

THE ROLE OF MEGENT INSTITUTION IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN SILTIE SOCIETY

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Abstract

Conflict occurs over different sources in Siltie society. In order to aver bad consequences of conflicts the rural society relies on different customary institutions such as Melcho. Taking the informal mechanisms of conflict resolution as one of the most important tools that maintain peace and order in the rural society, this research has been under taken in Megent institution of Siltie society, with the objective of studying the role of the institution in resolving conflicts. A total of fifteen purposive interviews with community elders have been undertaken in three Wordas of Siltie zone. In addition three observations have been undertaken in the research area. In order to meet objectives of the study, qualitative method was used for data gathering and interpretation. The researcher gathered and studied the process and observed same and derived of the roles through interpretation. The results show that the Megent institution plays roles such as peace and harmony in the society.

Keywords: Conflict, Customary institutions, Megent, Conflict resolution, Role.

1. INTRODUCTION

Most African countries have developed and still hold on to various customary laws under which the application of customary institutions of conflict resolution mechanisms is regularly performed in different terms such as Ubuntu in South Africa (Muigua, 2010). The Rwandan societies have been using Gacaca customarily for so long years at a grass root level to handle any sort of conflicts (Zartman, 2000). Conflict resolution amongst African communities has since time immemorial and continues to take the form of negotiation, mediation, reconciliation or ‘arbitration’ by council of elders, (Kazeem, 2009). These institution played great role in bringing peace and harmony. However, each institution may not have the same role and it depends on specific contexts though they may have common things for all (Birgit, B., 200).

In Ethiopia, each cultural community directed its affairs by a system of cohesion and equity through local notables and chiefs acting as arbiters (Getachew, 2010, Mellese, 2008) also argues that there are various social groups and traditional institutions that promote the culture of togetherness, harmony, and cooperation among the people by resolving the conflict at the grassroots level of the communities. This has been playing an important role in supporting the formal law and reducing their burdens through resolving conflicts (Ayke and Mekonnen, 2008).

The Siltie society in Ethiopia is one of the African communities that use customary ways of conflict resolutions such as Megent a well-structured system. These people have an extensive and very rich culture and custom which have been accumulated for centuries and have been handed down from generation to generation as a source of pride of the people. In siltie life “peace is a pervasive and sustained concern”.

Previous studies such as (Alula and Getachew, 2008) and (Keyredin Tezera, 2018) and have studied the megent institution of siltie society in a general manner. However, no previous studies have studies it in the context of its role in specific manner as adequate enough. Therefore this study aimed to fill this gap.

To achieve this purpose, a total of fifteen purposive interviews with community elders have been undertaken in three Wordas of Siltie zone. In addition three observations have been undertaken in the research area. In order to meet objectives of the study, qualitative method was used for data gathering and interpretation. The researcher gathered and studied the process and observed same and derived of the roles through interpretation.

The study is significant for the concerned bodies such as Siltie zone can have policy considerations based on the recommendations and in addition the research can promote further studies in the area.

2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

According to Fisher (1990) and J.Galtung (2004), defined conflict as an incompatibility of goals or values; and in which each parties aware of the incompatibility and perceived it as antithetical to its own goals or values in their relationship combined with attempts to control the antagonistic feelings of each other.

In the physical sense, conflict may be taken to mean a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals (Coser, 1956, cite by Melkamu, 2016).

As discussed above, conflict has various definitions with roughly related meanings and sources. But it has to be resolved well through proper institutions (Bendeman, H., 2007). In this, customary institutions play great role to solve the conflicts (Birgit, B., 200).

According to conflict resolution theorists, conflict resolution needs constructive way of resolving conflicts through proper implementation of the process and ritual of each institution depending on the nature and type of the institution as well as the conflict itself (ibid). Through this, customary conflict resolution institutions play vital roles (Bjarne, V., Erik, H. and Aase, R., 2011).

In Africa, Customary conflict resolution institutions such as gacaca plays great role in resolving conflicts (Bob, M., 2000)

In Ethiopia customary conflict resolutions such as Sera play important roles (Keyredin, 2012). Each customary conflict resolution institutions may have different roles. Therefore, studding case by case is important to have better understanding and best use of it. In the case of Siltie society, the role of Megent institution in resolving conflicts has not been well studied. Hence the study aimed to fill this gap.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter was concerned with the presentation and the analysis of the data gathered from different sources to answer the main objectives of the study. The data were analyzed in accordance with the research questions.

A. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Informants

It is very necessary to look at the socio-demographic characteristics of the informants to have some hint about the population under investigation. It includes age, sex, educational levels, marital status, occupation, religious background and social position of the informants in the study area.

I.Age and Sex of the Informants

Table1: Age of the informants

No	Age	No of Informants
1	50-65	4
2	65-80	6
3	80-85	5
Total		15

Source: from own field work/interviews' data, 2023.

A total of fifteen (15) participants engaged in this study. According to Table1, from 15 informants, 4 are from 50-65 years old, 6 are from the age of 65-80 and 5 informants are from 80-85 years old respectively. This indicates that the majority of the informants selected from the age of 50-85 years old. These informants were selected from community elders.

This was because; they are the maturity age and they also active groups physically, as well as, mentally.

Table 2: Sex of the informants

No	Sex	No of Informants
1	Men	15
2	Women	5
Total		15

Source: from own field work/interviews' data, 2023.

According to Table 2, out of 15 participants, the researcher conducted the study with 5 women and 15 men. These informants are selected from members of elders. The majority of participants were selected from men. Because men are mostly took place in conflict resolution over-community elders and they have more experience than women. In general, the researcher has selected fifteen (10) informants from the men, while the rest (5) were selected from women. Because, the men have taken great roles in conflict resolution over-community elders, at all stages.

II.Marital status, religion and educational level of the informants

Table 3.Marital status of the informants

No	Marital status	No of informants
1	Widowed	5
2	Married	10
Total		15

Source: from own field work/interviews' data, 2023.

Table 3 shows that out of the 15 informants, 10 informants were married, whereas 5 are widowed. Thus, the above results of the study showed, more than half of the informants were married and few of the informants are widowed. In general, the above lists of marital status simply shows that, how relatively all individuals who are take part in conflict resolution are married.

Table 4: Religious of the informants

No	Religion	No of the informants
1	Muslim	15
2	Orthodox	0
3	Protestant	0
Total		15

Source-From own field work interviews’ data, 2023

As Table 4 shows, out of the 15 total informants of the study, 15 informants were Muslim, 0 informants were from Orthodox and Protestants respectively. As it is evident from (Table 4) lists of the religions, all of the informants were Muslims. And we understood how all of the Siltie people were Muslim.

Table 5: Educational backgrounds of the informants

No	Educational Level	No of the informants
1	Grade 1-5	5
2	Grade 6-8	4
3	Grade 9-10	6
Total		15

Source: From own field work/interviews’ data, 2023.

As it is indicated in Table 5, from the total informants of fifty-seven (15), 5 informants have learned grade 1-5, 4 informants were learned grade 6-8 informants were learned grade 9-10.

III.Social position and occupation of the informants

Table 7: Social position of the informants

No	Status of the informants in the community	No of the informants
1	Community elders	15
Total		15

Source: From own fieldwork/interviews’ data, 2023.

As it is evident from Table 6 out of 15 informants, 15 informants were selected from community elders.

Table 8: Occupation (livelihood) of the Informants

No	Occupation/Livelihood	No of the informants
1	Farming	12
2	Self-employers	3
Total		15

Source: From own fieldwork/interviews' data, 2023.

As it is indicated in Table 7, from the total of (15) informants, almost more than half or 12 informants are the farmers, whereas 3 informants were self-employers respectively. Because, more of the individuals who took part in community elders conflict resolution setting are elderly local individuals and those individuals are the farmers.

B. The Roles of Mgent Institution in Resolving Conflicts in Siltie Society

i. The Sources of Conflicts

According to the key informants' interview with elders, one of the K-6 key informants, in 5/01/2023, at the place of Mierab Azernet-berbere district, commented that:

The serious cause of conflict among the Siltie is conflict over-land between the farmers. The elder also added that a conflict over land inheritance happens in a prevalent way.

According to the results of key informant's interview, 85 years old widow explained land boundary issues and it is quoted as follows:

“When my husband died in 2019, my neighbor started cutting trees on my farm land and later began to cultivate it. When I reported the case to the local authorities, he claimed that was part of his land since we had no clear boundary between his plot and ours. Only small grasses were separating our land.”

One of the key informants interview participants have revealed that land sellers and buyers who used to live in harmony before the registration and certification process often come into conflict during the registration period.

