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## Choice of Conflict Resolution Mechanisms among Pastoralists in Degahbour Woreda Somali Regional State, Ethiopia

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### ABSTRACT

Pastoralism has endured as a livelihood globally, but conflicts over natural resources have escalated due to various factors. This study assessed the choice of natural resource conflict resolution mechanisms among pastoralists in Degahbour Woreda, Somali Regional State, Ethiopia. A multistage sampling approach was used to select participants, and data was collected through household surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were presented descriptively. The binary logit model was employed to examine the factors influencing the choice of conflict resolution methods. The results revealed that a larger proportion of respondents (57.1%) preferred the local traditional resolution system over the governmental system (42.9%). Age, land size, livestock ownership, access to water, and household size positively influenced the choice of informal conflict resolution mechanisms, while educational level had a negative effect. Gender and occupation did not significantly influence the selection of resolution mechanisms. The findings suggest that customary institutions are deeply embedded in local contexts and perceived as more approachable and relevant for resolving resource-related disputes. Improving conflict resolution requires enhancing the effectiveness of traditional institutions and integrating them into formal systems, as well as promoting education and awareness of official mechanisms among younger and less educated groups.

### INTRODUCTION

Globally, pastoralism has endured as a livelihood amid the rise in agriculture and other economic activities. However, the search for water and pasture has led to conflicts driven by population growth, competing land use, shifting land tenure, and dwindling resources owing to climate change (Chelang & Chesire, 2020). In arid and semiarid regions, pastoralism has sustained livelihoods for millennia through communal landholding systems that enable resource-sharing and risk mitigation related to climate change and conflicts. Communal landholdings and indigenous management practices serve as inter- and intra-ethnic insurance mechanisms that are crucial for maintaining social cohesion and reducing conflict (Beyene, 2017; Gena & Jarra, 2023). However, the region is vulnerable to climate shock, including recurrent severe droughts that exacerbate poverty and conflict among pastoralists. Recent evidence has shown that shorter intervals between droughts, more frequent dry seasons, and large-scale conflicts have resulted in significant losses of life and assets (Majid *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, competition for water and grazing during the dry season has escalated into violent conflict (Burka *et al.*, 2023). Communities that rely on pastoralism face various challenges across regions, with conflicts over shared resources being a significant global issue that has disrupted pastoral economies. These disputes in Europe frequently revolve around issues of land utilization and legislation, whereas in sub-Saharan Africa they arise from disparities in how pastoral communities manage their

environmental resources (Chelang'a & Chesire, 2020). Selecting appropriate conflict resolution methods for pastoralists is a multifaceted process that necessitates consideration of various factors, including cultural suitability, efficacy, and the ability to adapt to evolving situations (Dezo, 2021). Conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Africa, including Ethiopia, often struggle because of reliance on Western models rather than on indigenous institutions (Mussa *et al.*, 2017). In the Somali Regional State, traditional pastoral conflict resolution remains crucial for addressing natural-resource-based disputes. Local pastoralists trust and respect these conventional methods, which are typically less costly, less confrontational, and more conducive to long-term peace (Jibril, 2013). Researchers and policymakers have studied various aspects of resource conflicts, including their dynamics, causes, and competition for natural resources in pastoral areas (Mohamed, 2018; Beyene, 2017). and Indigenous conflict-resolution mechanisms (Alemie and Mandefro, 2018; Muluken, 2020). Studies have also explored Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms (Alemie & Mandefro, 2018; Muluken, 2020), with some specifically examining pastoralists' preferences for resolving land disputes (Tan & Hassen, 2023). However, empirical research on pastoralists' choices of conflict-resolution mechanisms remains limited, revealing a significant gap in the literature. Therefore, this study sought to evaluate the preferred methods for resolving conflicts among pastoral communities in the Degahbour Woreda.

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## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Description of Study Area

In Ethiopia, the Somali Regional State (SRS) ranks as the second-largest region, surpassed only by the Oromia Regional State. Encompassing 350,000 km<sup>2</sup>, SRS shares borders with Djibouti to the north, Somalia to the east and northeast, and Kenya to the south. Its western boundary adjoins the Oromia region, whereas the Afar region lies northwest. The SRS is divided into 11 administrative zones: Fafan, Jarar, Sitti, Nogob, Erer, Doollo, Shabelle, Korahe, Afder, Dawa, and Liban.

