

Abo Gereb
Traditional Conflict Resolution System
Of Wajirat Society

Name: Nahom Tsegaye Haile

Id.No. 0050

Current Address: Mekelle

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About me

Name: Nahom Tsegaye Haile

Age: 29

Educational background

- Selamber primary school (Addis Ababa)
- Balcha Abanefso primary School (Addis Ababa)
- Ayer tena Secondary school (Addis Ababa)
- Higher 23 Preparatory school (Addis Ababa)
- Jimma University (Jimma).....degree in Civil Engineering
- Leadership training (vision Ethiopia congress of Democracy)

Voluntary service

- Pay It Forward (PIF)contribute a significant role of taking care for others especially Donating blood.
- I gave blood for 7 times while I was a student in Jimma University.

After I graduate from University I am working in different company on Highway construction, currently I am in Mekelle, Tigray.

I strongly Love my country Ethiopia and wishing our unity with our beautiful diversity

God bless Ethiopia.



Acknowledgement

First of all this project is the result of encouragement and support of Ethiopian Reconciliation commission and Tikvah ¹Ethiopia. So my first gratitude goes to them. My primary resources for the study, Ato Belay and Aboy Berhe who help me to picture out the process of the Abo-Gereb conflict resolution system, I really want to thank them for their invaluable support without expecting any backward benefit.

¹ Telegram channel having 900000+ followers, which contribute a significant role of addressing factual information.

Abstract

The general objective of the study has been to identify, describe and understand the traditional conflict management and resolution mechanisms of the Tigray regional state particularly wajirat society. The study conducted by using two main resources, primary and secondary. It covers the foundation, process and the status quo of the Abo-gereb traditional conflict resolution system. The study also tries to show the acceptance of the system and the current situation.

Glossary

<i>Abo-Gereb</i>	<i>collection of elders of the Gereb</i>
<i>Afar region</i>	<i>one of the nine regional states of Ethiopia, extends from central to north-eastern</i>
<i>Amhara Region</i>	<i>one of the nine regional states of Ethiopia located in north western and North central part of Ethiopia</i>
<i>Ashenda</i>	<i>a large festivity of the Tigray region yearly celebrated by Girls</i>
<i>Gereb</i>	<i>River</i>
<i>Tigrigna</i>	<i>sematic language spoken by Tigreans</i>
<i>Tigray Region</i>	<i>one of the nine regional states of Ethiopia located at the northern tip</i>
<i>Wajirat</i>	<i>one of the weredas of Tigray region in Ethiopia</i>

Chapter one

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Conflict is unavoidable in human life in which it arises from interest clashes. Hence, human beings always search for conflict management and resolution mechanisms through different ways based on their historical and cultural contexts and economic and power relation circumstances.

The traditional conflict management and resolution institutions are closely bound with socio-cultural and economic realities and of the lifestyles of the concerned communities. The study will contribute to the studies of traditional conflict management and resolution mechanisms in Ethiopia particularly in Tigray.

1.2 Scope of the study

The study targets identifying the conflict resolution mechanisms in Tigray region particularly the *Gereb*² institution. This study targeted both the present and historical appearance of the institution. The study finds and suggests factual dispute resolution mechanism

1.3 General objective

The general objective of this study is in order to assess the conflict resolution mechanisms in Tigray Region that could have a significant role in peace keeping among the societies.

1.4 About Tigray

Tigray region is one of the northernmost nine regional states of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia that comprises 52638 square kilometres. The official language is Tigrigna and the greatest part of the population is agriculturalists. Tigray is bordered by Eritrea to the north, Sudan to the west, the Amahra Region to the south and the Afar Region to the east and south east. Besides Mekelle major cities include adigrat, Aksum, shire, Humera, adwa, Adi-Remets, Alamata, Wukro, Maychew, Shiraro, Abiy-Adi, korem Quiha, Atsbi, Hawzen, Mehoni, Dansha and Zalanbesa and there is also historic significant town of yeha. as it known Tigray is the starting point of the Ethiopian Civilization. Christianity is the dominant religion though there are also Muslim Tigrayans in some districts. The people of Tigray Region have been struggled for their resistance against the central governments of the country. The political organizations that lead to fight with the central government of Emperor H/Selassie and Derg regime lead to found traditional dispute resolution systems.

