



The Role of Women in the Indigenous Conflict Resolution of Zewold, in Raya Kobo District

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Abstract

Conflicts are natural and unavoidable in human interaction arising from conflicting interests, divergent beliefs, and social injustices. This study explores the contributions of women within the Zewold indigenous conflict resolution system of Raya Kobo, investigating how they leverage community social capital as a powerful mechanism for justice and healing. Grounded in social capital theory and an interpretive paradigm, this study utilizes a qualitative approach with an ethnographic design. Empirical data were generated through purposive sampling, comprising 24 in-depth interviews with traditional elders, women mediators (Duberty), and local residents, alongside six key informant interviews with district cultural experts, a court president, and police representatives. These sources were supplemented by three focus group discussions, direct field observations of active reconciliation ceremonies and qualitative document analysis of archival materials. The findings reveal that through interventions like 'Erfo Mereba' women reshape the perspectives of victims' families reducing cycles of vengeance and driving conflict resolution efforts. Women's understanding of cultural norms positions them as key players in peace-building initiatives where they mend broken relationships and facilitate the reintegration of stakeholders. Despite their foundational role in generating and maintaining the community's social capital, deep-seated patriarchal norms and structural limitations continue to exclude women from formal decision-making bodies and institutional leadership positions within the Zewold governance structure.

Keywords

Conflict Resolution, Women's Roles, Zewold System, Social Capital Theory, Erfo Mereba, Peacebuilding

1. Introduction

Conflict is an inherent element of human interaction, inevitably arising from competing socio-economic interests, divergent value structures, and incompatible communal aspirations. If left unmanaged, interpersonal and intergroup disputes quickly escalate into protracted cycles of retaliatory violence, social fragmentation, and community instability, severely undermining the structural foundation of local societies (Galtung, 2004). Consequently, societies have historically constructed localized, context-specific mechanisms to manage disputes, dispense restorative justice, and mend fractured social relations (Assefa, 2005). Within this broader landscape of customary justice, indigenous conflict resolution systems stand out as highly resilient, culturally embedded practices that prioritize collective reconciliation, long-term harmony, and social equilibrium over punitive retribution. Rooted in generational wisdom, these systems operate through shared norms, internalized values, and cultural codes that are continually refined by community members to match changing historical realities. The operational strength of indigenous dispute mediation lies primarily in its organic accessibility and local legitimacy. Unlike state-administered legal frameworks that are often perceived as remote, costly, or adversarial, traditional practices match the lived realities and worldview of the populations they govern. This structural proximity allows indigenous mechanisms to effectively resolve deep-seated grievances, reduce transactional

friction, and permanently de-escalate cycles of vengeance (Avruch, 1998). The global relevance of these systems is demonstrated by instances where indigenous conflict mechanisms have been formally recognized or integrated into national legal structures to improve local access to justice. Throughout the African continent, pluralistic legal frameworks frequently co-exist, with customary justice mechanisms operating alongside formal courts to maintain grassroots security and socio-political stability. Ethiopia, characterized by its extensive ethnic and linguistic diversity, relies heavily on these community-based structures to maintain peace and build social cohesion across different regions. Notable examples include the *Shimgilina* systems, the Abegaz institution, and the Michu framework of mutual tolerance (Tsega, 2002). Within the Amhara National Regional State, the Zewold system of the Raya Kobo District serves as a significant example of functional customary arbitration. Formally recognized by regional administrative frameworks in 1985, Zewold serves as an essential pillar of local peacebuilding that complements state legal institutions by resolving disputes quickly and reinforcing local safety. Deeply embedded within the spiritual and cultural beliefs of the Raya Kobo population, this institution continues to exhibit operational resilience in resolving complex community disputes. However, existing literature on the Zewold system reveals a significant gap: the systematically underexplored and under-documented role of women. Most of the time research often focuses primarily on the visible, formal leadership roles occupied by male elders (*Shimgilina*), effectively sidelining the informal yet essential contributions of women. In the Raya Kobo District, women mediators traditionally known as the *Duberty* perform vital roles in the de-escalation of violence and the restoration of fractured relations. Through highly structured cultural performances, including and ritual songs, these women build trust, cultivate mutual empathy, and guide deeply polarized groups toward peaceful compromise. These localized interventions directly reflect the core mechanisms of social capital theory, as the *Duberty* mobilize social networks, shared norms of reciprocity, and collective trust to rebuild community stability. Despite their operational importance, these contributions have remained largely note documented within academic literature. Addressing this analytical gap is necessary not only to enrich the documentation of the *Zewold* system itself but also to expand theoretical understanding regarding the gendered dimensions of informal social capital in indigenous peace building. Accordingly, this study examines the contributions of women within the *Zewold* indigenous conflict resolution system in *Raya Kobo* District, North *Wollo*. The analysis focuses on formally documenting their functional roles, assessing how their relational assets and cultural expressions improve reconciliation, and evaluating the structural challenges that affect their broader participation.

2. Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework functions as the structural blueprint of an academic inquiry, providing the conceptual foundation and analytical boundaries that guide data interpretation (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). This study utilizes Social Capital Theory to analyze the contributions, mechanisms, and structural position of women within the Zewold indigenous conflict resolution system of the Raya Kobo District. Social capital theory establishes that social networks, shared cultural norms, and mutual trust constitute vital collective resources that allow communities to cooperate effectively, maintain institutional resilience, and resolve internal conflicts without resorting to destructive violence (Sanginga et al., 2007). As defined by Putnam (1995), social capital consists of specific features of social organization primarily trust, norms, and networks that facilitate coordinated collective action for mutual benefit. Within the Zewold system, these abstract elements are operationalized through the strategic interventions of the *Duberty*, manifesting as three distinct forms of gendered social capital: Cultural Mediation through Songs and Poetry: Rather than serving as ornamental traditions, women's cultural expressions and ceremonial oral expressions are deployed as active instruments of reconciliation. These specialized methods soften hearts and create a common communicative space that fosters trust among profoundly divided groups by focusing on individual and communal emotions, challenging antagonistic narratives, and cultivating empathy. Social Bridging and Community Healing: Women use kinship, maternal authority, and ancestral memory to heal deeply divided communities. By integrating localized cultural values into relational resources, they effectively turn retaliatory emotions into everlasting reconciliation and heal serious divisions. Developing Moral Authority and Trust: As the moral compass of the community, women apply heavy moral consequences through self-sacrifice and symbolic gestures. They force disputants to pay attention to peace processes by emphasizing the shared duty to respect maternal care, because failure to do so could result in serious social exclusion. This third dynamic strongly supports Coleman's (1990) conceptualization of social capital as a system of "credit slips," where the inherited social obligation to honor maternal appeals overrides political resistance or familial pressure to continue a blood feud. Ultimately, the operational effectiveness of the *Duberty* demonstrates that power within customary dispute resolution is not solely derived from formal, bureaucratic, or male-dominated domains. Instead, they rely on a combination of symbolic capital (cultural legitimacy) and relational capital (moral responsibility and community trust). Consequently, social capital theory provides an appropriate framework for examining how women's informal networks and normative authority serve as essential mechanisms for maintaining social order and community resilience (Woolcock, 2001). Consequently, this study uses Putnam's structural dimensions (trust, norms, and networks) and Coleman's concept of social obligations as the specific analytical categories to code and interpret the qualitative data collected from the Zewold system. Situating these practices within this paradigm emphasizes the structural value of gendered indigenous knowledge in preventing social fragmentation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted ethnographic research design to investigate the indigenous conflict resolution system of Zewold in the Raya Kobo District. An ethnographic design was selected to facilitate deep immersion into localized communal interactions, enabling the systematic observation and interpretation of conflict resolution processes within their natural cultural and ecological context. This methodological framework is uniquely suited for capturing nuanced social transactions, symbolic ritual operations, and gendered contributions that formal, highly structured quantitative methodologies typically overlook.

