Mengechaha, Indigenous Conflict Resolution among Gumuz Ethnic Group in Mandura District, North West Ethiopia

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Abstract
The objective of this study was to explore Mengechaha, Indigenous Conflict Resolution among Gumuz Ethnic Group in Mandura District, North West Ethiopia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviewe, focus group discussions, non participatory observation and document analysis in Mandura District. The collected data were analysed qualitatively in a descriptive manner. The findings show that the Gumuz people have indigenous conflict resolution which basically aim at restoring peace and harmony within the community for the conflict caused over natural resources competition, exchange marriage, clan based conflict and theft. The indigenous mechanisms were found to be fairly participatory and supplementary to the state machineries that work for justice, peace and harmony.

Key Words: Mengechaha, Indigenous Conflict Resolution, North West Ethiopia, Gumuz

1 Introducion: “Conflict” is term used to mean a variety of things, in an assortment of contexts under the mantle of conflict are words such as, serious disagreement, incompatibilities, fight, argue, contest, debate, combat, clash and war etc. These are the equally evocate terms to understand the term conflict or to know which description of behaviour fit under the title of conflict (Hilal, 2011). Conflict is a situation whereby individuals, groups, or countries are involved in disagreement over an issue. A conflict, as a state of disagreement may lead to crisis or violence (Peters, 2006 cited in Kwaku et al., nd). Here Peters (2006) notes that conflict, at all levels, may arise due to the desire for political, economic and social advantages, greed, ego-related problems, injustice, inequitable distribution of resources and plain mischief.

1.1. African Traditional Dispute Resolution
Africa is represented by a diversity of cultural and religious practices. This diversity affects the approaches to dispute and conflict resolution in the traditional setting. The approaches tend to differ from the western alternative dispute resolution in several respects. In Africa itself, the approach may also differ from one culture to another (Umunadi, 2011). The approaches also differ as one move from one level of conflict with another. There are variations in conflicts involving property, land, family, marriage, communities.

In nearly all African societies and the world at large, there is a preference for the peaceful settlement of dispute along the lines prescribed by the institutions and values of the community (Umunadi, 2011). The idea of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) is about the search for and application of “non conventional” peaceful means of settling disputes and resolving conflict situations using the least expensive methods, and in ways that satisfy the parties, as well as ways that preserve relationship diplomatically after a settlement might have been reached by the two parties (Hornby, 2006).

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2. The following terms interchangeably used as Alternative Dispute Resolution, Traditional Dispute Resolution, Indigenous Conflict Resolution: to mean a set of approaches and techniques aimed at resolving disputes in a non-confrontational way based on the cultures and norms of the society, alternatives to state justice system.
Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in Africa are generally closely bound with socio-political and economic realities of the lifestyles of the communities. These mechanisms are rooted in the culture and history of the African people, and are in one way or another unique to each community. The customary courts rely on goodwill of the society to adhere to its ruling (Rabar and Karimi, 2004, cited in Desalegn et al., 2005).

1.2. Traditional Conflict resolution institutions in Ethiopia
According to Alula and Getachew, 2008 (cited in Daniel, 2016), conflict resolution mechanisms in Ethiopia can be broadly classified as indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms and formal conflict resolution mechanism (state justice system). The formal conflict resolution mechanism (which is provided by the state) in Ethiopia is mainly European origin (Ayalew, 2012:8, cited in Daniel, 2016). Ethiopia is a country, known by archaeologists as a cradle of human kind, where its history can be counted in millennia recognizing those who do in decades or century (Teshale, 1995; Henz, 2000, cited in Wondyrad, 2014). Ethiopia is the home for various ethnic groups. Almost all ethnic groups have developed indigenous mechanisms of conflict resolution. Different ethnic groups like Oromo, Afar, Amhara, Benishangul Gumuz, Hareri, Somale, Sidama, Walayeta, Gamo, Tigray and others develop their own indigenous mechanisms of conflict resolution with certain peculiar features. These features, which comprise social traditions, values, norms, beliefs, rules, and laws, communicated and accepted among the respective communities for peaceful co-existences (Daniel, 2016).