The research was conducted in Degahbour Woreda, one of the 93 districts within the Somali Regional State, under the administration of the Jarar Zone. Situated in the

eastern agro-pastoral region of Somali State, Degahbour Woreda is bordered by Ararso to the north, Birqod to the south, Bilcil-Buur to the west, Gunagado to the southeast, and Yoale and Aware Woredas to the east.

The 2007 National Census report from the Central Statistics Agency (CSA, 2007) indicated that Woreda has a population of 115,555, comprising 65,081 males and 50,474 females. The majority (74.015%, or 85,528) resided in rural areas, whereas 25.985% (30,027) were urban inhabitants. The study area has an average household size of 6.8. The total population of the 16 kebeles in the studied woreda was 16993. The overall sample size was calculated using a government census report (2007).

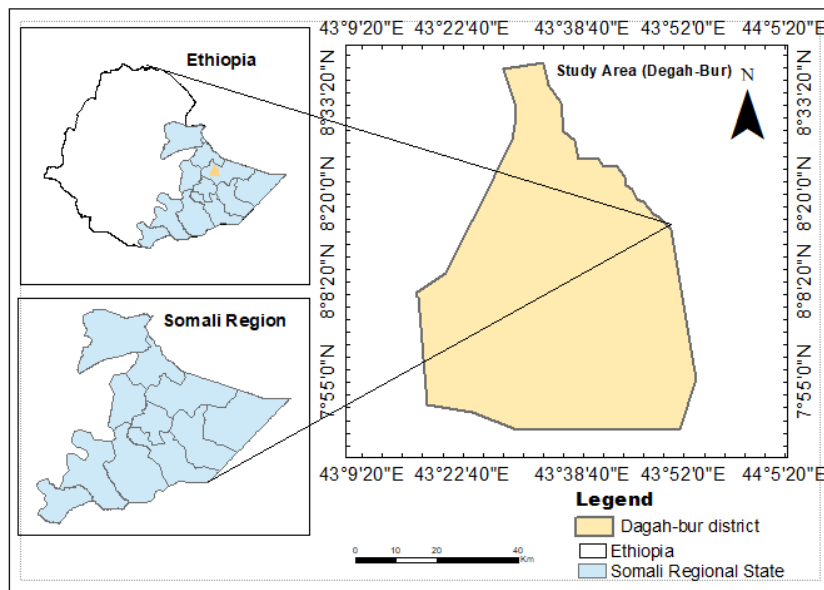


Figure 1: Study Area

### Data Collection

This study utilized a diverse approach to data collection, incorporating both primary and secondary methods. For the primary data, the researchers conducted household surveys, organized focus group discussions, and interviewed key informants. Secondary data sources include natural resource policy documents, scholarly publications, and pertinent official records. A multistage sampling approach was used to select the participants. Initially, Degahbour Woreda was purposefully chosen for its objectives. Subsequently, four kebeles were identified, based on the prevalence of natural resource conflicts. Finally, a simple random sampling method was employed to select the participants. Sample size was calculated using the formula proposed by Yamane (1967).

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} = \quad (1)$$

Where;

n = Sample Size

N = Total number of targeted populations

e = level of precision (sampling error) at 8 % (0.08) significance level, margin of error level of confidence is 98%; this will be a convenient method that reduces the possibility of nonresponse drastically.

$$n = \frac{16993}{(1 + 16993(0.08)^2)} = 156$$

### Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. To ascertain general data trends and characterize the study population, researchers employed the mean, median, and standard deviation. Additionally, multinomial logistic regression, an inferential statistical technique, was used to deduce the proportional responses regarding preferences for conflict-resolution mechanisms. Qualitative data gathered through interviews and focus group discussions were descriptively presented using complete sentences.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Household Demographic Background

The demographic profile of the households in the Degahbour woreda reveals a diverse population with varying socioeconomic backgrounds that could influence their preferences for conflict-resolution mechanisms. Education levels showed a significant proportion of illiterate individuals (56.4%), highlighting the potential challenges in accessing formal conflict-resolution mechanisms. Marital status data indicates that most household heads are married (76.9%), which may affect

their conflict-resolution preferences based on family dynamics.

Occupationally, the sample was diverse, with a notable presence of pastoralists (34.6%), followed by farmers, manual labour and petty traders. This occupational

distribution suggests that varied economic activities could influence conflict resolution choices. Income levels reflect the predominance of low-income households (66.7%), which may affect their ability to engage in formal conflict resolution systems.

