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Customary Conflict Resolution Mechanism in Rural Land Disputes Resolution in Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

Context and Background

Rural land disputes were instigated due to various factors like the increases in population number, scarcity of farm land, poverty, the increase in rural land value, and weak rural land administration system were the indirect causes of rural land disputes and manifested in the forms of boundary disputes, inheritances disputes, transfer of land disputes, access, and ownership disputes. This study indicated the different variant *shimglina* customary conflict resolution mechanisms are contributing significant role in rural land dispute resolution. *Shimglina* is Golden peace culture in resolving rural land disputes in preventing destructive conflict violence. The social capital and social solidarity of the community is functional under the umbrella of *shimglina* and vis versa. *Shimglina* is vital to resolve conflict and disputes terms of its attachments with the living God, value of perpetual peace, reduce time to decide on the issue, resource, its accessibility to all members of the community, and restoring the broken peaceful interaction.

Goal and Objectives

The objective of this study is to examine the practices and challenges of customary conflict resolution mechanisms in resolving rural land dispute in the study area. The Goal of this study is providing recommendations for policy makers, community leaders, and land administrators and for peace and land dispute workers.

Methodology

This study employed qualitative research approach and data were collected using focus group discussion, interviews, and non-participatory observation; and relevant literatures and documents are reviewed. Informants were selected based on purposive and snowball sampling. The total number of informants participated in this study were 201. The data were analyzed through the use of thematic analysis.

Results

The findings indicated *shimglina* customary conflict resolution mechanisms played great role in rural land dispute resolution. People prefer it in terms of time, resource, accessibility, and restoring the broken peaceful relationships. Also, the study revealed, *shimglina* faced many challenges which hinder its effectiveness in the resolution of land use disputes. Lack of attention to *shimglina* culture of peace by the government, the intervention of government bodies in the process of dispute resolution, the absence of incentives to *Shimageles* (elders), the influence globalization are the challenges. The government should give attention to *shimglina* in rural land disputes for peaceful co-existence and community solidarity. *Shimageles* (elders) play vital roles which include arbitration, mediation, decision making, peace-making, and permit traditional oath and link the living with God. This study recommends; the government should give attention to *shimglina* culture of peace in rural land use disputes.

Keywords

Rural Land? land Dispute, customary land, Conflict Resolution, Peace

1. Introduction

Societies worldwide have long used customary conflict resolution mechanisms to resolve conflicts and disputes that happened between individuals, groups, and among the community. In every community customary conflict resolution practices are often based on community customs (Macfarlane, 2006). In a society where the majority of the people are poor with widespread illiteracy culminating in lack of access to justice and the high cost of modern conflict resolution, and scarcity of lawyers; customary conflict resolution stands out as the best method of conflict resolution (Alemie, and Hone, 2018). The formal legal system is adversarial to the disputant and often overlooking facts and consensus which are at the heart of customary conflict resolution mechanisms (Luccaro, 2016). The aim of devising mechanisms to give effective dispute resolution is to ensure that the disputants are settled their dispute through effective and efficient means for the benefits of the disputants and the society in general (Taschuk and Chamber, 1999) to make their overall relationships and interaction harmonious.

Interest on land possession and control is increasing from time to time among individual farmers, investors, and it became the main factor of dispute because of the scarcity of land (Siyum, et al, 2015). Land dispute are a major hindrance to land use, development, peace and tenure security in Africa. In a number of sub-Saharan African countries land disputes have resulted in violent conflicts that have devastated communities, people's lives, livelihoods and relations of individuals, groups and communities (Niang and Dieng, 2004).

