

The Role of Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanisms for Peace, Security, and Sustainable Development in Ethiopia: The Case of the Mareko and Meskan-Gurage

Zelalem Mulatu and Yohannes Tesfaye, Addis Ababa Education Bureau

Abstract

The recent attention given to indigenous knowledge brought both self-awareness and new alternative for the development of the country. The study on which this article is based was aimed at describing the role of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms for peace, security, and sustainable development in Ethiopia with special emphasis on the Mareko and the Meskan-Gurage. This paper explores indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms of the region, Libidan Haafan Dumitcho of the Mareko and Feragezgn of the Meskan-Gurage and their role for peace, security, and sustainable development in the area under the study. Ethiopia is rich on indigenous knowledge which originated from its cultural diversity. It has been practicing various indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms for many centuries. Among these knowledge, indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms have a significant role for the country. Descriptive qualitative research method was used with semi-structured face-to-face interviews to collect data. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data. The desired end result of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms is of harmony, solidarity and shared dialogue among conflicting parties, not punishment. The absence of a clear policy direction in the application of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms has been found to be a limiting factor. However, indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms have great unused potential in maintaining peace, security, and sustainable development among a multiethnic and multicultural society such as Ethiopia, in general, and South- Central, in particular. The finding reveals that indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms are suitable and successful in the region to maintain peace, security, and sustainable development.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge, Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanisms, Peace, security, and Development.

Introduction

Several kinds of interest lead human beings into conflict. Consequently, conflict deteriorates peace, security, and development of either on an individual level or a group. Concerning this Dinkessa (2017) stated that conflict happens as uncertainties. It can arise from the mismatch of aims between individuals or groups. When you consider the diverse society, we live in, with so many different backgrounds, perspectives and approaches to life, it is not surprising that conflict is established as part and parcel of our everyday life. However, conflict can be handled and managed through both traditional and modern conflict resolution mechanisms. By doing so, it is possible to sustain peace, security, and development of an individual or a country.

In Ethiopia and elsewhere in Africa, indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms have a great role for the effective management of conflicts. These institutions can handle a conflict at any stage if

they are free from any influence. One of the very reasons for the effectiveness of these institutions is their attachment to the totality of people's life. Regarding this Murithi, (2006) stated that Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms refer to the local approach that communities use in resolving localized disputes through historically accumulated and locally defined knowledge, culture, and practices. Indigenous conflict resolution mechanism originates from the custom of the people as practiced over a long period, accepted by the community as governing principle, and hence binds the society, a breach of which entails social reaction and even punishment (Dagne and Bapu, 2013:2).

Indigenous mechanism to conflict resolution is made by the people not by the state and derives its legitimacy from participation and consensus of the community, and its recognition of the same by the government (Abera, 2000:839).

Conflict resolution mechanisms in Ethiopia can be generally classified as indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms (informal conflict resolution mechanism) and state justice system (formal conflict resolution mechanism) (Alula and Getachew: 2008). The formal conflict resolution mechanism in Ethiopia is mainly European origin (Ayalew, 2012:8). It was introduced in Ethiopia in the 1960s, and subsequent laws were issued by succeeding governments. According to Alula and Getachew (2008:1), indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms are predominant throughout the country at local level and they are the dominant justice system.

Ethiopia is the home for various ethnic groups. Almost all ethnic groups have developed indigenous mechanisms of conflict resolution. The area in south-central Ethiopia is inhabited by several ethno-linguistic groups. Features which include social traditions, values, norms, beliefs, rules, and laws, have connected and are accepted among the respective communities for peaceful co-existences. Abera (2000) argues that these indigenous conflict resolution institutions of different ethnic groups have been the major body of law in Ethiopia for centuries. Furthermore, the studies of (Lenin Ayehu, and Gemechu, (2018), and Abebe, Samson and Tessema (2015) show that the local communities preferred indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms to modern courts. The region in south-central Ethiopia is among the diversified regions of the country where different ethno-linguistic groups live for time immemorial.

