# Indigenous Oromo Gadaa System vis-à-vis Peace Building from Below Approach

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**Abstract**

*The conventional approach to peace building has often failed to lead to sustainable peace and it has become accepted that indigenous knowledge can play paramount role in ensuring peace. As every society have their own paradigm, the Oromo worldview is based on a holistic Gadaa system which promotes a culture of peace in their daily lives. This paper is intended to address why indigenous concepts matter in today's peace  building  processes,  and to explain the Oromo Gadaa system with respect to peacebuilding from below point of view. By employing qualitative research approach, the reviewed documents reveals that building a durable peace at local level is presumed essential in seeking positive social change at national level. Here, indigenous knowledge systems have immense potential to contribute within the efforts of crafting new paradigms for culture of peace in the country. Particularly, the  indigenous Gadaa system was developed as a unique democratic and egalitarian form of administration where peace building processes in the system takes inclusive dimensions to be considered. This makes it a trustworthy approach to sustainable peace building processes than the state induced top-down approaches. The paper concludes that, the indigenous Oromo world view based on the Gadaa system deals with peacebuilding process in broader and holistic ways than the way it is experienced at different corners. Accordingly, the lessons to be drawn from the indigenous Gadaa system regarding peace building processes needs to serve as an exemplar milestone for the furtherance of quest for culture of peace in the country.*

**Keywords:** *Gadaa System, Indigenous Knowledge, Oromo, and Peace Building*

## 1. Introduction

At a global level, peace building from below is fittingly considered where important contributions of indigenous knowledge systems in promoting peace have become increasingly prominent. Thus, as the continuing role and influence of indigenous approaches in Africa is hard to miss, the call and urgency for the inclusion of such indigenous knowledge and institutions in conflict resolution and peace building is premised on the number of factors (Osie-Hwedei and Galvin, 2015). In Africa,

reconsidering the indigenous knowledge systems and the cultural values of the grass root community becomes decisively important to bring about positive social changes including peace. As Tim Murithi (2009) argued, in order to design a fruitful peace building process, adopting a context specific approach helps to address basic problems effectually appropriating it to promote a lasting peace based on the indigenous approaches (Murithi, 2009).

In the contemporary Africa's context, succinctly capturing the essence of indigenous peace building approaches and what they mean to Africans and those who follow events on the continent is preponderant. Moreover, as to the Economic Commission for Africa's (ECA) report in 2007, the potential contribution of indigenous approaches in peace building can be reinforced from the precolonial systems of Africa. Because, they were actively decentralized with social control and carried out by local actors, and they were consensus based systems promoting solidarity and common bond of the society at that time opposed to the post/neo colonial period (ECA, 2007). Hence, these indigenous approaches of conflict resolution and peace building in Africa had spectacular features, which is uncommon in the global space today.

The Oromo nation in Africa also have their own administrative arrangement to lead their overall activities which is known as Gadaa system.  Gadaa system is an Oromo indigenous mechanism by which the Oromo are shaping their own ways of life and solve any problem they encounter to maintain peace and security of themselves and others in their relationships. Besides, Gadaa system is endowed with complex and comprehensive institutions that the Oromo people have been inventing since time immemorial to deal with the hurdles and details of their communal lives. These institutions are working as nonviolent methods/elements of conflict resolution, justice administration and peace building within the interaction of the Oromo among themselves and with other ethnic groups (Fituma, 2017). It is a multifaceted and holistic system that reveals the political, social, economic, and security aspects of the Oromo people's lives in which they have been governing themselves. It allows the whole community to have the opportunities to participate on equal basis in the overall governance endeavors.

