

# Indigenous Knowledge for Good Governance and Development: Unleashing the Wisdom of the Gada System

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## Abstract

Indigenous knowledge is a source of contemporary world and a cradle of proud for the nation that hosts and leaves a legacy for the future generation. The Gada is the legacy of the Oromo to Ethiopia in particular, and the humankind in general, because it has been given recognition by many scholars of developed countries taking it as a source of democracy, governance and development. Consequently, it has been registered as the intangible world heritage by the UNESCO. The objective of this study is, thus, to uncover the partly unleashed wisdom in the Gada and indicate the role it has in governance, democracy, power succession, and development. To bring the multiple realities in the Gada to the sight of readers, ethnographic research design was utilized, and this design helped the researcher to deeply discuss the wisdom. The targets of the study were some Abba Gadas, Hadha Sinqes, and some elderly people in the east, west, south and North Oromia. To gather the data, qualitative approach was used as the study adopted ethnographic design that seeks in-depth information with the help of gatekeepers that assisted the researcher entered into the society. The key findings of the study revealed that the Gada system, which is the forerunner of the contemporary democracies has been affected by different religious practices, and it has almost lost its flavor in many parts of Oromia. All the Abba Gadas and Hadha Sinqes agree that riots do not occur during power transfer if the Gada is a system of governance. As the Gada provides duties and responsibilities in terms of ages, all citizens know their roles in the society. Many of the respondents indicated that it is the system of humanity consisting of all the required provisions for children, women, men, elderly people, animals, and environment. The Hadha Sinqes and the Abba Gadas particularly disclosed that it is a system that mediates between the Creator and the Mother Earth. This belief makes the Gada share some elements with the philosophy of the ancient Greeks. Some elderly people also expressed that the Gada is a black philosophy that has a lot of abstractions to be explored and put into practice for the good of humanity. Some other Abba Gadas also explained that due to impositions on the Gada, the forest cover of Oromia has deteriorated, and many wild animals left their original places. Adding, they said that the possibility to generate hard currency from tourists has been reduced. The Gada system is against the cutting of big trees unwisely, and if it is required to be cut, instead of one tree two trees should be planted. One of the famous Abba Gada elders underlined that the Gada is a conflict medicine and it has to be adopted for the country as a system of governance if we want to manage conflicts and live in a harmony. He further noted that elderly people hold discussions under the sycamore tree (Odda, which is referred to as a venue for tranquility) to draft laws, reconcile conflicts, discuss different social issues. From these findings, it is possible to conclude that the Gada is a developmental governance system that give regards to all human beings irrespective of color, religion, and any other differences. Based on the key findings, the researcher recommends that the Gada system has to be nurtured at all levels to put it into practice and use it as a social mortar. It can also serve as a system that boosts the interdependence and economy of the region in particular and that of the country in general. Due to this all-touching advantage of it, the eyes of all concerned leaders and citizens should be kept on it, and seek means to protect it unleash its untouched wisdoms to contribute to the development of the country.

**Key words:** Gada, cradle, unleash, Hadha Sinqe, Odda, Abba Gada, indigenous, knowledge, legacy, democracy, development, sustainable, power succession, governance

## 1. Introduction

Wisdom in the indigenous knowledge can be seen as an indigenous knowledge that serves as a basis for living. “The wisdom in the Gada surpasses what people think in the usual way; its abyss is not explicable through the usual way of thinking” (one of the Oromo elders). The contemporary world has its origin in the practices and values of communities who walked this earth earlier. What was not recognized in the past in most cases appears in a different form in the current world serving as a record of knowledge. Similarly, the yesterday’s leadership and development were the reflections of the then indigenous knowledge and values due to the fact that life of communities depends on the way people think, behave, and create.

In Africa, many scientific and social researchers associated with the formulation of development assistance policies are now beginning to recognize the role that indigenous peoples' and their knowledge of the ecosystem can play in the success of development and governance (Lalonde, 1991). Despite the inherent incompatibilities between indigenous knowledge systems and the scientific knowledge system, an important challenge is to find innovative mechanisms to integrate both systems for mutual benefit (ibid). From what Lalonde said, it is apparent that there is a call to put the two ends together.

If indigenous knowledge, as called conflict medicine by Zartman, 2000, is supported by education, the benefit to be gained is more meaningful, and the indigenous societies will be motivated to use their indigenous knowledge for creative reasons, and help them to gain enhanced respect for local culture and wisdom (ibid). From what Zartman said, it is possible to infer that the education system has to help the indigenous knowledge grow and enhance the overall development, rather than planting alien education system that adds little value to the existing practices of societies.

Asmarom (1973) discussed that there are few institutions in the world that afford human beings a wisdom that has all the potential to manage challenges and create harmonious relationship among people. He adds that Africa has a lot of indigenous knowledge systems that can be a source of wisdom for the world, which include, to mention very few, like: Ibo, Kikuyu, Massai, and Nuer, who rely on their traditional practices in leading.