**Table 1:** Demographic characteristics

Variables	Description	Frequency n = 156	Percent
Gender	Female	80	53.3%
	Male	76	48.7%
Education level	Illiterate	88	56.4%
	Literate	68	43.6%
Marital status	Married	120	76.9%
	Single	20	12.8%
	Divorced	8	5.33%
	Windowed	2	1.3%
Occupation of the household head	Pastoralism	54	34.6%
	Petty trading	30	19.2%
	Manual Labour	32	20.5%
	Farmers	40	25.7
Land size	Mean (SD)	4.2564( 1.61793)	
Household income	Mean(SD)	11889.3 (7810.5)	

**Preference of Resolution Mechanism**

Participants were queried about their preferred institution for conflict resolution, specifically customary bodies/ community elders, official government structures, or alternative entities. The study area currently features traditional and formal governmental conflict-resolution mechanisms, with preferences varying based on the specific authority domains to address disputes.

In an examination of conflict-resolution approaches among pastoralists in the Degahbour Woreda, a clear distinction emerged regarding preferred methods. The research findings revealed that a significantly larger proportion of respondents (57.1%) expressed complete

faith in the local traditional resolution system than in the governmental system (42.9%). This suggests that residents harbor a deeply ingrained trust and confidence in the informal justice system, attributed to its accessibility and limited awareness of the formal judicial process. McPeak (2018) noted that customary conflict resolution was employed for minor land-related issues, whereas more serious disputes involving physical injuries or fatalities necessitated government intervention. Nevertheless, if these efforts are unsuccessful, a common practice involves initially attempting to resolve conflicts through traditional means before seeking governmental involvement.

**Table 2:** Demographic characteristics

Preference for resolution mechanism	Frequency	Percent
Customary clan system	89	57.1
Government (formal) system	67	42.9
Total	156	100.0

**Determinants of Resolution Mechanisms**

Indigenous conflict-resolution methods are widely employed and favored in pastoral communities. These approaches offer several benefits, including a swift crisis response, alleviating the burden on conventional courts, and conserving public funds and resources. Many individuals who find modern dispute-resolution systems uncomfortable, costly, or ill-suited to their requirements can access Indigenous conflict-resolution mechanisms. These traditional methods often satisfy disputants with their processes and are perceived as delivering fair outcomes. This is attributed to the fact that, unlike the

modern legal system, these mechanisms allow parties to actively manage their affairs Muluken (2020). In the Somali region, dispute resolution is handled by both the conventional and state-sanctioned tribunals. The official method of settling disagreements involves court proceedings, which are recognized by the government and undergo thorough examination for neutrality, ongoing unfairness, and procedural correctness (Tenaw, 2016). In contrast, the unofficial conflict-resolution approach has been passed down through generations. It utilizes strategies that successfully resolve conflicts without harming relationships within pastoral communities (Tenaw, 2016).

**Table 3:** Binary Logistic regression Results

<b>LR chi2 (12)</b>	<b>= 28.81</b>			
<b>Prob &gt; chi2</b>	<b>0.0002</b>			
<b>Log likelihood</b>	<b>--328.27995</b>			
<b>Variables</b>	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>std. errs</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>p&gt;z</b>
Gender	.0855154	.2816185	0.30	0.761
Age	.0823471	.033077	2.49	0.013
Education level	-.0357581	.2954075	-0.12	0.098
Land Size	1.042618	.206213	5.06	0.000
Occupation	.1346697	.0841292	1.60	0.109
Family size	.237462	.0913514	2.60	0.008
Access to water	.2201926	.197144	1.12	0.002
Household Income	1.628945	.4223371	3.86	0.000
LTU	.0902281	.0363962	2.48	0.013
Cons	-10.60052	2.609724	-4.06	0.000

The research findings indicate that age positively determines the choice of conflict information resolution mechanism and Within Somali pastoral households, and serves as a symbol of esteem and social standing, as FGD confirmed that older individuals express a strong preference for customary institutions when it comes to conflict resolution, grounded in a deep trust in the processes led by elders. The participants articulated that these traditional methods resonated with their cultural values, making them feel more authentic and relevant to their experiences. This connection to culture and tradition underscores the importance of elders as custodians of communal norms and practices, reinforcing their authority in resolving disputes and guiding decision-making as Muluken (2020), Tan and Hassen (2023), also noted that in traditional dispute resolution methods, Aqils who are chosen elders with extensive experience and favorable standing, act as conflict resolution specialists. Consequently, empirical evidence demonstrates a pronounced tendency for older individuals in both countries to opt for customary institutions when addressing conflict.