## 2. The Call and Urgency for African Indigenous Peace Building Approaches

In Africa, based on the conception of peace by Africans discussed above, nowadays the inclusion of indigenous knowledge and institutions to conflict resolution and peace building shows the resort to indigenous approaches for peace building. Cognizant of this, the following section addresses: W*hy the*

*African indigenous design concepts matter in peace building processes today?* The basic and possible reasons are presented as follows.

a) **The emerging demand for peace building from below:** since the 1990s the questions of conflict resolution approaches constitutes either the feasible approach is truly global enterprise or it is based upon hidden cultural values each communities (Woodhouse and Duffey, 2008). In response to this, John Paul Lederach already stressed the importance of the indigenous knowledge empowerment to transform conflict based on the human and cultural resources within a given setting. This helps to understand the long-term goal of conflict transformation as validating and building on people and resources within the indigenous setting from below. Growing attention has thus been paid recently to the adoption of community-based approaches as the grassroot community has often proven to be resilient in providing survival and coping mechanisms for the problems there (Haider, 2009). Therefore, it is an effective approach to peace building defined as the range of measures necessary to transform conflict towards sustainable, peaceful relations and outcomes. Community based approaches also be used to build social capital in divided societies by providing safe spaces for interaction, communication and joint decision-making. The empowerment of local communities is a common component and community-based approaches which lead to more effective and efficient project outcomes in peace building today. Especially, as the contexts in which conflict takes place varies the potential solutions are also expected to depend on the different settings recognizing the potential roles of both the *insiders* and *outsiders*. Generally, in building peace at local level, upholding and promoting the roles of grassroot actors along with their indigenous knowledge approach is presumed essential in seeking positive social change in Africa at large.

b) **Culturally insensitive trends in peace building process**: in addition to the above, the deliberate expansion in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace building in Africa has propelled the *questions of culture* in conflict resolution necessarily. As Tim Murithi has identified it, the contribution of culture to peace as an alternative model of transitional justice in effective peace building processes based on cultural attitudes and values are deemed important in Africa (Murithi, 2009). Thus, emphasis needs to be highly placed on how the indigenous strategies can be appreciated within the culturally congruent framework placing the highest importance on the culture of peace (Myers and Shinn, 2010). The [outsider's] imposition in the design of peace building approaches fails mostly, as the peace practitioners often come into a conflict in Africa with subconscious cultural assumptions ignoring the local potential options to solve the

problems (Lacroix and Neufeldt, 2010). As a result, the search for [indigenous] approaches of conflict resolution looks for social formations and capital that can be applied to the today's conflicts (Beth, 2014). Away to get the turn into indigenous approaches of peace building and learning from them is timely as such approaches are often very creative and have practiced outside the box in comparison to what western practitioners come up with it. Here, the Mozambican village elder's quote is expressive stating that "You can bring us the culture of war in a plane and humanitarian aid in a truck, but you can't bring us the Culture of Peace, because it is a tree with its roots deep in our land."

c) **The claim for continental ownership of solutions for the problems in Africa:** indigenous knowledge is maintained by its keepers based on their dynamic and sophisticated understanding of local surroundings that allows them to define their problems and seek solutions through local experiments and innovation. Recently, in Africa, there is a policy in the making as a response to Africa's desire in determining its own destiny by taking responsibility for the continent's issues using the initiatives suited by Africans themselves. These are popularly known as "African Solutions for African Problems (AfSol)" supposed to guide the activities of renewed regional and sub-regional organizations mandated with conflict resolution and prevention in the continent based on three complementary pillars which include: ownership, commitment and shared values (IPSS, 2014) and (Osie-Hwedei and Galvin, 2015). This idea of African-led solutions to African security problems has emerged as a holistic political, socio-cultural, economic, and intellectual endeavor to address peace and security challenges in the continent. Though the term AfSol was coined recently, indigenous conflict management, peacemaking, transitional justice, and reconciliation have existed for much longer in Africa through African indigenous approaches. This suggests that, understanding the features of indigenous African political institutions and social organizations is quite necessary for meaningful development of AfSol as a project (Fituma, 2017). This urge for local ownership and participation by Africans themselves with the critical need to engage local actors through their own endogenous knowledge in peace building work. In this context, the existence of indigenous approaches in Africa reflect the presence of shared values of Africans amongst themselves which in turn enhances their commitment and ownership to solve the problems they faced based on their own standards despite the varying ways of practice. These African values found at any corner of the continent, shared with others or not, can be designed

as a solution for the people of that locality and also can helps to create a collective identity and social harmony in the continent.