In Ethiopia, diversity management is the key issue in order to integrate the indigenous knowledge and initiate and sustain multifaceted development. The very thinking of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) is managing diversity for development. For example, the Ethiopian Herald (2015) issued on August 25, 2015 underlined that indigenous knowledge is an integral part of the development process of local communities, and it is an underutilized resource in development process of developing countries like Ethiopia. Adding the newspaper illustrated that learning from indigenous knowledge, by investigating first what local communities know and have, can improve understanding of local conditions and provide a productive context for activities designed to help the communities.

Studies by Assefa (2005), Lemessa (2011a) Zartman (2000) and Asmarom (1973) revealed that societies cannot effectively manage conflicts when there is no attempt to see the thing we have anew and look for the human-friendly system. They have also discussed that where there is a comprehensive system that gives attention to all age sets, problem management is effective and development is initiated. However, in these studies, the idea of reviving the Gada in a comprehensive, and developmental way has not been given due attention, which is the target of this study.

In a nutshell, the gaps that the researcher observed in these studies, the scant attention given to the Gada in terms of development, succession of power, democratization process, and the life experiences of the researcher have necessitated this study.

### 1.1 Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study is to assess the role the Gada plays in enhancing democracy, succession of power and development and generate some recommendations.

Based on the objective of this study, the following questions have been set to gather data for this study.

- What wisdom is there in the Gada to develop and sustain democratic principles in Oromia?

- What are the contributions of the Gada towards practicing power succession in Oromia?
- What is the future role of the Gada to enhance the developmental strategies in Oromia?

## 2. Review of Related Literature

### 2.1 Meanings of Afan Oromo Words

**Abba Gada:** a leader in the Oromo democratic governance system

**Daballe:** a citizen with grade between 0 and 8 years

**Folle (Gamme Titika):** a child with the age between 8 and 16

**Gada:** a democratic governance system, which is a forerunner of all democracies. It is also an age range between 40 and 48 at which a person starts leading.

**Gada Mojji:** a person with the age range between 64 and 72. This is age of retirement from working as active Abba Gada. At this age, a person takes care of the environment.

**Hadha Sinqe:** The first lady, who holds a stick (sinqe) for decision- making purpose

**Qallu:** A wise person or a prophet who mediates between Waqa and people

**Qallu institution:** An institution which is entrusted with the responsibility to enhance peace

### 2.2 The Gada as Democratic Social Organization

The peoples in the Horn of Africa in particular and the entire continent in general have been struggling for the democratization of their governance, leadership, and politics and striving to uproot authoritarian regimes. As a result, many, including Ethiopia, have recorded significant changes in establishing citizen friendly governance systems mainly by giving due regard to their local institutions like Gada system (Lemmu, 1992). Thus, it is necessary to discuss the decisive role that the political culture plays in influencing the leadership, governance, and development processes.

The Gada, which is inseparable from the life of the Oromo, is the indigenous traditional governance system developed by the Oromo and centering the benefits of the society on political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, and religious institutions (Asefa, 2012). Asefa describes the Gada as all- touching and the major cause for development and conflict management. Adding, he illustrated that Oromo were under one Gada administration in an all-encompassing democratic republic even before the few European pilgrims arrived from England on the shores of North America and later built a democracy. This system has the principles of checks and balances through the periodic succession of every eight years, and division of power among executive, legislative, and judicial branches, balanced opposition among the five parties, and power sharing between higher and lower administrative organs to prevent power from falling into the hands of tyrannical ruler (ibid).

The Gada is the most comprehensive indigenous African institution, which is rationale, creative and a base for the contemporary world democracy; it has a capacity to unite and mobilize people into a formidable and invisible force to accomplish any task with the result in mind (Bahrey, 1954).

The Gada has been structured in such a way citizens in the different age groups play their role for the development of Oromia, and hence Ethiopia through the creation of integration, and decentralizing the system of governance. The Gada formalizes age grades through which corporate age sets operate together (Zartman, 2000). The Gada age grades are classified as: Daballe (0 year- 8 years), Folle (Gamme Titika) (8 years- 16 years), Qondala (Gamme Gurguda) (16 years- 24 years), Kusa (24 years- 32 years), Raba (32 years- 40 years), Gada (40 years- 48 years), Yuba I (48 years- 56 years), Yuba II (56 years- 64 years), Gada Mojji (64 years- 72 years), and Jarsa (72 years- 80 years) (Asmarom, 2006, and Zartman, 2000). As can be seen in the classification, all age grades have well- defined purposes. To become a leader, one has to take a 40 year training.

### 2.3 Gada and Power Succession

Power transfer in the Oromo depends on the saying: "We receive power with blessings, we lead with blessings, and we give our power to others with blessings." This saying underscores that the elected people are meant to serve their people with willingly with the spirit of monist. It is the assignments attached to the age grades that keep someone in leadership position. Asefa (2012) says that the Gada system bestows age- based responsibilities on the citizens dividing the stages of life, from childhood to old age into a series of formal steps, each marked by a transition ceremony defined in terms of both what is permitted and what is forbidden. An individual enters the system at a specific age and passes through transition rites at intervals appropriate to the passage from childhood through full adulthood to mature age or leadership age (Asmarom, 1973). It has emphasized that citizens come to power through the provision of the Gada and give power to the coming generation so that the one in power will assume another better position that is in line with his Gada grade.

