



Full Length Research Paper

**An Appraisal of the Role of Women in Indigenous Peace-building Process in Ethiopia:
 Experience of *Siinqee* Practice from West Arsi Zone in Oromia Region**

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Abstract

The general objective of this study was to critically examine the role of women in the peace building process in Ethiopia by taking the experience of Siinqee practice from the west Arsi zone in the Oromia region. A qualitative research approach was employed. The data was gathered through focus group discussions and key informant interviews by identifying relevant and appropriate samples through purposive sampling techniques. The finding of this study shows that the role of women in nurturing indigenous peace building in the past time was very strong as compared to the current time. Women contributed a lot in mitigating the severity of conflict at the grassroots level and realizing social transformation. Nevertheless, challenges from religion, the politicization of culture, the passiveness of youth, and limitation of knowledge on the nature of the Gada system, cultural transformation, and censuring the role of women in peace building are hindering the futurity of women's status in indigenous peace building along with their representation. Although there are such challenges, women are currently playing their part in nurturing indigenous peace building mechanisms though it is too limited as compared to the past. The study concludes that strengthening the office that works on women empowerment in the indigenous culture of peace-building, strengthening the current women association on the practice of Siinqee, conducting integrated awareness creations, giving continuous capacity building training for women to ensure the continuity of the culture to ensure the culture of peace and non-violent conflict resolution needs to be implemented by all stakeholders..



1. Introduction

Indigenous peace-building mechanisms are playing an imperative role in addressing the existing differences among parties in the conflict and maintaining peace in a community. Indigenous approaches to conflict resolutions and peace building are varying considerably from society to society and there are many different indigenous approaches to conflict resolution as there are different societies and communities with a specific history, culture, and custom (Boege, 2006). According to Tsegai *et al.* (2018), in Africa, indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms are based on values, norms, cultures, and beliefs of the members of a given community. Thus, their decisions are willingly accepted by the community and continue to demonstrate their relevance in post-conflict resolution in achieving durable peace. In achieving lasting peace at the grassroots level in a given community, the empowerment of women in indigenous mechanisms of the peace building process is inevitable.

The signing of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (1325) on women, peace, and security in October 2000, marked the first time in the United Nations history that women's role in maintaining peace and security was recognized by the Council (Dahlström, 2012). Women are leading peace building efforts in a range of capacities, despite being largely excluded from informal negotiations (Warren *et al.*, 2018). Nonetheless, in most African societies, women still occupy lower positions in indigenous decision-making (Benardatte *et al.*, 2015). Ethiopia is the home of various ethnic groups. All

ethnic groups have developed indigenous mechanisms of ensuring comprehensive reconciliation. Different ethnic groups like Oromo, Afar, Amhara, Somali, Sidama, Gamo, and others develop their indigenous mechanisms of conflict resolution with certain peculiar features and are accepted among the respective communities for peaceful co-existence and solving conflict non-violently (Daniel, 2016:1).

Oromo people are expected to constitute more than 40% of the total population of Ethiopia and women participate in the overall peace building process through *Siinqee*¹ practice. *Siinqee*, the weapon of women exercised in a wider part of the Oromia region. In Arsi, women can carry their *siinqee* to enforce their human rights and to intervene in conflicts between individuals or a group of people (Talile, 2018). In the Gada system, women have been empowered in an indigenous mechanism of peace building to ends any act of hostilities and whenever there is war going on and women arrive at the place along with their *Siinqee* stick and stand between the parties in conflict, both parties promptly give up the fight. By doing so, women contribute a lot in social conflict transformation (Mamo *et al.*, 2014). Indigenous peace-building in a different part of Ethiopia is playing a decisive role in conflict transformation and maintaining peace among the peoples though there is a difference in their process, structure, and participants. Currently, indigenous mechanisms that are driven by women to build peace have not been adequately addressed. Particularly on participants, the involvement of women in fostering indigenous means of peace building

¹ A tiny straight beautiful stick hold by married women. It is also called the weapon/solidity of women. It is a symbol of dignity and peace. It is prepared from trees like "*Harooressa, Waddeessaa, etc*"

and it is different from others walking stick as it easily detected by community.

to bring a culture of peace, in general, is less emphasized in the study area. Though the previous study, for instance, Leila (2016) and Jemila (2014) attempted to come up with an area where women participate, challenges that stepping back the continuity of the role of women in nurturing indigenous mechanisms of peace building process via *Siinqee* practice was not addressed clearly.