d) **Legitimacy of indigenous approaches in the eyes of recipients and target group:** according to Coning (2013), external peace builders and/or out-siders need to re-affirm the principle of local ownership and re-commit to make it the starting point of their approach to state and peace building. No one seems to challenge the essential logic that for any peace process to be sustainable, it has made to sense for, and serve the interest of the people directly involved than the outsiders. This clearly indicates why indigenous knowledge in Africa tends to be legitimately accepted by Africans to deal with their issues. Here, transformation of the mindset of Africans to appreciate their indigenous form of knowledge and incorporate it in contemporary education and epistemological discourses is important. This allows, Africans to develop their socio-economic and political system that provides the continent a reasonable power-base to assert itself and its epistemological views in the global system. Because, these endogenous knowledge in African societies are premised on the vigorous role of the communities drawing a greater legitimacy with transparency and active participation as well which in turn promotes effective peace building practices in the continent today more than ever.

e) **The need for self-development guaranteed on peace from the inside:**  the urgency of using culturally appropriate peace building process stems also from the intricate relationship between peace and development where peace guarantees the conditions within which development can take place. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that, important global development assistance activities including; local participation, capacity building, and sustainable resource management- can be enhanced in cost-effective programs and strategies which understand and work with indigenous knowledge and indigenous decision-making systems. In Africa, peace is of utmost importance and it enables efforts there for socioeconomic development of the continent (Osie-Hwedei and Galvin, 2015). Thus, Africa's development trends can partly be attributed to the fact that the paradigms of socioeconomic development have ignored African knowledge systems lacking organic roots in the culture and knowledge system of the African people (Angula, 2008). Africa may be an ideal continent to learn about and begin seriously integrating indigenous knowledge with development planning techniques. As Asebe Regassa argued it very well, development should have to be culturally compatible and respects, enhances, and promotes local customs, values and livelihood traditions of the people (Regassa, 2012). Therefore, borrowing Western notions of

development in most cases contradict with indigenous conceptions and practices in Africa (Ibid, p. 26). Moreover, in order to alleviate the profound challenge of sustainable development in Africa, the knowledge of local and indigenous people, often referred to as indigenous knowledge has to be increasingly recognized as an important source of knowledge. Because, this knowledge is based on facts that are known or learnt from experience or acquired through observation and practice, and is handed down from generation to generation (Mafongoya and Ajayi, 2014). Thus, as development process in Africa mostly lacks context and relevance to the African people that needs to come from within, self-development as lasting demand should start from the African knowledge systems by learning from what people already know to what they need to know to solve their own problems by themselves.

f) **The timely demand of harnessing democratic governance based on indigenous mechanisms:** democracy as system of government is widely experiencing in Africa today where several nations in the continent have adopted it as a useful approach to promote good governance and development. The questions of democracy across African countries has led to the search for importance of African indigenous institutions of governance as alternative solutions to the leadership crises. Because, among others, the current political crisis in African continent is due to western ideologies about democracy that don't consider the African communal philosophy that is expressed through living together where "the society cannot be defined from the point of view individuals, but individuals is understood through the community; where the latter is present in the former (Mulgeta, 2016, p. 29). In addition, Tesfaye (2012) have argued, indigenous institutions of governance across African states are *more democratic and egalitarian* than the modern African states' legal institutions. Thus, in order to foster the democratization process in Africa the roles of indigenous approaches are hard to miss and pivotal. Today, in Africa, there are indigenous approaches that could bring about peaceful co-existence where these approaches can foster peace building and provide lessons on the political governances (Murithi, 2009). Also, as Yoseph Mulgeta argued it, to achieve political stability, peace and security, moral responsibility in leadership in the present Africa must be by means of reinstating indigenous African political leadership and their knowledge systems (Mulgeta, 2016). So, it is imperative to harness and reinstate the indigenous approaches and find ways of learning lessons from them in promoting good governance and democratic practices in Africa. Especially, combining these indigenous political leaderships and modern

democratic system more enable Africans to reconstruct their continent profitably drawing upon their cultural heritage in building peace sustainably.