Like other regions, here also these ethnic groups have developed their own indigenous mechanisms of conflict resolution with certain peculiar features. The major indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms of the region are *jarsumma* of the Arsi-Oromo, *Libidan Haafan Dumitcho* of the Mareko, *ye-Silte-serra* of the Silte, and *Feragezgn* of the Meskan-Gurage. For time immemorial, they have played major roles in maintaining peace and security in the area. This paper explores the role of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms for peace, security, and sustainable development in Ethiopia, with special emphasis on south-central Ethiopia.

Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms are one of the prevailing tools for peace, security, and sustainable development in Ethiopia. Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms have been in

existence in south-central Ethiopia since time immemorial. The government has recognized these institutions and the role played by indigenous actors and their relationship with the state law is a apparent. In south-central Ethiopia, the people have developed their own indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms. There is interconnection among these indigenous conflict resolution institutions. The inhabitants of the area, through their institutions, resolve their conflicts. For instance, the Mareko elders through their indigenous conflict resolution institution called *haffan dumicho* mediated and made resolution on the 1992 conflict between the Silite and the neighboring Arsi-Oromo.

Recently, these indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms have received growing attention as shown by an increase in research activities, publications, and policy interest as well as a growing attention given by the government, judiciary and the civil society (Gowok, 2008). Authors like [Daniel, 2016; Dinkessa, 2017; Lenin and et al, 2018; Daniel and Getu, 2019; Kairedin, 2020; and Kebede and Wondu; 2021], studied indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in south-central Ethiopia on issues such as the nature, process and roles of elders in conflict resolution. However, almost all of these researches mainly focused on the nature, process, and roles of elders in the indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms. They did not emphasize on the role of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms for peace, security and sustainable development. Hence, this study will contribute to fill this gap and to stimulate debates on how to develop the knowledge by using the experience of the Mareko and Meskan-Gurage ethnic groups of south-central Ethiopia as a case study. The study answered the following research questions:

- What are the nature and processes of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms among the Mareko and Meskan-Gurage groups in south-central Ethiopia?
- What are the roles of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms among the Mareko and Meskan-Gurage ethnic groups in south-central Ethiopia?

Research Methods

The descriptive and historical approach as well as case study was utilized in analyzing the subject matter which is presented in a narrative form. Both primary and secondary sources were used. Under primary source, oral information was gathered from an eyewitness account and the so-called living archives. Under secondary source, materials like thesis, articles, and books were used. Secondary data were also employed in the methodical and systematic analysis of the phenomenon under investigation. The organization of data analysis was done categorically. The idea was to find out the role of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms for peace, security, and sustainable development in Ethiopia, special emphasis on the Mareko and Meskan-Gurage. This procedure can help to present clear information for understanding the process of the study.

Results and Discussion

Description of the Study Area

The main abode of Mareko and Meskan-Gurage is South-central Ethiopia. This region is inhabited by several ethno-linguistic groups. Among them the Arsi-Oromo, Mareko, Meskan-Gurage, and Silite have had social, economic, and cultural interaction for time immemorial. The majority of the people in the study area earn their living from agriculture. Crop and livestock development are the major agricultural activities. Trade also supplements the economic (Yohannes, 2017).

The Mareko and Meskan-Gurage societies have their own beliefs, culture, values and norms. Obviously, the Mareko and Meskan-Gurage societies had their own socio-political and economic background. However, due to their age-old interaction, they share one another's culture. These two peoples have common ways of life: for instance, traditional coffee ceremony, wedding ceremony, mourning ceremony, hair style, dressing style, inhabiting mode, religious festivals, and so on (Informants; Imam Tuke. Demke Ahmed). In addition, interaction can be seen through the practice of giving peace among them, regardless of whether they know each other or not. They even share house utensils (Informants; Imam Tuke. Demke Ahmed). They do not interact only in the economic and social aspects, but also in religion. People of Mareko have been practicing different kinds of traditional beliefs and practices which have shaped the socio-economic and political life of their society.