### 2.4 Gada and Environment

The Gada and the environment are inseparable as its principle underlines the balance in the 'Mother Earth.' The Gada philosophy argues for nature- friendly environments (which are the concern of all), which are integral to the rituals and community celebrations at ritualized natural sceneries like sacred springs, mountains, trees, groves, and forests for the protection of nature in everyday life (Lemessa, 2012). Lemessa (2014) has also indicated that despite the recent development efforts prove that the indigenous knowledge systems are widely recognized as genuine and environmental care giving system. Lemessa appreciates the role of the indigenous knowledge in saving the environment with its diverse creatures.

Another study by Lemessa (2014) again indicates that the Oromo believe that the forest is a natural sanctuary for all creatures and the give all the necessary cares to sustain it. Lemessa said that the Oromo take care of the forest as religions handle their worship venues. He briefly stated that enhancing the Gada means enhancing the natural cover of the earth. He also expressed his worry that forest covers have diminished with the advent of western religions by the name modernization, because they destroyed the big trees particularly the Odda.

Contrary to the indigenous knowledge systems, modern knowledge systems are often viewed as catastrophe to the natural ecosystems and local knowledge systems that have been inbuilt there (Dove and Carpenter (2008). This issue attracts the attention of environmentalists in order to make interventions a wise integration of the two knowledge systems.

### 2.5 Gada and Conflict Management

The Gada system is a unifying system irrespective of any preconditions. Touching on its role of unification, Zartman (2000) wrote that many African researchers have looked into the reality in the Gada believing it can serve as one of the 'African Conflict Medicines, and many African countries have started browsing their wisdom system to manage conflicts and come together for integrated development.

Amanuel (2014) disclosed that indigenous knowledge plays a pivotal role in keeping peace and order taking the case of Kenya and Ethiopian Oromo divided by a boundary. Amanuel indicated that mystified realities can be transformed into a doable reality if there is a creative conflict management system like the Gada.

Asmarom (1973) discussed that the Qallu leaders are the most rooted conflict mediators in Waqefanna of the Gada, an African indigenous monotheistic religion and mediators in conflict. Qallu pacify when there is a conflict among different people through the mediating speech they make bringing the people in conflict. They have a responsibility to mediate conflict, and conflicts that failed to be resolved at lower levels are referred up to the national Qallu councils for mediation.

The Oromo people make all level best efforts to manage conflicts on three different levels: prevent social conflict from occurring, if it occurs, to prevent it from escalating; and if it escalates to make peace between the conflicting parties through the intervention of the Jarsa Biya (community elders) (Zartman, 2000). The ideological themes underpinning the processes of conflict management are effort exerted to manage conflicts; truth (dhugaa basu-giving witness) (unearthing the truth about the causes of the conflict); justice; punishment (guma) (payment for the wrong since the Oromo do not have jails or the death penalty); and reconciliation (keep harmony between humans

and nature) (Asmarom (1973). These govern the construction of political structures, (the Gada system), religious customs (the Qallu system), social structure (the eldership or jarsa biya system), and the elaborate processes of reconciliation (arara), systems that the Oromo developed to manage conflicts (ibid).

Customary institutions are implanted in the culture, values, traditions and history of societies, which host them and are entrenched in the socio-political and economic contexts of a given society and serve as conflict medicine and 'heal' African countries in conflict (Zartman, 2000).

### **2.6 Gada and Development**

The way leadership is defined shows the line of thought and development level of societies. That is why leadership and development are not separated entities that stand alone. Development without citizen friendly leadership style (indigenous leadership knowledge) is not sustainable. That is why writers like Bass (1990) stress the need to examine definition to leadership before introducing any development approach. Briefly, Bass underlines that where there is no fair treatment and inclusive principle, appreciating the gross of the development would not suffice; it can rather be one of the causes of conflicts. The saying that says "Think globally, but act locally" underlines the role of indigenous knowledge that creates a harmony between learning from other contexts and customizing into indigenous leadership system.

### **2.7 Gada and Democratic Government**

The Oromo had a form of constitutional and democratic government known as the Gada. Although the Gada system is a well known democratic organization works are very scant on it. It is only the current issue that some works are coming out. During the sixteenth and seventeenth century, when various peoples were fighting over economic resources in the Horn of Africa, the Oromo were effectively organized under the Gada institution for both offensive and defensive wars (Asmarom, 2006).

Hackman and Johnson (1996) defined democratic government associating with increased follower productivity, satisfaction, involvement, and commitment. Member satisfaction and nominations for leadership are greater under democratic leadership (Bass, 1990; Stogdill, 1974). Participation is a core characteristic of democratic government; and the ideal of it is friendly, and encourages participation (Lutharns, 1996).

### **2.8 Gada and Decision- Making**

The Gada is founded on the principle of consensus based decision- making. In the process of decision- making perspectives are encouraged and interpreted from different pint of views.