Arsi in general and the West Arsi zone in the Oromia region is reaching in indigenous knowledge that is playing a dynamic role in the restoration of broken justice in the society. Nevertheless, women participants in the different indigenous mechanisms of peace building need further emphasis. As a result, this study was intended to analyze the role of women in nurturing indigenous peace building in the past, present, challenges, and possible means of restoring previous women's status in peace building by taking the practice of *siinqee* in the West Arsi zone of Oromia region in Ethiopia. The study will also contribute to empowering women through indigenous knowledge and is expected to unveil women as a key agent of peace builder in the study area.

2. Theoretical Framework

For this study, feminist theory united with the model of the agency was picked as a theoretical framework the study. The concept of agency is the study to understand women as agents of the peace building process at the grassroots level in a given society. The feminist theory will help us to understand the gender roles in conflict prevention, management, resolution, transformation, and post-conflict reconstruction. According to Radtke (2017), feminism theory emphasizes the role of gen-

der in the socio-economic, cultural, and political activities of a given society and promotes that women can equally contribute to building a psychological make-up of society which is part of the peace building process. This implies that women are the agent or shareholders of activities or issues taking place in a given society and in this study too, women are assumed as the agent of the peace building process with a focus on indigenous conflict prevention, management, resolution, and transformation.

2.1 Peace, Peace building, Indigenous Conflict Resolution and Women

Peace is something everybody wants to have and which not many people achieve. When one has it can be lost very easily. It is something which has always to be worked for. For that reason, understandably, there are different definitions of peace (Brinkmann, 2006). According to Galtung (1990), peace is considered a contractual relationship that implies mutual recognition and agreement. It can be also understood as inner, outer, negative, and positive peace in general. Peace building involves establishing normalized relations between ordinary citizens on both sides of a conflict. According to Milofsky (2011), peace can be done at any time and peace building usually involves efforts to increase normal and cooperative contacts between opponents. Peace building builds bridges between ordinary people by opening channels of communication, working with the educational system, and reducing discrimination to achieve mutual co-existence and tolerance (Blumberg, *et al.*, 2006).

Unambiguously, involving women and gender expertise in peace building activities is essential for reconstituting political, legal, cultural and socio-economic, and social structures so that they can deliver on gender

equality goals. Gender equality brings to peace-building new degrees of democratic inclusiveness, faster and more durable economic growth, and human and social capital recovery (Klot, 2007). Societies in different parts of the world apply indigenous laws in their administration of justice to solve socioeconomic and political problems. In the process of solving social and economic problems through the indigenous method, conflicting parties are all willing to accept and abide by their traditional cultures (Seyoum, 2010). This implies that the role of indigenous conflict resolution is decisive in achieving expected peace building in post-conflict reconstruction. Particularly, if women get access to actively participate in indigenous conflict resolution, the process of achieving peace building in the short, medium, and long term becomes sophisticated due to the fact that women are more key agents in the process of ending conflict and restoring peace in all community. Peace building includes a set of values, relational skills, and analytical tools, processes to create sustainable, just, and peaceful communities. Ideas about gender help to determine the roles women and men play in peace building (Schirch, 2004).

According to Ho-Won (2017), many women all over the world are subject to various types of psychological violence in indigenous cultures. Many sources of oppression prohibit the realization of women's freedom for involvement in different societal activities including peace building and this limits their ability in every aspect of life. Most importantly, the application of feminine values to the radical conflict transformation and peace building process in a given society serves as an important principle to achieve durable peace. The roles men and women play in peace building may not be the same,

and they will vary by location and culture, but we need both men and women for peace-building to last. People often assume that women are natural peace builders, but this is not always the case, nor is it always the case that men are natural war-makers (Neufeldt et al, 2002).