An Over View of the Mareko Ethnic Group

The Mareko are one of the ethnic groups living in the south-central Ethiopia. They permanently live in Mareko wereda (district), which is found between 7:55' S and 8:04'N Latitude, and 38:26'W and 38:33' E longitude (Yohannes Tesfaye, 2007). Their ethnic group consists of 66 clans and hundreds of sub-clans. Among these 66 clans of Mareko, 49 clans now permanently live under the administrative division of Mareko district, and the rest Mareko clans live in the neighboring Meskan district and Silite Zone (Daniel, 2002). At present Mareko Wereda is one of the thirteen weredas that make up today's Gurage Zone which is under the administrative region of Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State. Until 2004 Mareko people and Meskan Gurage were under the administration of Meskanena Mareko district (Wereda). However, after 2004 the Mareko and Meskan became separate Weredas (districts) of the Gurage Zone. Subsequently, Mareko district was established (Informants: Demke Ahmed). Mareko district is located in the eastern part of the Gurage Zone whereby it shared boundary with Oromiya Regional State in the eastern part, Meskan wereda (district) of Gurage Zone in the western part, Sodo wereda (district) of Gurage Zone in northern part, and with Silite wereda (district) of Silite Zone in the southern part of its territory.

An Over View of the Meskan-Gurage

The permanent residence of the Meskan-Gurage people is Meskan *wereda* (district) around Butajira town in the Gurage Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPRS). It is approximately 130 km south of Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia,

and 65 km east of Wolkite, the administrative center of the Gurage Zone. The Mesqan speaking area is bordered by Kistane to the north, Silt'e to the south, Dobbi and Muher to the north-west and Mareko *wereda* to the east. Until the 1970s, Mareko *wereda* and Meskan *wereda*, the present permanent abode of the Mareko people and Meskan-Gurage people, respectively was under one administrative division known as Mareko *wereda* (Archive, 1848/67 and 7898/67).

Today the Mesqan *wereda* comprises of 41 *kebele* and one minor municipality, Butajira. According to the CSA estimate the total number of Mesqan speakers amount to 251,090 among whom 85,784 are male but 165,306 females. This number includes the Dobi. Mesqan is the dominant group in the *wereda* but there are also people from Silt'e, Amhara, Tigre, Oromo and Sebat-Bet Gurage who live in peaceful coexistence with the Mesqan (CSA).

The life of the Mesqan is based on agriculture and trade. Their staple diet is based on *ensat* 'false banana'. The most popular local foods which are considered parts of Mesqan's culture include: 'gocho', food prepared from the pith of the false banana', cheese, cabbage, and row meat. Most of the Mesqan people are followers of Islam.

Major Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanisms of the Mareko and the Meskan-Gurage

Libidan haffaan dumicho: An Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanism of the Mareko

Among the Mareko, there is legal pluralism. An Indigenous Conflict Resolution, Religious law (Sheria), and state legal system jointly solve any problems among the Mareko. The Mareko call their indigenous conflict resolution mechanism *Libidan Haffaan Dumicho* (literally means shade assembly of Mareko) or *Meie'n sera* (law of *Meie*). The Mareko call their land "Meie", and their neighbors call it "Mareko". However, the Mareko use both interchangeably. Based on lineage system *Libidan Haffaan Dumicho* has four forms of administrative structure. Mareko elders work at various levels of the *Libidan Haffaan Dumicho* both as local leaders and mediators. *Anane Dumicho* (Family Assembly), *Wagishten Affo* (Assembly of sub-clan), *Weemegichotee* (Assembly of clan), but this is the lowest of *Libidan Haffaan Dumicho*. Based on its structure and function, of these four levels, the *Anane Dumicho* (Family Assembly) is the first which resolves problems that may occur within a family. It is followed by *Wagishten Affo* (Assembly of sub-clan). Under this level, cases and conflicts which did not get resolution at *Anane Dumicho*, the family level, will be presented. *Weemegichotee* (Assembly of clan) is the third level of *Libidan Haffaan Dumicho* in which cases and conflicts within a clan will be presented and managed. The final and the main decision-making assembly of the Mareko nation is called *Libidan Haffaan Dumicho or Meie'n sera*. It manages disputes which may arise among the Mareko clans; other integrated ethno-linguistic groups and the neighboring ethnic groups.

