



Research Article

## HARMONY IN HERITAGE: CUSTOMARY CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN MESKAN WOREDA, SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA

**Submission Date:** Sep 29, 2023, **Accepted Date:** Oct 04, 2023,

**Published Date:** Oct 09, 2023

**Crossref doi:** <https://doi.org/10.37547/social-fsshj-03-10-02>

**Journal Website:**  
<https://frontlinejournal.s.org/journals/index.php/fsshj>

**Copyright:** Original content from this work may be used under the terms of the creative commons attributes 4.0 licence.

**Tadesse Abebe**

Lecturer of Social Anthropology at Bule Hora University, Oromia Ethiopia

### ABSTRACT

This study explores the intricate dynamics of customary conflict resolution mechanisms within the Gurage Zone, focusing on the Meskan Woreda region in Southern Ethiopia. Investigating the coexistence of traditional practices and contemporary influences in conflict resolution, this research sheds light on the resilience and adaptability of local customs in the face of evolving societal dynamics. By examining the multifaceted approach to conflict resolution in this region, we gain insights into the intricate interplay between tradition and modernity in addressing community disputes.

### KEYWORDS

Customary Conflict Resolution; Gurage Zone; Meskan Woreda; Southern Ethiopia; Tradition; Modernity.

### INTRODUCTION

In the rich tapestry of Ethiopia's diverse cultural landscape, the Gurage Zone stands as a testament to the country's vibrant heritage. Nestled within

this zone is the Meskan Woreda, a region steeped in tradition and history. As we navigate the intricate balance between tradition and

modernity, it becomes evident that this balance extends to the realm of conflict resolution.

The customs, practices, and values of the Gurage people have deep roots in the region's history and continue to play a significant role in the daily lives of its inhabitants. Among these traditions, one of the most intriguing aspects is the customary conflict resolution mechanisms that have been honed and passed down through generations.

This study sets out to delve into the heart of this vibrant tradition, exploring how customary conflict resolution mechanisms endure and adapt in the face of evolving societal dynamics. While modernity introduces new challenges and perspectives, the customs of Meskan Woreda persist, showcasing their resilience and adaptability.

The coexistence of these traditional practices with contemporary influences is a testament to the enduring strength of cultural heritage in shaping a community's identity. The conflict resolution processes within Meskan Woreda serve as a fascinating case study, reflecting the intricate interplay between tradition and modernity in addressing community disputes.

Through a comprehensive examination of customary conflict resolution practices in Meskan Woreda, this research seeks to shed light on the mechanisms that sustain harmony within a community rooted in its heritage while navigating the challenges of the present day. By doing so, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of how tradition and modernity can intersect and enrich the fabric of society, offering valuable insights for not only Meskan Woreda but also other regions facing similar cultural dynamics.

## METHOD

### Data Collection:

To comprehensively investigate customary conflict resolution in Meskan Woreda, Southern Ethiopia, this study employed a mixed-methods research approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods.

### Qualitative Data Collection:

**In-Depth Interviews:** A team of trained researchers conducted in-depth interviews with key informants and community members who possessed extensive knowledge and experience in the customary conflict resolution processes of

Meskan Woreda. These interviews were conducted in a conversational manner, allowing participants to share their insights, stories, and perspectives on how conflicts are traditionally resolved within the community. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed for analysis. This method allowed for a deep exploration of the cultural nuances, values, and practices surrounding conflict resolution.

**Focus Group Discussions:** Several focus group discussions were organized with community members representing different age groups, genders, and social backgrounds. These discussions were facilitated by experienced researchers and provided a platform for community members to openly share their views, experiences, and anecdotes related to customary conflict resolution. These discussions generated dynamic group interactions, revealing diverse perspectives and shedding light on the collective understanding of conflict resolution practices within the community.

**Participant Observation:** Researchers engaged in participant observation within the community, attending various meetings, gatherings, and actual conflict resolution sessions. By immersing

themselves in the community's daily life, researchers were able to witness firsthand how conflicts were presented, negotiated, and resolved. This method not only provided contextual insights into the practice of conflict resolution but also allowed for the observation of non-verbal cues, gestures, and cultural norms that play a crucial role in these processes.

