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The Economic and Socio-cultural Sources, Consequences and Intervention Mechanisms of Revenge in Amhara National Regional State: The Case of Denbia District

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Abstract:

Revenge and other social conflicts among individuals and communities usually occur in Denbia District. Revenge is an extension of destructive conflicts. It is an intrinsic, inevitable, and unavoidable aspect of social life which occurs during human interaction. Conflicts are inherent, because human beings have varying interests and needs. They are also inherent at the same time, because it is impossible to meet the needs and desires of all people simultaneously. Conflict results both constructive and destructive consequences. Destructive conflicts that end up in blood revenge often flows from narrowly defined or rigid goals, and most often produces negative results. Revenge has been one of the social problems practiced in the district of Denbia. Disputes lead to conflicts, and revenge becomes a potential result of conflict in turn in the district of Denbia. This problem is also a social and legal issue in Amhara National Regional State, because it causes life loss, physical injury, property loss and social instability. It disrupts the life of individuals and peaceful existence of groups. Revenge involves initial victims and perpetrators, families, close and distant relatives of both victims and perpetrator. Initial victims may search for opportunities to retaliate blood for blood or any other ways. Hence, it becomes a circular social problem where victims at one occasion will be perpetrators on the next having retaliated the initial perpetrator. This research deals on the Economic and Socio-cultural Sources, Consequences and Intervention Mechanisms of Revenge in Amhara National Regional State: The Case of Denbia District. Therefore, the researcher employed qualitative research approach and gathered data through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. A Victim of revenge and released perpetrators, and other community members used during the in-depth interview. Moreover, the researcher used focus group discussions with the peace and reconciliation committee, police officers, and legal professionals who have deeper experience resolution of disputes, conflicts and revenge. Because of the nature of the information collected from respondents, the researcher used thematic analysis, discourse analysis and content analysis all together. The findings of the study have shown that revenge, caused familial and societal problems in the district of Denbia District. Among the forty five kebeles some areas of the district are severely vulnerable for blood revenge killings consisted of higher rates of murder. Insignificant disputes and conflicts raised commonly because of land, grudge, alcoholism, women driven, money driven, stealing, revealing a secret, and other daily based conflicts eventually ended up with blood revenge killings. Mainly, Land conflicts lead to disastrous effects on individuals as well as on groups and end up with blood revenge among family members at the highest number. The number of people who lost their lives in blood revenge killings in five years from 2011 up to 2015 in Denbia district is raised to one hundred and twenty-one.

Keywords: Blood Revenge, Intrinsic, Conflict, Denbia District

1. Introduction

Denbia Woreda comprised of forty-five Kebeles, subsumed under five sub districts, five of which is urban such as Koladiba 01 Kebele, Koladiba 02 Kebele, Chuahit, Gorgora and Ayinba. The rest forty are rural Kebeles. Denbia woreda is bordered by Lake Tana in the South, lay Armachiho in the North, Chilga in the North West, Takusa in the South West, and the surroundings of Gondar town in the East. Based on the reports from Denbia Woreda Militia and Police office, all forms of revenge frequently occurred in Denbia woreda. Blood revenge killing is the prolonged and unsettled problem in the community of Denbia woreda in general and on the specific selected research sites in particular. Blood revenge killings will take so many forms and dimensions in Denbia woreda and it usually occurred among relatives and between family members as well. Among the forty-five kebeles, the specific sites where revenge became rampant are Zengaj ketena that comprised of Woyina Tana, Jarjar and Acher; Chuahit Ketena comprised of Gurandi, Fentay, and Chenker; Ayinba Ketena comprised of Gana, Mekuamiya and Anba Guarit; Guntir Ketena comprised of Wawuchamegen, Guntir, Abawora and Sankisa Ketena comprised of Hana, Samra, and Jiri Kebele.¹

¹ Unlike the administrative structure of West Belesa and Wogera, in Denbia woreda six to ten Kebeles are subsumed under sub-woreda. Denbia woreda also comprised of 45 Kebeles five of which is Urban which is the largest in North Gondar zone.

In Denbia woreda the traditional conflict resolution practices to mitigate revenge is implemented by performing a cultural practice called 'Dem Madrek'² literally translated in Amharic as 'drying blood revenge' by the reconciliation and peace committee. The reconciliation and peace committee employed the traditional systems of Dem Marek when a person causes death to another person. The peace and reconciliation committee usually organized randomly from different Kebeles' which are more likely blood revenge vulnerable areas and usually arrange a meeting and discuss the causes of the death whenever such kind of problem exists in the surrounding community of Denbia woreda.

The peace and reconciliation committee evaluate the damages caused by the perpetrator and appropriate compensation would be given to the family of the victim. Such a decision will be made against the families of the perpetrator. The compensation could be in money, domestic animals like cows and so on. According to KI1, sometimes it is common both the family of the victim and the perpetrator would come with a sheep then they would slaughter it and everyone involved will be invited to eat, and the family of the victim and perpetrator later signed an agreement called 'Dinji' and put a signature on it. The family of a victim and perpetrator promised to respect the agreement in front of the peace and reconciliation committee. If in case, any one of them violet the agreement, then the one who violet it will have supposed to pay three-fold of the previous payment decided by the reconciliation and peace committee. The issue of reconciliation and forgiveness to mitigate revenge killings is one of the most successful mechanisms used by the peace and reconciliation committee to settle peace in Denbia woreda. The role of reconciliation and peace committee has been stated by one of the reconciliation committee as follows:

- "One of our contributions to avoid blood revenge killings and to strengthen the community peace process is to instruct the people in various social gatherings to avoid the traditionally motivated revenge tragedies such as celebration of a revenge sometimes with a poem. Whenever we came to know that blood revenge killings happened in any one of the vulnerable Kebeles in Denbia woreda and arrange a peace meeting between the families of both the victims and the perpetrator, we take no food and no water and we pray to God to make the reconciliation fruitful. Even though we are working hard to mitigate such kind of tragedy, the concerned bodies including the government do not pay enough attention for the peace and reconciliation committee". (KI1, Ambaguarit Kebele).³