Ye feragezgn sarra: An Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanism of the Meskan-Gurage

Like their neighbors, the Meskan are also served by legal pluralism. An Indigenous Conflict Resolution, Religious law (Sheria), and state legal system jointly solve any problem among the Meskan.

Ye feragezgn sarra is the last conflict resolution institutions in the Meskan-Gurage. It gives solutions to any type of conflict in the society. Concerning this Kebede and Wondu (2021) reported that in this institution the conflicting parties do not have the right to appeal after verdict. Thus, this is the last conflict resolution institution in the Meskan-Gurage. According to the informants, *feragzegn* is the highest and last institution which gives final decisions in Meskan *woreda*. People cannot appeal after the *feragzegn's* decide on the issues. Thus, this branch is a non-appeal institution. The members of *feragzegn* decision makers are nominated on ethnic basis. In addition, age is considered criteria, so that elders should take the position of *feragzegn*. The origin of *feragzegn* is related with religion, particularly Islamic religion. It is found in Embor *kebele* and this institution does not a permanent place for meeting. As a result, it is held in the homes of the oldest *feragzegn*; and the time of the meeting is only every Sunday (Kebede and Wondu, 2021).

Interconnection and Cooperation among the Indigenous Conflict Resolution Institutions among the Mareko and the Meskan-Gurage

As discuss earlier, these two ethnic groups have their own indigenous conflict resolution institutions. There is interconnection and collaboration among the indigenous conflict resolution institutions in the region under the study. The inhabitants of the area, through their indigenous conflict resolution mechanism, mediate each other. For example, in 1992 the Mareko elders through their Haffaan Dumicho mediated and played a major role to resolve the conflict between the Arsi-Oromo and the neighboring Siltie (Informants; Inspector Edamo Kamilo, Obbo Berjano Oddo and Imam Tuke). Apart from these distinctive institutions, the people of the region have established and developed indigenous conflict resolution institutions for common use.

Even if Braukämper's¹ remarks on the interaction of the Mareko and the neighboring Meskan-Gurage is much exaggerated, from September 2018 up to mid-2022, there had been several conflicts recorded between the Mareko and Meskan-Gurage ethnic groups.

The 2018 Meskan-Mareko Conflict and its Background

The deep-rooted and long-established relationships of Meskan and Mareko have now changed due to several factors. Ownership of nine *kebeles* found in Meskan *woreda* is the main causes of the conflict that occurred between the two ethnic groups. Gurage Zone administration planned to establish a new administrative *woreda* 'East Meskan *woreda*' centered at Inseno town as one of the nine *kebeles* by dividing the former Meskan *woreda*, as a solution for the ongoing conflict in the study area. But this decision of the government aggravated the conflict because the new *woreda* including the nine *kebeles*. In this regard, the Mareko *woreda* aggressively opposed the decision and demonstrated in front of SEPDM head office. One key informant from Mareko *woreda* expressed his fear on this manner:

The decision made by Gurage zone administration has upset the Mareko ethnic group as it is the denial of our right towards the ownership of nine kebeles that historically belongs to us. In my

¹ Ulrich Braukämper. 2012. Stated that "Meskan are the inherited enemy of the Mareko"

opinion, the conflict may arise again for the third round if the regional and federal government do not stop it and bring good solution. We never accept a biased decision that only favors Meskan wereda, one of bête-gurage people (Imam Tuke, Koshe, 9 June, 2021).

Similarly, as most of the focus group discussion participants from the Mareko ethnic group affirm, a serious conflict will occur if this decision cannot be changed by zonal as well as regional administrations because it perpetuates further violent conflicts in the study areas. Any decision will not be applicable in the area before returning the nine *kebeles* to Mareko *wereda* (Berjano, Koshe, and 22th March, 2021).

