

## Relevance of Gadaa Values and Practices in Current Development

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### Abstract

Despite their advancement and intensiveness, existing scientific studies did not pay adequate attention to the relevance of Indigenous social values and customary practices in the current societal development context. Yet several studies agree that the implementation of modern science and technology increases the sustainability of development, while studies on the relevance of indigenous developmental values and practices are largely missing. The same scenario is observed in studying the relevance of Gada values and practices in multifaceted developments. However, empirical studies have shown that Indigenous knowledge remains important in many societies and that its importance has been increasing since the beginning of the post modernism ideas. This study dedicates to investigate the Gada values and practices associated with socio-economic wellbeing, identifying Gada values and practices that mostly concern environmental protection and to examine the relevance of Gada values and practices in current societal development. The paper employs qualitative research method to investigate indigenous knowledge importance in general and the relevance of Gada values and practices in the current societal development context in particular. Gada values and practices can have relevance in cultural development, social development, economic development and environmental protection and any other development. Even though modern elements brought opportunities in given society; it also has posed several inconveniences. Modern elements can influence society in certain desirable direction but it lacks effectiveness and sustainability. The development that ignores local indigenous knowledge may be ineffective and not satisfactory. This study indicates that indigenous developmental values and practices create profound potential that can help developmental effort so as to accelerate and sustain development and build solid ground for the societal prosperity. Furthermore, it was found that members of the society have preferences for their indigenous Gada values and practices owing to their familiarity and sense of ownership. This confirms that any development effort or project that can be launched in the area will be more viable and beneficial if appropriately exploit these opportunities.

**Keywords:** Gadaa values and practices; Relevance; Societal development

### Introduction

A number of alternative terms have been used to describe community based environmental and social development in different contexts. The equivalent term and idea that well describe community based development in the study area is Gada values and practices oriented development. This is because Gada is the collective conscience of understudy population. For example, Hinew et al. [1] stated that gada is an indigenous socio-political democratic system of Oromo people that regulated political stability, economic development, social activities, cultural obligations, moral responsibility, and philosophy of religious order of the society. In addition, Baissa et al. [2] delineated that Gada was a complex system in which the Oromo were divided into five "missensa," or "parties" and participated in military, political, legal and cultural affairs. The community or society based development implies that society has total involvement in a given development activities including both proposal stage up to full completion of any project.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relevance of Gada values and practices in the current societal development context with special emphasis on the Oromo society. The finding of this research is expected to give insight and knowledge of relevance of indigenous social values and practices in the societal development. Thus, the

finding can serve as road map to design appropriate interventions that is specific for the study populations so as to achieve desirable and sustainable overall developmental patterns. Indigenous social values and practices of any society in general and Gada values and practices of Oromo in particular endowed with values or general principles that effectively promote and sustain every developmental effort. In the aforementioned study area, development activities are prevailing. The study area is highly experiencing social, economic, political, cultural and environmental changes. But these changes were not studied in reference to local social values and practices as proscribed and prescribed in the Gada system. In order to achieve this objective the local Aba Gadas were included in this study in general, and indigenous inhabitants in particular were the concerns of this study. This is due to the Aba Gadas' more knowledge ability and experience of Gada values and practices. Thus, this study thoroughly considered these social values as a vital and plausible that needs close investigation and comprehensive policy adjustment.

The Gada values and practices can have relevance in cultural development, social development, economic development and environmental protection and development. Even though modern elements brought opportunities in the given society, it also has posed several inconveniences. Modern elements can influence society in certain desirable direction but it lacks effectiveness and sustainability. Following alien social values and practices can lead to cultural degradation, social alienation, economic marginalization and environmental deterioration. This aggravates social and environmental

problems. This leaves the society helpless and powerless. Environmental degradation is becoming serious local and global agenda. This scenario poses multidimensional problems. Thus, the current development efforts and activities need incorporation of local social values and practices so as to achieve multidimensional and sustainable development. In the study area there is no work done to promote indigenous developmental ideas and no study conducted about relevance of Gada values and practices in promoting and sustaining multidimensional development. This indicates the existing development activities do not give emphasis for these local social values and practices. The development that ignores local indigenous knowledge may be ineffective and not satisfactory. This trend is very tangible in the study area. But, it was not rigorously investigated.