Another member of the Peace and Reconciliation Committee in Chenker Cherkos stated the committee's challenge as follows:

- 'We find the reconciliation process productive. Sometimes we accomplish our reconciliation strategies to the extent that both the families of the victim and the perpetrator end up in a marriage relationships. For us this is a great achievement. However, it is better if the peace and reconciliation committee and the modern court system work together. It is also crucial to offer training for us to improve our skill gap of reconciliation. He further argued that the legal justice systems will finally judge either for the victim or for the perpetrator, whereas we the peace and reconciliation committee use a win-win system' for both the family of the victim and the perpetrator, and this will put the community reconciliation committee in conflict with the formal justice system since revenge is considered as a crime against the community by the law. Therefore, we need to work side by side to mitigate the gap (KI2 Chenker Kebele)

1.2. The Process of Traditional Blood Revenge Resolution used by the Peace and Reconciliation Committee in Denbia District

Depending on the nature and dimension of revenge killings, the peace and reconciliation committees are usually applying many strategies. Basically, the peace and reconciliation committees will apply systematic traditional reconciliation strategies. That could be explained as a mixture of consultation and mediation. First the peace and reconciliation committee will go to the families of the victim and requests them to negotiate with the families of the perpetrator. Following that step, the committee will try to reduce any possible escalating prejudice and hostility from the families of the victim against the family of the perpetrator. Therefore, the committee will address the regretting attitudes; reconciliation aspires of the families of the perpetrator with the families of the victims. Accompanied by a priest the peace and reconciliation committee will make sure that the families of a victim are willing to talk and come to terms with the families of the perpetrator. After that the committee will make sure both the families of the victims and the families of the perpetrator are willing to face and talk to each other to find a compromise, and following this, the peace and reconciliation committee will follow their own traditional strict procedure.

The representative of the families of a victim and the families of a perpetrator appears before the peace and reconciliation committee. Both will be blessed by the high priest with the cross, and the committee will let the victims and the perpetrators family to explain their perception and to express their feelings. At the end, the committee will come up with a solution and then the families of the perpetrator will agree to pay for compensation called 'ye Badima', literally translated as 'payment for the farm land'. The Payment of 'ye Badima' by the families of the perpetrator will secure them not to displace, or disappear from their original farm land. The decision of the payment depends on the magnitude of the injury of the victim suffered by the perpetrator and of course the intension of the perpetrator will be taken into consideration as well. The payment made by the committee usually exceeds forty to fifty thousand Birr, and the family of the perpetrator will also agree to bring their perpetrator before the court if they found him. At the end, a written agreement is signed by both the victim and perpetrator's family and the committees will also put a signature on it. This agreement is

² The Amharic word 'Dem Marek' is literally translated as 'drying the blood'. when a person causes death to another person, the peace and reconciliation committee will finally pass decision that the perpetrators family will suppose to pay some compensation for the family of the victim in many ways most of the time they deal with the financial aspect of the dispute settling.

³ The traditional reconciliation and forgiveness strategies are also cited by the peace and reconciliation committee members as the main peace building strategies. Accompanied by the church, priests are very instrumental in urging reconciliation and forgiveness. Dinji and other life exemplary explanations plays good role for the re-integration of the families of the victim and the perpetrator.

called Dinji,⁴ literally translated as fixed agreement. This agreement called Dinji is supposed to be respected by both sides. If one of them violet the agreement, the one who is violated the agreement will supposed to pay three-fold of the previous agreement passed by the peace and reconciliation committee. Concerning the nature and dimensions of blood revenge killings, the peace and reconciliation committee describe it as follows:

- ‘In Denbia woreda revenge killings is the most unsettled problem, & an unavoidable phenomenon that is intricately linked with the surrounding community. Revenge killings can be mitigated on some occasions and can be managed at some point if the government give enough attention for our job that usually made effective reconciliations among the disputed farmers that leads towards revenge killings’ (FGD1).



Figure 1: The Peace and Reconciliation Committee on duty. One of the leading Reconciliation and Peace Committee addressing on the points of reconciliation, compromise and re-union to restore peace among the families of the victim and the families of the perpetrator (April, 2016)

The nature and dimensions of dispute provoking revenge will take so many forms. It has its own political, economic, social and psychological causes.⁵ Conflicts over land often have extensive negative effects on the economic, social, cultural and psychological lives of the people of Denbia woreda where land distribution is not enough for the people to use it. The prospects of land gain by illegal means are wide spread and many poor people lack access to land. Land conflicts can have disastrous effects on individuals as well as on groups and end up with blood revenge. Most people in each woreda compete to control and expand *common land* usually called in Amharic ‘*common land*’, (የልሳ ማዳታ)፤ literally translated as *land that nobody own*. Furthermore, the researchers have observed that the land administration office in Denbia woreda do not have an organized land resource distribution management system that in turn led to land conflicts or conflicts to grab a piece of land that leads to violent conflicts and end up in blood revenges.

1.3. Land Inheritance in the Rural Denbia District as a Factor for Revenge Killings in Denbia District

In the community of Denbia woreda, the land belonging to the kinship group has been formally divided among its extended family members, and these divisions continue in fixed form for generations. This kind of land arrangement is prevalent in Denbia woreda. Each family within the kinship group claims a fixed area of land, and allocation normally takes place within the family, except when unusual circumstances require a general re-allocation among the member families of all the land claimed by the descent group. (Markakis:1975, 76). Conflicts over a piece of land in Denbia woreda occur in many forms. There are conflicts among family members. This is mainly connected with land inheritance from the one who dies. Family members and relatives can kill each other demanding over the use of a piece of land that will end up in killings and blood revenges. Such kind of land conflicts are complex and difficult to solve at the start because the one who claims the land could be a family member who gets the land from his own parents. However, this will be considered by other family members as illegal possession of the land by him/her. Land inheritance is the passage of title and ownership of property from the one who dies to people whom the law designates because of blood or marriage relation as the deceased heir by operation of the law or by the will of the deceased. (Daniel &

⁴ Dinji is supposed to be respected by the family of the victim and the perpetrator. If one of them violet the agreement, the one who violet it will suppose to pay three-fold of the previous agreement passed by the peace and reconciliation committee. Most of the penalty of the Dinji depends on the crime committed by the perpetrator however, as to our observation on the reconciliation process it will be amounted to 40 to 50 thousand Ethiopian Birr.