In fact, "land disputes are very serious and fierce, nobody takes the matter flippantly, and hence any silly issues can result in big conflicts costing even the life of the disputants or resulting in injuries or costly court case proceedings" (Behailu, 2015:139). Rural land disputes are a serious social problem in rural Ethiopia and the problem need a settlement mechanism which works based on the social systems of a community (Bedasa and Hussein, 2018). In Ethiopia the majority of the rural population used customary conflict resolution mechanisms to settle down their land dispute based on the specific context of their cultural reality (Kassa, 2020). However, customary conflict resolution mechanisms face challenges like government interference and cultural defect in rural land disputes settlement (Girma, 2014) which affects its effectiveness in resolving various types of rural land disputes. The majority of farmers in Amhara region have experienced land disputes due to inheritance, boundary, land transfer and divorce (Shibeshi, et al. 2015). Moreover, Zirehun (2016) stated that the current rural land proclamation is failed to resolve land disputes in Ethiopia. In this situation, measures that can help include reinforcing customary dispute resolution mechanisms in the resolution of land disputes (USAID, 2013).

According to Solomon (1992), Yohanness (2003), and Yoseph (2006), the customary law that is applied among the Amhara is not written. The mechanism is used to resolve various types of disputes including rural land dispute in the region. *Shimglina* or elderliness is the most common form of dispute resolution all over the region at a local community level. Besides to this, religious leaders and elders have been playing a key role in dispute resolution in many parts of Amara Region (Getachew, 1998). Accordingly, an in-depth investigation of the practices, and challenges of *shimglina* customary conflict resolution in resolving rural land disputes in Dar zuria Woreda in focus is found to be indispensable.

2. Methodological Approaches and Methods

The study employed qualitative research design to this study as the nature of the research that target on community beliefs, opinions, experiences, and relationships, cultural and social phenomenon with regard to the practices and challenges of *shimglina* customary conflict resolution mechanisms in rural land disputes in the study area. The method that the researcher was used to select his FGD discussants and key informants from the kebeles was purposive sampling. The kebeles are selected based on the preliminary data taken from the rural land administration office on land and land related disputes. The participants of the study were elders, religious leaders, *Woreda* courts judges, and *Woreda* and *kebele* land administration experts, the land administration committee, and land holder farmers who settled their land dispute with customary conflict resolution mechanisms and experts from Amhara region land administration. The study was focused on five rural *kebeles* of Bahir Dar *zuria* *Woreda* and the target population of the study was residents of Wojer, Sebatamet, Tentakerkose, Feresewoga and Lijome *kebeles* of Bahir Dar *Zuria* *Woreda*. Concerning the analysis, the collected data was analyzed basing on the content presented and developed interpretation from the thematic areas relevant to this study.

3.1. Description of the Study Area

Bahir Dar *Zuria* *Woreda* is found in west Gojjam Administrative Zone of Amhara National Regional State of Ethiopia. The *Woreda*, shared boundaries with Lake Tana in north, Achefir *Woreda* in the east, Dera *Woreda* in the east, and Yilmana Densa *Woreda* in the south. It has 36 rural kebeles with its total population 202,960 (DOA, 2000a).

4. Theoretical Grounds for Conflict Resolution by Customary or Ingenious Mechanisms

There are theories which support conflict resolution by customary mechanisms through elders based on the cultural, norm and value foundation of a society. Some of the theories important to clarify the nature and significance of customary or indigenous mechanisms of are the following:

4.1. Social Capital Theory

It also explains the restorative nature of dispute resolution by elders in African Societies. Customary dispute resolution by elders target in restoring the social ties or social capital that had been broken by the wrong committed due to the dispute (Kariuki, 2015). The theory explains how the community and local elders resolve disputes and reestablish social ties. In addition to this, it also describes how social ties or social capital contributes and play for peaceful relationships. The theory would argue that the success of the customary or indigenous mechanisms in helping resolve the conflict and to bring about peace will be dependent on the existing social capital (Ibid). In view of this theory, the *shimglina* customary or indigenous dispute resolution mechanism adopted and utilized by the community helps the community to resolve land use and land related disputes based on its long established traditional social capital like *Iddir* and *mahiber*.

4. 2. Social Solidarity Theory

The social solidarity theory explains the importance of dispute resolution by customary or indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms through elders. It is very important where a community do not want to use the formal dispute resolution mechanisms due to disliking of the western legal system in its which creates problem in the future relationship of disputants, dissatisfaction in the result, costs, time, and other factors. Thus, customary practices of conflict resolution by elders are important to resolve the arising disputes within the community (Durkheim, 1984 and Kariuki, 2015). In a society, individual members are social actors who are controlled by social facts such as values, norms, and social structures in their life. Using this theory for dispute resolution by elders is possible in which, dispute resolution by elders is viewed as a social fact from which society gains benefit from it (Kariuki, 2015).