Jeylan (2004) reported that the Gada has a provision to make decisions with the help of Abbaa Bokkuu (carrier of the scepter holding a position similar to that of a magistrate), Abbaa Caffee (father of legislative assembly), and Abbaa Alangaa (Attorney general). These institutions work together in the process of legal administration, drafting, peace building, social transformation, and integration of the society.

Asmarom (1973) discussed the Gumi Institution is the highest and the most important indigenous social organization. The author is succinct in putting the descriptions of this body as: "The National Assembly", (Gumi) is made up of all the Gada assemblies of the Oromo, who meet, once every eight years, to review the laws, to proclaim new laws, to evaluate the men in power, and to resolve major conflicts that could not be resolved at lower levels of their judicial organization. Through the Gumi assembly, Abba Gadas revise the existing legal framework and come up with the revised version so that it fits with the current context. It is the most democratic system since power rests on the people and all sections of the nation are directly or indirectly represented in the council (Caffee).

The Gumi Gayo of the Borana Oromo is the colorful and illusive event, where all people of indigenous wisdoms come together to discuss how to reign peace among the Oromo people and the neighboring ones to sustain mutual trust and development (Gumi Gayo Assembly, 37). Gumi Gayo is peace- making venue, where all social concerns are discussed, and new alternatives of conflict management strategies are generated. Abba Gadas lead the Oromo people with the principle "We do want everyone to live freely, legally and equally in our territory, enjoying the benefits of this land with us. But we do not tolerate any nullification on our inalienable democratic rights provided for us by the creator and the law of humanity" (ibid). This quote signifies the dictating principle of the Gada System that gives priority to peace, co- existence, and good governance that nurtures development.

### **2.9 Indigenous Knowledge**

Indigenous knowledge emerges from ancestral teachings that are spiritual and sacred in origin (Ermine, 1995). It exists in our visions, dreams, ceremonies, songs, dances, and prayers. It is not knowledge that comes solely from

books. It is lived knowledge, experiential knowledge and enacted knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is different from other areas of knowledge like scientific knowledge, or historical knowledge, or art knowledge, which are open to people of any ethnic background. But indigenous knowledge is explicitly attached to particular ethnic groups as cultural knowledge of groups classified as indigenous.

Absolon (2010) reported that elders are cornerstones of indigenous knowledge, culture and heritage. Without elders, it is hardly possible to preserve indigenous knowledge. Oral traditions, languages and historical accounts would be lost without the wisdom, knowledge and experience of elders. What the traditional people say is of value in settling conflicts and bringing the community members together.

### 2.10 Some Gada Centers

Melba (1998) discussed that there are different Gada centers where Oromo people come together and draft laws. The Gada centers are marked by the Odda tree (sacred meeting ground for the enactment of many Oromo ceremonies), which serves as a place that hosts all irrespective of any discrimination.

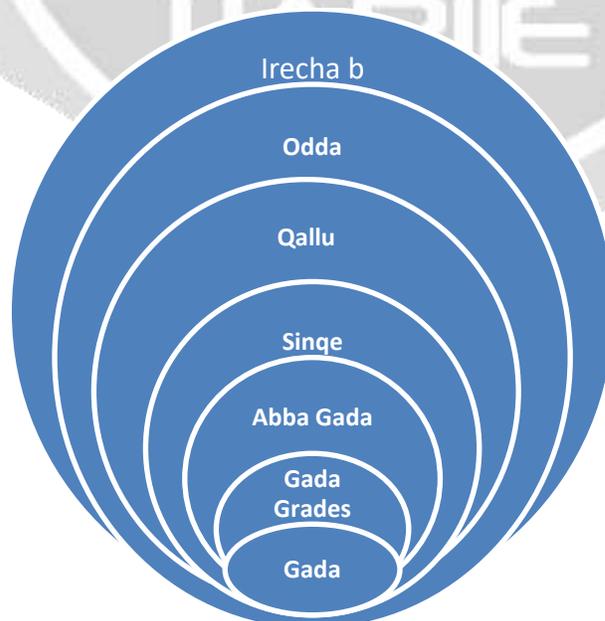
Some of the major Gada centers, just to cite the very few, are Odaa Nabee (East Shewa), Oda Rooba(in Bale), Madda Walaabuu (South-Western Bale), Oda Bisil (West Shewa), Oda Bultum(West Hararge), Oda Bulluq (Horo Guduru) and Oda el Dallo (Liban). These are being rehabilitated after the Gada has been registered as one of the intangible heritages of the world.

### 2.11 Gada as a Means of Accommodation

The Gada does not discriminate among people. It is the system that gives attention to all irrespective of color, place of origin, culture and religion. The adoption is undertaken by the Abba Gada on behalf of his clan. Before adoption, animal(s) is slaughtered and a knife is dipped in the blood of the victim and planted in the assembly, repeating in chorus what the Abba Gada says. "I hate what you hate, I like what you like, I fight whom you fight, I go where you go, and I chase whom you chase (Hassen 1990). This oath is binding and unbreakable on both sides and the adopted becomes the "son" or daughter of the people, and the blood symbolizes brotherhood and the fight for human rights (Hassen, 1990).