**Quantitative Data Collection (Survey):** To complement the qualitative data, a structured survey was administered to a representative sample of community members. The survey included questions related to their perceptions of customary conflict resolution, their level of satisfaction with its outcomes, and their openness to incorporating modern approaches. This quantitative data helped provide a broader perspective on community attitudes and experiences related to conflict resolution practices.

**Ethical Considerations:** Throughout the data collection process, ethical considerations were paramount. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and strict confidentiality was maintained. Additionally, researchers were culturally sensitive and respectful of local customs and traditions, ensuring that the

research process did not disrupt or harm the community in any way.

By combining these qualitative and quantitative methods, this study aimed to present a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of customary conflict resolution practices in Meskan Woreda, Southern Ethiopia, and the interplay between tradition and modernity in this context.

## RESULTS

The study on customary conflict resolution in Meskan Woreda, Southern Ethiopia, reveals a complex and robust system deeply rooted in cultural heritage. Key findings include:

**Customary Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:** The community in Meskan Woreda continues to rely on traditional practices for resolving conflicts. Elders, respected community members, and council meetings play central roles in these processes.

**Cultural Significance:** Customary conflict resolution is viewed not only as a means to resolve disputes but also as a vital aspect of preserving cultural identity and maintaining social cohesion within the community.

**Adaptation to Modernity:** While traditional practices persist, there is a degree of adaptation to modernity. Community members expressed openness to incorporating certain modern elements, such as written agreements and legal frameworks, into the customary conflict resolution process.

**Challenges:** Challenges include issues of access to justice, gender disparities in decision-making, and the need for more structured documentation of resolutions.

## DISCUSSION

The findings underscore the resilience of customary conflict resolution practices in Meskan Woreda, reflecting the harmonious interplay between tradition and modernity. The community's commitment to preserving cultural heritage through these practices is evident. Additionally, the adaptation of certain modern elements highlights the community's pragmatism in addressing contemporary challenges.

The challenges identified, such as gender disparities and issues related to access to justice, warrant attention. Addressing these challenges while respecting the community's cultural values

can lead to more inclusive and effective conflict resolution processes.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study on customary conflict resolution in Meskan Woreda, Southern Ethiopia, illuminates the enduring significance of cultural heritage in shaping community practices. Customary conflict resolution mechanisms continue to serve as vital tools for resolving disputes and maintaining social harmony.

The findings suggest that while tradition remains at the core of conflict resolution, there is room for thoughtful adaptation to modernity. Addressing the identified challenges and fostering gender-inclusive practices can enhance the effectiveness of these mechanisms.

Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how tradition and modernity coexist within a dynamic cultural context. It underscores the importance of preserving and respecting cultural heritage while addressing contemporary needs, offering insights that may be valuable not only to Meskan Woreda but also to other communities navigating the delicate balance between tradition and progress.

## REFERENCES

1. Agbu, O & Bolarinwa, J. (2006). Introduction to Peace Studies. Abuja: National Open University of Nigeria
2. Akihm. (1997) Traditional conflict resolution in South Africa journal conflict resolution.
3. Allan, K. (2007). Conflict and Critical Theories, Part I: Conflict Theory: Lewis
4. Assefa, Abebe (2001). Customary Mechanisms for the Prevention of Conflict. The Experience of the Oromo. Paper presented to the workshop on conflict in the horn: Prevention and Resolution organized by the Ethiopia chapter of OSSREA, May 11-12, 2001. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
5. Bukari, K. (2013). Exploring Indigenous Approaches to Conflict Resolution: The Case of the Bawku Conflict in Ghana. Vol.4, No.2. Journal of Sociological Research.
6. Burton, J. (1990). Conflict: Human needs Theory: Macmillan Press.

7. Central Statistical Authority (CSA). 2010. The 2007 Population and housing census of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: CSA.
8. Collier, P. (2000). „Doing Well Out of War“ in Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars, Mats Berdal and David Malone (eds.), Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
9. Coser, L. (1968). “Conflict, Social Aspect” In international Encyclopedia of the Social Science. V.3. the MacMillan Company and Free press
10. Dawson, Christian. (2009). Practical Research Methods. How to books: 3 Newtec Place.

FRONTLINE  
JOURNALS