In his theory of social action, parsons (1991) argued that shared values and norms, which are provided for by the cultural system of the society, support the order and harmony of society. In this regards, shared value patterns are integrated in actors (individuals) mind sets and actions through the process of internalization. The social integration in a society rest on a society wide agreement on basic norms and values that long established in a society and it contributes to the peaceful co-existence of the society. Furthermore Murithi, (2006:13) stated as follows:

An integral part of the process of achieving positive peace is the need to promote social solidarity. Achieving social solidarity means that members of the society once again begin to recognize each other as fellow human beings and begin to share a concern in the common welfare and well-being of each other. Social solidarity makes sense because only by ensuring the security, safety, and well-being of other people, can we hope to secure our own security, safety, and well-being. To emphasize the need to foster social solidarity is to recognize the interconnectedness of each human being.

The social solidarity theory is essential to understand and explain the practices and challenges of the various variants of *shimglina* customary or indigenous system of dispute resolution in rural land use and land related disputes by *shimageles* (elders and religious leaders) and how individuals and the

community benefited from the *shimglina* customary or indigenous conflict resolution mechanism within the resolution of their land disputes based up on their shared peace values and norms as *shimglina* contains culture of peace in its practice and nature.

5. Discussion, and Findings of the study

5.1. The Practices of *Shimglina* Customary Conflict Resolution Mechanism in Rural Land Disputes in the Study Area

Farming communities in Bahir Dar zuria Woreda were using *shimglina* customary conflict resolution in rural land disputes and the various variants of *shimglina* customary conflict resolution mechanisms (Interview with regional land expert 1 at Amhara region rural land administration and use Bureau, February, 18th, 2020). Government document also acknowledge, customary conflict resolution mechanisms are practiced in resolving rural land disputes in Amhara region and in the study area in particular. Various variants of *shimglina* customary conflict resolution mechanisms in Bahir Dar Zuria Woreda in particular (Interview with elder 2 at Lijome *kebele*, February, 7th, 2020). In supporting this, the revised rural land administration and use proclamation of Amhara National Regional State No.133/2006 article 29/1, stated, “any civil dispute that may arise in connection to land holding or using right shall priory be seen and resolved in arbitration” (ANRS, Zikre Hig, No,18:30). Thus, this evidence indicated that customary conflict resolution mechanisms were essentially established by the government for land disputes resolution at the *kebele* level.

As *shimglina* is a committee of elders that are establishing for resolving different types of conflict and disputes in the society, it works for sustaining the future peace of the disputants (Getachew, 1998 Solomon (1992), Yohanness (2003), and Yoseph (2006). *Shimglina* customary conflict resolutions have been practiced in different forms like *kebele* level *shimglina*, village level *shimglina*, neighbor level *shimglina* and family level *shimglina*. It is the major and widely used conflict resolution mechanism practiced in rural land disputes (Interview with elder 5 at Lijome *kebele*, 7th February, 2020).

Shimgelina is the mechanism that practiced largely in the resolution of land disputes in the rural society of Amhara (WB, 2012b), and Yohanness (2003). Besides, the informants asserted that the community in the study area practiced it to handle land disputes that arise within community members at the grass root level by using the wisdom of *shimageles* (elders and religious leaders) for the harmonious life of the community, to reestablish the then peaceful interaction of the parties who were in disputes and to maintain inter individual and intra community solidarity. As key informant stated in the following way:

In the institution of shimglina mediators and conciliators are residents within their community they are living. They work in the resolution of land disputes for the shared benefits of the disputant and for the general community, since they are closely connected with the disputants as a member of the community (Interview with elder 4, who resolved his land disputes through shimglina at Sebatamet kebele, 11th February, 2020).