According to key informants, the most complex and prevalent conflicts over inheritance usually happen among family members, especially when father dies without handing over his land to any of the family members. The participant remarked that: land related conflict occurs mostly between the same brothers on sharing their parent farm-land. Similarly, among the key informant interview with elders, K-2 informant, in 23/02/2023, said that:

The land inheritance issue is the major source of conflict in the Siltie society when heirs' cannot agree on the part ion of farming lands and properties.

The participant remarked that, land related conflict occurs mostly between the same brothers on sharing their parent farm-land.

As evidenced through interview with community elders, in 09/03/2023, at the place of Medecha, divorce related land problems are the main causes of conflict. However economic factors and resource administration is still another source of divorce conflict. It can occurs either when husbands sells resources such as livestock and land without the consent of the wife or when the wives do the same thing, especially, cereal crops without the consent of the husbands.

ii. The Process of Megent Institution to Resolve the Conflicts in Siltie Society

According to the data gathered from key informants, the nature of Megent institution and its procedures do not vary depending on space and time.

When a person wants to seek resolution of conflict or protection from any conflicting party's revenge, goes to yebad Baliq (elders) and say: "Megent". Mena "I seek protection of the country, the culture, the spirit of the Siltie society). First, once agreement to reconcile is reached, each conflicting party elects members of elders of his own.

Specific Baliq selected by the plaintiff should be accepted or approved by the defendant. Otherwise one party is obligated to ask another Baliq to whom the other party is interested. The number of Baliq for Megent varies based on the complexity of the conflict. Numerically, most of time parties selected between two and five whose purpose is to resolve the conflict at hand. Two Baliqs from both (the plaintiff and the defendant side) commonly known as 'Rubts' or guarantees will be selected.

Among the in-depth interview participants with community elders, one of the I-3 participants, in 11/01/2023, at the place of Hunbosho, identified that:

Rubt is the person who is knowledgeable enough to solve community problems and who speak reality without supporting one side and also who work daily for the community life. The elders deeply try to understand the cases of the conflicts and give the right decision and make peace among the disputants through mutual benefit and sometimes sanctions.

According to the data obtained from the key informants, the Siltie perceives conflicts as a natural phenomenon in everyday life of human interaction. Therefore, they believe that the occurrence of conflicts between or among community members is normal. They have different proverbs to show the natural existence of conflicts between people who interact or come into contact with each other. For example they have a saying "meshinen yehilqetin herat yolebnetin" which means conflict is natural but solving it properly is part of humanity.

Among the key informants interview with elders, one of the K-10 informant, in 11/01/2023, at the place of Mierab azernet-berbere woreda, remarked that:

Megent provider is not an organization established rather a person who have the knowledge and ability of resolving conflict in the area, who have good ideology and act good things in the community, who speak justice and truth and acceptable by the community.

As it is explained by key informants, Megent is mainly characterized by the presence of a neutral mediator between the conflicting parties. The role of a third party as a mediator varies in degree from case to case and the nature of the relationships of persons in the conflict. Where the conflicting parties have no serious problem, there will be face-to-face discussion. A mediator simply facilitates so that the negotiators to arrive at a decision on which both parties agree.

According to the interview with elders, in some cases, the government courts encourage cases to be steered amicably through elders and people engage in Megent process.

The Megent institution has certain procedure of hearing cases. The plaintiff and the defendant come in front of the Rubts (guarantee elders) and present their case by standing there. The plaintiff stands on the right side, and presents his/her case first. While one party is speaking the other party is expected to listen carefully for which he/she responds later and not to speak against. The defendant, who stands on the left side, is the second to presents his /her case. After hearing the cases, the Rubts may ask both parties turn by turn for clarification.

Besides, if the case needs further investigation and one or the two parties conceal the truth, the Rubts try to convince one by one separately. In this process, they use their personal skills and knowledge of cultural norms, values and custom and warn the party by referring to customary laws.

According to community elders, remarked that: If the case is about trespassing one's farm-land border, the elders of the area summon the other party to attend the meeting and ask them about the issue. First they give them cooling period to think on the issue and return to their natural and usual good faith and mind. After hearing the case, they give fair decision based-up-on the reality. In order to make sure how the person speaks reality about the issue at dispute, they use proverbs, examinations and cross examination. Between their speeches they repeatedly use natural, moral and spiritual values that the society collectively exists because of such values. They may have also affidavit and oath.