⁵ One of the disastrous effects of blood revenge killings is the economic consequences. Especially if the one murdered is the bread winner. All the families would face a serious of consequences including the displacement of the family from its original farmland.

Melkamu,2009:205). According to land laws and transfer of land holding rights it shall be in written form and any land holder may transfer permanently his holding rights to family members and temporarily to various person's members in gift. (Chapter 3 Article 3).⁶ And chapter 3 Article 10 states that where more than one heir shares the inherited land, and where the share of each share is less than the minimum plot of land holding determined by regulation, the family members shall not partition the land other than using it jointly. However, against the law one of the family member may take the loin share of the land prohibit the other family member to stay using the land. Such kind of circumstances will put them in violent conflict. The reconciliation and peace committee at Denbia woreda pointed out that these kinds of conflict over land are complex and controversial and more difficult to deal with than other cases. Rural land administration proclamation Number 333/2003 do not accept the above claim of the person who stand to take all the land for him/her self. According to Herring such kind of claim shall be regarded unacceptable because the one who pass the piece of land or the property intends to deprive the other family member from the property and will be better to deal the case with the civil code (Herring: 209:138). According to the rural land inheritance law, the heir as stated by the new federal rural land use and administration law are both the family members which are defined as 'any person who permanently living with holder of land use right sharing the livelihood of the later' and lawful heir. (Art.2410).

The strict interpretation of this article indicates or includes not only those persons who have relation by consanguinity or affinity to the holder of the right but also anybody provided they are living permanently with the holder and share the means of the livelihood of the holder. Here, the major criterion is not blood or affinity relationship but whether the person concerned is living with and by the income of the right holder. The other persons who are competent to inherit the deceased are his/her lawful heirs. The meaning of the lawful heir is not provided in the same proclamation mentioned here above. Thus, we need to go to the civil code so long as the latter law has not repealed it expressly. According to rural land administration office in Denbia woreda, the triggering cause for blood revenge killings is Land. Basically, conflicts arise as a result of the multiple rent for money, unlawful double allocation of land for a single person due to undocumented customary, or when farmers have tried to plough common lands through expansion (usually grazing lands), due to competing state agencies land purchase and expansion for various reasons.

- According KI4 reconciliation and peace committee in Denbia woreda, many plots of land are being rented by different farmers to different land users while the renter plough the land for several years, and became successful, another buyer appears as an intruder or and provides enough money to the owner of the land to ban the one who used to plough the land. The respondent further argued that Sometimes this kind of intruding scenario will involve up to the extent of attacking the porter who is supposed to protect the property of person the person who rent the land at the beginning, and this will lead into the vicious cycle of killing and blood revenges. (KI4 Jenda Kebele).

The actual number of land related blood revenge killings in five years in Denbia woreda is displayed in the table below.

Years In E.C.	Triggering Causes of violent killings that eventually ended up with the vicious cycle blood revenges (2003-2007).							
	Revenge	Land	Grudge	Women Driven	Daily based conflicts	Alcohol driven Incidences	Money Driven Incidence	Total in one year
2003	8	5	7	-	-	1	-	21
2004	9	6	4	1	1	2	-	23
2005	7	4	-	2	2	3	2	20
2006	6	4	3	3	3	2	2	23
2007	7	4	6	-	3	5	-	25
Total in 5 years	37	23	20	6	9	13	4	112

Table 2: Causes of revenge killings and the number of people who lost their lives in five years from 2003 up to 2007 EC in Denbia district is displayed in the table above. (Sources: Denbia woreda District Police Office, February 2008)

As displayed in the table above the major causes for blood revenge killings in Denbia woreda is land. Basically, in Denbia woreda in general and the study sites in particular such as Zengaj, Chua hit, Ayinba, and Sankisa ketenas with their respective Kebles are the most vulnerable areas of revenge killings because of land. Many farmers in this woreda desire to control land, claim to inherit land from a close family member, and still some also snatch or control common land by force and intimidation. Mainly the claim to inherit

⁶ An agreement made orally shall not be acceptable by law. Any land holder may, transfer his holding and for limited period o time to more than one person. Where the land holding is a joint holding of the husband and wife or other persons, the gift shall only be applicable in agreement with the husband and wife or other joint holders. Where a man or women dies without making a will and he does not have a child residing in the region engaged or like to be engaged in agricultural works, or where he does not have family, his Parents who are resident of the region engaged or like to be engaged in agricultural works and priory land holding. Inheritance is the devolution of the property of the deceased to persons on the basis of close blood relation to the deceased.

land, firearms and any other left pieces of resources from parents and grandparents are most common causes of blood revenge killings in the woreda. In Denbia woreda, Violent conflicts in general and blood revenge killings in particular are usually attributed with an accidentally daily based conflict, grudge, money motivated, alcohol and women driven conflicts as well. Sometimes it is possible to notice a revenge for an unknown reason.

- For instance, according to one of the reconciliation and peace committee, blood revenge usually occurs after 20 or 30 years long time period. The reason for the vicious cycle of blood revenge killings lies on the fact that the family of the victim do not take revenge right on the perpetrator. Instead the family of the victim will look for the close family of the perpetrator for revenge. Usually a father or brother will be targeted (KI6).