3.2 Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling was used to select information-rich participants with specialized, experiential knowledge of the Zewold system. The target population from Raya Kobo District spanned three strategic categories: Duberty (women mediators using cultural performance for reconciliation), and Zewold elders with recognized mediation authority. The final sample of 30 participants included 24 for in-depth interviews and six key informants for structural insights. Inclusion required long-term district residence, direct involvement in local reconciliation, and recognized cultural or institutional authority.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

To ensure data depth, empirical saturation, and rigorous triangulation, multiple complementary qualitative methods were deployed concurrently:

3.3.1 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six purposively selected institutional actors, including local cultural experts, the district police commander, and the district court president. These sessions provided macro-level, systemic insights into the intersection between the indigenous Zewold system and the formal state legal apparatus.

3.3.2 In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were carried out with 24 informants, including traditional elders, Duberty mediators, and affected community residents. These narrative-driven interactions focused on the lived experiences, personal histories, and gendered dynamics of local reconciliation.

3.3.3 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Three focus group discussions were conducted, each composed of six heterogeneous participants encompassing both men and women. Discussants were chosen based on their generational residency and in-depth knowledge of Zewold customs, encouraging group introspection, discussion, and affirmation of shared reciprocity expectations and community norms.

3.4 Document Analysis

The researcher employed document analysis by accessing archival records and official reports at the Raya Kobo District Culture and Tourism Office. The researcher specifically sought out historical monographs, administrative reports on indigenous governance, and documented oral histories compiled by the office. This allowed for a systematic review of the socio-political structures relevant to the study.

3.5 Field Observation

Direct field observations were conducted during active conflict resolution ceremonies executed between January and February 2024. Detailed field notes were systematically recorded to document the operational dynamics of women's participation, the performance of symbolic practices, and non-verbal relational indicators, such as the specific deference and moral authority accorded to elderly women during volatile disputes. This method captured subtle cultural mechanisms that are frequently obscured or omitted in retrospective verbal accounts.

3.6 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify, code, and arrange recurrent patterns related to women's contributions to the Zewold system. The focus groups and interviews were systematically coded, and the resulting codes were grouped into broad topics that were directly related to social capital theory, with a particular emphasis on social bridging networks, cultural authority, and trust-building mechanisms. Content analysis was used to secondary textual and visual materials obtained from the District Culture and Tourism Development Office, such as official pamphlets, images, and internal institutional reports, in order to supplement the narrative data. In ceremonial settings, institutional and symbolic expressions of women's authority were systematically categorized.

4. Result and Discussion

The indigenous conflict resolution system of *Zewold* in the Raya Kobo District functions through a dense matrix of communal norms, networks, and mutual trust. While formal traditional adjudication structures often privilege male elders

(*Shimgilina*), qualitative data indicate that the operational success and emotional legitimacy of *Zewold* depend fundamentally on the strategic deployment of social capital by women, known locally as the *Duberty*. Rather than serving a peripheral or purely decorative function, these women mobilize specific normative assets to de-escalate violence, build intergroup trust, and enforce communal reconciliation.

4.1 Cultural Mediation through Songs and Poem

Women in the Raya Kobo District utilize expressive cultural forms, specifically structured poems and songs, as potent tools for conflict de-escalation and emotional modification. This performance represents a deliberate deployment of localized normative communication to alter the psychological disposition of aggrieved parties. Field data indicate that when masculine disputes reach a state of volatile impasse, the introduction of women's vocal performances serves to disrupt retaliatory narratives. An expert from the District Culture and Tourism Development Office observed:

"In Raya Kobo, using Zewold, the instrumental participation and significant role of women in conflict resolution are truly remarkable. In the District Women have the power to soften the conflict resolution process, allowing the conflicting parties to come to a peaceful agreement through their well-known poems and songs the woman's ability to soften the hearts of the victim's family is truly worthy, leading them towards acceptance and forgiveness."