### 2.12 Analytical Framework of the study

In this analytical framework, the different important features of the Gada have been indicated. To analyze the wisdom that the Gada has for the power succession and development have been described by showing the interfaces between the features and the Gada system. If one understands these features, he/ she can understand the role the Gada plays in the lives of people. The data gathering and analysis have been dictated by these provisions of the Gada.



### Fig 1: Developed by the researcher based on his experiences and readings

**Gada Grades:** The Gada grades designate people in terms of their ages for different responsibilities. Passing in these ages is the natural rights for each citizen so as to enjoy the assignments according to their ages.

**Odda- Sycamore Tree:** This tree is inseparable from the Gada as it serves as a sanctuary for the Gada and all associated rituals. It is a symbol for the accommodative nature of the Gada system.

**Sinqe:** Sinqe is a female led institution, which is led by Hadha Sinqe. In this institution, females discuss what they can contribute for their people in general and the female society in particular.

**Qallu:** Qallu is another component of the Gada System, which works for the perpetuation of peace in the system. Qallu institutions serve as a setting of conflict resolution for the society.

**Irecha:** Irecha constitutes one of the several religious and cultural practices defining the hallmark of the entire Oromo life. It has promoted and enhanced understanding and unity among the Oromo. It has helped build their common values and shared visions, and consolidated peace, tolerance and resilience.

### 3. The Research Methods

In this chapter, the research design and approaches, population and sampling, data sources, data gathering tools, data analysis techniques, and the research ethical considerations have been discussed.

#### 3.1 Research Design and Approaches

The research design adopted for this study is ethnographic, because the intention of the study was to learn from the Oromo what the Gada does in terms of democracy, power succession, and development, and interpret learned patterns of behaviors, customs, and ways of life.

The research approach used was qualitative as the objective of this study is to describe what is going on in the Oromo by carefully listening to the indigenous people and generate in-depth data and create a pattern for the practices of the people. Besides, the qualitative approach is an appropriate ethnographic research avenue.

#### 3.2 Population and Sampling

The study dealt with the Oromo people by giving special reference to the Abba Gadas, Hadha Sinqe, and the Gada elderly people who have the knowledge and practices in narrating the role the Gada plays in the overall governance system of the people.

From the pool of the people, the researcher purposively took the former Abba Gadas and the Abba Gadas in power from North, South, East, and West parts of Oromia National Regional State and Amhara National Regional State. The reason why the researcher identified the resource persons purposively was due to their rich experiences of the Gada and the possibility to collect in-depth information from them.

#### 3.3 Sample Frame and Units

The sample frame of the study is the Abba Gadas, Hadha Sinqes, elderly people at different levels and zones of Oromia. From the frame, the regional and local level concerned people were drawn for the study.

#### 3.4 Instruments

To gather data for this study, checklist based non participant observation; open ended interview, focus group discussion, and document review were used.

**Observation:** The objective of using observation was to see sacred trees and rivers and how they are conserved. Observation is very important in that it gives an opportunity to observe naturally occurring events in person. To do this, checklist that is based on the research questions was produced.

**Open- ended Interview:** Interview is a preferred instrument of data gathering in that it gives a chance to the researcher to hold one- to- one discussion to thoroughly discuss issues in depth. Accordingly, the Abba Gadas and Hadha Sinqes were interviewed.

**Focus Group Discussion (FGD):** FGD is regarded as a forum of reform in that it helps researchers to have a group of people, who are initiated to forward multiple information, because of the triggering effects the ideas raised by the different participants. In this process, 6- 12 people took part in the discussion. The participants of the FGD included the Gada elderly people from different parts of the region.

**Document Review:** Documents, which have relevance for the study, were reviewed. These documents were obtained from the different culture and the Abba Gada offices.

### 3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

To analyze the data, first of all, the data were transcribed and polished. Following, the data were categorized under each research question and sub headings were created. The sub headings were further re- categorized to establish more comprehensive themes. Finally, using the content analysis technique, the data were analyzed.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

It goes without saying that ethics is the foundation effective communication between the researcher and the data sources. To this end, the researcher took all the necessary cares to make this study ethical. First of all, a letter of cooperation was taken from the university's Research Publication and Coordination Office. Following, the objectives of the study was discussed with the various targets of the study. The researcher assured that the participants that they could withdraw from participating in the study if they do not feel good with no precondition. With all this surety, the researcher undertook this study.

## 4. Results and Discussions

The data collected from different sources have been presented and discussed. The data have also been crosschecked to understand whether there are congruencies or dissimilarities among the ideas generated from the different targets of the study.

### 4.1 Response Rate

All the targeted Abba Gadas have been communicated at their place and the planned information has been secured. The Abba Gadas dealt with include Abba Gadas, the Abba Gadas' coalition leader, and the Hadha Sinqe, and the renowned Oromo Gada fathers. One of the Oromo elderly persons, who was granted honorary doctoral degree by Bule Hora University and is regarded as the walking encyclopedia of the Gada System also participated in the study.

### 4.2 Demographic Factors

Saving three, all of the participants were males. From this finding, one can realize that the Sinqe System is not as strong as the Abba Gada System. Even though it has been learnt that there is no male domination on women, the Sinqe system is not operating as the Abba Gada system. The half part of the Bokku- stick seems to lag behind the other half part.