Attempts to establish the new *wereda* in the study area has worsened the existing situation. After the violent conflict, public reconciliation has been held more than 26 times by assembly of elders from Arsi, Meskan, Mareko, Silti and Sodo neighboring (10 elders each) ethnic groups. However, the upshot of this reconciliation was unable to bring a lasting solution for the conflict.

The Mareko ethnic group has shifted their interests of calming the nine *kebeles* to the status of being a special *wereda*. As *wereda* government informants from Mareko confirmed, they are not given attention by the zone administration because they are not bête-guraghe. Because of that, as the lasting solution, Mareko ethnic group are demanding the status of a special *wereda* from the regional government since they will stop their direct relationa with the Guraghe zone (*Obbo Abdela, Koshe, 13-14th Jun, 2021*). The researcher confirmed that Mareko *wereda* has a direct connection with the regional government running the *wereda* administration.

Among the major actors of the study area, the roles of informal youth associations have worsened the bloody violent conflict between the two ethnic groups. In the case of Meskan and Mareko ethnic conflict, political elites and business owners have been motivating and financing the youth movement before and after the conflict. Key informants from both Meskan and Mareko sides affirm that since the outbreak of the conflict between the two ethnic groups in Sep 13, 2018, youth's (Lodissa) in Koshe, the administrative city of Mareko, blocked the road that links Butajira to Zeway for more than five months. During the violent conflict, they were involved in killing, burning houses, looting and injuring Meskan ethnic groups. Similar measures were also taken by Meskan ethnic youth (Ardee) movements, which is found to be a driving force for changing the latent nature of the conflict into a serious violence.

The Impacts of the Conflict on the Mareko and Meskan Ethnic Groups

The 2018 Meskan-Mareko conflict heavily affected the total life of both parties. However, the magnitude of the loss in human and material wealth varies from area to area. For instance, in the inhabitants of the nine *kebeles* (the hub of the conflict) Yeumerwacho, Bamo, Bati Lejano, Ochageneme, Dida, Bati Futo, Inseno town, and Beche Bulchano, the conflict has been imposing not only considerable impacts on different socio-economic interactions of the communities but has also created security related problems in the area. However, my informants underlined that the presence of an indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms along both ethnic groups and the

commitment of the leaders of these indigenous conflict resolution institutions played a major role for cooling down the conflict. From September 2018 to mid-2022, the only interaction between the Mareko and the Meskan ethnic group was made by the elders of these indigenous conflict resolution institutions, *Libidan Haafan Dumitcho* of the Mareko, and *feragezgn of the Meskan* (Informants; Ato Wuletaw, Ato Mekonnen, Ato Shesu).

Social Impact

The Meskan and Mareko ethnic conflict has resulted in social impact: loss of human life, physical and psychological injury, and separation of families- this was the first of all social impacts in the study area. The most severe outcome of violent ethnic conflict is its social cost i.e., loss of human life. Due to the ethnic conflicts between the two ethnic groups, 63 people have died. It was further indicated that in the two conflict times (Sep, 13th, 2018 and Nov, 14th, 2018) 470 people were heavily wounded, and 55,648 displaced. Moreover, as one *wereda* official informant confirmed, during the conflict displaced pregnant women who gave birth in the refugee camps at Butajira suffered a lot; they were not even treated by the people around them and from the city. Almost all married couples (families) among the two ethnic groups were separated. Inter-ethnic/clan marriage links were disrupted as the conflict replaced friendliness/cooperation with hatred and grievance. (Informant Oboo Berjano, Batu, 20th March, 2021). Moreover, many of the key informants (Ato Wuletaw, Ato Mekonnen, Ato Shesu) asserted that the repeated Meskan and Mareko ethnic conflicts weakened and destroyed social inter-relation between the two ethnic groups until the elders of these indigenous conflict resolution institutions, *Libidan Haafan Dumitcho* of the Mareko, and *feragezgn* the Meskan successfully handled the situation and solved the problem jointly with the government.