² A river in the land of wajirat

1.5 About Hintalo-Wajirat

Wajirat is one of the woredas in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia. It is named after its largest town, Hintalo, and the Wajirat Mountains in the southern part of the woreda. Located in the Debub Misraqawi (South-eastern) Zone at the eastern edge of the Ethiopian highlands Hintalo Wajirat is bordered on the south by the Debubawi (Southern) Zone, on the west by Samre, on the north by Enderta, and on the east by the Afar Region. Other towns in Hintalo Wajirat include Adi Gudem.

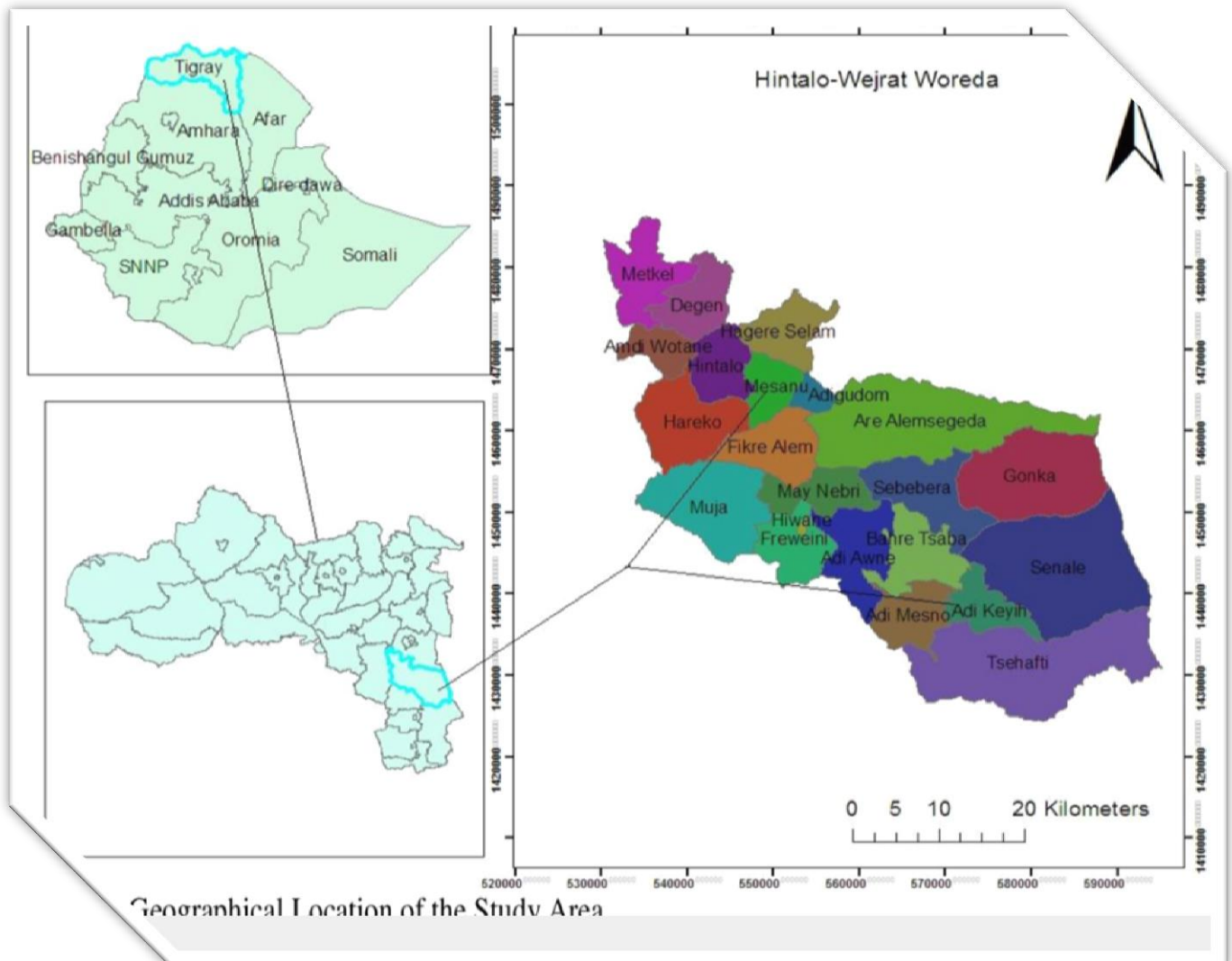
The language spoken is Tigrigna which is Ethiopian Semitic language (Ethiopic) natively spoken by the Tigrinyas of Eritrea and Tigrayans of Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, Tigrinya is spoken in the Tigray region. It is also spoken by groups of emigrants from these regions.