Many of the Abba Gadas were the public servants. However, after their anointment they have left the public sectors and devoted their time for the service of the Gada system. Age wise, all are above 40 as it takes 40 years to become mature Abba Gada. Many of the elderly people, who participated in the FGD, were between 60 and 110 years. The religion of all of them is Waqeffanna- worshipper of one God.

The major Odda centers include Gumi Gayo and Arero in Borana Zone, Me'e Bokko and Nura in Guji Zone, the Tulama's Oda Nabe, Karrayu's Hora Sama in East Shoa Zone, the Macha's Oda Bisil, Oda Buluk of East Wollega, the Oda Roba in Bale Zone, Madda Walaabuu in South-Western Bale, the Ituu and Humbana's Oda Bultum in West Hararghe, and Oda el Dallo in Liban. Moreover, there are number less Oddas in different localities of Oromia and Amhara National States. To mention some of the living Oddas in the latter, Odda of Sheik Mohammed in Kemissie town, Odda of Garado in Chafa, and Odda of Jille Dhumuga. Interviews were held with 12 Abba Gadas from different areas, four Hadha Sinqes (1 regional, and 2 local) and FGDs were held with 48 participants with renowned elderly people from the Gada Centers (Borana, Kamise, Horro Guduru, Guji, Hararghe, Arsi, west shoa, Bale, and Illu Abba Bora. Observations were also made at the major Gada sites to have insights about the current status of the Gada and the Odda centers. Accordingly, Gumi Gayo Odda, Me'e Bokko Odda, Odda

Nabe, Hora Sama, Oda Bisil, and Odda Garado were observed to understand the current status of the Gada practices. Totally, 63 participants participated in this study.

### 4.3 Sustainability of Democratic Principles and Development

From the places observed by the researcher, it was learnt that the Gada, which is regarded as a system for humanity, has preserved democratic principles and development particularly in Borana, Guji, and Bishoftu. The researcher also observed that the people are transparent, respect the law, accountable, and take responsibilities in what they do. It was also observed that social network created by the Oromo plays a pivotal role in enhancing the capability of the people to support each other. One of the interviews held with one Abba Gada also falls in line with what the researcher observed as it showed that the Gada is a universal culture and has a provision for all creatures and the earth.

One of the interviewees also disclosed Busa Gonofa, which is similar with the present credit and saving institution, is a system established by the Gada to make the Oromo self sufficient get networked with each other development purposes. This institution still operates in different parts of the region.

Another interviewee illustrated that the western democracy or the so called modern democracy has limitations in treating human beings in the same way. He mentioned that people are unfairly treated because of their colors, beliefs and place or origins and the like, while, according to the teaching of the Gada, human beings are equal irrespective of their color, belief, and place of origins.

The Gada's First lady, Hadha Sinqe, was also interviewed and she disclosed the fathomless wisdom of the Gada in terms of the strategy of the Gada in bringing development and sustaining it. She also revealed that the Gada system emerged with the emergence of humanity and is a perfect democracy, and the Book of all sorts of laws for humanity.

Coming to the Gada's provision for gender equality, she discussed that the stick that is held by the Abba Gada witnesses that male is inseparable from female. The head of the stick shows the male reproductive organ whereas the bottom- the foundation part of it indicates the female reproductive organ. She emphasized that the Gada incomplete if it treats the male and female in isolation.

Again, Hadha Sinqe discussed the role of the Gada in defending territorial integrity. The Hadha Sinqe explained that the Gada believes in peaceful conflict resolution, because it is a system of peacemaking among all human beings. When citizens are forced to wage just war to defend their territories, there is a procedure to become victorious. She joins the heads of the sticks and requires the fighters to pass under it. Anyone who disregards the instruction of Hadha Sinqe cannot go for the war, because she has disregarded the instruction of the war. She explained that the martyrs' statue erected in Adama city symbolizes the time of going for a mission. She again explained that Sinqe system is the origin of the Red Cross or Red Crescent, and the Hadha Sinqe does a mediation work during wars without any discrimination. If parties in war disregard the instruction given by the Hadha Sinqe, they are considered as unlawful ones.

The Hadha Sinqe discussed that the Gada has a system for mediating between a husband and a wife, when they are in conflict, and resolves it in a fair way. In the Gada System, even when there are divorces, ladies do not leave their home like what is common in many traditions. If one of them has to leave the home, there is also a possibility for the man to do so.

In case of adoption, no difference is made between the biological and the adopted child; both have equal rights. If a family that does not have another child before and adopt a child, bears to a child later on, the child that was adopted is considered the first child of the family as the Hadha Sinqe reported.

Two other hadha sinques reported that the Gada can serve all human beings and sustain peace and development, and it is not biased against any religion, because it is pro diversity in all possible ways. However, it was touched on those other religions some practices against the Gada tenets.

The Abba Gadas' coalition leader in the interview held with him revealed that the Gada system needs attention from the Oromo people, the regional state, and the federal state if it has to flourish like the time of 16<sup>th</sup> century and contribute for the democratization process and development of the country. He particularly touched on that there are

inconsistencies in referring to the Gada system because of the failure of the region to harmonize the exercise across the region. For example, some outsiders or non Oromo consider the system as a local cult and it is against other religions.