This perspective eloquently showcases the profound influence and invaluable input of women in mediating conflicts under the guidance of *Zewold*. Women exhibit an extraordinary talent for utilizing poignant poetry and captivating melodies to facilitate resolution and harmonious outcomes among opposing factions. Moreover, their exceptional ability to resonate with the emotions of the victims' loved ones steers them toward embracing reconciliation and pardoning. Further inquiry into the role of women in *Zewold* was posed to *Zewold* elder, who emphasized:

"Women play a crucial role in Zewold, significantly improving the effectiveness of conflict resolution and ensuring successful reconciliation, particularly in cases of murder. Without their invaluable contribution to fostering peace in the District, resolving such complex issues would have been nearly impossible."

As evidenced by the above narration, women function as the bridge' in the most volatile social ruptures, such as homicide. Their presence provides the emotional legitimacy required for restorative justice to take place. This suggests that in the Raya Kobo context, the 'success' of the *Zewold* system in maintaining communal peace is directly depending upon the inclusion of women as symbolic and practical mediators.

4.2 Trust-Building and Moral Authority

Women's moral power and symbolic self-sacrifice play a major role in the *Zewold* system's ability to resolve extremely violent crimes, such as killing. Women put those involved under tremendous moral and psychological pressure to give up cycles of retaliation through visible signs of vulnerability and sacred cultural invocations. The relationship trust needed to start restorative justice is established by this intervention. This operational requirement was emphasized by a *Zewold* elder:

Women play a crucial role in Zewold, significantly improving the effectiveness of conflict resolution and ensuring successful reconciliation, particularly in cases of murder."

Women play an indispensable and transformative role in *Zewold* by significantly elevating the overall effectiveness and success of traditional reconciliation processes. Their unique contributions are vital to achieving lasting peace, providing the necessary depth and care required to navigate and resolve even the most severe conflicts, such as murder cases. Focus group discussants detailed this behavioral strategy:

Throughout Zewold's intercession, particularly when reconciling cases of murder, the women, driven by fear of further retaliation and a desire to break the cycle of revenge, refuse to sit or eat until an agreement is reached. They stand vigilantly, abstaining from food and drink passionately seeking resolution. Their apprehension about the outcome whether the reconciliation will hold or lead to further violence highlights the profound emotional toll of such conflicts.

When symbolic physical endurance proves insufficient to break a deadlock, women escalate their moral intervention by invoking the absolute cultural sanctity of motherhood. This final symbolic sanction is designed to induce compliance through profound social shame:

"In certain situations, the severity of a crime against their family may drive individuals to seek vengeance or retaliation. During these moments, women may publicly take out their breasts and condemn those who refuse reconciliation. They say, "Don't move from where you stand; we have asked you, in the name of the breast that nourished and raised you."

This act often compels the conflicting parties to accept the decisions made by the *Zewold* and other stakeholders, choosing resolution over further escalation of the conflict.

According to the district's culture and tourism development expert, women use different strategies to resolve conflicts. One notable method involves a strong gesture where they use their breasts to express condemnation. Observing these women's behavior frequently causes people to reconsider their rejection of conventional reconciliation techniques. This response stems from the community's strong belief that all children are fed by their mothers' breasts. Therefore, it is considered a grave affront to one's own mother to ignore a woman's comments, which might lead to social exclusion in the community. Relationship disputes will inevitably arise, but it's critical to settle them quickly to prevent hostility and resentment. To clarify the above accounts narrated by culture and tourism experts and my own observations, as well as my personal observations, the researcher verified that moms are highly respected in the community. This sentiment is especially clear when mothers use the expression "In the name of my breast, which nourished you" to caution their kids against partaking in pointless activities. In the Zewold of the Raya Kobo District, where female mediators actively participate in efforts at reconciliation, women thus play a crucial role in conflict resolution. The women are trying to evoke an emotional response and create moral authority by showing their breasts, which represent motherhood and care. They urge the opposing parties to look for a peaceful solution and demand reconciliation and an end to violence through this potent gesture. Their ultimate objective is to safeguard families and stop disputes from getting worse.

