# Do’oma site-specific topic: Customary leadership

At a community level there is one only organised group which is customary, this group is the elders’ group which usually contains 6 members from elders elected by the community. The number varies from 6 to 8, but at this time they are 6. The other group of elders are religious leaders organised in each congregation of Protestant churches. The church elders can deal with issues of church members inside the church; however community elders are elected by the community to serve the entire community. They deal with any conflict resolution except death and crimes against women like rape, they decide on fines, they mobilise the community to enforce folkways in imposing sanctions on offenders especially by exclusion of the person from social connections and interactions.

The role of the elders’ group is recognised and supported by the kebele office which provides meeting space in its compound, accepts the decision of the elders, refers cases to the wereda court if they are beyond the elders’ group besides the sanctions imposed by elders. At some points the kebele also wants to use the elders’ group to convince villagers about any intervention like the effort against harmful traditional practices; the kebele accepts and sees the case of complaints of about PSNP inclusion that came through the elders’ group etc.

When the wereda wants to evaluate the work of the kebele administration, members of elders’ group are the first to be invited to evaluate them together with wereda officials.

The elders’ group don’t have any incentive except the respect that the community owes them. N, who holds both community and church elder positions, said that he feels that he should have some kind of incentive for the community elders as the work is too much and time-consuming, but for the church he feels that he is working for God and he never complained about it.

The elders’ group have good relationships except for the problem which occurred last year when two of the elders were found to be biased and were in conflict with the rest of the group, which led them to be demoted from their position in the community. People respect elders in general though there are a few who want to stand against the judgments of the elders, and rarely try to frighten them. However, these deviant people are still more respectful and fearful to this elders’ group than to the kebele, because if the elders call on the community and ask for them to be excluded, the situation would be difficult for the household.

The elders’ group interact with the kebele council leader and the kebele chairman, but their direct contact with the wereda is limited, though the wereda contacts them whenever it finds it essential.

The community gives more importance and respect to the elders than to the kebele, though the kebele is getting power because of PSNP decision making on whom to include and exclude, the organisation of the militia etc. Sometimes people become reluctant when the kebele calls for a meeting, but if it is announced that the meeting is with community elders’, everyone comes to the meeting. If both the elders and the kebele office and the church elders couldn’t bring resolution over any single issue, it will be referred to the wereda court where the final decision is made. The elders’ group in Do’oma tries to deal with conflicts and resolve them, moreover, they negotiate with the wereda court to take back cases even after court decisions over the issue. For example in 2010, XX fought with a villager and hurt him, and the court decided on 8 years imprisonment for him, at this time the elders’ group discussed with the court and took back the case and decided on 800 birr compensation to be paid to the victim, and the imprisonment was cancelled, but the offender had to sell his hut to pay the required compensation, and now he is living in a rented hut with his wife and two children for which he pays 10 birr monthly.

Besides the customary group, there is one family which holds a special position in the community, traditionally respected, and has special function in the community. The name of the person currently in this position is NN known by the community as Dubusha Goda which means leader of Dubusha. The word Dubusha refers to a customary practice and prayer that could be done only by Dubusha leader. This prayer can’t be done by any other religious leader. The community believe that they should go to this person by contributing money to buy a sheep and butter that can be sacrificed for the prayer, to get rid of disease, death, drought and misfortune in the community. If a woman dies at delivery, it is serious problem that God/Toso is angry at the community and prayer is a must by Dabusha Goda/the leader. The sheep is slaughtered and the butter is left there for hyenas after the celebration is done. No one dares to eat this meat or butter. The succession for this position is done via vertical generation, first son takes the position, if found infertile, his next older brother will replace his position. According to the elders interviewed this Dabusha Goda is highly respected, people even fear them if he curses you, the curse will come onto your family, therefore the power is not only mobilizing exclusion, he can even expel a person who he felt was a threat to a community.