Another Abba Gada from south Oromia similarly described the Gada as the initiator of developments has to serve as an alternative governance philosophy. An elderly person aged 110 remarkably shared with the researcher that the Gada is life, love, wealth, source of wisdom, philosophy of the black people, and the beginning of all civilizations.

#### 4.4 The Gada and Power Succession Practices

From his observation, the researcher realized that at most parts of the study site, the indigenous venues for the exercise of the Gada are under threat at some places like Kamise, and West Oromia due to the influence of different religious practices, and the then political matters. This action is against the natural cover and productivity the earth. The village where the researcher was born is in a similar problem of loss of big trees. Many places are being threatened by a similar human action.

“Gada is a school of Leadership, and power sharing does not initiate conflicts as all the age grades have their own assignments for people, and rather the Gada is the source of peace and democracy” one elderly person from Guji Me’e Boku said. The researcher asked him why and he answered that it is so because to become a mature Abba Gada, one has to learn from mature Abba Gadas passing in the five Gada grades consuming 8 years in each.

All the Focus Group Discussants revealed that the Qallu institution is an institution that is meant to bring peace and order among the people supporting the Abba Gadas and Hadha Sinqes. Qallu system serves as a councilor to the system to make it democratic and sustainable. It is like the democratic institutions that Ethiopia has to put in place for check and balance.

The principle of the Gada is “Lead with all the transparency.” Before the appointment of the Abba Gada or Hadha Sinqe, proclamations are proclaimed depending on the existing situation. In the renewal congress of Tulama Oromo held in 2017, it was noted that the Gada is registering significant results after its recognition by the UNESCO, and it has to be revived through the exploration and restoration of the Odda and other entities. The Tulama Oromo Gada renaissance congress motivated the Oromo to enhance the Gada as some interviewees explained during the congress.

Similarly, the Gada revival ceremony organized at Odda Nabe revealed that the Gada is taking the right course in reviving the values, cultural, historical, and social heritages of the Oromo. The Abba Gadas coalition leader discussed during the event that the Oromo philosophy of life in general is regaining its natural flavor and moving to a stage that uplifts the pride of the Oromo. One renowned Abba Gada from east Oromia said, “No one steps to power without consent from the people. It is taboo if one does this, and he will be considered as outcast because of his or her violation from the norm provided by the Gada.”

The researcher also discussed with Abba Gaddas from Bale, Arsi, Wollega, and south Shoa, east shoa when they came together for a meeting to Bishoftu and he learnt from the way they were explaining the provision of the Gada and that no one jumps to a power because he is an influential person. The Gada is a tool of peace because it discourages people to operate in a system less way thinking to fulfill one’s benefit. As the Gada teaches that citizens become selfless servants of the Oromo, the people respect the norm of coming to power keeping quality services in mind.

The Hadha Sinqe also raised that she was moving to the different parts of rural Oromia and other places where the Oromo live, for example, Kamisse, Raya, Benishangul, South National, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Regional State to motivate females and assist them to actively engage themselves and promote the Gada for fairness and peaceful transfer of power. “Power belongs to the citizens; no one gains personal power and exercises hidden agenda; it is against the teaching of foremothers and forefathers” said the Hadha Sinqe.

“Peaceful ways of earning position where one can fit into to serve others is the prime principle of the Gada” said another participant. In this quote there are important expressions like peaceful, earn, serve others, and prime. These expressions signify that the person who aspires to lead should walk through peaceful way, have capability, and be selfless. This thinking is similar with the monist leadership style, which is founded on the principle of ‘sacrificial goat’ which gives priority to the gains of others.

One of the key informants from Kemise said that the Oromo will not have the current status if they do not have the habit of listening to each other. They are what they are because of their wisdom in sharing ideas.

In all the interviews at Senbete town, it was learnt that the Gada is known by another name, which is called Abigar. The word is used as a substitute for the Gada. This difference, as said by the interviewee, this difference occurred due to geographical differences and the influence of other cultures.

#### **4.5 The Gada and the Enhancement of Developmental Strategies**

In the Focus Group Discussions held, the participants underlined that a person is not respected because of what he or she possesses, it is rather because of his or her selfless service to the people according to what has been entrusted to him depending on his or her age grade.

The Abba Gada coalition leader said “The Gada enhances developmental strategies and democracy through nurturing humankind starting from the childhood.” The Hadha Sinqe also supported the idea raised by the Abba Gada saying “The Gada evolved with human beings to serve all and boost creativity depending on the existing reality.”

One of the participants reflected that non Oromo are not seen as a threat to the Oromo, because it is an opportunity for them due to the fact that both work towards making the earth a conducive place for living. It considers non-Oromo as equally important citizens for the development of effective and developmental system. Adding, the participant noted that the Gada centers peace and democracy for which the Odda is a symbol.

Another Abba Gada reflected that the Gada is a ‘river’ of wisdom from which all creatures can drink. Besides, he said that it is a shade for all irrespective of place of origin, color, religion, gender, and any other forms of differences.