Based on the 2007 national census conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), this woreda has

- ✓ A total population of 153,505 and total of 34,360 households were counted in this woreda, resulting in an average of 4.47 persons to a household, and 33,130 housing units. 98.84% of the population said they were Orthodox Christians, and 1.14% was Muslim
- ✓ The largest ethnic group reported in Hintalo Wajirat was the Tigrayan (99.79%); all other ethnic groups made up 0.21% of the population.
- ✓ Tigrinya was spoken as a first language by 99.8%; the remaining 0.2% spoke all other primary languages reported. 98.58% of the population practiced Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, and 1.39% were Muslim.
- ✓ Concerning education, 9.12% of the population were considered literate, which is less than the Zone average of 15.71%; 10.59% of children aged 7–12 were in primary school; 0.63% of the children aged 13–14 were in junior secondary school; and 0.19% of the inhabitants aged 15–18 were in senior secondary school.
- ✓ Concerning sanitary conditions, about 69% of the urban houses and 14% of all houses had access to safe drinking water at the time of the census; about 7% of the urban and about 3% of the total had toilet facilities.
- ✓ The known historical, cultural and religious festivity of the wajirat is *Ashenda*³. Which is a girls and young women's festival celebrated in northern Ethiopia among Orthodox Christianity followers. It is typically celebrated between 16-26 August every year

³ A large festivity celebrated by girls in Tigray and Amhara Regions

Graphical location of study area



Chapter Two

2 The *Abo-Gereb* institution of Wajirat

2.1 Traditional conflict resolution system

In the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1994), customary and religious institutions are given a constitutional right to handle personal and family matters if the conflicting parties give their consent to get decision by these institutions

Parallel to the formal criminal justice system of Ethiopia, societies also have their own customary ways of dealing with crime. In many regions of the country, and especially in the remote and peripheral areas, these customary dispute resolution mechanisms are more influential and applicable than the formal criminal justice system. Many regions of Ethiopia, the customary norms are more strong, relevant, and accessible than imposed and top-down legal norms. Moreover, experiences in different regions of Ethiopia show that people, even after passing through the procedures and penalties in the formal criminal court, tend to use the customary dispute resolution mechanisms for reconciliation and in order to control acts of revenge

2.2 Abo-Gereb institution of wajirat

2.2.1 Introduction

Gereb literally means “river” in the land of Wajerat. It is an indigenous institution that comprises Abo-Gerebs (collection of elders) committed to the overall societal issues as local court of administration. Gereb is one of the successful indigenous courts or institutions in managing inter-ethnic conflict in the land of Wajerat beyond intra-communal issues particularly between Wajirat and Afar⁴. Gereb has a long history in the land of Wajerat. Its origin is related to a form of public struggle towards democracy and self-rule.

The objective of the Gereb was to resist the then government suppressions inclusively. It was a symbol of reaction to the existing undemocratic rule and bad governance. Thus, different local communities of Wajirat, Enderta, Seharti-Samre and Bora-Slawa met in Hintalo for the first time to develop common agenda on how to run self-rule and challenge the government.

