skills of all the conflict resolution institutions in the area.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The result has also confirmed that both the Afar - Amhara regional border communities have their own traditional institutions called Abegars / Shimagles/ and the Sheh-legas, modern conflict resolution and mixed conflict resolution also known as local joint peace committee to solve their

inter-clan and inter-ethnic violence respectively. Except in mediation, all the three institutions have low effective achievements in inter-community negotiation, intercommunity facilitation, inter-community conflict analysis, and intercommunity communication. Due to this the inter-community violent conflicts have reached violent stages and de-escalated through the intervention of federal security force as a short-term solution. However, they have a great achievement in mediation, especially the mixed conflict institutions locally known as the joint peace committee which has a great success story in returning the looted property and compensation for human and animal death, as well as damaged property.

The urgent need of defining of the resource ownership and contested regional boundaries of the two communities through the active involvement of stakeholders such as the federal government, the two regional governments, local government, and local resource users. It is important to give more attention in the delineation and demarcation of the two community borders based on the principle of equity of resource sharing and historical resource sharing culture.

The research urges Redefining, reorganizing and strengthening the joint peace committees. As Hundie (2010) highlighted, the power of conflict institutions, as conflicts become minimal if the conflict capacity and effectiveness of the existing institutions are stronger than the institution of violence.

It is recommended that conflict transformation should be a conflict intervention mechanism to the Afar- Amhara resource conflict. Conflict factors as of underlying and aggravating factors such as violence culture, cannot be solved by other mechanisms and needs conflict transformation frameworks. De Rivera (2009) underlines transforming the world of conflict to a world of peace requires the transformation of human values, norms, beliefs from the culture of violence to a culture of peace. The local and federal governments should organize and implement problem-solving workshops, alternative dispute resolution, dialogue, facilitated meetings, and truth-telling community groups. These will reduce contradictions; develop better attitudes and behaviour within the groups.

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9. KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Abagar: - Traditional dispute resolution mechanism in the Afar- Amhara border community

Kebele: - The smallest administrative unit in the Ethiopian Federal Government structure as a ward, a neighborhood, which has at least 1000 families of about 4500 to 6000 people.

Shimglina: - Traditional conflict resolution mechanism in Amhara society.

*Woreda***:** - an Amharic word (Ethiopian language) which refers to the smaller administrative unit, greater than *Kebele*, in the Ethiopian Federal government structure, it is like a district.

Zone - The medium administrative unit in the Ethiopian Federal Government structure below a region and above a *Woredas.*