#### **4.6 Gada and the Future**

From the visits paid to some places in Oromia to observe the status of the Gada practices, the researcher observed there are some revivals of the Gada System. Some of the Gada values are being put in place by the region. This can show that the future of the Gad is bright.

Abba Gadas from east, west, north, and south Oromia in general agreed that the future of the Oromo in particular, Ethiopia in general shall be brighter, development- oriented, equitable, and democratic, if the Gada is adopted as a system of governance, development emblem, and globalization formula.

One of the respondents from Kemise explained that the Gada has to be rejuvenated by educating the young generation through the establishment of formal education, and then it will be an avenue for the comprehensive development of the country. Besides, he discussed that the Oromo and the government have to put what they say into practice if the desire is to scale up and use it as a standard of peace building and development.

The Hadha Sinqe also shared what the Abba Gadas identified and said “adopting the Gada System means planting peace, democracy, equity, vision for the development of the Country.” She, adding, said, it is considered as a sanctuary of all creatures, because it frees people to talk, work, enjoy, share, and live peacefully.

During his trip to Nairobi- Kenya, the researcher had an opportunity to visit some Gada historical places. One of the places he observed was Odda Borana, which was established around a place called Two Rivers. The researcher took some minutes and said to himself self “The Oromo in Ethiopia have to learn something from this to take care of the Oddas.” In the discussion the researcher made with one Kenyan, the Odda is formally protected by the local government of the city government because it is one of the intangible heritages of the country.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

The following main issues have been concluded from the key findings of the study.

- The Gada is a hub of welcoming diversity, favorable ground for conflict management, peace building, equity, and a homegrown source of development.
- Age grade is a standard of the Gada to assign responsibilities to citizens.
- That Bokku is a symbol for equality of men and women the base showing the woman and the head showing the man.
- The Akko Manoyye's (one of the Oromo queens) instruction to build a house between the earth and the sky shows that women had an important role in introducing new thing before their counterparts.
- The revival of the Gada is signaling the regaining of the forest cover at the observed places.
- The gudifacha (local adoption system) introduced by the Gada is becoming an alternative for the westernized adoption and managing child trafficking.
- Busa Gonofa (indigenous support system) is becoming an indigenous system that can help citizens become self reliant.
- The Gada has a complete provision for governance and development for the Oromo.

## 5.2 Recommendations

### 5.2.1 Policy- Makers

From the key findings of the study, the following are recommended to be performed by policy makers.

- Policy makers should enact the policy that protects the indigenous knowledge working with all concerned people and organizations.
- The regional system has to be given attention while designing polices. If it is so, citizens will benefit from what takes place and diversity is enhanced.
- There has to also be education policy that enacts the inclusion of the Gada system in the education policy of the regional state.

### 5.2.2 The Country at Large

The researcher recommends the following to be carried out at the country level to preserve and sustain the Gada's wisdom.

- There should be Gada rehabilitation movement in collaboration with the countries that have rich experiences in preserving and protecting world heritages.
- The country has to strengthen the institutions that work on the heritage management and create their branches at different levels.
- The country has to devise a strategy to effectively introduce dualism policy to use the indigenous wisdom together with the contemporary system in different affairs.
- The different values in the country should not be treated in a fragmented manner; they should be considered as the wealth of the country and promotional works should be done to help citizens understand and utilize for the good of all.

### 5.2.3 Oromia National Regional State

As the cradle of democratic principles, the Oromia National Regional State has to do the following.

- The Region has to mobilize and raise the awareness of the Oromo to preserve the Gada system through the establishment of the Gada enhancement center.
- The Regional State should also establish the Gada tourist attractions at places where the Odda centers are situated.
- The Gada has to become a part of the school curriculum at all levels.
  - The fallen Odda trees should also be rehabilitated involving people at different levels.
  - The Sinqe system has to be strengthened and established at regional and local levels.

### 5.2.4 Development Planners

Development planners have to do the following activities to rehabilitate the Gada system.

- They should understand the role of the Gada for development and develop creative plan that connects the future with the present.
- Planners should know that indigenous knowledge carries identity of people protect it in a planned way.
- Institution like: The Gada and Developmental State has to be in place to attract the attention of citizens so as to use for the good of all.

### 5.2.5 Future Researchers

Other researchers should undertake the following activities to know the indigenous knowledge better.

- Using this study as a springboard, other researchers have to open their eyes and carryout studies on the Gada as black philosophy, and the forerunner of the west philosophy.
- Comparative indigenous knowledge study has to be done to raise the awareness of citizens.
- Studies have to be undertaken on other provisions of the Gada system relating to development and democracy.
- A comparative study has to be taken place on Hadha Sinqe and Abba Gada.

### 5.2.6 Abba Gadas and Hadha Sinqes

Abba Gadas and Hadha Sinqes are required to do the following tasks.

- As the way we were doing businesses may not bring a significant change, both Abba Gadas and Hadha Sinqes should work on the promotion of the Gada system in a system- based way.
- They should take initiatives to creatively work with all people at different levels.

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