

SIGOTETA

**INDIGENOUS CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISM AMONG
DAWURO PEOPLE.**

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Short Introduction about Myself

My Name is Muluken Zeleke, 26 year old. I was born and grown up at Dawuro, Waka town. I have attended my primary school at Guzo primary school, Waka. I have finished my secondary school at Hawassa Tabor eduction Center. I have 2 brothers and 2 sisters. My mother is a teacher and My father is an attorney. Formerly, I was working as General Practitioner at Tarcha General Hospital, Dawuro. Currently, I am lecturer at Woliata Sodo University.

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LOCAL TERM MEANINGS

Anjuwa.....	Blessings
Chima asa.....	Elders
Chasha.....	Cursing
Godere.....	Sweet potato
Siliso.....	Food made of cheese
Dinkiya.....	Musical instrument
Dawortswa.....	Dawuro Language
Sigoteta.....	Making peace
Halala.....	Name of the King
Kela.....	Stone Wall
Wolasa.....	Conflict
Kaysuwa.....	Robbery
Horuwa.....	Abduction
Decha.....	Physical damage
Shempo wedha.....	Murder
Utsa.....	False Banana
Moridaga.....	Defendant
Mortidaga.....	Plaintiff
Tumateta.....	Truth
Maghana.....	Compliant

LIST OF ACRONYMS

SNNPRS.....	Southern Nations and Nationalities People's Regional State
NGOs.....	Non governmental organizations

CHAPTER ONE

1. Introduction

Ethiopia is a country in which various ethnic groups live together for a long period of time. As conflict is inevitable, these ethnic groups have experienced conflict of various types as we understand from our history over different times. As different we are, each ethnic group has its unique way of handling conflicts and disagreements.

The Dawuro people in southern Ethiopia are one of those ethnic groups with their own conflict resolution mechanism also known as '**Sigoteta or Sikoteta**'. In this short literature we will try to see the traditional Dawuro people conflict resolution mechanism. Further more, we will explore the strength and weakness of the mechanism, its current status and what should be done in the future.

1.1 Dawuro zone and Its Geographic features

Dawuro zone is one of the seventeen zones found in the Southern Nations and Nationalities People's Regional State (SNNPRS) which is one of the nine regional states of Ethiopia. It is located in the south-western direction of the country. It is located at about 500 km south west of Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia and 275 km of Hawassa, the capital of SNNPR. It is situated between 6°52'N_7°00'N latitude and 37°07'E_37°26'E longitude. Its total size is 446,082 hectares (i.e. 4403sq. km).

The zone shares borders in the west with Kofa which formerly was its part but later became a special district, in the north with Oromiya region (Jimma zone), in the north east with Khabata-Tembaro, in the east with Wolayitta, and in the south with Gofa zones. Also most of its land is bounded by *Gojeb* and *Omo* rivers.

The total size of the population, according to the 1999 E.C. census, is 543,148. As the census' statistical report indicates, number of females has covered more than half of this figure. With respect to settlement proportion, 89.4% of the total population live in the rural whereas 10.6% live in the urban areas. Dawuro people are the original settlers in the area. They take about 95% of the total size of the population. There are also other ethnic groups living in the area such as Hadiyas, Amharas, Oromos, Wolayittas, Tigres, Gurages,

1.2 Traditional, Cultural and Linguistic features

People of Dawuro have their own traditional features. Regarding traditional food, those living in the highlands mostly use product of *utsa* as their favourite food, yet those living at the lowlands usually use plants such as *godere*, sugar beet, cassava. Well known traditional foods are like siliso, tancho, burto and etc. Concerning religion, Dawuros follow different religions of which Christianity, Islam and traditional beliefs are the main ones. They have varieties of traditional clothes which are dressed at different occasions. Dawuro have their own traditional wedding and condolences expressions.

When we come to musical instruments, we get that the people have their own traditional musical instruments which they play at different occasions such as holidays, wedding and condolence expressions. *Dinkiya* is a typical musical band which is known as world's longest musical instrument.

The language which Dawuros speak is known as *Dawurotsuwa* [dawurot^suwa] or 'Dawuro language'. It is the language which is widely spoken in the area. There are also other languages in the area spoken by other groups. the *Manja* ethnic group speaks which is the Kaffa dialect, takes the second place in terms of number of speakers. Others such as Amharic, Oromiffa and Wolayitta, are also spoken at varying levels.

1.3 Natural resources and other specific features

The area is rich with varieties of natural resources. Forest, surface and underground water, wild animals, and minerals are mentioned among them. The south-western and western part of the zone is largely covered with a natural forest. The huge forest at *Chebera-Churchura*, of the Dawuro zone and *Konta* special district, has been reserved as a national park.

Gojeb and Omo are the two big rivers flowing in the area which have several tributaries. On omo river, Gibe No.3 hydro-electric power dam at Loma district is built. It generates about 1870 megawatt electric power.