The society in Ethiopia is making innovative use of the customary institutions to resolve disputes on land and other natural resources (Kassa, 2020). As land is one of the most important natural resource

for the Amhara, the community used the indigenous or customary institutions for land dispute resolution (WB, 2012b). Equally, in the study area, there are various variants of *shimglina* customary or indigenous disputes resolution institutions which are practiced to resolve land and land related disputes in the community and they are serving the community in keeping the peace of the society more than government disputes settlement institutions. *Shimgelina* have different variants in the community as it is stated above. Disputants were settle their land disputes based on their choice from the above listed variants of *Shimgelina*. The informants also explained that, *Shimglina* is a preferable and respected dispute resolution mechanism in land disputes (FGD1 with elders at *Wojer kebele*, 9th February, 2020). Furthermore, elders also described it as follows:

*Shimglina serve as a mechanism to resolve land disputes to maintain the community in peace and stability based on its respected shared norm of the society that promotes forgiveness, tolerance, peaceful coexistence, respect and truthfulness are among others. The variants of the practices *shimglina* customary conflict resolution mechanism are hierarchical in the community. The dispute resolution activity is guided by the traditional shared norms and values (Interview with elder 6 at *Tentakerkose kebele*, 17th, 2020).*

In this regards, Kariuki, (2015) explained that dispute resolution by the social facts (norms and values) is important to solidify the peaceful coexistence of the society and to restrain the action of the disputants because dispute resolution by elders itself is a social fact. Therefore, individual disputants as a social actor cannot be out of it.

As key informants revealed, there are different the hierarchies of *shimglina*. *Kebele* level *shimglina* is the highest level of *shimglina* in the study area. The *shimageles* at this level is called “*Yehager Shimagine*” and the actors of *shimglina* in this level are *shimageles* (elders and religious leaders) that are selected from the villagers within the *kebeles* who are well respected and well known in dispute resolution. The community has the right to follow up the procedure of the reconciliation. This form of *shimglina* is more effective in resolving communal land disputes between the community and individuals that happened due to squatting on communal lands. In addition, the *kebele* level *shimglina* by *yehager shimagine* is practiced to resolve more serious escalated problems of land disputes (Interview with elder3 and religious leader1 at *Lijome kebele*, 24th and 5th, 2020).

The second level of *shimglina* is village level *shimglina* which is functioned within the members of one village or within one *Iddir* (self-help association of the village). Despite, the primary purpose of *Iddir* is for funeral related services within its members but now their service in the rural community extends to settle disputes which arise within its members. In this self-help association land disputes are governed based on their established norms and rules. The informants indicated, this level of *shimglina* is functional and effective to settle land disputes in which it were happened in one village members and included in one self-help association (Interview with elder 2 *Feresewoga kebele*, 5th ,February, 2020).

In addition, *shimglina* in this level involved three chiefs of one *Iddir* (self-help association) and elders. In the procedures of the resolution, it is mandatory to all members of the *Iddir* or villagers to attend the meeting and can suggest their ideas in relation to the disputes. Reconciliation could be conducted based

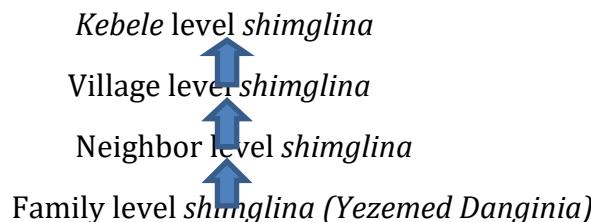
on the values of the community and the wrongdoer is punished based on the specific rules of the *Iddir* in terms of money.

The third level of *shimglina* is neighbor level *shimglina*. It is practiced by farmers who are living as neighborhood in one village and they are interconnected through the social ties such as *wodaje*, grateful, *yekeristena lij*, and marriage. This level of *shimglina* dispute resolution mechanism is effective to settle land disputes which could be happened between neighborhoods in one village. It is important to resolve disputes of divorce related land division, inheritance; cattle crop distraction dispute, private grazing land dispute, drainage directions, access to pathways dispute and plant shade disputes that arise between or among neighbors (Interview with elder 4 and religious leader 1 at Sebatamet *kebele*, 23rd February, 2020).