Gumuz, an ethnic group in Benishangul Gumuz region have their own indigenous conflict resolution mechanism, Mengehacha, which being used by the community to resolve conflicts (intra- and inter-ethnic group). This article assesses Mengehacha, Indigenous conflict resolution mechanism, among Gumuz, in Mandura district, North West Ethiopia. The objective was to assess the causes of conflicts, and their indigenous conflict resolution mechanism.

2. Materials and Methodology

2.1. Research Design
According to Beverley H. and et al., 2009), Ethnography is qualitative research methodology for descriptive studies of cultures and peoples. The cultural parameter is that the people under investigation have something in common such as in geographical-a particular region or country, religious, social/familial and shared experience.

In ethnographic research, the researcher frequently lives with the people and becomes a part of their culture. The researcher explores with the people their rituals and customs. An entire cultural group may be studied or a subgroup in the culture. Ethnographic research design was appropriate to conduct this research.

2.2. Data collection tools: The two types of data sources that the researcher used were:
Primary data sources
Observation: The researcher attempted to observe all sorts of activities that have direct or remote relevance on the study. Ceremonies any rituals, Conflict resolution mechanism were carefully observed.

Interview: The researcher used semi-structured interviews with Key informants, knowledgeable elders, to collect data about the Indigenous System of governance or conflict resolution and its role for Gumuz.

Focus group

discussion: The researcher attempted to make a focus group discussion of 8-10 individuals in concerning the process of Mengecheha, the mechanism of indigenous conflict resolution whenever happened. The discussants were purposively selected from elders, womens, leader of the community. The participants discussed the process of Indigenous system of conflict resolution among the Gumuz.
Document analysis: Published books and unpublished materials from different offices, journals, websites, and other material were used as secondary sources.

2.3. Methods of Data analysis: The research process reflects the methodological approach which a team of researcher/s decides to adopt. Ethnographic methodological approaches have been applied to analyze the collected data. The data gathered from primary sources (semi-structured interview, non-participatory observation, and Focus Group Discussion) were arranged in their thematic area or based on the specific objectives and interpreted in a descriptive way.

3. Background of the study area

3.1. Location of Study Area
This study was carried out in Metekel Zone, particularly Mandura district. Mandura is one of the 20 districts in the Benishangul -Gumuz Region of Ethiopia. It is bordered by Dangur in the north and north west, by Pawi Special Woreda in the north west, by Amhara Region in the east, by Dibate in the South, and by Bulen in the South west. http/www.wikipedia.manduraworeda.downloaded 13/08/2017.

Figure 1. Map of the study area (Assefa, 2012)

3.2. Demographics
The 2007 national census reported a total population for this woreda of 40,746, of whom 21,241 were men and 19,505 were women; 7,518 or 18.45% of its population were urban dwellers. The majority of the inhabitants practiced traditional beliefs, with 47.76% of the population reporting they observed this belief, while 39.26% of the population said they practised Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, and 7.59% were Moslem (CSA, 2007)

The four largest ethnic groups reported in Mandura were the Gumuz (87%), the Awi (8.9%) a subgroup of the Agaw, the Amhara (3.9%); all other ethnic groups made up 0.2% of the population. Gumuz is spoken as a first language by 87%, 8.4% speak Awngi, and 4.6% speak Amhara. The majority of the inhabitants practiced traditional religions, with 72.5% of the population reporting beliefs classified under that category, while 24.5% practiced Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity (ibid).
3.3. Physical aspects of the district
The Topography of the area is more or less plain and is characterized as slightly undulating from hilltops towards rivers. The altitude of Mandura ranges from 150m to 1400m A.S.L, thus belonging to the general classification of lowlands of less than 1500m A.S.L. The area is relatively gentle and flat with an average mountain 10%, plain 36%, valley 17% and other 42%. The slope of the Woreda ranges from 0-10% (36%), 10-20% (5%), 20-30% (24%) and greater than 30% (35%) (MWRADO unpublished data, Assefa, 2012).