Conversely, educational level negatively affects the preference for customary institutions, suggesting that individuals with higher educational levels are more likely to favour formal institutions. In other words, greater literacy and educational attainment may lead people to prefer formal legal systems over traditional customary practices. Therefore, contrary to our hypothesis, educated households continue to prefer to resolve conflicts through formal institutions.

The results of the logistic regression indicate that land size has a positive effect on customary institutional preferences. This suggests that individuals with larger landholdings are significantly more likely to prefer customary conflict-resolution methods. The reason behind this preference is that customary institutions are often deeply involved in managing land-related disputes and adhere to traditional practices that are well suited to the complexities of land ownership and use. This study reveals that land conflicts can be resolved through

customary institutions. (FDG) confirmed that most land-related conflicts are resolved through customary resolution mechanisms, highlighting the prevalence and effectiveness of these traditional methods in managing disputes. As previous studies have revealed, According to the Somali Xeer Dhaqameed (customary law), land ownership is vested in the Somali people collectively, with individual clans and sub-clans having exclusive rights to the land they have historically occupied. This system allows clan members to access, control, and transfer land-use rights while maintaining customary practices for resource use and conflict management. Despite the general openness of land resource access, conflicts and competing needs between clans can arise, as highlighted in the study (Fikre & Abdurhman, 2019).

Livestock ownership positively influences the selection of conflict resolution methods. This suggests that individuals possessing larger numbers of livestock are more inclined to favour traditional institutions in resolving disputes. As the size of livestock holdings increases, so does the tendency to opt for customary approaches over formal ones. Tan and Hassen (2023) revealed that households with more substantial herds prefer to address land use conflicts through traditional institutions rather than formal legal systems. This preference stems from the role of informal mechanisms in mitigating the risks associated with land access and the depletion of grazing resources, which often necessitate migration to areas with fewer resource limitations (Tan & Hassen, 2023).

Moreover, the variable representing access to water showed positive correlation. This finding suggests a strong and statistically significant association between the availability of water and the inclination towards customary institutions. The positive effects indicate that individuals in areas where water is a critical resource are more likely to favour customary conflict resolution mechanisms. This preference may arise because customary institutions are often deeply integrated into local practices and possess traditional expertise in managing disputes related to essential resources such as water. Consequently, this study

reveals that water-related conflicts are resolved through customary institutions, which aligns with Devereux (2006), who observed that individuals are required to consult their community elders before digging a new well to mitigate the possibility of conflict and to ensure properly planned wells. A schedule for watering animals was developed by community elders.

Household size positively determined the choice of informal conflict resolution. This finding suggests that individuals from larger households demonstrate a greater propensity to favour customary conflict resolution mechanisms over formal court systems. This study aligns with the research of Tan and Hassen (2023), which indicated that a large family size provides additional labour to support household livestock production activities such as grazing, watering, and the protection of clan territory. Gender and occupation did not significantly influence the selection of resolution mechanisms for disputes on natural resources. These findings suggest that these factors may not be crucial in determining whether individuals prefer customary institutions to formal institutions for conflict resolution.

## CONCLUSION

An examination of dispute resolution mechanisms in Degahbour Woreda revealed a preference for traditional institutions over formal legal systems, which are influenced by various demographic and socioeconomic factors. Individuals with larger landholdings, more livestock, and better access to water sources tend to favour customary conflict resolution methods. Conversely, those with higher education levels preferred formal institutions. Larger families also lean towards traditional methods, aligning with the community-based nature of customary practices. This study employed a survey method and binary logit regression models to analyze the effects of age, gender, family size, land size, livestock holdings, occupation, and income on conflict resolution preferences. The findings indicate that age, family size, livestock herd size, access to water, and household income positively influence the choice of customary mechanisms, whereas higher education levels negatively impact this choice.

Traditional institutions are deeply embedded in local contexts and perceived as more approachable and relevant for resolving disputes, especially those concerning land, livestock, and water resources. The significant influence of factors such as land size, number of livestock, and water access underscores the essential role of customary practices in addressing resource-related conflict.

Improving conflict resolution requires enhancing the effectiveness of traditional institutions and integrating them into formal systems to manage resource-related disputes better. Promoting education and awareness of official mechanisms, particularly among younger and less educated groups, can foster a more balanced approach.

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