

**International Journal of Emerging Multidisciplinary Research And Innovation
(IJEMRI)****Customary Justice and Legal Pluralism in Urban Ethiopia: Shimglina Practices and Challenges in Debre Berhan City****¹Dr. Geremew Wube Ashagre, ²Dr Radhakrishnan S**

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ABSTRACT

This research paper discusses the customs and issues of shimglina traditional conflict resolution in the city of Debre Berhan City, North Shewa Zone, Amhara Regional State, Ethiopia. A qualitative study was employed which included 5 focus group discussions and 50 participants and semi-structured interviews with 67 key informants who were selected by use of purposive and snowball sampling. Thematic analysis was done on the data using Social Capital Theory and Social Solidarity Theory. The results indicate that shimglina tackles various conflicts such as family, neighborhood, commercial, inheritance, property and community disagreements. The mechanism was appreciated by the participants in terms of its easy access, low cost, familiarity with its culture, perceived speed as well as the focus on reconciliation and social relationships. Shimglina works at interrelations family, neighborhood, community, and greater levels, where shimageles (elders) performed the role of mediators, conciliators, arbitrators, and peacemakers. Its efficacy is however questioned by urbanization, social diversity, evolving relationship, government intervention, lack of institutional backing, generational shift, growing complex conflicts and doubt of how well it is connected with formal justice institutions. This research adds empirical data to the ways of traditional conflict resolution functioning and changing in a developing urban environment in Ethiopia.

Keywords: Shimglina, Urban Conflict Resolution, Social Capital, Social Solidarity, Debre Berhan, Ethiopia

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.65180/ijemri.2026.2.4.02>

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Conflict is a natural aspect of the social life, as the result of conflicting interests, ownership of the resources, as well as the causes of the unfriendly social relations. In Africa, traditional ad hoc systems have been in place to resolve conflicts, ensure social harmony, and rebuild relationships. Locally acknowledged norms, social networks, and community authority often feature these mechanisms, which are based on dialogue, reconciliation, and restoration instead of adversarial adjudication (Pankhurst and Assefa, 2008; Epple and Assefa, 2020). Justice system in Ethiopia is pluralistic, with customary, religious and state based systems present and interacting.

The traditional dispute resolution is also important when formal legal institutions grow in scope, albeit with varying degrees of cooperation, complementary, and conflicting relationships with state justice (Epple and Assefa, 2020). Constitutional customary and religious dispute resolution is also recognized to acknowledge personal and family dispute in the specified personal issues and in agreements made between the parties (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia [FDRE], 1995).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Being a necessary aspect of social life, conflict emerges due to the personal contradiction of interests, the disagreement of resources, the interpersonal conflict of personalities and the transformation of social relationships. Formal courts as a source of justice are also important,

but not the most important, nor is directing people where their everyday conflicts are concerned.

Even in Ethiopia, traditional systems are significant elements of the plural justice system. According to the Justice Needs and Satisfaction Survey, there were estimated to be 7.4 million impactful legal issues encountered each year and 43% of individuals who took action to address their most serious legal issue used local elders. Furthermore, 64% of cases presented to the village elders were deemed as resolved (Hiil, 2020). Although their relevance remains, traditional mechanisms experience adverse problems concerning the legal recognition, jurisdiction, enforcement, institutional autonomy, and their connection with formal justice organizations (Assefa, 2020; Epple and Assefa, 2020).

Such difficulties might be aggravated in urban environments, where movement of people, social differences, evolving terms of relationships, more complicated arguments may undermine the social connections and mutual consent on which traditional institutions rely. Even though shinglina as a conventional dispute-resolution system is still a key aspect of Amhara communities, empirical data on the dynamics of shinglina in urban areas is little known.