Women play a decisive role in changing the spirit of animosity to solidarity through indigenous peace building because they are a key player in ensuring both negative and positive peace in the community. In the West Arsi zone, women participate in the peace process through *Siinqee* practice which is the indicator of women's representation in conflict resolution and defending their moral right in the society. According to Daniel (2002), *Siinqee* is used as a weapon to fight against the violation of women's rights and sisterhood of solidarity for married women. Interference in a woman's sacred authority (*Siinqee* law) is assumed breaking the law of God and parties agree to accept the possible recommendation of women because women collectively or individually raise their *siinqee* and curse party who oversteps community peace. Daniel added that because women are considered innocent and peace-loving, they use their *siinqee* to perform reconciliation which is an important linchpin of peace building. *Siinqee* serves as a symbol of conflict resolution, mediation, and peace building. Arsi women do not stay silent when the conflict escalated and try to find a possible remedy to end conflict and commence building social reintegration. They are known for resolving light disagreements heavy or complex conflicts under the umbrella of *Siinqee* practice (Jamila, 2014). Women as an agent of peace building, make meaningful participation in effective peace processes like facilitating conditions of comprehensive reconciliation to heal the past wounds and en-

sure social reintegration through *Ateetee* and *Siinqee* practice. Women also actively participate in post-conflict community building.

3. Research Techniques and Methodology

3.1 Overview of description of the study area

Ethiopia embraces ten regional states and two self-administrative cities. Particularly, Oromia regional state embraces about 22 administrative and one among these zones is the West Arsi zone. West Arsi is bordered by Sidama and Southern Nation, Nationality and people regional state to the west and south. It shares a boundary line with the East Shewa zone to the north, Arsi to the north-east, Guji to the southeast, and Bale zone to the east. Most parts of the zone have elevations ranging from 1500 to over 2300m. West Arsi Zone has 13 districts and 4 urban administrations and about 324 peasants associations. This area is home to three lakes (langano, Shalla, and Abijata). Kaka Mountain is one of the largest mountains in Oromia next to Tulu Deltu and Chilalo (West Arsi Zone Planning and Development Office, 2020).

3.2 Research approach, design and data collection instruments

This study employed a qualitative research approach as it emphasized an interpretative study of specified issues. the Qualitative research approach was emphasized in this study because it seeks answers to a question posed by researchers, collects data based on evidence, produces findings that were not determined in advance and it produces findings that are applicable beyond the immediate

boundaries of the study (Creswell, 2007). In terms of research design, a case study was implemented in line with the qualitative approach. A case study is a detailed analysis of a person or group, especially as a model of social phenomena. It is also an intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is at least in part to shed light on a larger population (Gerring, 2007). A case study research involves ongoing examination and interpretation of the data normally obtained from interviews, documents, etc. It is characterized by synthesizing the many disparate pieces of information acquired during the research process to identify and report meaningful findings (Hancock, 2006).

The study employed both primary and secondary data sources. Accordingly, focus group discussion and key informant interviews were thoroughly implemented as key instruments of data collection. There were two focus group discussions in three districts (Negele Arsi, Kokossa, and Kofale) that were purposively selected for deep group discussion by implementing guidelines of focus group discussions. Participants were purposively recruited from notable community elders, adults, and young women with the support of the culture and tourism office of each respective district and primary data collection facilitators. There were nine to twelve participants² in each group and they were discussed critically on the questions that set by researchers for about forty minutes to one hour at the venue prepared by mutual agreement. The main rationale to incorporate focus group discussion as key primary data collection is its appropriateness to achieve the general and specific objectives of this study.

² Both FGDs and KIIs participant real was used in this study anonymously as per agreement with participants during primary data collection.

In addition, to focus group discussions, structured or direct interviews were employed with much emphasis on key informant interviews. According to Walliman (2006), a key informant is a person who has unique skills or professional background related to the issue being or has access to other information of interest to the evaluator. The following stakeholders on indigenous mechanisms of peace building process that includes *Abba Gada*³, *Hadha Siinqee*⁴, employees of each selected district who are working in culture and tourism office at district and zone level were part of the key informant interview.