Most of the brutal conflicts and blood revenge killings in Denbia woreda do not involve gun fires unlike West Belesa and Wogera. In Denbia woreda it is not uncommon to see many farmers carrying long thick sticks with them. In Amharic, this stick named as 'shimel' or 'betir'⁷. In Denbia woreda, most farmers consider this shimel or betir not less than a firearm. Therefore, instead perpetrators in Denbia woreda usually used 'ferad', 'shimel', and knife as a gun. In fact, sometimes gunfire also used by perpetrators in Denbia woreda.



Figure 2: Portrayed above is 'Shimel' (ሸሙል) used as an instrument by perpetrators to attack their victim in the community of Denbia woreda. (May, 2016)

According to Denbia woreda land administration office, one of the economic constraints causing conflict and blood revenge killings is usually the desire to control over a piece of land that ends up in revenge killing among many farmers in Denbia Woreda. Basically, the economy of the people of Denbia Woreda is based on subsistence agriculture. Traditionally, in the community of Denbia woreda land relationships are ordered according to three basic principles of social organization such as kinship, the polity and religion. Accordingly, rights over land are vested in the kinship group, the state, and the church. These three categories are still valid today. Each of the traditional categories represents complex arrangements of rights and obligations in relation to land to those who claim rights over the piece of land. First instances rights over land are claimed by the descent group. In most general terms, according to the land administration office in Denbia woreda: The community in Denbia woreda stroll descent group genealogical character is from seven to ten generation deep and is constituted by all known descendants through any line of descent of a man or women who are being granted hereditary rights over land. All the grantees descendants are thought to have in an alienable right to use a share of land. The founder of the lineage is known as Abbat.⁸

⁷ It is common to see many farmers in Denbia woreda walking with long tick stick made of wood. 'Ferad' is also an axe like but straitened also used for defence and attack as well. Most farmers consider this shimel or betir not less than a firearm. Therefore, instead perpetrators usually used 'ferad', 'shimel', knife as a gun. In fact, sometimes gunfire also used by perpetrators. Most of the revenge killings eventually ended up with the vicious cycle of blood revenges. Most of the blood revenge killings often among relatives and family members of the claim over a piece of land.

⁸ The descendant of the Abbat who claims rights to the land is known as balabat. In recent years, this term has taken on added social and political meaning. However, in the community of Denbia woreda originally it denoted simply the status of a person whose rights over land derived from membership in a kinship group. All the members of the kinship group have rights to a share of the land. Such rights refer to a portion of the land and not to any specific plot. It is the right which is inherited.

- In the community of Denbia woreda, the land belonging to the kinship group has been formally divided among its member families, and these divisions continue in fixed form for generations. This kind of land arrangement is also prevalent in Denbia woreda. Each family within the kinship group claims a fixed area of land, and allocation normally takes place within the family, problem occurs when one of the family member claim to hold the loin share’ (KI7)

Traditionally, rights of land holding which resemble full ownership could be acquired in Denbia woreda community through the occupation and cultivation of unclaimed land that may include any common land usually for grazing purpose.

- ‘According to KI8 customary laws that sustain forty years of continued occupancy and payment of taxes constitutes a prescriptive right over such land. This in turn encourages an expansion of common land. This also leads in to conflict that resulted in blood revenge among the kinship group as well. A more recent way is the acquiring of land through purchase for one or two years. This practice seems to have been practised into the community of Denbia woreda. When the other better contender tends to buy(rent) the land with more money this puts the first buyer in conflict with the newcomer that end up conflict and killings’ (KI7Koladiba 01 Kebele)

2. The Roles of Socialization Processes and Familial Attitudes on the Perception and Practices of Revenge in Denbia District

The perception and practice of revenge is attributed with socialization process and familial attitudes. In Denbia woreda the vicious cycle of conflict and blood revenge killings has started an earlier time. When the researchers have come across with the people of the study site; some of the respondents assert that revenge killings were a common practice and even encouraged by the feudal political system in the previous times. Since the system was traditional monarchical system were political power was controlled by people with close family ties revenge was appreciated. He who failed to revenge was undermined and hated by the ruling traditional monarchy whereas the one who takes revenge will be highly appreciated. Perpetrators were not brought before the laws. Therefore, the role and function of justice was undermined and dysfunctional. When we come to the perception of revenge killings at the familial level in particular and the socialization process in general, revenge killings were highly appreciated. According to the argument by KI8, the family is one big source of the problem for revenge killings by providing all the necessary teachings, guidance and direction for the grown-up teenager:

- ‘A family teaches and provides proper guidance to a small child continuously and stimulate him to take revenge against his father’s perpetrator. If he did the revenge, he will be highly appreciated by the family. He will be considered as a hero, valiant, courageous, gallant, fearless, appreciated, praised and prized by both the family and the surrounding people. (KI8: Denbia woreda police commission officer).

As the respondent argued blood revenge is almost a tradition of the communities of the people of Denbia woreda, and people, in this area as explained earlier, use ‘*Shimel*’ as a gun fire to attack their enemy. The rural community in Denbia woreda socializes their children to be tough and to be energetic in fighting, and recite with passion the so called ‘*fukera*’. *Fukera* is usually accompanied by a dispute provoking poem to energize the young not to fear to take revenge. Briefly put, brood in Denbia woreda rural community are almost socialized by inculcating the tradition of revenge in their mind. The community will have prized him with the following inspiring and blood revenge provoking poem:

- የቆለውየደጋውደመተላለኝ፤
- የኔ ማደምቀረ እንደበሰበሰ፤

However, the peace and reconciliation committee, like they put it with their own words, opposed such kind of dispute and blood revenge provoking poems and instruct the community to avoid such poems in the various social gatherings of the community. The perception and practice of revenge is attributed with socialization process and familial attitudes. In Denbia woreda the vicious cycle of conflict and blood revenge killings has started in the past. For instance, one of the respondents argued that revenge was appreciated.

- ‘He who failed to revenge was undermined and hated by the ruling traditional monarchy whereas the one who takes revenge he will be highly appreciated. Perpetrators were not brought before the laws. Therefore, role and function of justice was undermined and dysfunctional. (KI9; Denbia woreda police commission officer).