The body of literature has been heavily biased towards rural settings, thus showing limited knowledge of how shinglina functions and adjusts in urban environments, the nature of tribes placing it, why society still uses it, and the issues surrounding its ineffectiveness. Such disparity is especially applicable in Debre Berhan City where

urban developments and the evolving social interaction patterns offer a significant point of reference in studying customary justice. In this study, it explores the practices and issues of shimglina in Debre Berhan City, including the organizational levels, processes, and type of conflicts addressed, the perceived strengths, experience and decision making domain by community members and the interaction of shimglina with formal justice institutions.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

The overall aim of the research is to investigate the shimglina traditional conflict resolution systems and practices in settling different forms of conflicts in Debre Berhan City, the North Shewa Zone of Amhara Regional State, Ethiopia.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To distinguish and explain the different shapes and levels of hierarchy of shimglina customary conflict resolution in Debre Berhan City.
2. To analyze the procedures and processes of shimglina in resolving different types of conflicts in the urban context.
3. To consider the benefits and strengths of shimglina customary conflict resolution mechanisms in conflict settlement of urban areas.
4. Determine and discuss the obstacles that prevent making shimglina workable in solving conflicts in the city of Debre Berhan.

5. To find out the experiences and decision-making processes of community members on using shimglina.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the different types and levels of hierarchies of shimglina customary conflict resolution within Debre Berhan City?
2. What procedures and processes are followed by shimglina in resolving different types of conflicts in the urban context?
3. What are the strengths and benefits of shimglina customary mechanisms of conflict resolution in urban conflict settlement?
4. What challenges hinder the effectiveness of shimglina in resolving conflicts in Debre Berhan City?
5. What do members of the community experience and how do they decide on using shimglina and formal dispute-resolution?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research has theoretical, empirical, practical, and policy implications. Ideally, its contribution towards comprehending the influence of social networks, trust, reciprocity, shared norms, and community solidarity on customary conflict resolution in an urban setting is evident (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000).

Empirically, the research paper contributes to existing sparse research on shimglina in urban Ethiopia and provides insights into the interplay between traditional and formal justice institutions (Pankhurst and Assefa, 2008; Epple and Assefa, 2020).

In practice, the results can guide elders and those in power and other actors of the justice sector to enhance the strength of accessible and reconciliation-oriented dispute resolution and enhance relevant connections with formal justice institutions. In terms of policy, the research has given evidence as it applies to Ethiopian increasing focus on community-based and customary justice systems.

1.6 Scope and Delimitations

This paper is narrowly directed at the *shimglina* traditional conflict-resolution methods in the city of Debre Berhan. The study does not suggest statistical generalizability although the findings might be informative about other cities in the Amhara Region and Ethiopia. Since a qualitative case study is a qualitative study, it aims to produce both contextual and interpretive insights into the phenomenon in its specific social context (Yin, 2018; Creswell and Poth, 2018).

The paper looks at conflicts that are solved with the help of *shimglina* and fails to give a concrete overview of all the conflicts solved in formal courts or any other customary organization. Instead of making a systematic comparative analysis of its results with outcomes of actual courts, it concentrates on the practices, perceived strengths and experiences, challenges related to *shimglina*.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Customary Conflict Resolution and *Shimglina*

In this wider context, *shimglina* is a crucial traditional dispute-resolution methodology in Amhara communities. It is based on the respected elders (*shimageles*) to reconcile conflicts and mediate and rebuild the social relationship. It has been shown to be applied in family, interpersonal, land and community conflicts, and the key aspects of its implementation are reconciliation and peaceful living (Pankhurst and Assefa, 2008; Alemneh, 2023).

The ongoing institutional focus on customary justice in Ethiopia, with some latest trends to formalize customary courts in Amhara Region, further points out the necessity to discuss the way *shimglina* operates and changes in the modern urban environments.

2.2 Empirical Literature on Traditional conflict resolution in Ethiopia.

The traditional dispute settlement is also a significant aspect of the plural justice in Ethiopia. In the current literature, a wide range of customary institutions in the country is recorded, which are coexisting with formal and religious justice systems (Pankhurst and Assefa, 2008; Eppele and Assefa, 2020). The evidence on national justice-needs also demonstrates that local elders still continue to be one of the most heavily utilised sources of dispute-resolution services, meaning that community-based justice still holds social significance (HiiL, 2020).