3.3 Sample techniques and data analysis

The purposive sampling technique was employed accompanied with snowballing as it deals with the selection of units based on personal judgment rather than randomization (Elder, 2009). Accordingly, there were two focus group discussions in three districts of the West Arsi zone with 75 total participants. In addition, there were five to eight participants of key informant interviews from different segments of society and this accounts for about 38 participants. Hence, about 113 participants were directly participated in the study to achieve the objective of the study. The inductive data analysis method was purposefully employed here as its support to analyze the study conducted in a natural setting like indigenous knowledge in which researchers collect data observation, focus group discussion, interviewing, or both and researcher identifies problems and concepts that appear likely to help in understanding the situation. The information gathered from key informants and focus group discussions

was coherently organized and analyzed carefully. Last but not the least, both primary and secondary data were combined carefully for triangulation and reanalyzed before finalizing the study. In terms of ethical issues, researchers were made every effort to avoid bias to ensure the objective, analysis, and interpretation of the collected data and primary data was collected based on mutual agreement with respective participants.

3. Results and Discussion

4.1 Meaning, Background and Nature of Siinqee/Weapon of Women

Siinqee is a tiny straight stick made up of the tree called *siinqee* tree or from other selective trees and it is only held by married women starting from the date of wedding on different events. It also shares the central emphasis of critical feminism and it is also called the sovereign power/solidarity/ of women and if somebody censures, degrade, or insults a woman who holds *siinqee*, there would be punishment or moral compensation from offender/s. No one crosses women holding *siinqee* because it is forbidden and stayed with Arsi Oromo for a long period and it was passed from generation to generation relatively without deteriorating its originality along with its basic norms/principles. Wedded women hold *siinqee* at least on the following common events⁵. These include conflict prevention, condemning evil events in society, Thanksgiving Day, blessing, cursing, public celebration, and defending the natural and cultural rights of women.

The participants of FGDs unfolded that although the practice of *siinqee* is relatively functional or semi-functional in all districts

³ Head of community

⁴ Practitioner of *siinqee*/weapon of women/

⁵ Interview and discussion conducted with key informant and focus group discussants at Negelle Arsi, Oromia, 2020

of the West Arsi zone, it is found in good progress in the districts of Kofale, Kokossa, Nagelle Arsi. In the past time, a woman has special dignity in society along with their *siinqee*. As result, the practice of *siinqee* is directly attached to women because women do not hold a gun and other materials to accomplish their role in the community. When we say *siinqee* is a weapon of women, we are talking about the special status of women in society because women are not obliged to arm weapons, rather they use *siinqee* to deal with issues. When we talk about the practice of *siinqee*, there is one performs that come to the mind of all of us; that is ululating and a woman ululates at least on the following events⁶. This includes conflict prevention, happiness, and belongingness, condemning extraordinary events in society, and defending their natural and moral right. The practice of *siinqee* is very strict when a given husband violates his wife who is in the period of “*qanafaa*”⁷ because giving special places for a mother who gives birth recently is mandatory in the Gada system.

For instance, it is critical when a husband hurt his wife who was recently delivered child, she informs the case to nearby women and then, women gathered together and go to the council of local elders to inform what happened and go to the victim house by ululating⁸ and holding *siinqee*. Then, they push the husband to quest apologize to his wife and compensate her based on the recommendation of gathered women in his residential

house. The following poem is used by women when a given husband violates the right of his wife who recently gave birth.

deettuu harma aananii.....the delivered women with rich of milk in her breast
deettuu tiyya dhaananii....you violated women who recently delivered
uleen isiin ati dhooftu.....the stick you used to violate her
ueebiteetuma si haa dhooftuu....let it violate you back
silaa addabbiin sirraa hin ooltuu.....because you will never escape from moral punishment