4.3 Social Bridging and Communal Healing

In the Zewold system, women serve as crucial social bridges that mend damaged community networks. This was confirmed by the researcher's own observations, which showed a custom in which an elderly woman chosen for her singing ability leads the mediation effort by singing a song that embodies the voices of all the female participants. The English version of the song that was played throughout the mediation process is shown below:

የሞተው ጅነት ይግባ - ያሉት ልጆች ይደጉለት፤
ለሞተው ነፍሱ ይማርለት - መረባ።
ደም መቃባትስ አይበጀን - በደጋጎች መጀን - ሰላም ደግነት ይበጀን፤
እርቅ ይውረድልን - ደም ይድረቅልን።
/ደም ይድረቅልን ማለት ከአሁን በኋላ መገዳደል ይቁም ማለት ነው።/
ደግሞ በሰርግ እንጅ በሞት አንገናኝ - እርቅ ይውረድ - መቼ!? አሁን!

English Translation: *May the departed find solace in heaven, may his children grow up for him, and may his departed soul be bestowed with blessings!*

We refrain from shedding blood. Let us strive for peace and compassion. May peace be upon us! Let the wounds heal and the violence cease. (The meaning of 'let the wounds heal' is: from this point onward, let the killing stop.) Furthermore, our meetings will no longer take place in the domain of mortality but instead in the domain of marriage and celebration. Let reconciliation descend—when? Now!

This performance shows how woman uses their singing ability to give voice to the collective feelings of the community's women during active reconciliation ceremonies. Both the bereaved and the hostile parties experience an instant sense of optimism as a result of this customary ceremonial pleading, known locally as Erfo Mereba, which marks a final stop to the cycle of blood feuds. Temporally, the conceptual core of these verses directs the community's attention away from active animosity and toward group reconciliation, clearly mandating that future communal meetings must occur within the joyous realm of marriage rather than the lamentation of death. A significant informant stressed the transformational potential of women's spoken utterances, underscoring the psychological and structural significance of this poetic intervention:

Another informant emphasized the power of women's songs and poetry, stating:

The purpose of the women's poems is to soften the hearts of men hardened by grudges and make them ready for elders' mediation (Shimgilina). These poems are not just sung for entertainment; they are a 'softener of hearts.' When men arrive holding sticks and harboring deep-seated grudges, the women bring peace through these verses, pleading 'please' (Erfo)."

As we can see from the above narrations provided by the informants this highlights how women's poetry serves as a powerful de-escalation tool, using ritual pleading (Erfo) to soften aggrieved men's hearts and pave the way for formal elders' mediation (Shimgilina)." The FGD discussants further advised that:

"Women played a pivotal role in the reconciliation process, often shedding tears as they actively engaged in the ceremonies. The proceedings typically commence with the phrase 'Erfo Mereba,' instilling a sense of hope among both the grieving and the most adversarial parties. They find solace in the belief that the reconciliation ceremony will address their disputes and bring an end to their grievances."

Based on these insights from the FGD discussants, women have been fundamental to reconciliation processes, frequently expressing deep emotion during the ceremonies. The initiation phrase "Erfo Mereba" instills immediate hope in all

participants, who believe these ceremonies will effectively resolve conflicts and provide essential closure to their grievances. The researcher also confirmed this assertion by reviewing Amharic secondary sources from unpublished research conducted by the District Culture and Tourism Office in 2010 and 2013.



Figure 1

Figure 1 illustrates the active participation of women in the *Zewold* reconciliation process, specifically showcasing their contributions through the tradition known as "Erfo Mereba." (Image credit: Raya Kobo District Culture and Tourism Office, 2024). A culture and tourism expert detailed the symbolic and rhetorical tools used by women in this mechanism:

In conflict resolution of Zewold women use song as a primary mediation tool during Raya Kobo, wearing unique clothing and carrying ceremonial red or black sticks (koti). They intervene with aggressors to promote compassion and peace using persuasive speech and language. In addition to promoting understanding amongst people, their attempts are essential to the greater process of reconciliation.