There has been something of a trend internationally towards development at a community level, involving “bottom-up”, community-generated solutions to intractable economic and social problems, rather than the application of “one size fits all”, “top-down” policies and initiatives from central government [3]. The application and utilization of indigenous social values and practices become extremely less and less partly due to enormous inflow of non-local social values and practices. Even though there are such pervasive external influences the society yet inclines to utilize their indigenous social values and practices. The importation of alien principle of development creates no commitment and lack of confidence. The ruling regimes have been imposing different policies and programs that do not have any link with the existing local social values and practices. For this reason, the society in the study area does not show significant socio-cultural, economic and political change which needs meticulous investigation.

The general objective of this research is to investigate the relevance of indigenous social values and customary practices in the current societal development context with particular emphasis on Gada system of Oromo society.

The specific objectives of the research are:

- To identify Gada values and practices that mostly concern environmental protection,
- To investigate the Gada values and practices associated with socio-economic and political wellbeing,
- To examine the relevance of Gada values and practices in current societal development (Figure 1).

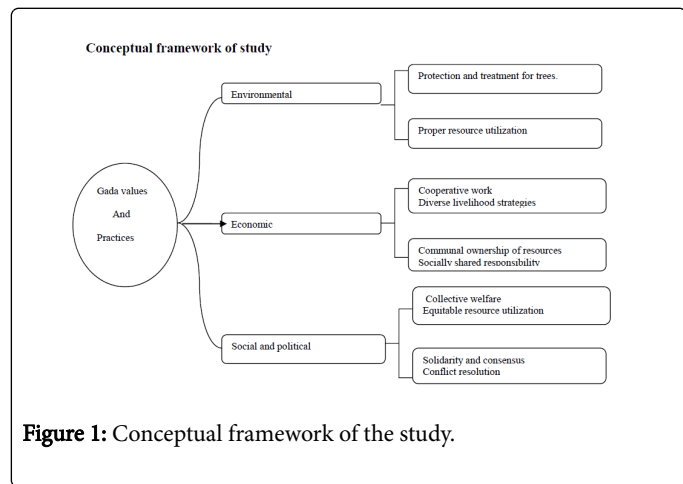


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study.

## Research Methodology

This study was conducted in the Ethiopia with particular emphasis on Oromo society. Oromo Society is very populous and inhabiting on the vast geographic coverage. Recently, some part of Oromia state administratively divided into several zones. This zones mainly occupied by farming community. Majority of the people produce Agricultural products. Oromo society in general and the zones in the area in particular have undergone different social changes. Currently, the area is experiencing new developmental projects. This society has its own indigenous social values and customary practices that help their local development. This values and practices are integral elements of Gada system. Hence, the motive behind this study was to identify the relevance of Gada values and practices in the current societal development context (Figure 2).

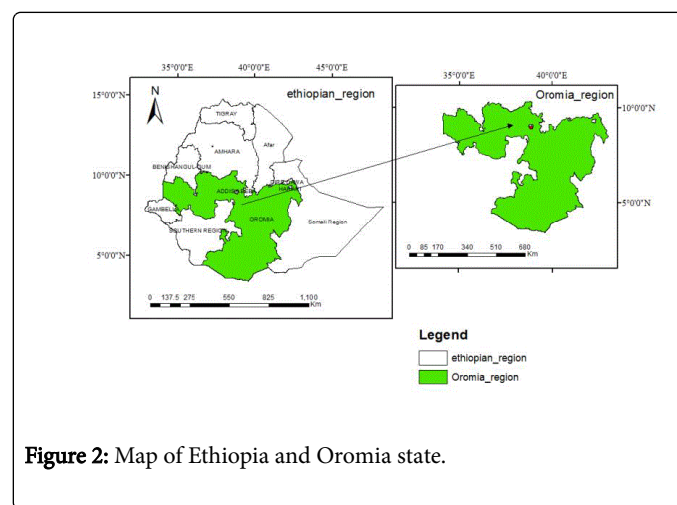


Figure 2: Map of Ethiopia and Oromia state.