## 3. The Oromo Gadaa System from Bottom-up Peace Building Perspective

The Oromo Gadaa system essentially incorporated elements of contemporary peace building approaches to maintain social harmony and peaceful coexistence designs including: culture of peace, gender equality, solidarity, peacemaking, development, human rights, justice, and natural resource management among others and these values can serve as a milestones upon which positive peace can be built contemporarily. Gadaa system is developed as a unique culture and democratic egalitarian form of administration by the Oromo and peace building process in the system takes a stand in the argument that: *the indigenous Oromo world view of understanding indigenous peace building under the Gadaa system is broader and more holistic than the way others are using today at different corners of the world.* Here, it is relevant to discuss the concept of peace building in a broader context to understand what it entails for the Oromo's stance which is used in this work. Gadaa system as an indigenous peace building approach is explained below from positive peace building elements including culture of peace, human rights protection, economic well-being, ecological well-being, reconciliation, and nonviolence among others.

**Culture of peace in the Gadaa system:** the United Nations definition culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes and behaviors that reflects respect for life, human beings and their dignity and brings to the forefront about human rights and reject violence in all its forms. It adheres to the principles of freedom, justice, solidarity and tolerance, as well as understanding among peoples, groups and individuals. In the culture of peace, people assumes a global human identity and it is a process that grows out of the beliefs and actions of the people themselves and develops differently in each society, depending upon its history, culture and traditions which cannot be imposed from the outside (Schilling, 2012). In the Oromo society too, culture of peace can be explained from three interrelated concepts of philosophy, moral, and spiritual/religious under the Gadaa system as follows.

i.    Firstly, from the *Oromo philosophical standpoint*, understanding culture of peace needs to be comprehended from their own world view perspectives that includes *ayyaana, uumaa* and *safuu* (Megerssa, 2005). The Oromo use these concepts to explain the organization and interconnection among the human, spiritual and physical worlds as they believe that through *ayyaana, Waaqa* creates and regulates the human and physical world in balanced ways. This *ayyaana* also maintains the connection between the creator and the created (Jalata and Schaffer, 2013). Cognizant of this, Mulgeta (2016) explained the concept of *safuu* (human ontology) as an epistemological notion founded on the idea of *jiruu-fi-jireenya-nama* (ontological characteristics of human being). This makes *safuu* a critical reflection upon what ought to exist

between each human being and *uumaa* as well as *ayyaana,* on the one side and, and between an individual and human society on the other side. Gadaa system is a political philosophy in which the desire of *Waaqa* is not for obedience but for *safuu* as an overarching harmony in the universe which implies concord in respect for all humans and recognizes the interconnections among these humans and the natural environment (Jalata and Schaffer, 2013). Based on this, the Oromo term *nagaa (*which literally means peace) shows the agreement of anything involved in natural relations to create peaceful co-existence between different parts of the human and cosmic orders.

ii. Secondly, from *moral point of view*, the prominence of peace in the Oromo culture as a moral consensus was clearly identified by the work of Tenna Dewo in 2013. He analyzed the *Gadaa* system in terms of its implicit values and have explicated the moral principles and values underlying the Oromo concepts of peace (*nagaa*) and moral order *(safuu).* Peace/*nagaa* is supreme and a binding element in the *safuu* concept of the Oromo as it is the integrative girdle that connects people together rooted itself in the customary law of their *safuu. Safuu* is a moral category based on Oromo notion of respect for all things constituting the ethical basis upon which all human action should be founded. Thus, *safuu* serve as a litmus-test and social compass as it directs one on the right path and show them the path way in which life can be best lived within the context of Oromo world view. Cited in Keneni (2012), the place and value of *nagaa* for the Oromo has been well described in the Oromo Studies Association