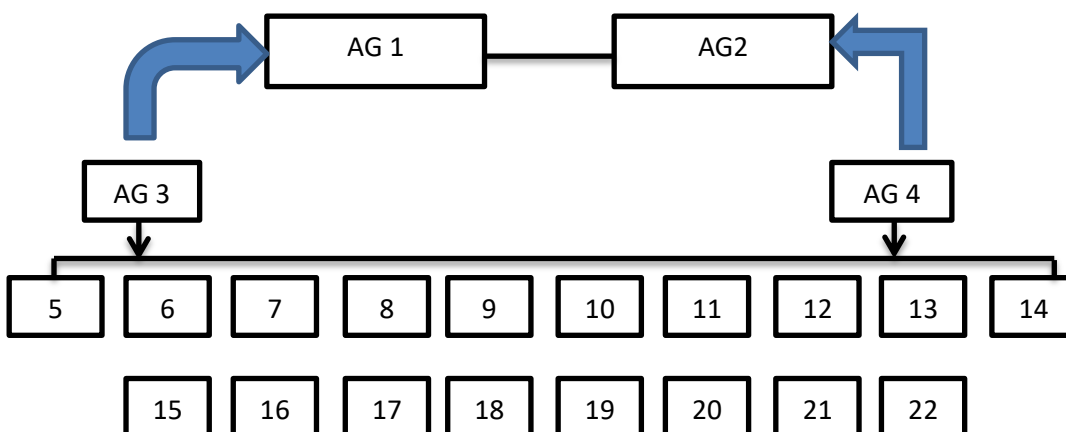
Through time, Gereb became a joint institution which functions as an indigenous court run by council of elders from Afar and Wejerat. Gereb members are elected by the entire adult men population of the

⁴ Neighboring regions of Tigray

locality through voting with the prime responsibility of restoring law and order. The Gereb develops its own rules and regulations which serve as traditional law to its localities. When necessary, it could be modified with full justification by the Gereb members. The Gereb institution maintains mutual benefits of the two ethnic groups. The institution embraces representatives of the two ethnic groups for whom the society refers to “Abo-Gerebs⁵”.

2.2.2 Structure

Abo-Gereb (s) literally stands for father of river(s), a collection of people who run the Gereb institution as actors of peace to resolve mostly an inter-communal conflict or inter-ethnic conflict. The criteria for election of Abo-Gerebs are based on the social acceptance, patience, past experience, and neutral and impartial stand of individuals in making wise decisions. Abo –Gerebs are real representatives of their respective community. The number of the elders is 20. Two of the 20 persons act as leaders and play the role of administrators.



The following are some of the articles included:-

- Government officials are not considered as God, they are human.
- Every adult citizen should be ready for struggle against external enemy.
- Stop theft and raid.
- The 20 elders should be loyal to the institution.

⁵ Fathers of the river or a collection of elders

2.2.3 Roles of the institution

The major role of “Abo-Gerebs”

- Resolving inter-ethnic conflicts with less expense.
- They serve as representative of the wajirat.
- Maintaining security and peace by negotiating with the Afar elders through Gereb institution.
- Dispute resolution of inter-group issue related to cattle raid, use of water grazing land, theft, robbery.
- Preserve norms and values of the society.
- Expose the wrongdoer and let them to punishment.
- Most of the cases where theft, rape, harms human body etc.

The communities belong to side by side and directly linking with the mechanism are the wajirat and the Afar. Also the two ethnic groups have so many interactions of social, historical and also economic aspects

The Abo-Gerebs have full power to punish a body which they taught guilty in resolving conflict. Usually compensation, punishments imposed on the wrongdoers would be decided by agreement of the Abo-Gerebs. All decisions passed by Abo-Gereb are practical and acceptable by the society members.

2.2.4 Process of the resolution system

The process of mediation of the Abo-Gereb’s is different based on the cases in order to obtain the simplest way of resolution. According to Ato Belay whom I met to collect more information about the mechanism, I present it in four steps of resolving the conflict.

Step 1 gathering initial information

When there are conflicts among the societies of wajirat and by the time the case delivered to the Abo-Gereb, they sent two representatives to parties of conflict. The two representatives take the whole useful information about the conflict from both sides and share those cases to the rest of council of elders of the Abo-Gereb. Note that the two representatives going together to gather useful information from both parties.

Step 2 Abo-Gereb discussions

After the representatives share what they have on the cases, the 20 members of the Abo-Gereb discussed each other which is every one of the members of the council presents his idea freely about the raised issue what he thinks right to .After the council of elders (Abo-Gereb) finalized discussion about specific issues of conflict and they found it not enough to decide they might agree on calling of the two parties of conflict and hearing their rational truth once again. *(The duration of time of self-discussion of the Abo-Gereb is depends on the conflict and the consent of the elders).*

Step 3 Hearing

The council of elders (*Abo-Gereb*) gathering with the two parties and try to figure out the core of the conflict briefly by asking both sides one by one. The parties present their own truth to the elders of the council, in this process the Abo-Gereb gather enough information to resolve the conflict by giving impartial decision.

