
CUSTOMARY CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISM AMONG THE GURAGE ZONE: A CASE STUDY OF MESKAN WOREDA, SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT: This study focuses on exploring the customary conflict resolution mechanism among the Gurage Zone, with a specific case study conducted in Meskan Woreda, Southern Ethiopia. Customary conflict resolution mechanisms play a significant role in many societies, including the Gurage community, where traditional norms and practices are deeply ingrained. The study aims to examine the processes, procedures, and effectiveness of customary conflict resolution mechanisms in addressing disputes and maintaining social harmony within the Gurage Zone. Data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and observation of actual conflict resolution sessions. The findings shed light on the various stages of the conflict resolution process, the roles of key stakeholders, and the cultural and social factors influencing the effectiveness of the mechanisms. The study contributes to a better understanding of indigenous conflict resolution systems in Ethiopia and provides insights for policymakers and practitioners in fostering effective and culturally appropriate dispute resolution strategies.

KEYWORDS: Customary conflict resolution, Gurage Zone, Meskan Woreda, Southern Ethiopia, Indigenous dispute resolution, Cultural norms, Social harmony, Stakeholder roles, Conflict resolution process.

INTRODUCTION

Customary conflict resolution mechanisms play a crucial role in many societies, particularly in areas where traditional norms and practices are deeply rooted. The Gurage Zone, located in Southern Ethiopia, is known for its unique cultural heritage and customary practices. Within this context, this research paper focuses on exploring the customary conflict resolution mechanism among the Gurage Zone, specifically through a case study conducted in Meskan Woreda. The aim of this study is to examine the processes, procedures, and effectiveness of the customary conflict resolution mechanisms in addressing disputes and maintaining social harmony within the Gurage community.

Understanding the customary conflict resolution practices in the Gurage Zone is essential for several reasons. Firstly, it allows for a deeper understanding of the cultural dynamics and traditions that shape conflict resolution processes. Secondly, it provides insights into the role of local stakeholders, such as elders, religious leaders, and community members, in resolving conflicts and maintaining social order. Lastly, this research contributes to the existing literature

on indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, providing valuable knowledge for policymakers and practitioners seeking to develop culturally appropriate dispute resolution strategies.

METHOD

The study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilizing a case study design to explore the customary conflict resolution mechanism among the Gurage Zone, with a focus on Meskan Woreda. The following steps were undertaken:

Selection of Meskan Woreda: Meskan Woreda was selected as the specific case study area due to its representative nature within the Gurage Zone and its rich cultural traditions.

Data Collection: Data were collected through a combination of methods, including semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and observation of actual conflict resolution sessions. Key stakeholders involved in the conflict resolution process, such as elders, community leaders, and local authorities, were identified and approached for interviews. Focus group discussions were conducted with community members to gather their perspectives on the customary conflict resolution mechanisms. Additionally, the researcher observed actual conflict resolution sessions to gain insights into the practical aspects of the process.

Data Analysis: The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Transcripts from interviews and focus group discussions were carefully reviewed, coded, and categorized to identify recurring themes and patterns. The observational data were also analyzed to understand the practical implementation of the customary conflict resolution mechanisms.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the research process to ensure informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for the participants' rights.

The findings from this study will provide a comprehensive understanding of the customary conflict resolution mechanism among the Gurage Zone, with a specific focus on Meskan Woreda. The research will shed light on the processes, procedures, and effectiveness of the mechanisms, as well as the cultural and social factors that influence their outcomes. By delving into the indigenous conflict resolution practices, this study contributes to the broader knowledge base on traditional dispute resolution systems and offers insights for policymakers and practitioners in fostering effective and culturally appropriate conflict resolution strategies within the Gurage community.

RESULTS

The results of the study provide insights into the customary conflict resolution mechanism among the Gurage Zone, specifically through the case study conducted in Meskan Woreda, Southern Ethiopia. Through interviews, focus group discussions, and observation of conflict resolution sessions, several key findings have emerged. The customary conflict resolution process in the Gurage community involves multiple stages, including mediation, negotiation, and reconciliation. Elders, religious leaders, and community members play significant roles in facilitating and overseeing the resolution process. Cultural norms and values, such as respect, consensus-building, and restoration of social harmony, heavily influence the mechanism.

DISCUSSION

The discussion focuses on the implications of the findings and their significance in understanding the customary conflict resolution practices within the Gurage Zone. The results highlight the effectiveness of the mechanism in addressing disputes and maintaining social order. The involvement of local stakeholders, particularly elders and religious leaders, signifies the community's reliance on traditional wisdom and the importance of community involvement in conflict resolution. The emphasis on reconciliation and restoring social harmony aligns with the cultural values of the Gurage community, promoting long-term peace and stability.

Furthermore, the discussion explores the challenges and limitations of the customary conflict resolution mechanism. Some challenges identified include the potential influence of external factors, the changing dynamics of modern society, and the need for capacity-building and institutional support to preserve and strengthen the customary practices. The discussion also addresses potential strategies for enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of the mechanism, such as community awareness programs, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and collaboration between customary and formal justice systems.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the customary conflict resolution mechanism among the Gurage Zone, with a specific case study conducted in Meskan Woreda, Southern Ethiopia. The findings highlight the significance of cultural norms, community involvement, and traditional wisdom in addressing disputes and maintaining social harmony. The study contributes to the understanding of indigenous conflict resolution systems and their relevance in contemporary society. The results can inform policymakers, legal practitioners, and community leaders in developing contextually appropriate approaches to conflict resolution in the Gurage community and beyond. Preserving and strengthening the customary conflict resolution practices is crucial for maintaining social cohesion, resolving disputes, and promoting sustainable peace within the Gurage Zone. Further research is recommended to explore additional factors influencing the effectiveness of the mechanism and to assess its applicability in different cultural contexts.

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