Newsletter in 2008 stating "Peace is central to Oromo ritual and ceremonial activities, to administrative and legal functions, to traditional religion, morality, and social life, and the conduct of politics. For the Oromo, nagaa is an essential key to an orderly universe and societal well-being that humans must pursue." This signifies what Legesse (2006) stated as peace is a pervasive and sustained concern in moral life [of the Oromo], where the long blessings that are given daily by Oromo elders are prayers for peace and the theme of peace is everywhere in their life. Also, according to Gufu Oba (1996) cited in Dewo (2008) and Scott-Villiers, *etal* (2011), the Oromo culture of peace (*nagaa*) suggests a human condition that contributes to a harmonious and generous universe where every greeting, prayer, ritual, political, and judicial protocol invokes peace. Thus, in the Oromo world view the governing word is peace (*nagaa*) and it has a special place and value among the Oromo expressed in every activity of their life based on several mechanisms that are used in the community. iii. Thirdly, from *spiritual/religious point of view*, Mohammed Hassen has explained the culture of peace in the Oromo Gadaa system from the *Abba Muudaa* perspective where the house of the *Abba Muudaa*

*(galma)* itself served as a center for spiritual activities and a symbol of peace and moral force. The essence of the teaching in the *galma* was peace and harmony where the Oromo start and end all their prayers with *nagaa* including the safety and well-being of the individual and of the community. Hence, for the community, peace is the maintenance of law and order, care of the poor, weak and sick whereas for an individual, peace is the inner peace including peace of body, mind and soul. Here, peace relates to an individual's imaginative sense of well-tempered, balanced interrelations with other persons, the environment and with *Waaqa* (Hassen, 2005).

**Human rights protection in the Gadaa system:** human rights and peace are intractably connected to each other because the denial of human rights is itself the denial of positive peace (Barash and Webel, 2009). Thus, peace and human rights, necessarily, complement each other where peace cannot be achieved without human rights being protected and realized and in turn human rights cannot be achieved in the absence of peace (Santa-Barbara, 2007). Peace without human rights would be a flawed peace and people cannot be said to be living in peace if their human rights are violated as the structural and institutional violence inherent in human rights abuse are the antithesis of peace.

The Oromo social order claims to understand and live according to the laws of *Waaqa* and societal norms being necessary both morally and ethically. They believe in *Waaqaa's* Law *(Seera Waaqa)* and the law of society they established through the Gadaa system to maintain *nagaa*/peace and *safuu* among *Waaqa*, society and the nature to achieve their full human destiny. This respect for the laws of *Waaqa* in the Gadaa system have been essentially helped to maintain *nagaa*/peace and *safuu* as a moral balance in the Oromo society (Jalata and Schaffer, 2013). In the Gadaa system, human rights are naturally given and inborn status where everyone acquired it automatically as *birmadu* (children are set free through birth) and every person has *birmaduma* which is every person's inviolable and inalienable freedom (OCTB, 2015). The fact strictly respected in the Gadaa system has contributed to the prevalence of freedom and liberty of the people to believe in the equality of mankind, and to live both harmoniously and peacefully among themselves and with other societies. Therefore, as a commitment to human rights and freedom are the key characteristics of peaceful society, Gadaa system could serve as an asset that recognizes the rights of all Oromo and others. This can be enriched by the today's democratic cultures to bring about a lasting improvement in the lives of peoples who have suffered the loss of human rights (Jalata and Schaffer, 2013). Importantly, accepting the rights of others is a category designed to promote individuals or groups basic rights and freedoms as well as to protect the social and cultural norms of citizens (IEP, 2011). In this way, the nature of the Gadaa system has enabled the Oromo people to treat each other and others equally with several premeditated mechanisms. For instance, *guddifachaa* (adoption of children); *moggasaa* (adoption of non-Oromo

individuals to Oromo clan); *seeraa kooluu* (law of refugees who seek asylum); and *seera boojuu* (law of war prisoners) helped to uplift social harmony and promote human rights and societal security of everyone under the Gadaa system.