In this study, qualitative approach was employed owing to its nature and goodness fit of the approach. The main research tool was in-depth interview. Both primary and secondary data sources were used. The primary data was obtained from the Abba Gadas. This data was collected through in depth interview, focus group discussion and key informants interview. The researcher decided that 50 sample size of the population is enough and provide adequate data concerning the theme understudy. This is fixed presumably believing that information extracted from the sample is expected to meet the research objective and research questions. The members of the sample population are Abba Gadas who are serving or already served the society under consideration in different time periods. They are chosen because of their suffice awareness and knowledge about overall and detail of Gada values and practices in relation to local development and environmental protection. Abba Gadas are resourceful in knowledge and practices of Gada system in general and its values in particular. They were selected purposively from each and every local Gada structures. The respondents were accessed through snowball sampling techniques. The course of data collection was proceeded in this way until the required sample size and adequate data become suffice and saturated.

The secondary data was extracted from various documents like research works, books, and governmental and non-governmental organization relevant documents. Qualitative data obtained through the predetermined data collection tools was analyzed using appropriate methods of analysis.

## Results and Discussion

### Gada values and practices for environmental protection

It is obvious that all society concern their environments. The society and environment interaction has been changed its form from time to time. As a result, some environmental conversion signals forthcoming undesirable occurrences. This is very serious and demanding particularly in industrial society. Those societies exploit the environment relentlessly. For this reason, nowadays the world is facing ever dangerous environmental deterioration. Nevertheless, there are remarkable and promising efforts aim at environmental protection and preservation. All of environmental preservation and protection strategies have no equal effectiveness and do not assure sustainability. The more the effort is participatory the more likely it results in effective and sustainable environmental development. In this regard, the indigenous social values and customary practices target the environment is more effective and trustworthy. This may be owing to its nature of societal ownership and total social involvement. Nevertheless, Chamaret et al. [4] indicates that in recent years, many indicator sets have been developed on an international level based on top-down approaches [4]. But they commonly lack legitimacy for stakeholders and adequacy to specific site issues. Thus, they need to be complemented by the consultation of local actors. The best practical example in this area under discussion is the Gada system values and practices which highly accentuate environmental protection and proper resource utilization. According to Gada system social values all members of the society have moral obligation to care for and uphold their environment. Oromo society considers trees as important as human being. They view trees as they are source of soul. This means trees yield all important things for mankind including fruits or as source of food. Therefore, they do not compromise any attempt against trees. Cutting down trees equally treat with committing homicide which results in severe punishment. This assures that Oromo society's environmental protection is more powerful than the so called environmental protection treaty or any artificial convention aim at environs. Oromo society has its own principle that regulates their interaction with environment. In line with this theme Atoma et al. [5] discusses the valuable contributions of the use of indigenous knowledge in sustainable development without cost or damage to the environment. The interaction is very friendly and depends on the mutual co-existence that consolidates sustainability of the environment. Gada values and practices are very essential in creating community commitment and participation. The study conducted in the Lebanon shows that the participatory process where all stakeholders are involved in the policy and implementation process, would allow community to take ownership of the sustainable development process [6]. This illustrates that current environment protection need to take into account indigenous social values and practices. Environmental protections become more effective and sustainable if the effort incorporate customary practices and empower local community.

### Gada values and practices for economic well being

All societies have their way of producing material needs. This social pattern constitutes principles that govern and encourage material production of societal wellbeing. These social values and customary practices pay particular attention towards development and sustainable progress of a given society. Thus, indigenous social values and

customary practices can assure economic wellbeing of the society via cooperative work and division of labour.