The fourth level of *shimglina* is *shimglina* in the family level. It is called *yezemed danignet* (family arbitration) (Focus group discussion with elder1 at Wojer *kebele*, 9th February, 2020). The *shimglina* processes is facilitated, negotiated, and reconciled through blood relationships of the disputants or the relatives and family members of the disputants (Getachew, 1998 and Yoseph, 2006). This forms of *shimglina* customary disputes resolution practice is used significantly when the rural land and land related disputes are within family members. Mostly, it is importantly used to resolve intra family land disputes that arise due to inheritance of the rural land of their family, divorce related land division disputes, donation disputes and it did vital role in the harmonious existence of families (Interview with elder 3 at Tentakerkose *kebele*, 17th, February, 2020). Therefore, this evidence indicated that *shimglina* contributes great role in the peaceful relationships of families and for the restoration of their harmonious interactions in their day to day social and economic interactions.

In addition, to the above mechanisms, the Amhara community utilizes the social capital of the society to resolve disputes (Birhanu, 2018). The informants also stated, "Some land disputes aroused between individuals and the community were resolved in *Iddir* and sometimes in *mahiber*" which is the other variant or form of *shimglina* in the community. This indicates, the social capital of the community in the study area served to settle land dispute. From the all variants of *shimglina* the researcher understands *shimglina* is a culture of peace established based on values, attitudes, traditions, norms and the modes of behavior that is about shifting mindset of disputants and behavior in all conflictual, disputable aspects of the community, the journey from force to value and norm based reason, from dispute and conflict to dialogue to heal the wounds of the conflict and reach to the umbrella of peace.

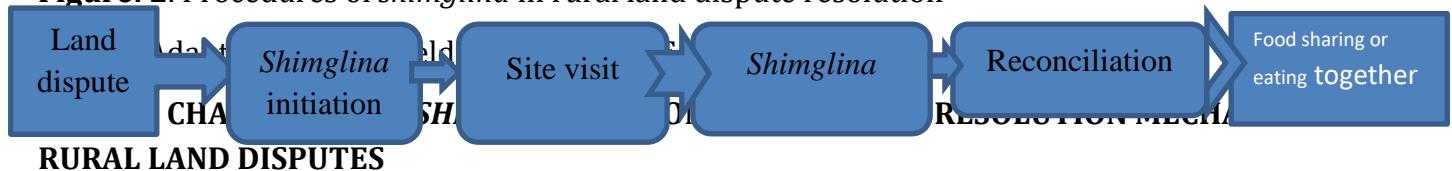
Figure: 1. Levels of *shimglina* customary conflict resolution in rural land disputes among the rural community in the study area



Source: Adapted from the collected data (March, 6th, 2020)

In this level of *shimglina*, there is no separation of authority in the settlement of rural land disputes. Thus, disputants have the right to take their cases to any level of *shimglina* based on their choice or preference. *Shimglina* significantly helps the community to restore the broken social ties due to land disputes that were happened between individuals, groups and families (Interview with elder 1 at Tentakerkose *kebele*, 5th February, 2020).

Figure: 2. Procedures of *shimglina* in rural land dispute resolution



RURAL LAND DISPUTES

The collected data showed *shimglina* customary conflict resolution mechanism has been encountered many challenges in settling rural land disputes. The challenges have negative influences in the handling of land disputes effectively (Interview with elder 2 at Sebatamet *kebele*, 9th, February, 2020). The implementation of customary conflict resolution in rural land dispute settlement practices has been challenges from different directions (Kassa, 2020 and Girma, 2014). The main challenge was designing appropriate policies and institutional frameworks that create conducive environment for an effective deployment of customary dispute resolution institutions in rural land disputes (Mequanent, 2016). According to the collected data, the challenges of *shimglina* customary conflict resolution in rural land disputes resolution in the study area community are discussed below:

a. The Absence of Incentives

Shimglina customary conflict resolution through *shimageles* (elders and religious leaders) had no incentives for their disputes resolution activity from anybody (Bamlak, 2013). The informants also added that the absence of encouragements negatively influence the *shimageles* (elders and religious leaders) interest in their dispute resolution activity and on their effectiveness. They provide voluntary or free service to their community by scarifying their time that was very important in their personal agricultural activities. They serve in the resolution of disputes in the community as a moral responsibility and as well as they are concerned for the peaceful existence of the community members. Therefore, the absence of incentives is one of the challenges in *shimglina* customary conflict resolution in land disputes (FGD2 with the elderly arbitration committee at Feresewoga *kebele*, 11th February, 2020).