Women work in a team to defend their rights in the community and by doing this; they are contributing to peace building at the grassroots level by solving conflict among clans, families, and beyond. Women contributed to building an egalitarian family because family is the key driver of peacebuilding in a given society Leila (2016) and Jemila (2014). Although this norm was very strong in the study are previously, today its practice is declining from time to time and its futurity is also doubtful based on findings. Women also hold wet grass along with *siinqee* and go to rivers or mountains by ululating when there is war, natural problems, pandemic or epidemic, or other extraordinary cases that will violate implicitly or explicitly human security. In *siinqee* institution, women play an important role in ensuring negative peace. According to

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Cultural symbol used by mother who delivered child recently, most probably used up to 40 days from delivery date.

⁸ Ululating is the ultimate symbol of the practice of *siinqee* and the study area peoples aware of that there is something new in their village when they here women ululating. It is the symptom of calling parties

in the conflict to cease fire/stop physical or psychological violence and ready to reconcile their differences in order to build durable peace and the role of practice of *siinqee* is indispensable from onset to outset of the process of addressing the causes of conflict and giving final decision via local council of elders/*Abbaa Gadaa*).

Jenner *et al.* (2008), negative peace refers to the absence of violence. If a ceasefire is endorsed, a negative peace will ensue. It is negative because something undesirable stopped not to happening. Some of the undesirable issue to be ended includes physical violence and oppression.

Through indigenous knowledge, women in the study area ensure negative peace through ceasefire by holding their golden *Siinqee* and persuading parties to leave the spirit of animosity and commence building the common road that takes them solidarity where all parties benefit from it indifferently. There are certain poems of *siinqee* that are used by women on different events. For instance, women use the following poem for convincing somebody to follow the right direction or learn from his/her shortcoming.

siinqee waraana beeraa...siinqee
the weapon of women
ateetee beenaa... Let us go to per-
form ateetee
siinqee tiyya lootii hananee...I
hold my beautiful siinqee
rabbi kiyya mootii amanee...I be-
lieve on my almighty God
safuu tiyya ilaali.....let you look
women morality
abboo na wallaalinii.....Re-
spect me and accept my decision

The message of this poem indicates that women use diplomatic and non-violent methods to persuade parties in the conflict to come to a round table and deal with their differences in a reasonable way and handle it constructively by taking into consideration the norms and morality of society they are living in. The poem also shows women strongly pray or quest their God to sophisticate the process of restoring peace and mutual understanding in society.

4.2 The Role of Women in Nurturing Indigenous Peace building

Women are known to play a critical role in mobilizing their communities to begin the process of reconciliation and rebuilding, rehabilitation, and reintegration into society (Goyol, 2019). In modern society, conflict management is not a question of gender. It is a concern for both sexes. Men and women equally participate in the management process. However, in the traditional era, it had a different form from the existing trend (Jemal, 2012:48). In the study area, the nexus between *siinqee* and women in the peacebuilding process is much intertwined. As a result of the respect, they have for *siinqee* norms, moralities, and values, usually, parties in conflict tolerate *siinqee* institution procedures. Most of the time, conflicting parties' will refrain from verbal or physical attacks while mature women stand between them by holding *siinqee* and conducting *siinqee* motos. This visualizes that women play a decisive role in creating lasting peace if they get due emphasis in the community. According to Zelalem (2015), women have indirect participation in conflict resolution to ensure durable peace in the community. In the early stages of a conflict, they act as peace envoys or messengers sent between the disputing parties. According to participants of focus group discussion in Kofale, Kokossa, and Negele Arsi, women have sacred status in the community because they are assumed as a messenger of peace during ensuring negative peace. For, instance, one of the greater contributions of *siinqee* practice in the study area was its contribution in managing and solving border-related conflict between the West Arsi zone and Sidama regional state.