According to the district's experts, women in *Zewold* employ various effective methods for conflict resolution. As important mediation tools, they employ unique attire, the symbolic *koti* (black stick), and the strength of poem and song. Their ability to represent and influence both sides of the conflict is demonstrated by their powerful discourse, which promotes mercy and peace and greatly aids in reconciliation. I observed throughout my ethnographic fieldwork that the atmosphere changed to one of tremendous joy after the procedure reached a formal resolution. During my field observations, researcher noted that the conclusion of the reconciliation process was marked by a profound sense of shared relief. This was most poignantly articulated by a *Zewold* elder who, reflecting the collective sentiment of the women mediators stated:

"ሰው ሲታረቅ ደስታ ነው፤ እናት አታልቅስ፤ ደም አይፍሰስ። እኛ ሴቶች ሰላም ወርዶ በማየታችን መረባ ብለናል፤ እልል ብለናል! "There is great joy when people reconcile; mothers should not have to mourn, and bloodshed must end. As women, seeing peace restored has brought us a sense of completion and immense jubilation."

From the above statements given by one of female participants or the women, the restoration of peace brings ultimate fulfillment and immense joy, marking an end to the grief of mothers and the tragedy of bloodshed. Other informants summarized the impact of the women's declarations by stating:

"የሴቶች ማጠቃለያ "በቀል ሞተ፤ ሰላም ነገሰ፤ ዝምድና ተጀመረ" የሚል ይዘት ያለው ሲሆን፤ ይህንንም በእልልታ እና በምርቃን ያጅቡታል" The women conclude with the powerful declaration, 'Revenge is dead, peace reigns, and kinship is renewed,' accompanying their words with joyful ululations and blessings."

As we can see from the above women always have a critical role in the areas for , the restoration of peace represents ultimate fulfillment and immense joy, driven by the core objective of ending the profound grief of mothers and the tragedy of bloodshed Through blessings and festivities, they hope to fully end the cycle of retaliation and establish peace, allowing strained relationships to mend and community connectedness to be happily rekindled. In the end, their involvement specifically attempts to treat and heal the profound feelings of grief and wounds
Women Dubertis Engaged in Intercession.



Figure 2

Figure 2, displayed in the Raya Kobo District Culture and Tourism Office, captures women practicing the art of intercession through "Erfo Mereba". Their heartfelt expressions and expressive verses possess the power to heal broken spirits and seek forgiveness from those they have wronged. This dedication not only underscores their commitment to reconciliation but also enriches the community's cultural heritage. (Photo captured and documented by Raya Kobo Culture and Tourism Office .Regarding the commitment of women to conflict resolution, a Zewold elder English below as follows:

“ሴቶች ደም በበቀል እንዳይቀጥል እንዲህ እያሉ ይማጠናሉ፡

"ደሙ ይድረቅና አጥንቱ ይረፍ፤

በእናት ለቅሶ ፋንታ ሰላም ይትረፍ።

ልጅ ከልጅ ይሳሳቅ በቀል ይጥፋና፤

ዘወልድ ይሙት ይጽና የእርቁ ዋስትና

To ensure that bloodshed does not continue through revenge, the women plead as follows:

"Let the blood dry up and the bones rest;

Instead of a mother's weeping, let peace overflow. >

Let child smile with child as revenge vanishes, and

Let Zewold prevail and stand firm as the guarantee of the reconciliation.

The above court president statements about the commitment of women to peace showed that the women's plea serves as a definitive call to halt the cycle of revenge. By advocating for an end to bloodshed and the grief of mothers, they promote a future where children can smile and the Zewold tradition remains the ultimate guarantee of lasting peace and reconciliation. A cultural specialist detailed one such action:

They diffuse tension using powerful maternal appeals such as invoking the nourishing breast and using traditional proverbs. Because rejecting their call is a profound societal taboo, the entire community is effectively compelled to choose reconciliation and social cohesion. This Amharic poetic expression below, which I have translated into English:

እናት አትቀጥር ልጇን በበቀል፤

ፍቅር ይለምልምና ጥላቻ ይነቀል።

የአበልጅነት ይሁን የዛሬው ትስስር፤

ደሙ ደርቋልና ቁም አይኑር በምድር።

A mother should not bury her child out of revenge;

Let love flourish and hatred be uprooted.