The above explanation forwarded by the police commissioner is supportive in that the law used by the imperial regime at that time was called Fetha Nagast or the law of kings. Concerning blood revenge killings, for instance, Fetha Nagast states that ‘a victim can take revenge against his perpetrator, however the one who is going to take revenge is expected to bring his victim before the judge and then can take his life’ (Article 47:12 Chapter No. 1707). When we come to the perception of revenge killings at the familial level in particular and the socialization process in general, revenge killings were highly appreciated. A family teaches and provides proper guidance to a small child continuously and let him to take revenge against his father’s perpetrator. If he did the revenge, he will be highly appreciated by the family. He will be considered as a hero, valiant, courageous, gallant, fearless, appreciated, praised and prized by both the family member and the surrounding people. There is an interesting story in Denbia woreda at Ayinba ketena that comprises Mequamia, Anbagarit and Gana Kebele. As one of the religious leader’s committee members explained the following story ‘a woman who lost her husband by a perpetrator while she was pregnant for him after she gave birth to a baby boy she named him Atrsaw (*አትረሳው*), literally translated in English as ‘*don’t forget*’. Twenty years later he avenged and killed nine people including the perpetrator. And the community praised Atrsaw with the following blood revenge provoking poem:

- ሲተምአሰፈተለ ማደምአላረሰ፤
- የመቃብር ደንጋይ እያመለሰ፤
- ‘የአትረሳውአባት ማየቶ እንደሞተ፤
- ደፍን ማደንወደን አሰረውቃይ፤

A similar story at Zengaj ketena holds similar scenario that the families of a victim targeted to avenge the perpetrator unfortunately the perpetrator again killed five of them and following that incidence the people at Zengaj ketena praised the perpetrator with the following poem

- አግዥት ሁነ ወመጠአንድ ሁኖ ቆያቸዉኛ
- አባደፋር ሀይሌ መኳከም ገቢያቸዉኛ

However, if someone fails to take revenge he will be considered as a coward, the family and the surrounding people will judge him as the one who failed to avenge for his brother/father. Consequently, he will be alienated and excluded from any social gatherings. He will be excluded from wedding, coffee ceremony; funeral, church, and the community will make him feel that a huge social sanction put on him. The families of the victim will have pressurized him to revenge as well. They will ashamed him. The whole sanction will lead him to revenge. Therefore, he will consider the revenge as the best alternative to lift the social sanction made by the community. The socialization processes and familial attitudes on the perception and practices of revenge are highly manifested through cultural influence. According to the conciliators of revenge killings women at family wise played a huge role for revenge killings. 'Women do have a huge role of escalating revenge killings. They encourage men in many ways to take revenge.'⁹

2.1. Investigating the Psycho-Social Challenges that Families of Both Victims and Offenders Encounter as a Result of Revenge in Denbia District

As a result of revenge families of both victims and offenders will suffer from various psycho-social challenges. One effect of psycho-social challenge of revenge killings is an erosion of trust among the victim and perpetrators family. Trust in human relation is vital in the building up of social capital since the loss of trust has led to a disintegration of kinship ties, and family ties as well. Subsequently this has also led to increased individualism and a change of settlements from their permanent farm lands. The case of Ayinba ketena and Ambaguarit Kebele is the best example to explain such cases.

- 'Some of our reconciliations' may not be successful, for instance one of the families of the perpetrators paid a compensation of thirty thousand Birr for the families of the victim in Zengaj Kebele thus those families may not to be displaced from their original farmland. However, after they paid the above compensation, they have not gone back to reclaim their land. This is because of their loss of trust over the families of the victim following intimidation. They also worried for the lives of their children and describe it with their own words 'how can we live next to the families of the victim' (FGD2)

2.1.1. Psychological Challenges

This is characterized by fear and trauma. The perpetrator will feel no longer at ease after gunning down his victim. The perpetrators families and close relatives will be exposed to the danger of blood revenge killings. The families of the perpetrator will soon realize that the families of the victim would avenge them hence they should disappear from their farmlands and dwellings. The perpetrator already abandoned his residence and obscures himself somewhere until reconciliation is made.¹⁰ . Not only the perpetrator and his families that suffered from psychological trauma, and fear similar effect rests on the side of the family of the victim. According to the KI6 'close families, relatives and neighbours in particular and the surrounding community in general expect the revenge to come from the victim's family against the family of the perpetrator. Otherwise, as mentioned earlier, if they fail to take revenge insults in many forms will be followed by the exclusion from many social gatherings. And the neighbours of the victim will avoid the victim's family from any social gatherings if they fail to take revenge.

2.1.2. The Economic Challenges of Revenge

The perpetrator will soon disappear and abandoned his house and farmland after he kills his victim. He left all his family. If he is the bread winner all the family will start to suffer from hunger for shortage of food. Sometimes it is possible that his farmland will be controlled by the victim's family and deprived the family of the perpetrator not to till their land until justice is done either on their own hand by killing the perpetrator or put him before the court. For instance, the case of a respondent, the father of the perpetrator in Denbia woreda explains the situation as follows

- 'My son used to rent land for money in each year and plough it for many years, however an intruder came and rent that same land with better amount of money and paid for the owner of the land. Following this there was a misunderstanding between the new renter of the piece of land and my son. My son has asked the renter to hands-off the land for him and the new renter refused. Following this verbal offense continued that end up in with a killing. My son killed the new renter of the land. As a father i brought my son to the court. Even though reconciliation is done with the families of the victim through the peace and reconciliation committee, i feel insecure and intimidated by the families of the victim hence i left my house and farmland and

⁹ They usually women use provoking poem. They will also pay money for the revenge to be taken. Some women will say to the extent that they intimidate their husbands and ask for divorce if he refused to involve in the revenge' for instance, 'ye kolaw ye de gaw demu temelete yene wondim kere ende bese bese' such kind of poem will initiate men to take revenge.