2.2.1 Traditional Conflict Resolution in the rural set up.

A large portion of the Ethiopian evidence is rural based. Pankhurst and Assefa (2008) record the customary institutions in dispute management and sustaining social relations, whereas Abate and Shiferaw (2008) record the significance of customary mechanisms in North Shewa. More recently, Alemneh (2023) discovered that to this day, shimglina is applicable in land conflicts between rural areas at Bahir Dar Zuria, in particular, by reconciliation and reestablishing peaceful relations. According to these studies, traditional mechanisms are likely to attract most of their legitimacy through the commonality of norms, ongoing social relationships, and community acknowledgment. Nonetheless, the results of mostly rural locations cannot necessarily tell how shimglina works in the context of more heterogeneous and mobile cities.

2.2.2 Shimglina, Legal Pluralism, and Institutional Relations.

Shimglina is a country that functions on the larger legal pluralism system in Ethiopia where customary, religious and state-driven institutions interplay (Epple and Assefa, 2020). This interdependence can be characterized as collaboration and conflicts with respect to jurisdiction and authority enforcement, human-rights norms, and authority (Assefa, 2020; Fiseha, 2014). One example presented by Addis (2023) demonstrates that the jurisdiction and autonomy of customary institutions in Amhara Region may be influenced by the government. Accordingly, shimglina can be effective and sustainable not only when it is accepted by the community but

also the connection to the formal justice and administration is assessed.

2.2.3 Traditional justice in the cities.

It is through the urbanization that a unique context of customary justice is formed. Evidence provided by countries shows that, at the urban level, the use of elders remains, but it is less common than in rural communities: 26% of urban residents who took action on a legal issue called local elders, as opposed to 51 times in the rural world (HiiL, 2020).

This implies that urbanization does not abolish the customary justice but it can convert the social conditions that underlie it. Greater mobility, demographic heterogeneity, and the development of new social relations can put a strain on the systems that are traditionally based on familiarity, mutual norms, and civil ties (Epple and Assefa, 2020).

2.2.4 Legal and institutional challenges.

The association between customary and formal justice is a major concern. Even though the FDRE Constitution includes some recognition of customary adjudication, there are issues of jurisdiction, enforcement, accountability, institutional coordination, and human-rights protection (FDRE, 1995; Assefa, 2020; Epple and Assefa, 2020).

Institutional environment in which customary justice is applicable is also changing and this is evidenced by the recent customary-court reforms in Amhara Region. As a result of these developments, it becomes significant to consider not only whether the customary mechanisms are

formally established in the law, but how they operate, evolve and cope with the formal institutions in practice.

2.2.5 Research Gap

Although there is increased scholarly research on customary justice in Ethiopia, there is limited empirical research on shimglina in urban areas especially within the rapidly developing cities like Debre Berhan. Current literature has focused on rural settings to a great extent and national surveys do not give much information about real practice, levels of organization, form of conflicts, preference of the community and problems of institutions in city contexts of shimglina. This paper fills this gap because it will discuss the functioning, intention, and use of shimglina by community members, and its adaptability to social and institutional environment of city Debre Berhan.

3. Theoretical Framework

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Theoretical View that Informed the Research.

Using the social capital theory and the social solidarity theory, this paper has elaborated on the persistence of shimglina and its operation. The social capital theory emphasises the importance of social networks, trust, reciprocity and shared norms in enhancing cooperation (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000).

The Social Solidarity Theory, including that of Durkheim (1984), lays stress on the values, social integration, and cohesion as the sources of social order. The theories, in combination, offer a

complementary approach to the explanation that shimglina is a relationship-based, as well as reconciliation-oriented, institution.

3.2 Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory describes the mechanisms by which a collective action occurs through network, trust, reciprocity and shared norm (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000).