As most informants agreed, land dispute resolution in the community took their time that is important for their personal work to feed their family members. Agricultural activity by its nature needs a lot of time to cultivate. Therefore, providing *shimglina* dispute resolution service consumes their time especially during farming and harvest season. They also told, "we are unpaid judges in resolving land and land related disputes by our traditional wisdom but the government did not support us in different things like money or other things to credit our service" (FGD2 with the elderly arbitration committee at Feresewoga *kebele*, 11th ,February, 2020). There were no budget or financial support in the practice

of *shimglina* customary conflict resolution mechanisms in rural land disputes settlements to the *shimageles* (elders and religious leaders, even though most disputes are resolved at local level through customary systems of *shimglina* (A religious leader 2 at Sebatamet *kebele*, 23rd February, 2020).

b. The Influence of Globalization

Due to the influence of globalization and the modern formal dispute resolution system, new ideas are introduced and inculcated in the society (Kariuki, 2015). Similarly, some young members of the community in the study area are influenced by the effect globalization and the introductions' and expansion of the modern legal system of disputes resolutions and shared new ideas that results to changes of understanding towards *shimglina* customary dispute resolution in rural land disputes as backward mechanism of the ancient society. This makes them negligent to accept and respect the values of the community which are important in customary dispute resolution (Interview with elder 3 at Wojer *kebele*, 9th, February, 2020). This evidence indicated, there were existed some levels of influence of globalization and modern education on the young a little schooled member of the community. Furthermore, two members of elderly arbitration committee stated the issue in the following ways:

*Young farmers in our area were educated with compared to the majority of the farmers and they are at least grade 10th and 12th completed. Due to the influence of their modern education, the values they give to *shimglina* in rural land dispute were reduced. Even though they were taking their land dispute to *shimglina*, mostly they violate the decisions of elders and agreement of themselves (FGD2 with the elderly arbitration committee at Feresewoga *kebele*, 11th, February, 2020).*

c. The Low Attention Given by the Government to *Shimglina* Customary Dispute Resolution Mechanism

In developing countries the significance and practical implementation of customary strategies have been very much disenabled by the politicization, corruption and abuse of traditional structures, which have gradually, affects negatively the conflict resolution built around them in the eyes of the people and reduced confidence in their efficiency (Boege, 2006 and Kariuki, 2015). Lacks of attention to *shimglina* were one of the challenges in the practices of *shimglina* for land dispute resolution. In affirming this idea, two key informants summarized this issue in the following way:

*In our area, *shimglina* in general and *shimageles* (elders and religious leaders) in particular are given less attention by the government to settle different cause of rural land disputes. For the advancement of *shimglina*, in settling different rural land and rural land related disputes, the support and promotion of the government is very significant. Despite the fact that, the governments more focus on informing the community about the formal mechanisms of rural land dispute resolution institutions rather than encouraging the community in using the local dispute resolution mechanism in local land dispute problems. i.e. *Shimglina* through local elders and religious leaders in the community to resolve land and related disputes. The government did not give recognition to the work of elders and religious leaders in land dispute resolution and only call us for when land disputes were escalated in our locality. We calm down the disputes, soon after*

the governments forget us. More over the government use us for political input to interact with the community and to protect their interest in land related benefits (Interview with elder 4 and religious leader 2 at Tentakerkose kebele, 24th, February, 2020).

d. Unable to Resolve the Land Disputes between Individual Landholder, community and the Government

According to research informants, *shimglina* customary conflict resolution mechanisms in rural land disputes cannot resolve the disputes that arise between individuals, community and the government due to land expropriation and land valuation because of the absence laws and rules related to the problem. The issue of rural land dispute between individuals, the community and the state in the study area were aroused when there were land expropriations by the state of rural land under individual and community holding for various purposes like industry site and flora farm investments without enough compensation and fair land valuation (Interview with Woreda land administration experts). One of the land administrations experts summarized this issue in the following way:

The problems were occurred due to the fact that, the government did not allow the issue to Shimlina by shimageles (elders and religious leaders). The disputes were resolved by the governmentally established grievance hearing committee in the rural land administration and use offices. The problem here is those committee members are political appointees any they try to solve the dispute based on the law of the state and they lack neutrality in their decision and favors to the government ((Interview with elder 2 at Tentakerkose kebele, 15th, February, 2020).

6. Conclusion

This study was carried out in Bahir Dar Zuria Woreda to examine the practices and challenges of customary conflict resolution mechanisms in rural land disputes. The findings showed that the resolution of land disputes by customary conflict resolution mechanisms are largely practiced in the community. *Shimglina* customary conflict resolution mechanisms are practiced in the resolution of land disputes in the community. There are various variants of *shimglina*. The various variants of *shimglina* institutions are used to settle land disputes in the community and *shimglina* plays great role in the resolution of land disputes. Local elders and religious leaders are responsible actors in the practices of *shimglina* conflict resolution mechanisms to create harmonious relation between or among the disputants.

Rural land disputes were addressed through *shimglina* customary conflict resolution mechanisms in Bahir Dar Zuria Woreda people such as disputes related to land ownership, boundary trespass, land inheritance, donation, land transfer, share cropping, plant shade, drainage direction, divorce related land disputes, livestock destroy crops, disputes on grazing land, access to pathways disputes, dispute on squatting communal lands and land grabbing disputes.

The findings indicated that *shimglina* customary conflict resolution in rural disputes have been best for the rural economically poor community in many ways like cost effectiveness to run their dispute case, builds the broken relationships of the disputants through forgiveness, consensus based participation in

the process of dispute resolution, timely response or speedy resolution, accessible to their locality, and complementary service to the government to fill gaps were the strength of *shimglina* customary conflict resolution mechanisms in settling rural land disputes in the case study area.

Concerning the challenges of the practices customary conflict resolution in rural land dispute, the result of this study reveals that *shimglina* customary conflict resolution mechanisms has encountered and faced many challenges in settling rural land disputes that occurred within the community at large. These challenges were; the absence of incentives to elders and religious leaders, the absence of legally recognized enforcement mechanisms for the decision *shimageles* (elders and religious leaders), the low attention given by the government to *shimglina*, influence of the government and the politicization of *shimglina*. Based on the findings, the researcher, recommends the regional and local governments should give high attention to *shimglina* by elders and religious leaders as a result of local disputes can be better resolved by the customary conflict resolution practices of *shimglina* in the study are, the community members should give more attention to *shimglina* customary conflict resolution systems which has been used since ancient time and fits into the local people culture of peace, economic activity, and social organization, as well as the history and political organization of the community in the study area to promote mutual support and solidify harmonious co-existence.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS AND ROLES

All of the research activities in this study are done by **Asmare Shetahun Alemneh**

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Debo: A customary mechanism of performing agricultural tasks together.

Derg: The Military Council ruled over Ethiopia from 1974-1991.

Gilgil: Conforms to a kind of amicable process of dispute resolution.

Iddir: A customary institution used for ceremonial of sorrow.

Irq: The term Irq is the Amharic translation of the term conciliation.

Kebele: It is the lowest unit of local government in Ethiopia.

Mahiber: An association which is organized for the feast of saints such as St. Michael.

Mehala: An oath and swearing.

Sembete: A religious based practice mainly on the Sabbath day.

Shimlina: This literally means elderliness, denotes dispute solution by elderly persons.

Wodaje: A kind of established good relationship with individuals.

Woreda: It is an administrative division of a local government in Ethiopia that is equivalent to a district.

Yetut lij: A kind of adoption to be relatives based on the religious practices of orthodox Christianity.

Yezemed danginia: Settling disputes by the relatives of the disputants.

Yekirstina lij: A relationship created through God parenthood based on orthodox Christianity.