

ITP: Ethiopia 2013

Faculty Advisor: **Professor Dana Hill**

Research Group Members: **Alexandra Von Wobeser Martinez Vara, Alberto Agraz Sanchez, Melissa Goldman, Kelsey Green**

Paper Title: **Customary Dispute Resolution Mechanisms in Ethiopia: An Ancient Tradition's Modern Applications**

Abstract:

Ethiopia has a long and rich history of many ethnic groups (also called tribes or clans) coexisting under a national government. Today, over 80 ethnic groups exist in Ethiopia, and each of them has its own Customary Dispute Resolution Mechanism ("CDRM") for resolving inter-community and intra-community disputes of all kinds. These CDRMs operate parallel to formal courts and are recognized by the Ethiopian constitution as valid fora for dispute resolution. In fact, CDR is "probably the dominant dispute resolution [method] in Ethiopia" today.

In March 2013, four students traveled from Northwestern University School of Law, in the United States, to visit Ethiopia and learn more about these CDRMs that have been successfully solving disputes for close-knit, rural, impoverished communities for thousands of years. The information presented in this paper is a reflection of what those four students learned from a semester-long course, independent research, and two weeks conducting interviews and immersing themselves in Ethiopian culture. In the end, it seems that CDRMs have thrived for thousands of years and survived the modern introduction of a so-called "formal" court system—continuing to operate today—because of the peace-oriented, interest-focused, and community-centric approach to dispute resolution on which they are based.