The soil in general is clay in texture. The major crops grown in the study area are Sorghum, Maize, Groundnut, Sesame, Millet, Rice, Tiff, Adeco, bean, Yam, Kenkes etc, and the major livestock reared are Cattle, Sheep, Goat, Donkey, Mule, Poultry etc. The trees species found in the forest include Wanza, Mecha, Girare, Gambelo, Gravillia, Jacaranda, Spatodera, Sholla, Dogma Bamboo etc. The climatic condition of the area is characterized by tropical hot humid state with an annual rainfall of 900-1400 mm, concentrating in one season, during the months of May-October. Rainfall reaches its peak during July-September. Annual temperature of the area ranges from 15°C to 39°C with mean maximum and minimum temperature of 39°C and 15°C, respectively. The coolest period is July-August (12°C) and the hottest period is March-April (39°C). The agro-ecology of the woreda is 100% moist kola (MWRADO, cited in Ibid).

4. Finding
4.1. Sources (Causes) of Conflict in Mandura district
Conflicts and their causes vary according to culture, security or season. The causes of conflict among communities are diverse, reflecting the geographical, socio-economic and political differences of the regions. According to the data obtained from interviews from Security and Administration head of Mandura district, key informants and Community elders, conflict because of female’s abduction, extramarital sexual relationship with married woman, exchange marriages, belief in an evil eye, clan based conflict (intra or inter clan), enter ethnic and inter personal, revenge, failure to pay loan, conflict over competition of resource e.g. grazing land/boundary, theft and Blood feud (relationship that emerges from homicide within or outside the community) have been a common sources of conflict in Mandura district.

4.2. Process of Indigenous Conflict Resolution in Mandura district
Gumuz, one of Nilotic Ethnic group in Ethiopia have their own way of resolving disagreement emanated from various reason as do other community. Gumuz’s Indigenous conflict resolution process begins with Temba ends with Mangahacha process. It is a mechanism of indigenous conflict resolution which has two phases: Temba and Mengehacha. Temba is an initial stage of indigenous system of governance, which exists in every area where the Gumuz resides. According to the data obtained from interview, Temba means an argument or discussion between the disputants in the presence of known community elders/council of elders, or it is bringing the issues to council of elders. To other informant it means the process of appealing or presenting and discussing any cases or types of conflict to council of elders. Temba, if the victim presented to the council of elders or community elders, it passes different process until it finalized with aritual process, reconciliation process, which is known as Mengehacha.

In any case of dispute, the process starts when the elders, Temba elders begin reconciliation process. Selected community elders from different clan will reconcile the disputants, its process start selecting the places of reconciliation, especially at river or valley area where both sides stands the opposite side of the river. A goat will be brought to the river or valley area by the killers family, and the 2 disputant parties will exchange the position at the river or at the valley. And one of the front leg of goat will be cut and the small intensity of the goat also will be drown out before it is slaughtered, the goat will be slaughtered and the broken half leg will be broken in to two by the disputant (together) by stones and the small intensity of the goat will be stretched until it bursted by the disputant parties by their
teeth. Then, they would reconcile both disputants and make them hug each other and they will go to each other’s house and slaughther hifer and drink a local beer, bordion. Lastly, the community elders will end the meeting or gathering.

Fig. 1 slaughtering of goat

Recommendation
Conflicts are inevitable in human history. The main issue is proper management of it. According to the data obtained from community leaders and other respondents, indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms are important among Gumuz communities in addressing conflicts. But this doesn’t mean it has a potential of resolving it merely in full manner. Hence, indigenous system of conflict governance has to be financed, encouraged, supported, duly recognized and be given equal treatment with the modern court system.

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