Despite the fact that agro-pastoral sector is the dominant livelihood strategy there are members of society tend to involve in supplementary alternative livelihood strategies; they engage in poultry, traditional trade (bartering), handicrafts, woodwork, metalwork, etc and in so doing generate income either as complementary to farming or mainstay livelihood strategies. These social values highly promote diversification and multiplication of living alternatives. Montes et al. [7] state that indigenous knowledge is important to recognize that indigenous/local knowledge guarantees the survival of cultural and biological diversity.

The societies oriented towards proper utilization of resource and keen enough in making sure their basic needs. They engage in variety of livelihood strategy so as to maximize their survival and prosperity. The existing social values and customary practices highly encourage diversification of livelihood strategies and diligence. These tendencies or lifestyles helped the societal development and economic wellbeing of its members. Thus, the above evidence demonstrates that the social values and customary practices help social progress.

This further demonstrates that the economic welfare of the society to some extent based on the social values of the society. The social values and practices of the society build cooperation among its actors. Even poor individual opt to work cooperatively with relatively richer households who can afford all necessary needs to poor individuals. On the other hand, the households that do not support the cooperation and less diligent are not recognized in social patterns. Furthermore, the Abba Gadas proved the same facts that having said that Oromos resource utilization and resource management highly interlinked with social values and custom. Abba Gadas added that all members of society have equal responsibility to protect resources. Moreover, social values and custom of the society appreciate cooperation and coordination among themselves. This asserted by the paper argues that IKS in Central Africa have a high sustainability potential. They have over generations fostered relationships with other groups, creating a complex web of high levels of cooperation, exchange and support that are essential for sustainability.

### Gada values and practices for social well being

Indigenous social values and customary practices promote collective conscience. This helps the overall wellbeing of the society. Similarly Gada values are mainly oriented towards stability and cohesion of the society. Gada system has several importances for overall system of the Oromo society. In line with this Hinew et al. [1] elaborated that since Gada was highly endowed with moral and legal values, among the Oromo it created peaceful setting and kept social order by prohibiting injustice, social evils and political chaos. Accordingly, different social organizations are expected to be interdependent. This trend makes sure social vitality for the existing overall developmental patterns. It forms new potentials that can help developmental effort so as to accelerate and sustain there by creating solid ground for the societal prosperity. Gada values and practices have many relevant contributions for societal development. Several literatures have been revealed that Gada values and practices can promote current societal development. Hinew et al. [1] confirmed that Gada discourage early marriage, ban social evils like corruption and rape and encourage good governance, work and to be self-reliant which in turn promote societal development. These days, the study area demand multidimensional development but in the same token the members of society are conscious about their

indigenous social values and practices. Thus, any development effort that project in the area will be beneficial if appropriately exploit these opportunities. The study conducted in the rural Mexico by Larrison et al. [8] supports the use of the bottom-up model of social development theory as a preferable structure for community development programs.

This reveals that people prefer more to practice their own local life style and their own philosophies of life. They used to build up tremendous social capital and network. This helped them to have harmonious and stable social interaction. The community used to guide and orient their children through socializing in a way that their children should conform the local social values and norms. This socialization process inculcated the decisive role of community spirit in the mind of the children. The total comprehension of these social values and norms perceived as quality of maturity. However, there are few part of the community who tend to borrow alien social values and customary practices. They impose alien social values and norms thereby the last generation did injustice up on the community under consideration [9]. The study participants confirmed that they prefer to practice and pursue everything from the perspectives of their local social values and customary practices with the exception of few members of the community that would-be assimilated. Furthermore, Abba Gadas reported that community spirit under Gada system is very strong. For this reason, people would like to look out for one another and care for each other with full trust. Supporting local and regional networks of traditional practitioners and community exchanges can help to disseminate useful and relevant Indigenous knowledge and to enable communities to participate more actively in the development process.