Economic Impacts

Besides its devastating impact on social life of both parties, in the economic aspect, ethnic conflict destroyed the very basis of development and discouraged the playing field for sustainable development. The Meskan and Mareko official interviewees confirmed that the ethnic conflict between the two ethnic groups damaged the economic resources of the area. On the 13th Sep, 2018 and 14th Nov, 2018 conflicts, several individual properties were looted and damaged. Social services such as markets, hotels, etc., were destroyed. Moreover, individual houses and cars of both Meskan and Mareko were burned down, and the people were displaced from their residences. The data varied on the number of properties looted, damaged and burned down from both ethnic groups. The Zone's conflict situation reports also indicated that on the 13th Sep, 2018 and 14th Nov, 2018 conflict, lots of individual properties (houses, animals and crops) were looted, burned and lost. Here the elders of these indigenous conflict resolution institutions, *Libidan Haafan Dumitcho* of the Mareko, and *Feragezgn of the Meskan* also played a great role in controlling the problems (Ato Wuletaw, Ato Mekonnen, Ato Shesu).

The Role of Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanisms for Peace, Security, and Sustainable Development among the Mareko and the Meskan-Gurage

Globally, a new beginning of peace, security, and development has emerged in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Gradually, security and development were considered as multidimensional processes whose final goals should be the well-being and safety of the citizens and, with plural actors like private and public and different instruments, not only security and development Grasa and Mateos, (2010:28). Both these indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms have equal competence with government for the advancement of economic welfare, and the task of guaranteeing the basic needs of the population who fell into these institutions.

Human beings value peace and security for sustainability of development. Therefore, for peace and security to take place in the society, the role of indigenous conflict resolution institutions has to be put in place with their support and identification of national policies and programs.

Development can only come in an environment where peace and security prevail. This is the reason many people always believe that development, peace and security work hand in hand. Due this fact, it is said that any society or community that pursues development must support and endorse peace and security within its place. Osajie (2021: 260-261) regarding the role of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms for peace, security, and development in the Horn of Africa, the AU, IGAD, and ILO remarked the following statement:

Formal social protection mechanisms have been unable to meet the needs of these people, and traditional practices have broken down in key areas under the sheer pressure of demands. This all tends towards exclusion and contributes to erode the efficiency of local coping mechanisms in a setting where people are already vulnerable and live below the poverty line.²

Several studies (Badejo 2020; Abutudu, 2003; Neethling, 2005; Ramirez, NY) show the direct relationship between peace, security, and sustainable development. It is also obvious that the sustainability of development is under quotation unless and other wise peace and security is maintained. Like in other regions of Ethiopia, among the Mareko and the Meskan-Gurage, almost all conflicts not only deteriorate peace and security but also abort and affect sustainable development at individual and/or *wereda* (district) level.

As cattle breeder and plough farmers, here among the Mareko and the Meskan-Gurage, conflict at any level fundamentally deteriorates the basic economic activities of the area like plowing, sowing, harvesting, grazing, marketing, transaction and others. These conditions brought food shortage. The best example for this case is the recent Meskan-Mareko conflict. Since its beginning in September 2018, the Meskan-Mareko conflict has left thousands without shelter, food, and clothing on both sides (informants Imam Tuke, Inspector Edamo).

² Employment for Peace, Stability and Development, Draft: Regional Strategy for the Horn of Africa 2011 – 2015, Page 12

As neighbors, there were consecutive attempts made by the neighboring Oromo *Abba Gada* and elders of the Silte to mediate the Meskan-Mareko conflict. However, according to my informants (*Obbo Berjano*), these indigenous conflict resolutions were hijacked by informally organized youth in both ethnic groups while the negotiation was coming to an end. Such conditions witnessed the lack of clear government policy for the implementation of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms.

In both Mareko and Meskan *weredas* (district), farmers did not farm their plot of lands particularly at the hub of the conflict in the nine *kebele* since September 2018. This circumstance made thousands of people refugees in the respective *weredas*. Until the mid-2014 they were in camps. They were under Ethiopian government aids without any personal property (informants Inspector Edamo, personal observation). This and other events witnessed the direct relationship of peace, security, and development in the area under the study.