Step 4 decision making (conflict resolution)

After the Abo-Gereb hearing the history, they gather one last time *(at this time the participants are the two representatives and the two leaders of the Abo-Gereb)*. Then the elders finalized their discussion and investigation which means they are now capable of resolving the conflict in a very peaceful and impartial way. Finally they decide and resolve the conflict in front of public includes relatives, friends and other from both parties which address both parties acceptance.

This process different a little in which the conflict is between two ethnic groups more of the wajirat and the Afar's. In this situation the two leaders of Abo-Gereb go to discuss with another elders of the Afar's. By then they will resolve it by further discussion with respective elders of the afar.

Chapter three

3.1 Current condition of the Abo-Gereb institution

According to Ato belay and a lately joined friend of Ato belay called *Aboy berhe* told me that through time the institution is unable to continue its duty due to different reasons.

According to *Aboy Berhe* Younger of the society were obeying any decision made by the *Abo-Gereb* and they are obeisant for the elders. But through time they starting to show disobediences because of some of the factors mentioned above. In fact some of the Youngers try to obey the elders and they are fully agreed about their fundamental services to the community but after some time they completely forget what the elders told to them because they dominated by the idea of other which are against the norms and values of the society. Some of these reasons are as follows

3.2 Problems identified

- ✓ Most of the younger generations do not have much knowledge and understanding about their societal values, norms, history and culture.
- ✓ Elders are disappointed by the youngers reaction since they keep trying to take back them to their culture but they got less results than they expect.
- ✓ Influence of western world through media specially on social medias led to vanish the norms and values of the society to adoration of the elders of the community as if the youngers think like it is backwardness and ashamed of it.
- ✓ There is no means of income to the institution so that the elders of the council are not getting compensated for the time and the energy they invest.

3.3 Recommended solutions

The Abo-Gereb plays an important role and filling the gap in the formal justice system.so in order to promote this institution we must:-

- ❖ Promote the values, norms, histories and culture of the society through different mediums especially social medias mainly *Facebook* to address the new generation.
- ❖ The government specially the administration of the society assist the institution by giving them a place where they permanently use for their service.
- ❖ Find a way of financing the institution because the elders are not supposed to collecting money from the society since it might affect the societal trust on elders.

- ❖ Culture must be giving as one of the subject of education to the coming generation with their respective culture and also common national histories.

3.4 Things we should learn

There are many cultural and traditional practices in our country. We can learn, research, promote our cultures since many of them are still not even raised. As an Ethiopian we should take lots of positive aspects like love, respect, unity, helping each other, proud as an Ethiopian, acting and standing as one Ethiopia and protect our country from external enemy.

3.5 My view on this project

As an a proud Ethiopian it is a pleasure to participate this kind of significant role in order to re assure the love, unity with diversity in a greater peace. Especially in recent times our country passes on difficult situations of conflict. Those are mostly ethnic bases, so I assume this kind of practices have the power to vanish the conflict if we are considering it seriously. Right now I live in Tigray, I saw the beautiful culture but as an Ethiopian I really worried about the relation of Tigray region with Amhara region. So I truly believe this kind of practices is mostly useful in order to resolve the conflicts and com together again. So I really proud to contribute something useful to conflict resolution process.

- It will contribute a significant role for the current situation in Ethiopian especially between Tigray and Amhara Regions.
- It will contribute documentation of customary dispute resolution systems in Tigray for further studies.
- It might use for similar in depth researches in Ethiopia.

Chapter four

4.1 Conclusion

The objective of the study is to conduct a description of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms among the society of Wajirat of Tigray region. The study tries to describe the mechanism by using a primary data through interview and secondary data that can describe the society very well. Those finding show that the society of Wajirat have a conflict resolution mechanism that managing, resolving conflicts among them and also with neighbouring ethnic group. The mechanism also prevents lots of indigenous values, norms and cultures of the society from vanishing them. Finally I really proud of participating such kind of project that could contribute a significant role for the peace keeping process of our beloved ,historical, cultural and most importantly independent(*never colonized*) country, Ethiopia. I wish a greater peace, prosperity, respect, and love among the peoples of Ethiopia.

References

Primary resources

- *Ato Belay*
- *Aboy Berhe*

Secondary resources

- *Internet*
- *Indigenous conflict resolution system*