Applied to shimglina, the theory contributes to understanding why members of a community trust the elders, how social networks play a role in the situation, and how reciprocal relations facilitate the settlement of disputes. It also gives a ground on which the relationship and networks that traditional justice relies on can be altered by the forces of urbanization, movement, and social diversity.

3.3 Social Solidarity Theory

The Social Solidarity Theory by Durkheim (1984) highlights the role of common norms and integration into society in ensuring social order. This approach applies specifically to the shimglina where the dispute resolution goes beyond settling disputes to the level of restoring relationships and preserving harmony in the community. It thus aids in understanding the focus dictated by reconciliation, social cohesion, and further interaction between the disputants.

4 Study application.

The two theories are used complementarily. Social Capital Theory describes how networks, trust, reciprocity, and community ties maintain

shimglina, and Social Solidarity Theory describes how reconciliation, shared norms, and communion social practices are at the heart of shimglina. All these combine to inform the interpretation of community preferences, dispute-resolution processes, its subordinate elders, and impacts of urbanization and shifting social relationships on shimglina.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design because the research questions seek to understand experiences, meanings, practices, relationships, and decision-making processes surrounding *shimglina*. Qualitative inquiry is particularly appropriate when researchers seek contextual and interpretive understanding of social phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

4.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Debre Berhan City, North Shewa Zone, Amhara Regional State, Ethiopia. Debre Berhan is located approximately 130 kilometers northeast of Addis Ababa and is an important administrative and economic center in North Shewa.

4.3 Target Population

- **Shimageles (Elders):** Individuals recognized as elders (*Shimageles*) who participate in *shimglina* dispute resolution processes.
- **Religious Leaders:** Individuals serving as religious leaders who participate in or support *shimglina* processes.

- **Conflict Disputants:** Individuals who have experienced conflicts and utilized *shimglina* for resolution.
- **Government Officials:** City and kebele administration officials, judges, and peace and security office representatives.
- **Community Mediators:** Individuals involved in community-based mediation initiatives.

4.4 Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling is appropriate for qualitative research where participants are selected because they possess knowledge relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Saturation was used as an important consideration in determining when sufficient information had been collected. Guest et al. (2006) demonstrate that saturation can provide an empirically informed basis for determining adequacy in qualitative interviewing.

The selection criteria for informants included: (1) age and recognition as an elder or religious leader, (2) experience participating in *shimglina* dispute resolution, (3) experience with conflicts, (4) professional role in conflict resolution or administration, and (5) willingness to participate in the study.

4.5 Sample Size

A total of 117 participants participated in the study. The sample comprised five focus group discussions (FGDs) with 10 participants each (50 participants) and 67 key informants. The key informants included *shimagiles* (elders) (24), religious leaders (10), government officials,

including *kebele* administrators, peace and security officers, and judges (12), conflict disputants (11), and community mediators (10).

4.6 Data Collection Methods

4.6.1 Focus Group Discussions

Five FGDs were conducted, each consisting of 10 participants. The discussions explored the forms and levels of *shimglina*, procedures, types of disputes, strengths, challenges, community preferences, and relationships with formal justice mechanisms.

FGDs were conducted in Amharic to enable participants to express their experiences and meanings comfortably. Each discussion lasted approximately 60–80 minutes. The researcher moderated the discussions with assistance from a trained note-taker.

4.6.2 Key Informant Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 67 key informants. The interviews explored participants' experiences with *shimglina*, its organizational levels, procedures, types of conflicts, strengths, challenges, and possible approaches to strengthening the mechanism.

Each interview lasted approximately 35-40 minutes. Because participants expressed concerns about audio recording in the sensitive political and security environment, interviews were not audio-recorded. Detailed notes were taken during interviews and expanded immediately afterward. The use of detailed field notes rather than audio recording should be understood as a methodological decision designed to protect

participants' perceived safety and willingness to participate.

4.7 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and themes within the qualitative data. The initial analytical procedure followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

The study followed established ethical principles for qualitative social research. Participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality arrangements, and their right to withdraw without negative consequences.