**Economic well-being and development in the Gadaa system:** the quest for adequately fulfilling the basic human needs in particular and the communal socio-economic development in general are at the center of building positive peace today. According to Megersa (2002) cited in Jalata (2012), the Oromo concept of (social) development is constructed based on seven interconnected stages including: *gudina, gabbina, ballina, badhaadha, hoormata, dagaaga*, and *dagaa-hoora*. Thus, in the Gadaa system there cannot be *finna* (development) without the prevalence of peace, social justice, *kao (*freedom, peace, prosperity, success, and happiness), and *safuu* (Jalata, 2012). As Diro (2004) also explained, the concept of economic development for the Oromo is a systematic and well-balanced relation between the three variables including: capital (*sanyii*), its reproduction and multiplication (*hormaata*), and distribution of benefits, which implies security (*tika*). Thus, for the Oromo development emerges through the well-being of the whole Oromo society improved in economic, social, cultural, and even political conditions. In order to achieve inclusive development, the Oromo have developed several institutions through which they effectively mobilize their productive resources via cooperation and a tradition of helping one another for communal benefit of the whole society. These mechanisms include: *daboo, kadhachiisa, dado, and wanfala* among others (Diro, 2004) and (OCTB, 2015). Also, the Oromo Gadaa system, via *buusaa-gonofaa,* has the commendable tradition or practice of helping the needy among them. It have served as a basic cooperative structure that they use; if a person loses asset due to any reason, each member of the clan would contribute whatever he/she can to help the person in rehabilitation of him/herself for a better and prosperous life. Also, in the Gadaa system, through *daara-baasuu* the Oromo people supports individuals who are in need including the poor, orphans, and other helpless people (Demissie, 2011) and (OCTB, 2015). This practice of stretching helping hands to the needy makes the Gadaa system to be considered as an exemplary social capacitating system to build a positive peace where the commendable practice of helping the needy would contribute to the rehabilitation of the individuals who are in need.

**Ecological well-being and environmental security in the Gadaa system:** natural resource management and environmental protection is at the center of positive peace building today. Rather than contemporary Western induced environmental ethics discourses, every indigenous societies have their own wisdoms long held in their culture for the human affairs and their relation to the physical environment (Belay, 2014). Also, according to Berkes (2008) cited in Asebe Regassa (2012), indigenous

people's environmental knowledge is unique because it embedded in local cultural milieu, bounded of indigenous knowledge in space and time, conjoint constitution of the human, nonhuman and a supernatural and non-instrumental approach to nature. Indigenous knowledge systems in Africa are traditionally applied in harmony with the natural and spiritual world. These traditional or cultural practices are ingeniously designed to address local ecological limitations by maintaining a sustainable utilization and protection of commonly shared natural resources. This can be termed as what Workineh Kalbessa (2012) called it "An Indigenous Environmental Ethic" which is the set of values and beliefs of an individual or group of people relating to the environment. It involves individuals' or people's attitudes towards the environment and aims to sift useful ideas within indigenous beliefs and practices which are relevant to environmentally and socially sound development.  For the Oromo too, the concept of peace goes beyond the human domain and it includes care for the overall planet basing on their belief system which values the harmonious relationship among the beings. Oromo "ecotheology" allows them to govern the spirits, beliefs and the relationship between the *Waaqa* and humans, and between humans and the natural environment; and it also teaches a positive relationship between *Waaqa,* humanity and nonhuman creation has the capacity, which it already fulfils in part, to address environmental problems in Oromia (Ibid).

As Belay (2014) has explained it, the Oromo nation responsibly care for the natural environment considering its intrinsic and extrinsic value in addition to its cultural and economic significances for them. Among others, even, in the Oromo society the opening ceremony of the *Gumii Gayoo* (Gadaa General Assembly) or any social gathering consists customary blessings before the session commenced; saying that "May God give us rain, bless our pasture, and provide us peace, prosperity and stability" (Doyo, 2014). According to Asmarom Legesse (1973) too, the blessing goes as follows: "Praise to be God, who has brought us to *Gaayo*, may we full his laws in peace; peace to the land, peace to the multitudes, peace to the multitudes of *Gaayo;* let there be peace in our deliberation, let there be nothing but rain and peace" Also as Hassen, (2005) noted, the *Galma* as a spiritual center were visited by the Oromo people both to learn and to participate in prayers for peace, rain, fertility and plenty.  Moreover, put very comprehensively, according to Jan Hultin (1994), peace for the Oromo is a moral state form and necessary condition for the well-being of the society at large and where there is no peace there is misery and death.