¹⁰ Both the perpetrator and his families suffered from psychological trauma, and fear from any possible revenge to come from the side of the family of the victim. If any one of the victim's family failed to take revenge, he will be excluded from any social gatherings. From wedding ceremony, funeral, coffee ceremony and others. Where as the perpetrator will be praised, encouraged and will be considered as a hero by both his family and the surrounding community.

begun to live in Koldadiba. In fact, my wife travel back and forth to the farm land and brought the harvest since the family of the victim do not take revenge on women' (KI9).

As mentioned earlier one of the worst consequences of revenge killings is the economic effects on the families of the perpetrator. The best example is the perpetrator with whom the researcher make depth interview in Denbia woreda Ambaguarit Kebele. A respondent argued that

- 'In Ambaguarit Kebele a perpetrator has killed and disappeared. For fear of revenge by the victim's family the perpetrator with all his families displace from his house and from his permanent farm land. The community peace committee has tried so many times but the victim's family refused to come to terms and prohibited the perpetrators brother and his family not to step on to his farm land. All his family including himself suffered from economic devastation. A bout nine of his families including him exposed to chronic shortage of food. The respondent further argued that about the situation as follows; 'this extended family is still being exposed to economic crisis and chronic shortage of food because who's main bread winner their father is unable to plough his land for fear of revenge by the victim families. The question is how are we going to eliminate or mitigate blood revenge killings and what are we doing about such kind of blood revenge victims and their families? One solution is by backing and strengthening the community peace and reconciliation committee. In woreda, zone, regional as well as federal level we need to design a method to constantly design to support and monitor the community peace and reconciliation committee. (KI10).

As to the researchers' observation, enough attention is not given for the peace and reconciliation committee and concerned stakeholders need to creating awareness through education to the community is crucial to reduce revenge killings in Denbia woreda and other research sites. For instance, the church or religious institutions have their own responsibility in teaching and shaping the youth with good manner. To be ethical is an objective necessity for humans. Family also have their own responsibility and have a vital share to bring up their children to be ethical and help them to send to school. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopian constitution puts land under public ownership however the selling of land to private gains in the communities of Denbia woreda is common. Loss justice administration system and inefficient administration and impartiality in the deliverance of justice services will leave individual with grief and resentment. As a result, the individual will decide to take justice in his own hands and involved in violent conflict and blood revenge killings.

- According to KI11, 'the root cause of violent killings and revenge is land. Initially, the victim and the perpetrator make dispute over a piece of land, when they came to the urban areas and get drunk, and at some point, emotional feelings out bursts as well as a show of defiance leads to a violent action and fear makes one of them attack others out of the fear of being attacked. Therefore, one of the contender will kill the other in such a way that such vicious circle of killings and revenge will continue until the community peace committee finally intervene to make a reconciliation. (KI11, March,2008).

As to the explanation given from Hoffmann, most blood revenge conflicts occurs in the absence of very well established mechanisms of mediating conflicts as early as possible by backing the traditional resolution systems otherwise the inability of governments to mediate conflicts will end up in violent conflicts and revenge (Hoffmann, 2008:158).

- 'One of the community Reconciliation peace committee in Denbia woreda describes the role of their reconciliation as follows: 'Our job of reconciliations is effective and holistic and should be recognized, and respected. In fact, we expect a reward from God. When will be the government give enough attention for our role of avoiding revenge killings? The concerned bodies including the government must support the community peace committee financially and institutionally'. (KI11, March, 2008).

As to the researchers' observation in the research sites, the peace and reconciliation committee raised an important point that stake holders and especially government concerned bodies have ignored their role for so long. It will be vital to recognize, sponsor and economically support the reconciliation and peace committee; hence it may help them to undertake their task effectively.

2.2. The Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms Used by the Peace and Reconciliation Committee to Mitigate Blood Revenge in Denbia District

In Denbia woreda the traditional way of resolving conflict is by performing a cultural practice called 'Dem Marek', this means when a person causes death to another person the community peace committee usually from different Kebeles will convene a meeting and discuss the causes of the death. Then they will evaluate the damages caused and appropriate compensation would be given to the family of the victim by the perpetrators family. The compensation could be in money, domestic animals like cows. Then sometimes it is common both the victim and the perpetrators family they would come with a sheep then they would slaughter it and eat the sheep from the opposite group and the victim and perpetrators family later signed an agreement called *Dinji* (ድንጅ) and put a signature on it.¹¹ . Reconciliation and forgiveness for the end of revenge killings is one of the most successful strategies used by the community peace committee to settle peace. Their role of reconciliation was summarized by one of the peace and reconciliation committee, from Gana Kebele as follows:

- 'One of our contributions to avoid revenge killings and to uplift the peace process is to pray for the end of such scenarios. Whenever we came to know that revenge killings happened in any one of the vulnerable Kebeles in Denbia woreda and going to peace meeting and settlement between the family of both the victims and the perpetrator, we take no food and water and

¹¹ Both of them promised to respect the agreement in front of the community peace committee. If in any case one of them violet the agreement, then the one who violet it will suppose to pay three-fold of the previous payment of 40,000 Or 50,000 Birr.

ask God to make the negotiations fruitful. Even though we are working hard to mitigate such kind of tragedy, the concerned bodies including the government do not pay enough attention for the community peace committee. (KI12, Gana Kebele). Initially, the perpetrator went to steal cabbage and other fruits on the farm land of a priest. Unfortunately, the son of the priest killed the perpetrator and disappeared. And the family of the perpetrator, who lost his life, again take revenge on the younger brother of the one who killed the perpetrator on Zengaj Kebele. Since both the family of the perpetrator and the family of the victim took human lives the reconciliation did not require Dinji or any other compensation. Since it was considered as equivalent as both sides take human lives. As displayed in the Figure below the cross is the most important spiritual instrument employed by the peace and reconciliation committee to restore peace among the families of the perpetrator and the victim.