Withstanding the presence and active political participation of informal youth organizations, in both ethnic groups, the elders finally looked inward to seek a solution for the devastating Meskan-Mareko conflict. The irredentist question of the Mareko was manipulated by the informal youth organization known as *Lodissa*, (means young in the language of Mareko). The Meskan youth were also organized to protect their interest. The informally organized youth group of the Meskan is known as *Aredde*, (means young in the language of Meskan dialect). These two informal youth groups were the center of the Meskan-Mareko conflict. They even had directly and indirectly manipulated their respective ethnic groups' politics from the 2010 political change in the country until the mid-2014. What made worse to handle the Meskan-Mareko conflict through their own indigenous conflict resolutions mechanism was that, due to the popularity that they received from their respective ethnic groups, both *Lodissa* (youth association of the Mareko) and *Aredde* (youth association of the Meskan) had hijacked the elders of *Libidan Haafan Dumitcho* of the Mareko, and *feragezgn* of the Meskan-Gurage elders who were leaders of indigenous conflict resolutions mechanism on both sides.

Besides the role of indigenous conflict resolution institutions, (in both ethnic groups) both the Regional and Federal Government measures and interventions in the study area were effective to reduce the physical damage by deploying the national army and regional police forces. The Federal Government via the Ministry of Peace visited the study area and the victims. After their visit, the Minister of Peace instructed the two ethnic groups to engage on how to better resolve their difference in a peaceful way rather than resorting to violent ethnic conflicts.

Generally, besides the political and other interests that hindered the effectiveness of the implementation, the role of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms had a supplementary role in handling conflict in south-central Ethiopia. According to my informants in this region, conflicts have been better resolved through an indigenous conflict resolution mechanism rather than by the formal state courts.

Conclusion

The cultural diversity of Ethiopia has made the country rich in indigenous conflict resolution institutions. The region, south-central Ethiopia, is a hub of ethno-linguistic and cultural diversity. Here, every ethnic-linguistic group has one or more indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms. The most important indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms of the study area are *libidan haafan dumitcho* of the Mareko, and *feragezgn* of the Meskan-Gurage. However, the establishment of Mareko *wereda* in 2002 became the basic cause for conflict in the study area. Because the nine *kebeles* of Meskan *wereda* have the name of the Mareko ethnic clans that is claimed by Mareko: Yeumerwacho, Bamo, Bati Lejano, Ochageneme, Dida, Bati Fato, Inseno town, Beche Bulchano, and Inseno usemen, it became the main causes of Meskan and Mareko conflict. The appointment of the Meskan *wereda* governor was also found to trigger the conflict in the study area. Specifically, the slogans of demonstrators to support the newly appointed governor in Inseno town (one of the nine *kebele* of the study area) created anger, and then Mareko ethnic groups started destruction of the Meskan owned properties. Especially, youths (locally known Lodisaa) spread-out the violence in the nine *kebeles* that are inhabited by both Meskan and Mareko ethnic groups. As a reaction, the Meskan informally organized youth association also did the same on Mareko's property in the major towns of the area Butajira and Enseno. Based on the information obtained from both communities, the appointment of a new governor of Meskan *wereda* and slogans carried by his supporters were the proximate cause of the bloody violent conflict between the two ethnic groups.

The latent and actual violent conflicts between Meskan and Mareko (particularly in the nine *kebeles*: Yeumerwacho, Bamo, Bati Lejano, Ochageneme, Dida, Bati Futo, Inseno town, Beche Bulchano,) have been imposing not only considerable impacts on different socio-economic interactions of the communities but also have created security related problems in the area.

Similar to the conflict between the Mareko and Meskan, almost all conflicts had been solved only through indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms. These institutions have a great role for peace, security, and sustainable development in Ethiopia, in general, and south-central Ethiopia, in particular. However, sometimes the duty of these institutions is hijacked and aborted by informally organized youth associations, businessmen, and politicians. Such conditions express lack of government policy for indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms.

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