As critically explained by Mergo (2014), within the Oromo life there are the practices of long established indigenous forest stewardship where natural panoramas are both respected and sacred based on *safuu* and *ayyaana*.  For him, it is only through the binding use of *safuu* and *ayyaana* that creatures could remain sustainable amid human-environment interaction. In the Oromo *safuu* context,

natural resources are believed to be blessings from *Waaqa* (God) and source of life.  Hence, violating their resilient existence is expressed as an offense against the general life systems on earth and *Waaqa*. For the Oromo, an orderly universe and societal well-being are prioritized over individual or personal well-being and interest (Keneni, 2012). Therefore, the ultimate goal of any type of *nagaa* is communal well-being in an orderly universe. In short, for the Oromo there cannot be an orderly universe and societal well-being without *nagaa* which is highly valued among them. According to Demissie (2011) too, under the *safuu* norms there is a mutual relation between things where every creature [including environment] is expected to live in harmony without inflicting each other. The *safuu* principle and Oromo world outlook in general puts respect for the nature at the center of all. Also, in the Oromo culture, the people have reverence for the natural environment they live in because there is understanding of the close interrelation between natural resources and human life (OCTB, 2015). For example, Denge (2011) explained that; water, pasture and land all have an equally unifying role for the Oromo society under the Gadaa system based on *Aadaa Seera Bisssani* which is customs and laws of range resources to govern the range resources amongst themselves and with neighboring communities). Thus, natural resources have significant importance as a source and sustainer of life that need to have peaceful interaction with human around them. In addition, as Asebe Regassa explained it, in the Guji Oromo there has been a deep-rooted belief that any disruption in their relationship with non-human things in nature generally would displease

*Waaqa* and invoke punishment in the form of drought, famine, disease and war (Regassa, 2012, p. 38).

**Reconciliation approaches in the Gadaa system:** since conflict is naturally inevitable, the mechanisms of managing, transforming and reconciling it are pivotal.  Reconciliation can be thought of as the restoration of a state of peace to the relationship, where the entities are at least not harming each other, and begin to trust each other not to do the same thing in future (Santa-Barbara, 2007). In the Oromo world view, *nagaa* (peace) transcends short-lived conflict management because it is a concern of orderly universe and societal well-being (Keneni, 2012). Thus, *nagaa* is valued among the Oromo people and there are myriad of mechanisms to restore it when it is lost for whatever reason. Importantly, the Oromo under their Gadaa system manages and resolve conflict through identifiable steps to arrive at reconciliation so that harmonious relation can be restored among the conflicting parties (Tuso, 2000). The reconciliation process in the Gadaa system takes place mostly through arbitration which has enabled to maintain social relations where those who quarrel with each other have to make peace (OCTB, 2015). Decision are made based on the satisfaction of parties in the conflict at the best interest of the public and therefore, there is no loser-winner but win-win that seeks

to balance the conflict of individuals against the peace and security of the society in general (Tesfaye, 2012). The practice of reconciliation among the Oromo people is based on investigating into the truth and by making the right decision on the case which in turn have significant role in promoting a healthy relationship and peaceful co-existence among the community.

In addition, as Kelbessa (2012) explained it, in the Gadaa system there has been a traditional court system of solving conflicts under several steps. In the first place, elders are required to settle the conflict between the opposing groups. If they cannot do so, the case will be referred to *jalaba* (the representative of the different clans). If the latter fails to solve the conflict, the *hayyuu* will see the case and unsolved cases can be referred to *raabaa* (a group which consists of individuals who are about to enter the *Gadaa* period) and *Abbaa Gadaa* consecutively. *Abbaa Gadaas* can resolve conflicts between members of their own *luba*, or between different *luba*. The *Qaalluu* leaders can also mediate the conflict between moieties, clans and lineages. Finally, all unresolved conflicts will be referred to the *Gumii Gayoo* assembly, which gives final decisions. This signifies that the Oromo people have relied on participatory democratic principles to handle different issues including conflict resolution.