Figure 3: Portrayed above the families of the victim and the families of the perpetrator on reconciliation, swore on the cross, not to involve into any further vicious cycle of blood revenge killings, Saint Michael church, Denbia woreda, koladiba (May, 2016)

Reconciliation and forgiveness are also cited as main peace building strategies. Accompanied by the church, priests are very instrumental in urging reconciliation and forgiveness. Dinji and other life exemplary explanations folk ways plays good role for the re-integration of the victims and perpetrators family. One of the peace and reconciliation committee at Mekuamiya Mariam stated the following:

- ‘We find the peace and reconciliation process fruitful. Sometimes we accomplish our reconciliation and forgiveness to the extent that both the families of the victim and the families of the perpetrator end up in a marriage. For us this is a great achievement (KI13, Mekuamiya Mariam Kebele).

2.3. Revenge Intervention Mechanisms and Dispute Resolution Strategies to Deal Effectively with the Problem

To deal with revenge intervention mechanisms and dispute resolution strategies effectively with the problem of revenge and the effort to mitigate the dangers of conflict and revenge killings will start from the earnest with the empowering of the peace and reconciliation committee, or 'ye dem adraki committees' (blood drying committee) at various levels. This will be a serious objective that needs necessary attention from the concerned bodies. The study shows that land is the main sources of conflict that eventually leads to violent killings and revenges between family members and among relatives. Therefore, the following intervention mechanisms and dispute resolution strategies to deal effectively with the land in both West Belesa and Denbia woreda will help to mitigate revenge killings incidences. Clearly defined and secured property rights to land, for all the people of the community in the woreda will be crucial. This may include the recognition of customary and informal rights. It may also include the introduction of new forms of intermediate tenure.

Fair land registration is another important ways and strategies to secure land rights in the woreda, all existing claims have to be documented and overlapping interests addressed and clarified in a fair and transparent way. Land registration can be done in many different ways and does not necessarily have to include a technology-based land information system or highly accurate surveying. It should be simple and cost effective as possible, it must be adapted to the people of the woreda established with active public participation and reflecting all legitimated property rights such as formal, informal, customary, religious, state and common. Customary land administration will also prevent conflicts resulting from the misuse of land over the land allocation; a number of provisions can be made. The Identification of the exact boundary of the neighbouring farmers land, Identifications of job descriptions and responsibilities of people working at Denbia woreda land administration offices and the avoiding multiple offering of land for the same person at the woreda, including the establishing of local control mechanisms and the introduction of corrective measures for the people who are working on land distribution and registration if there is any misuse of their authority by irregularly allocating land for their own profit will deal effectively the problem or will at least mitigate the effect of blood revenge killings. The other most crucial factor is the rule of law, since the establishment of the rule of law is a prerequisite for all other measures for the prevention and resolution of land conflicts in the woreda with a clear definition of land uses in the woreda will prevent many conflicts over the use of a given piece of land.

The other most important is the issue of common land grabbing should be addressed properly and have to be realistic and adapted to the woreda levels or conditions otherwise it will be violated and result in gratuitous conflicts that resulted in revenge killings again. An active involvement of citizens in land use planning especially at neighbourhood and village level can mitigate land use conflicts. Furthermore, the land distribution conditions should be improved and intervention is needed by the woreda land administration office and other concerned bodies. And finally, offering awareness creation training for the community of the woreda that will help to foster ethical principles, instilling shared values, commitment to social justice, and environmental protection in the woreda.

3. The Role of the Reconciliation and Peace Committee in Denbia Woreda in the Management of Traditional Conflict

Efficient and effective management of conflict is fundamental to the development of any society, but the prevailing situation in the community of Denbia woreda constitutes a reversal of this reality. The reconciliation and peace committee is not awarded accordingly to their job. The reconciliation and peace committee is doing a holistic job of avoiding any type of conflict. However, their main contribution is mitigating blood revenge killings which is the most prolonged and unsettled problem in the lives of many farmers in Denbia woreda.¹² The concerned bodies do not give enough attention to the reconciliation and peace committee. They usually travel far places in each Kebele, and cross river various valley to settle any aspects of disputes including blood revenge killings among the community members. They use their own accommodation and transport fee expenses. The researchers suggest that the role and significance of the reconciliation and peace committee must get enough attention from the side of the government and from any concerned bodies as well. Attaining adequate financial and institutional support will help them to undertake their job of avoiding any type of conflict mainly blood revenge killings. Supporting the reconciliation and peace committee is crucial. It will automatically help to improve the rule of law and it will improve the functioning of the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms usually used by those reconciliation and peace committees.

As a non-participant spectator, the researchers have observed an incident of blood revenge reconciliation strategies used by the reconciliation and peace committee in Denbia woreda at koladiba saint Michael church, the traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution used by the community peace committee are significant in restoring peace and order among the communities of Denbia woreda. They applied the aforementioned traditional conflict resolution strategies for an effective reconciliation to bring peace among the communities of Denbia in general and the perpetrators and the victims' family in particular. When blood revenge killings and any other violent conflicts have occurred among the communities of Denbia woreda, the traditional means of avoiding conflict are usually the primary means of resolving such problem. The effectiveness of the traditional conflict resolution systems determines whether they can be resolved in a peaceful way or whether they will descend in to violence. However, almost all the peace and reconciliation process involves militias and police from the woreda militia and police office.

As a non-participant observer, the researchers have observed an incident of blood revenge reconciliation strategies used by the reconciliation and peace committee in Denbia woreda near Ayinba Kebele at St. Mariam church, the traditional mechanisms of

¹² The reconciliation and peace committees' employ various traditional conflict resolution mechanisms such as: *Ye dem madrek* (የደም ማደረጃ), *Yebadima* (የባድማ), *Afirsata*, (አፈርሳታ) *Dinji*, (ድንጅ) and others as usually practiced in Denbia woreda to any community member which is affected by any type of conflict including blood revenge conflict killings.

conflict resolution used by the community peace committee do have the following attributes: Initially, the reconciliation peace committee stressed on the points of compromise and reunion to restore social harmony on the communities of Denbia in general and among the families of the perpetrator and the families of the victim in particular. This is highly accompanied by the high priest with their cross and other dignitaries as displayed in the descriptive Figure below.