Whether through spiritual kinship or today's newfound bond,

The blood has dried, so let there be no malice left on earth.

In this community, women use the strength of spiritual kinship to break patterns of revenge and serve as moral protectors who openly denounce violence. Instead of continuing to be helpless victims of war, they purposefully disrupt damaging, clan-based polarization through artistic preaching. They transform localized, defensive bonding links into broad bridging social capital by appealing to shared heritage and the story of community survival. Deep rifts between hostile groups are bridged by this restorative intervention, which actively rebuilds the broken networks of reciprocity and trust necessary for long-term community resilience and sustainable peace.

4.4 Structural Challenges and Marginalization in Decision-Making

Despite the essential functional and moral contributions of women to the survival and efficacy of the *Zewold* institution, their participation is characterized by a profound structural paradox. While women are highly valued for their ability to generate social capital, perform emotional labor, and de-escalate conflict, they face systemic exclusion from formal governance, institutional leadership, and final decision-making roles within the *Zewold* framework. This exclusion is maintained by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. An expert from the District Culture and Tourism Development Office noted:

"Despite the active participation of women in conflict resolution efforts, they are generally excluded from decision-making processes."

As we can see from the above narrations given the District Culture and Tourism Development this marginalization is persistent and widespread, restricting women's agency to informal, preparatory, or purely symbolic domains while reserving institutional authority for male elders. Focus group discussions confirmed this systemic boundary:

"Women played a vital role... however; they often find themselves excluded from significant decision-making roles within the community."

As a result, the strategic and emotional groundwork laid by the *Duberty* is ultimately designated by male-dominated structures, which assume exclusive authority over the final legal terms and formal agreements. A study participant explicitly stated: “Their voices were often not heard in decision-making. All final decisions were made by male members.”

5. Conclusions

In the Zewold indigenous conflict resolution system of the *Raya Kobo* District, women utilize community social capital as a powerful, essential mechanism for justice, emotional modification, and communal healing. Operating as vital mediators and guardians of cultural heritage, the *Duberty* drive distinct strategic interventions that directly address the profound emotional and psychological trauma of conflict dimensions. Through Communal Normative Performance, women deploy the sacred *Erfo Mereba* tradition. Dressed in unique attire and carrying ceremonial sticks (*koti*), they utilize structured ritual poems, songs, persuasive speech, and visible signs of physical endurance to mobilize community norms, lower transactional barriers to peace, and actively disrupt volatile retaliatory narratives. In high-stakes, deeply embedded crimes like homicide, where often encounters resistance and falters, women strategically deploy Bonding Social Capital by invoking the absolute cultural sanctity of motherhood to enforce compliance and dismantle destructive blood feuds. By publicly exposing their breasts and issuing a sacred condemnation, they establish an absolute moral and psychological agreement. Because violating a pact delivered under this banner constitutes a grave violation of core community codes that triggers immediate, total social exclusion, humiliation, and isolation, this severe sanction compels conflicting parties to choose resolution over further escalation. This profound intervention enables deep Relational Restoration and Bridging Social Capital. By transforming localized, defensive, into broad community networks, it effectively reframes rival sides as shared children of a common motherhood. This unique utilization of social capital restores the fundamental standards of mutual trust, cooperation, and reciprocity required for long-term peace and community resilience, ultimately transforming divided groups into a unified community. However, a profound structural contradiction and paradox remain: despite their vital role in generating the social capital, emotional labor, and psychological readiness that guarantees the system’s survival, operational success, and emotional legitimacy, women face persistent marginalization and are routinely excluded from formal institutional leadership, governance, and final decision-making roles, which remain reserved for male elders. If this traditional indigenous institution is to continue to be valid, inclusive, and sustainable in maintaining communal peace, women’s informal peacemaking capital must be formally acknowledged, and they must be empowered and fully integrated into the leadership and final decision-making structures of the Zewold system.

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