### **Gada values and practices for political solidarity and consensus**

All societies desire to have its ruling structure and administrative mechanism thereby solidify its political sovereignty. They have different social values and customary practices that encourage its members to involve into social life and public affairs. They have also principle that promotes their political consensus. For example, they had strong solidarity and sentiment. They worked cooperatively in all aspects they had political alertness and commitment. Before years ago the community was small but well organized and ordered social entity [9-11]. As a result, they are able to develop strong consensus and active participation in their political life Furthermore; the members of the community are well organized according to their age category. This enable the members of the community at the given age class to be conscious of their public life. Bulcha et al. [12] mentioned that the Oromo society has a heritage that had promoted democracy and strongly discouraged dictatorship. Furthermore, Lewis et al. [13] concludes that the Oromo share some elements of political culture, ideology, and values despite some differences among various Oromo groups and regions. The "equality" and "democracy" concepts which are popular among the educated and politically sensitive Oromos seem to be a widespread and general part of their people's background "Respect for law, for peace making elders, for assemblies, and the recourse to voluntary organizations with elected officials who should serve the community that elected them, and be responsible to them, is basic to the life of many Oromo country people" Indeed, this political socialization procedure was very effective and viable. Yet, the given society members who stayed away from the political arena remained reluctant. Conversely, the social members who are keen in their political life can play a pivotal role in political progress of the

community. This illustrates that the political participation of the community become high when the degree of modernizing process is low or non-existent and this means people tend to participate more actively. Empowerment of local communities is a prerequisite for the integration of indigenous knowledge in the development process. Similar to this, Bergdall et al. [14] suggests that Effective catalysts from outside of the community don't do anything directly for people. They encourage people to do things are their own. Asset Based Community driven Development emphasizes that one leads best by stepping back [15]. Communities drive their own development; catalysts facilitate the process. This implies a number of practical activities that are far easier to talk about than to do. Furthermore, Baissa et al. [2] concludes that Oromo cultural values will provide extremely useful and powerful building blocks to create and institutionalize a political power that will lead the nation with dignity, liberty, and prosperity.

The data gathered from members of society confirmed that they had active political participation in gada system [16]. The research participants further explained that before getting merged into the modern politics they used to elect their leader directly and publicly through strong debate and consensus Hasen et al. [17]. They had deliberation forum through which their issues were raised and entertained. The given society used to elect their leader with their full consent and consensus. All issues concerning their collective life were addressed in a way that incorporates the interest of all members. In line with this Debele et al. [9] stated that the community's homogeneity and strong solidarity made possible such achievements. This implies that people were more potentially capable of determining their fate by their own voice. This is the most important point which discloses the background of political life of the given society under consideration [4]. However, few people in the society used to abstain from public dialogue and refrain from passing decision. This does not mean that the political pattern was partial rather the people had limitations in utilizing the given opportunities equally and effectively [18]. The political pattern was flexible and opens for all to participate though the members of the society could not develop similar conscious and dedication. Additionally, the study participants well-articulated the fact that their local governing mechanism was indigenous democracy or Gada ruling system which incorporates the voices of all eligible members of the community; they added that decision was made publicly at the assembly forum.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

### **Conclusion**

In most cases, the indigenous social values and alien social values contradict each other. In view of that members of the understudy society have shown preferences for their indigenous Gada values and practices owing to their familiarity and sense of ownership [19]. The study area is highly occupied by homogeneous social groups that follow by and large similar social, political, economic, cultural and philosophical styles. In fact, the study area is composed of individuals and groups that highly shaped and socialized under the umbrella of Gada values and practices. Nowadays, the study area is experienced new alien social values and practices. As a result, several formerly non-existence social, economical, cultural and environmental problems are emerging [20]. These trends have not brought up significant outweigh outcome as compared to indigenous values and practices towards environmental protection and socio-economic wellbeing. The scenario of development activities and its effectiveness is not balancing [21].

This unfriendly societal react towards environment and being reluctant towards social agenda were not social facts in this society in the past [22]. The indigenous social values and practices of everywhere society in general and Gada values and practices of Oromo in particular can profoundly contribute for the current societal development. These values and practices are multitudes and crucial elements that have timeless relevance.

## Recommendation

These days, the study area demand multidimensional development but in the same token the members of society are conscious about their indigenous social values and practices. Thus, any development effort that project in the area will be beneficial if appropriately exploit these opportunities.

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