Basically, decisions made by the reconciliation peace committee are systematically based on the process of listening carefully to the plea of the families of perpetrator and victim separately and one after the other and then follows discussion and negotiation between the reconciliation peace committees to put an appropriate decision. During the resolution process, almost all the reconciliation peace committee will participate in providing systematic suggestion, information, direction as well as comments for each other and for the perpetrators and victims family as well. As displayed in the Figure below, during the reconciliation process a sheep will be slaughtered and after the reconciliation is made successful, both the families of the victim and the families of the perpetrator will eat together from it. For instance, portrayed below are both the families of the perpetrator and the families of the victim are invited to eat together, the slaughtered sheep, after the peace process is over.



Figure 4: Portrayed above are both the families of the perpetrator and the families of the victim are invited to eat together, the slaughtered sheep, after the peace process is over. (June, 2016)

Although the reconciliation peace committee have a high level of acceptance and legitimacy by both the families of perpetrator and victim and their last decisions are supposed to be accepted without any precondition, the process of reconciliation should pass through a cautious discussion. The reconciliation peace committee are supported by militias and if necessary with police forces during the resolution process by the wise men. Enforcement of decisions by the reconciliation peace committee is secured through the agreement were both the families of the victim and perpetrator signed. This agreement usually called Dinji. If in any case one of them violet the agreement, they are supposed to pay three-fold of the previous decision made by the committee. The rules of evidence and procedures presented by the families of the victim and the perpetrator seem to be flexible in the process of reconciliation by the reconciliation peace committee. The families of the victim will be give the priority advantage to choose where to held the reconciliation and the reconciliation peace committee are usually twelve to fifteen in number with whom few notable priests are also involved in the reconciliation process. The peace and reconciliation is accompanied by high priests with a cross brought from the church. Starting with a blessing of both the families of the perpetrator and the families of the victims, the cross is the most crucial spiritual instrument for the peace settlement used by the reconciliation committee.

3.1. Conclusion

Revenge, caused familial and societal problems in the district of Denbia District. Among the forty five kebeles some areas of the district are severely vulnerable for blood revenge killings consisted of higher rates of murder. Insignificant disputes and conflicts raised commonly because of land, grudge, alcoholism, women driven, money driven, stealing, revealing a secret, and other daily based conflicts eventually ended up with blood revenge killings. Mainly, Land conflicts lead to disastrous effects on individuals as well as on groups and end up with blood revenge among family members at the highest number. The problem of conflict among individuals and communities affects the whole world, developed and developing, the urban and the rural societies, civilized and developing nations. But the cause, impact, the types of actors involved and resolution mechanism are different depending on political, socio-economic and technological development of the society (Galtung, 2000). It is impossible to prevent and avoid social conflict from the life of society; but its violence and escalation can be minimized (Gleditsch, 2001). As far as the economic cause is concerned, the issues of land takes the lion's share as the cause of conflict among rural communities of Denbia district. Land is not only a source for livelihoods; it also carries spiritual values and is a valuable economic asset. The increasing population in the light of dwindling land resources and environmental stress in a situation of land governance deficits has led to numerous land conflicts within and

between communities of Denbia. The number of people who lost their lives in five years from 2011 up to 2015 in Denbia district is raised to one hundred and twelve. Among this figure, more than forty lost their life because of blood revenge.

In Denbia woreda, Violent conflicts in general and blood revenge killings in particular are usually attributed with an accidentally daily based conflicts, land, gambling, theft, alcohol and women driven conflicts as well. Sometimes it is possible to notice a revenge for an unknown reason. For instance, according to KI2 reconciliation and peace committee, blood revenge usually occurs after 20 or 30 years long time period. The reason for the vicious cycle of blood revenge killings lies on the fact that the family of the victim do not take revenge right on the perpetrator. Instead the family of the victim will look for the close family of the perpetrator for revenge. Usually a father or brother will be targeted. Unlike other districts, most of the brutal conflicts and blood revenge killings in Denbia woreda do not involve gun fires. Instead used 'shimel' or 'betir'¹³. In Denbia woreda, most farmers consider this shimel or betir not less than a firearm.

The Communities of Denbia woreda prefer the traditional conflict and revenge resolution mechanisms than the modern one. Some argue that the constraints of the legal or criminal justice system in addressing revenge and restoring former relationships lies on the fact that it is punitive. The legal justice system focused on punishments of the criminal committed the crime and the deterrence effect as well. As Macfarlane argues the formal legal system focusing on principles of law and state sanctioned procedures and institutions (Macfarlane, 1998:487). In the criminal justice system cases can only be settled with principles, laws and guidelines. The criminal justice system considered crime against the public. Hence criminals or perpetrators in this case can't relive from liability by the traditional consensus. Unlike the traditional justice system, which usually a win-win position was both the family of the victim and the perpetrator restore their former relationships. The constraints of the legal justice system lie on the fact that either the victim or the perpetrator may be the winner or the beneficiary. The other constraint, of the legal justice system, is the procedures used is very stringent, time taking and costly. The decisions of the criminal justice system are binding in addressing revenge which will be enforced by disregarding the willingness of both the victim and the perpetrator.

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¹³ It is not uncommon to see many farmers in Denbia woreda walking with long tick stick made of wood. 'Ferad' is also an axe like but straitened also used for defence and attack as well. Most farmers consider this shimel or betir not less than a firearm. Therefore, instead perpetrators usually used 'ferad', 'shimel', knife as a gun. In fact, sometimes gunfire also used by perpetrators. Most of the revenge killings eventually ended up with the vicious cycle of blood revenges. Most of the blood revenge killings scenario often occurred among relatives and family members of the claim over a piece of land.