5. Findings

5.1 Forms and Hierarchical Levels of *Shimglina* in Debre Berhan City

The results show that *shimglina* works at various levels that are interdependent on each other in the City of Debre Berhan. These are family level, neighborhood level, community level and more broadly city level.

This finding is broadly consistent with Ethiopian scholarship showing that customary institutions are socially embedded and may operate at different levels depending on the nature and scale of the dispute (Pankhurst & Assefa, 2008).

5.1.1 Family-Level *Shimglina* (*Yezemed Danginia*)

The first avenue of intra-family conflicts was assigned to family level shimglina. Respondents mentioned that they used it in inheritance disputes, marriage disputes, parent-damage disputes, and during disputes over family assets. A 62 years long shimagile of the city of Debre Berhan stated that the city is often characterized by disputes among families over inheritance, property and relationships within a family.

Yezemed danginia is a place where the family has to settle as it sustains family relationships. Once the problems are brought in the outer region of the family, the problems tend to create irreparable fissures. The results suggest that family elders use kinship relations, knowledge of family history, and emotional bonds to reconcile.

5.1.2 Neighbor-Level *Shimglina*

Shimglina at the neighborhood level resolves conflicts concerning the continued coexistence of neighbors. The neighbor-level shimglina deals with a number of conflicts among neighbors such as: Noise and nuisance complaints, sewage, boundary and property line disputes, access and pathway conflicts, pet and animal-related disputes, parking and space utilization conflicts. Neighbors in some cities might lack as long a tradition of living together as in the country districts, but we still rely on each other; when neighborhoods quarrel over sewage, noise, boundary, or any question, it is necessary to settle it by means of shimglina, since we must still live side by side. The results indicate that the

relationships within neighborhoods are a significant social basis of traditional dispute resolution. Although there may be no widespread kinship links among residents, the ongoing residential interaction generates incentives towards reconciliation and coexistence.

The findings suggest that neighborhood relationships constitute an important social foundation for customary dispute resolution. Even when residents do not share extensive kinship ties, continuing residential interaction creates incentives for reconciliation and peaceful coexistence.

5.1.3 Community-Level *Shimglina*

At local level, respondents outlined how the elders, religious leaders, government and mediators of the community would be involved in conflicts that could not be solved at the grassroots. This is the degree of shimglina where community involvement and joint decision-making exist. Community-level shimglina resolves many conflicts and some of them include: Business and commercial conflicts, community resource conflicts, and conflicts between community members and outsiders, multi-family or multi-household conflict, and discrimination on community members of outsiders.

One Kebele administrator of 35 years old responded: In our kebele we have arranged a group of the elders who can solve the conflicts that cannot be resolved within the family or neighbor level and their decision counts. The results show that the credibility of elders is

greatly hinged on social awareness and confidence, which is in line with the rest of the literature on customary justice in Ethiopia (Pankhurst and Assefa, 2008; Epple and Assefa, 2020).

5.1.4 City-Level *Shimglina*

A 46 years old city official who took part in the focus discussion explained as follows: The city administration understands that *shimglina* can help us to resolve conflicts, although we have established means of conflict resolution, we also use community-based resolution with the help of respected elders, especially a conflict that touches upon communal harmony and social cohesion. Such customary processes on a higher level would imply that *shimglina* can adjust to the bigger and more social scale of the city.

5.2 Types of Conflicts Resolved by *Shimglina*

- Family and Domestic Conflicts: Disputes within families, including inheritance, marital conflicts, and parent-child disagreements.
- Neighbor Conflicts: Disputes between neighbors over noise, boundaries, access, and other issues.
- Business and Commercial Disputes: Conflicts arising from business transactions, partnerships, and commercial relationships.
- Inheritance and Property Disputes: Conflicts over inheritance, property ownership, and asset distribution.
- Land and Property Conflicts: Disputes over land, housing, and property rights.