The medieval dawuro kingdom was built defensive stone walls. The walls locally called '**Kati Halala Keela**'. The length of the single walls estimated around 150km to 200 km. The sum total of the seven rows to be about more than 1000km. Its average height and width is about 2.6m and 3.5m, respectively.

Chapter TWO

2.1 Definition of Conflict

Traditional definitions of **conflict** regard it as, 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. Conflict it is also named as '**wolasa or wolaqetusa**' in local language are inevitable normal, positive and even sometimes necessary and useful for social changes. In our day to day interaction with others, we either observe disputes which range from the very interpersonal quarrel, family and neighbour dispute, ethnic and inter state conflict.

Generally, conflict could be taken as opposition between individuals, groups, institutions, that arises because of incompatible interests and wishes. Conflicts could be economical, political, social, cultural, struggles within humans at all levels of institutions.

2.2 Causes of conflict among Dawuro people

Every society perceives something as to what the conflict is and why it happens. Anything breaking the rules or any action against the norms and traditions of the society considered wrong. Act of wrong which may lead to conflict can be like not respecting the elderly, lying to others, touching others property to the level of denying their rights.

The most frequent conflict issues in Dawuro society are farmland, grazing land, water and borders. As majority of Dawuro population are farmer cultivating different crops for living and grazing animals. While moving animals for grazing and water usually causes conflict among people. Densely populated highland areas with cliff mountain tomography and scarce resource of land and water, this escalate disagreement and rivalries among people to exclusively control the resource.

The Dawuro have also been experiencing border conflicts among themselves and their neighbours. Conflicts for border among themselves has been manifested between different villages. The more serious reason for conflicts are such as robbery (kaysuwa), rape, abduction (horuwa) murder(shempo wodha), revenge(zaruwa), physical damage and beating(decha) and etc.

Family related issues are another common reason for conflict among Dawuro people. A family consists of parents and children including father, mother, son, daughter, wives, grandfather and grandmother. Conflict within a family mainly caused by conflict over division of labour, resource distribution like land and property management. Mistreatment from husband may be major cause of conflict between husband and wives. Conflict within a family may also involves relationship between cousins, uncles and nephews.

Other common reasons such as violation of agreement for example money lending and failure to pay back and property lending. Adultery and insult are also another reasons for conflict.

Chapter THREE

3.1 Naming and Mechanism of Conflict Resolution

Indigenous conflict resolutions are locally organized institutions working according to the norms and customs of a given society and works according to specific culture of a particular community. Dawuro ethnic group indigenous conflict resolution mechanism is called '**Sigoteta or sigetusa**'. In other part of the community it is also named as '**Sikoteta or Erkiya**' which has similar meaning. The literal meaning of the word is making peace or becoming friends again.

Sigetusa (the indigenous conflict resolution mechanism) is the process which involves mainly four groups of people. The Elders(*chima*) who listen and resolve the conflict, the appealer who claims who has been done wrong or plaintiff (*mortidaga* or *maganiyaga*), the accused group or defendant (*moridaga*) and crowd and family. Each group has their own rights and responsibilities.

Plaintiff and defendant are the main actor of the resolution process without them there would be no gathering. The mediators or elders have main role in decision making. The elders should be trusted by parties of conflict. The elders should be trustworthy, well-spoken, respected and honourable person who shows willingness and determination to help the parties in conflict. The crowd can participate in discussion but have no decision making right.

The elders who act as mediators are respected and highly trusted by the whole community. Elders who are chose to be mediators have characters like wisdom, experience, moral standard, knowledge of the custom of the community, good reputation, exemplary deeds, their ability to analyse and advise disputants, impartial and incorruptible.

The aim of the Sigoteta is directed on restoration of peace and normal relationship as previous between the conflicted groups rather than punishing the wrongdoer. It solves the dispute between disputants and by doing so brings the *Tumateta* (truth) and resolve the conflict. The disputants reach on agreement before any outcome by that restore peace. There is no written law and it is strongly depend on consents of the disputants and custom, norm, spiritual belief of the community to accept the decision. The community use cursing (*chasha*), blessings(*anjuwa*) and oath to abide to the decision of the elders. If the parties which doesn't accept the decision could also be stigmatized from community.

3.2 The procedure followed by the elders and the process

When any type of conflict happens in the community, the plaintiff (*mortidage*) brings his or her or their dispute to the elders. The plaintiff says I/we have *maggana* (compliant) about this and that. It also could be the other way round. The elders first learn about the issue and go and request the disputants to handle their problems and ask them about their willingness if the elders can get involved and facilitate the situation.

Therefore, if both the disputants are willing to be mediated, the elders who are closest relative for either party ruled out from the meditation. Based on the seriousness of the conflict, the wishes of the parties and the number of people involved in the reconciliation process. it can be take place at home, under a tree yard or on open space.