**The practices of nonviolence in the Gadaa system:** nonviolence is a holistic belief and effective approach to social change, which seeks to transform society using means consistent with the ends of a fair, just and peaceful world. For the Oromo too, under their principled world views of Gadaa system, the notion of *safuu* as human ontology and morality have equipped them to practice *nonviolence* values providing care for the environment, the self, or others. According to Donald Levin, for instance, civility in deliberation of the Oromo polity have served them to facilitate mutual respect in democratic thoughts and their custom encourage civility in public discourse by avoiding to provoke resentments but to promote peace (Levine, 2007). Rooted in the Gadaa system, there are several nonviolent methods of conflict resolution, justice administration and peace building within the interaction of the Oromo among themselves and with others. These include: *michuu* (literally mean a bond of friendship by which the Oromo used to solve conflicts and establish cultural tolerance with other ethnic groups with whom they came into contact in one way or the other); *harma-hodhaa* (literally translated as sucking the breast and the system was used to establish a kind of parent-child relationship between the Oromo and other groups, but without complete absorption); *luba-baasa* (literally translated as to set free or to make free and it was a mechanism by which the Oromo used to incorporate members of other ethnic groups, especially those captured in battle); *waadaa/ irbuu /kakuu* (literally mean to swear or take an oath to forgive and forget what happened and guarantee not to take revenge of any kind for the sake of *Waaqa* and *Lafa* (earth)*; siiqqee* (Oromo women's institution in the *Gadaa* system); *moggaasaa* (an adoption mechanism); *gumaa* (literally mean indemnity or compensation); and

*jaarsummaa/araara* (literally the process of reconciliation between conflicting individuals or groups by a group of elders) see Tuso (2000), Gemechu (2002), Chemeda *etal* (2007),  and  Keneni (2012) among others.

## 4. Conclusion

Indigenous knowledge systems have immense potential to contribute within the efforts of crafting new paradigms and approaches to peace in Africa. Indigenous peace building system are expected to be incorporated into the contemporary peace building mechanisms since they are based on the principles cherished and internalized by a community, and are contextualized to capture their collective knowledge and experiences that yields a positive result. Acknowledging these contributions and experiences in the field of peace building provides a different perspective when approaching the issue of peace processes, especially at the grassroot level. Thus, undermining the saliency of indigenous approaches endangers local peace building mechanisms.

The indigenous peace building approaches practiced by the Oromo are profoundly bound with socio-political and economic realities of the lifestyles of themselves under the Gadaa system. In this context the principles of social cohesion, harmony, participation, peaceful co-existence, respect, tolerance and humility, among others are emphasized as core issues in indigenous peace building system of the Oromo society. Gadaa as comprehensive system reflects the ways of living of the people and it has ensured the values and principles necessary for peace building as an indigenous approach. It incorporates the values and principles towards which the whole world has been striving such as: respecting of the rights of women and children, conservation of environment, peaceful conflict resolution, mutual assistance, provision of asylum to the seekers, and providing humanitarian assistance for those who are in need *inter alia.*

Generally, Gadaa system is the most fortunate approach in deepening culture of peace through a view of contradictions as mutable, a holistic view of the conflict formation, a civilization with principle of unity identifying all humans and other creations as part of self, and civilization without self-other dualism. This all makes Gadaa system *a unity-based indigenous worldview* promoting a culture of peace practiced by the Oromo society as compared to peace building from below. From peace building point of view Gadaa system  institutions are aimed to achieve sustainable peace and justice through participatory and consultative processes, individuals and groups seek opportunities for growth and development, human relationships are based on truthfulness, equality and solidarity, the essential oneness and wholeness of all human being is recognized, and all forms of prejudice and segregation

are rejected, women and men participate equally in the administration of their human affairs, and human development and prosperity are achieved through application of ethical principles and processes of consultative decision-making and governance.

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