- Community Conflicts: Tensions within communities over resources, social issues, or interpersonal relationships.
- Workplace Conflicts: Disputes arising in workplace settings.
- Social and Cultural Conflicts: Conflicts arising from social and cultural differences.

The diversity of disputes identified in the present study is broadly consistent with national justice-needs evidence showing that land, family, neighborhood, domestic, debt, and other everyday disputes constitute important categories of legal problems in Ethiopia and that elders are frequently involved in resolving several of these categories (HiiL, 2020).

5.3 Procedures of *Shimglina* in Urban Conflict Resolution

This finding is important because customary justice is sometimes incorrectly characterized as unstructured or procedurally arbitrary. Ethiopian scholarship instead demonstrates that customary institutions operate according to socially recognized norms and procedures, even though these procedures may differ from formal court procedures (Pankhurst & Assefa, 2008; Epple & Assefa, 2020).

5.3.1 Reporting

The process generally begins when one disputant approaches elders and presents the problem. A 67 years old interviewee *shimagile* explained: "When a conflict arises, the person who feels wronged will come to us and explain the problem. In the city, people may come from different parts

of the city, not just their immediate neighborhood. We listen to the initial explanation and decide whether we can take the case."

5.3.2 Investigation and Information Gathering

Participants described several information-gathering practices, including:

- Hearing from both parties: Elders listen to both disputants' accounts of the conflict.
- Consulting witnesses: Elders consult community members who may have relevant information.
- Site visits: For property-related conflicts, elders may visit the location in question.
- Reviewing documents: Where available, elders review relevant documents or evidence.

5.3.3 Hearing and Deliberation

Key informant interviewees as well as focus discussants reveal that hearing involves both parties presenting their cases before the elders and community members. The process is characterized by:

- Open participation: Community members can attend and contribute their perspectives.
- Questioning: Elders ask questions to clarify issues and test the credibility of claims.
- Mediation: Elders facilitate dialogue between the parties, helping them understand each other's perspectives.
- Consensus-building: Elders work to build consensus around a resolution.

5.3.4 Decision-Making

After deliberation, the elders make a decision based on community norms, values, and precedents. As a focus discussant elder explained: "Our decisions are guided by the customs and traditions of our community, adapted to the realities of city life.

5.3.5 Reconciliation and Restoration

- Forgiveness: Disputants are encouraged to forgive each other.
- Reconciliation ceremony: A ceremony may be conducted to mark the restoration of relationships.
- Monitoring: Elders follow up to ensure the resolution is implemented and relationships are restored.

5.4 Strengths of *Shimglina* in Urban Conflict Resolution

5.4.1 Community Participation

The findings indicate that *shimglina* provides opportunities for community participation and collective deliberation. As one conflict disputants FGD participant noted: "When we gather to resolve a conflict, all community members can speak. The *shimageles* listen to everyone's views and work toward a decision that everyone can accept."

This is consistent with the relational and socially embedded character of customary justice described in Ethiopian legal-pluralism scholarship (Epple & Assefa, 2020).

5.4.2 Preference for Customary Mechanisms

Key informants and focus-group participants reported that community members often prefer *shimageles* for disputes that can be resolved within the community. A 57-year-old community mediator noted that: “People prefer *shimagille* elders because they are trusted insiders who understand community ties and traditions. Unlike formal courts which are slow, costly, and can worsen conflicts elders focus on restoring peace and preserving relationships, which is why they are approached first”.

This finding is supported by national evidence. HiiL (2021) found that local elders were the most frequently used dispute-resolution source among Ethiopians who took action to resolve their most serious legal problems. Users also reported comparatively high levels of trust and satisfaction with elder-led processes.

6. Discussion

6.1 Interpretation of Findings

The results indicate that *shimglina* is a significant society-based conflict resolution mechanism in Debre Berhan City. The fact that it has been functioning at various levels over time, implies that the customary justice has not merely faded away with urbanization. Rather, it has changed to fit in an urban social environment.