The reconciliation process begins with the separation of parties involved in conflict and reporting the case. Elders give opening speech for what reason they gathered. Reporting the case can be made by the parties themselves, elders, neighbours, eye witness or friends. When the meeting is on, each party asked to give his or her reason for the conflict before the process of resolution begins. In this regard, both parties requested to give an accurate and precise description of what caused the conflict. Then the elders question each parties so that it allows them to understand about cause of conflict, level of damage and decision to be made.

After the issue was discussed between the elders and the cause well identified. The elders make proper decision concerning who is innocent and who is guilty. When making decisions the elders rely on truth. Based on the tradition, value custom and religious beliefs, they make judgement which bring the end to dispute, peace and unity among the parties. Compensation is part of the decision based on cause of conflict and amount of damage insulted.

After decision passed, both parties make an oath not to engage on conflict again and revenge each other. When the parties making the oath they promise if they doesn't keep the oath a very serious result happen on his personal life, family life as well as property. They enforce the law according to the community tradition and agreement. The party which fails to abide get excluded, cursed and socially sanctioned. After that according to scope they will have traditional dinner, borde and the disputants hug with each other, laugh and celebrate.

3.3 The relation between the Formal court system

The indigenous institution(Sigoteta) and the formal court system works in collaboration because their common goal is to keep the peace and security of their community. The indigenous institution is highly accepted by the community so it works to strength the social bond and relation between people. As examples can taken from many parts of Ethiopia, Dawuro traditional approaches to conflict management and resolutions have great potential for managing conflicts and building peace. It works in hand to hand with formal court system. Some cases which can not be managed by the elders will be reported to formal system. The formal system also referee some cases to traditional system to save cost and time. Generally, the two system work together for the benefit of the community.

3.4 The strength, weakness and its current challenges

The strength of traditional resolution institution are it works to tighten the bond inside the community. It can be interpersonal, with in a family or in society as general. It works not to punish but to prevent damage. In cost wise it is cheaper than the formal system and doesn't consume much time and the decision is also agreeable by both parties.

The Dawuro traditional conflict resolution institution is mainly patriarchal, doesn't involve women. With understanding of the role of women often as key mediators in community tensions and support the resolution of local issues, not involving them can be considered as weakness of the system. Without involving women, the final result of the resolution can not be fully accepted. On other hand , the involvement of the younger generation can also considered as weakness because there is not much work being done to transfer this knowledge and tradition to the younger generation.

With modernization and increasing community awarenesses, the traditional system involve practices, customs and traditions which doesn't go with the modern formal system which can be seen as challenges to this traditional conflict resolution institution. Therefore keeping the traditional institution acceptable, functional and reliable in current system is the main challenge.

Chapter FOUR

4.1 My Recommendations

Conflict is unavoidable because we are social being. What matters most is how respond to it. As we can see from my writing about Dawuro traditional conflict resolution institution responding properly to conflict increase social bonding and keep the society peace and security. When doing my writing I have talked to elders, religious leaders, history teachers, each of them believe and share that traditional conflict mechanism is vital for the community.

Traditional institutions should be encouraged, and supported by government, formal system and NGOs. Traditional and modern approaches should not be used independently of each other. The traditional institutions may not resolve conflicts in a full manner but should be recognized and work side by side with formal court system.

The Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms should be included under education curriculum starting from primary school. Education can contribute to mitigating conflict by bringing behavioural and attitudinal change. Education can alter societal contradictions, improve relations and interaction and encourage changes in attitudes in ways that can reduce the risk of conflict and help build a sustainable peace. If conflict happens by including traditional institution in education we can teach new generation how to resolve conflicts.

Further more, the women involvement should be encouraged because women are important member of a family and community and key mediators in community tensions and support the resolution of local issues. Elders and families should also work on passing the societal norms, traditions to their children and younger generation.

4.2 Conclusions

Conflict is a natural phenomena and happens world wide. Similarly, different types of conflict happens between individuals and groups with its own mechanism of solving among Dawuro people. As many traditional conflict resolution mechanism in Ethiopia, 'Sigoteta' the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms of Dawuro people have so many advantages compared with the modern court system in terms of cost effectiveness and time and energy saving as they are undertaken out of work time in the morning and near the residential area. Moreover, they have also relatively a permanent or sustainable solution for conflicting parties.

The main stake holders in this resolution mechanism are Elders(chima asa) and disputants. Elders are an aged people such as village elders, religious leaders who are elected on the basis of their great knowledge, wisdom and experience. Elders have a power and ability to persuade others and to reach an agreement as well as natural skill to resolve conflicts because of knowing their culture, beliefs, values, customs and norms. They are respected and feared by the society. In general, the indigenous institution of conflict resolution mechanism in Dawuro zone play a significant role in terms of providing peace and stability between and among the communities.

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