According to interview with community elders, in 11/01/2023, at the place of Worcha, remarked that: At the end, the parties in the conflict agree on the decision of the elders. They shake hands each other and say "we are from soil and we will pass way. Finally we will be in the soil. The soil is our temporary shelter here." They restore their previous relationship and pace and harmony exists. Finally the elders invite the villagers and relatives to slaughter sheep for a ceremony of reconciliation. However this cannot be usual because sometimes the elders may pass this step based on the gravity of the issue and the level of the grievance of the parties.

Among the in-depth interview with community elders, one of the I-4 informant, in 11/01/2023, at the place of Woshermine, commented that at the end, after the wrong doer/offender admits his/her error, the elders and individuals who came for witness come together and put the stone on their border invite them to oath not to take part in conflicts again. Then, at this time the conflicting groups believe that, if we broke our oath and, our wrong will endanger our generation because of the sinfulness.

So, if a person again tress passes the border, the issues cannot be resolved over the Megent as before, rather the elders refer it to the higher council of elders. By understanding the conflicting group case through listening the left and right witness and the elders make as the conflicting group to excuse each-others through forgiveness or sanction may follow.

In the reconciliation ceremony, the Rubts let the two parties to shake hands with each other and kiss one another. Then, the two party's oath as a sign of joint commitment to peace and reconciliation will be witnessed by all participants.

iii.Procedures of Megent

As evidenced through interview with community elders, in 11/01/2023, at the place of Bilalo remarked that: the conflict resolution is effective in dealing with interpersonal or intercommunity conflicts as far as the approach concerned every detail of the situation based on the society's norm and custom.

It is effectively used at a grass root level to settle conflicts among the people focusing on culture, custom and norms. Therefore, the institutions are organized as a means to find solutions for conflict and conflict related issues.

According the in-depth interview with community elders, 11/01/2023, at the place of Mugaze, one of the I-7 informant identified that: the conflict resolution settings, the conventional procedure involves three steps: to talk or discuss about the matter, call Rubts on each side, to resolve the conflict through the process of hearing and examination of parties before the Rubts and to reconcile the conflicting group. The third component of this procedure is the most important aspect of settings for conflict resolution. It is one of the major merits of customary conflict resolution settings over the formal ones. It is that: the Baliq council has

its own structures and processes that even stipulate the sitting position while analyzing the cases at hand. The sitting position is mostly in a circle form where the Baliq or Rubts possibly see one another face to face. Always, the oldest person among the Baliq or Rubts from the village team opens the case; unless he willingly invites some other person to open the case on his behalf. The elder may open the cases by proverbs or without proverbs. After hearing and examination of parties, decision will be given. After the decision, the conflicting parties will oath not to enter in to conflict once again. In addition to this slaughtering of sheep or ox may be followed as a sigh of happiness for solving the conflicting and restoring the previous prelateship of the parties. However, this is not a mandatory practice unless the parties have capacity to do so and the gravity of the conflict is high. Finally blessing and rituals to restore the relation of parties will be undertaken.

iv. The Roles of Megent Derived From Discussions Above(A,B)

As derived from the discussions above Megent institution in Siltie society in resolving conflicts plays roles such as resolving crimes, maintain peace and stability in the community, reconciliation of the conflicting parties and their respective families, restitution of victims and reintegration of offenders, restoring the previous peaceful relationship within the community, as well maintaining their future peaceful relationships.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the data and the findings of the study, the following major conclusions are derived in relation to basic questions of the study:

4.1.1. In Siltie society most conflicts occur due to scarcity of resources especially land related conflicts are common.

4.1.2. Based on the Megent conflict resolution institution, the parties resolve conflicts and constitution and the institution plays roles such as: maintain peace and stability in the community, reconciliation of the conflicting parties and their respective families, restitution of victims and reintegration of offenders, restoring the previous peaceful relationship within the community, as well maintaining their future peaceful relationships.

4.2. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations were made to enhance the role of Megent in resolving conflicts in the Siltie society:

4.2.1. To maintain peace and harmony in the siltie society, the Siltie Zone Justice sector should integrate its work with Megent institution through promotion and recognition.

4.2.2. To reduce the over-loads from the government formal court, the Siltie zone courts and police sector should have to working to increase the Megent practices in conflict resolution by creating opportunities for income-generating resources for the institution and provide incentives.

4.2.3. The Siltie Zone Tourism sector should best utilize the benefits and promotions of the Megent institution.

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