The observation is in line with Epplé and Assef (2020) observation that customary legal orders still exist both in urban and rural environments and evolve into hybrid and adaptive orders in response to the social conditions.

Shimglina is functionally varied as evidenced by the identification of family, neighborhood, commercial, inheritance, property, and community disputes. It matches national justice-needs evidence of seniors being engaged in solution of broad spectrum of daily legal matters, such as land, family, domestic and neighborhood disputes (HiiL, 2020).

The systemic nature of the reporting, collection, hearing, deliberation, decision making process, reconciliation process, and follow up is evidence that *shimglina* is not merely an ad hoc process. Instead, it adheres to socially established methods offering order and predictability to the means of dispute settlement. This explanation guides more comprehensive work on Ethiopia that indicates that customary institutions work using the laid down norms and procedures, although the way its procedures are done is unlike formal judicial procedures (Pankhurst & Assefa, 2008; Epplé & Assefa, 2020).

The results regarding accessibility, affordability, speed, cultural familiarity and reconciliation assist in understanding why *shimglina* is still used by community members. The findings align closely with the evidence present in the nation suggesting that local elders are extensively used and that users highly rate processes led by the elder (HiiL, 2020).

Of special significance is the restorative attitude of *shimglina*. The participants were keen to note that the goal is not merely to identify a winner and loser but restoring relations. It is in line with the results of HiiL who discovered that the

significant portion of elder-led dispute resolution in Ethiopia is reconciliation (HiiL, 2020).

6.2 Comparison to the Literature.

The results support some of the findings in past Ethiopian studies. To begin with, they lend credence to the perception that customary justice is well rooted within the social relationships and community norms (Pankhurst and Assefa, 2008).

Second, the results are in line with national evidence that shows the significance of elders as justice providers. According to HiiL (2021), 43% of the surveyed who terminated their most severe legal issue by taking action involved local elders and processes led by the elders had a fairly good rating regarding procedural fairness, trust, and outcome.

Third, the results confirm the literature that focuses on the multifaceted interrelation of formal and customary justice in Ethiopia (Epple and Assefa, 2020; Assefa, 2020).

The current research expands this body of knowledge by targeting more specifically an urban Amhara context, and by studying how shimglina reacts to urbanization, social heterogeneity, and to ever more complicated conflicts.

The results related to the interference of the government are also in line with the research of Addis (2023) in Ankober, where he recorded the interference of the state in the jurisdiction of Šəmgəl Lawrence in the Amhara case.

The current research thus creates a significant urban layer to the current research because it demonstrates that customary justice is challenged

not only by institutional but also social challenges of striving towards an urban change.

6.3 Theoretical Implications

The results offer a lot of evidence to Social Capital Theory. The use of trust, social networks, mutual responsibilities and community recognition play a pivotal role in shimglina functioning. This bias towards older citizens is in part due to their being socially familiar and engrained in community networks.

The results also point towards the Social Solidarity Theory. The key goals of shimglina became reconciliation, restoration, forgiveness, and maintenance of harmony in the community. The practices can be viewed as processes by which social relationships are restored after conflicts.

Simultaneously, the results suggest that social capital and solidarity do not remain unchanged and are dynamic. The customary justice that relies on a social relationship of nearness may be shifted by urbanization, population movement, social difference and the generation change. This observation complements the larger social-capital literature that stresses that social networks may evolve as social structures and participation evolves (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000).

6.4 Conclusion to the practice of Conflict Resolution.

This has a number of implications to the development and institutionalization of the customary justice in Ethiopia. To begin with,

shimglina should be treated not as an alternative to formal courts, but as their complement, which involves better coordination of customary and formal institutions of justice (Assefa, 2020; Fiseha, 2014). Second, the shimglina sustainability can be reinforced with proper institutional back up, training, and capacity development, without affecting the community legitimacy of shimglina. Third, the elders must modify their practices to new urban realities such as more complicated conflicts and social diversity. Lastly, accountability and human-right guarantees should also be a part of the creation of customary justice, especially towards women and other groups that may be vulnerable.

6.5 study strengths and limitations.

The project contains advantages and disadvantages. It offers empirical data regarding shimglina within an urban environment, where there is still little research on the subject. This allowed the research to collect a wide range of opinions such as elders, religious leaders, government officials, conflict disputants and community mediators because of the use of FGDs and KIIs. This is a methodological complement that enhanced the richness and validity of findings.

There are also limitations to the study. First, it concentrates on Debre Berhan City, which reduces the extrapolation of the results to other urban setting. Second, it may have been biased by the subjectivity of the accounts of the participants through recall or social-desirability bias. Third, the research did not compare systematically

shimglina with cases tried by formal courts. Fourth, it has a cross-sectional design that fails to measure how shimglina practices have changed over a period of time. These restrictions can be aligned with a more general rule that qualitative case studies give a priority to contextual insight and analytic comprehension over statistical generalizing (Yin, 2018; Creswell and Poth, 2018).

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

The research involved in this paper analyzed the experiences and issues of shimglina traditional conflict resolution in Debre Berhan City, North Shewa Zone, Amhara Regional State, Ethiopia. The results show that shimglina is not a socially meaningless conflict resolution mechanism that is no longer used in the city. It works across related levels, such as family, neighborhood, community, and processes at the bigger city-level.

The procedure consists of familiar steps that entail reporting, information acquisition, hearing, deliberation, decision-making, reconciliation, and follow-up. These practices are fairly systematic in nature and therefore challenge the view that customary justice is always unstructured or arbitrary.

Another aspect that the research reveals is that shimglina solves numerous conflicts such as family conflicts, neighborhood conflicts, commercial conflicts, inheritance and property conflicts as well as at a community level.

Key strengths were accessibility, affordability, speed, cultural familiarity, community

participation and reconciliation. In general, these results can be interpreted in line with evidence on the national level about the significant role of elders in the Ethiopian justice environment (HiiL, 2020).

Meanwhile, shimglina has some serious challenges. These involve urbanization, social dislocation, population diversity, the evolving social networks, government interference, weak institutional support, the generational change, complicated urban conflicts and uncertainty as to the interrelationship between the customary and formal justice institutions.

In the meantime, there is a changing institutional environment of customary justice and some evidence to further note is that there is no clearer coordination between the customary and formal justice institutions. The viability of shimglina in the future will not only rely on institutional recognition but also proper support of the aged, roles and jurisdiction, community legitimacy protection and security of rights and accountability.

7.2 Recommendations

1. Acknowledgment and approval of shimglina. Shimglina should be accepted by relevant authorities as a supplementary community based system and relevant authorities need to support it while maintaining the community legitimacy.
2. Enhancement of customary–formal justice interconnections. There should be clear channels of collaboration, referral and

communication between shimglina and formal justice institutions with well defined roles.

3. Capacity development for elders. The seniors are to be trained mediation, negotiating, legal sensitivity, human rights, gender sensitivity, and handling all forms of complicating city conflicts.
4. Fortification of propinquity and responsibility. Elders should be guaranteed protection against unsuitable political interferences as well as enhanced impartiality, accountability, and legitimacy to the community.
5. Human-rights safeguards. Shimglina practice is expected to be in line with the constitutional and human-rights practices, especially when handling cases of women, children, domestic violence and other serious criminal cases.
6. Intergenerational engagement. Programs must be developed at the community level to promote effective interaction between the older and younger generation to facilitate sustainability and adaptation of shimglina to the evolving urban environments.

7.3 Future Research recommendations.

Further studies might discuss comparisons in shimglina in various urban environments in Ethiopia and study the development of customary dispute resolution. A mixed method research may be performed to measure the results of shimglina in relation to formal justice mechanisms. Future studies might investigate the participation of younger generations in shimglina, gender experiences and involvement and how the

relationship between traditional and official

institutions of justice is changing.

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