According to data gathered from participants in Negelle Arsi town, many conflicts were managed and resolved with the initiatives of women in 2018-2020. Some of these conflicts include inter-religious, inter-clan, inter-ethnic, and inter-family. The current women association on *siinqee* practice in Negelle Arsi town is strongly attempting to re-integrate and empower women in indigenous mechanisms of peace building as they did in the past time. For instance, women association on *siinqee* practice in Negelle Arsi town contributed a lot in decreasing the consequences of conflict created in the Negelle Arsi town upon the massacre of popular Oromo singer and human rights defender called Hachalu Hundessa. Hence, the practice of *siinqee* has special representation in society and contributes a lot to the process of creating an egalitarian society. This implies that the inclusion of women who are the key agent in indigenous peace building processes can further generate larger opportunities for the society including amplification of women's voices in the process of conflict prevention be it family or societal level.

In the Gada system, women have great representation in the process of conflict prevention and reconciliation and creating lasting peace in the society as they are urging parties to achieve agreement non-violently (Endalkachew et al., 2016). The role of women in peace building in society is not limited to urging the parties in the conflict to cease hostility/fighting, they are playing a great role in processing the tradition of “*wogaa*”⁹ in Siko-mando Gada system. *Wogaa* is a means for requesting apologizing for a crime committed intentionally or unintentionally. Here, the

offender goes to the house of *haadha siinqee/practitioner of siinqee/* and report his/her that he/she is learned from his/her mistake and now needs to restore peace and social relationship with the defender/s by conducting appropriate moral compensation. In the previous time, *wogaa* is widely practiced among the Siko-Mando Gada system and played a great role in peace building and averting different types of revenge in the study area. This shows that peace building needs holistic transformation of the spirit of parties in the conflict to commence social integration and averts the practice of different types of revenge. In general, the participation of women in indigenous peace building was very strong in the study area as almost all participants in this research confirmed. The data acquired from different districts and west Arsi zone culture and tourism chief experts also share the idea of participants. For instance, the interview conducted with west Arsi zone culture and tourism chief experts indicates that different stakeholders are sharing the experience of women's participation in peace building to adopt into their own indigenous culture to enhance the participation of women in peace building. For instance, a team gathered from Sudan visited the practice of *siinqee* in the West Arsi zone particularly Kofale districts, and shared these experiences. The office also portrayed that their office is giving different moral encouragement to restore the participation of women in indigenous peace building in all perspectives.

4.3 The Current Status of Women’s Role in Nurturing Indigenous Peace building
Women’s participation in peace building is

⁹ The practice of sending *siinqee* practitioners for reconciliation among Siko-mando Gada system after learning from own mistake

indispensable in the process of achieving durable peace. In the past time, the participation of women in indigenous peace building in the study area was undeniably contributed to creating sustainable peace in the society, especially at the grassroots level. Nonetheless, currently, the participation of women in the indigenous means of peace building is not as strong as part-time due to multiple explicit and implicit factors. The majority of participants were argued that the generation gap in the context of using indigenous knowledge is going to happen as there is explicit knowledge and skill gap among the young generation. Particularly, young females are rarely interested to share experiences and apply the role of women in peace building and this implies that there is a high probability of losing such indigenous culture that attempts to build an egalitarian society where women have actual participation and decision making in the societal affairs in all perspectives. According to focus group participants of Kofale and Kokossa districts, the role of women in indigenous peace building is drastically weakening in the area due to multiple factors. The procedure of marriage being westernized, daughters are not following their mother customs, Gada system is not as strong as the past time, females are being delivered before legal marriage, young generations are rarely eager to request and know about the customs of their family, and mothers are rarely interested to teach their daughter about their culture.

Women are also too active on the practice of religion and relatively passive in the practice of indigenous culture currently¹⁰. This implies that the current status of the practice of

Siinqee in the peace building process is not as strong as the previous generation based on the data collected from key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Previous generations are very committed to sharing women experience conflict management from their family in the form of dialogue and demonstration, the current generations are passive to learn, not or rarely follow and apply their family's indigenous cultures including the practice of *siinqee*¹¹. Currently, women are seeing the practice of siinqee as a serious breakdown of religious law according to participants of focus group discussion conducted at Kokossa, Negele Arsi, and Kofale and believe that they may not be granted paradise in the second world if they exercise siinqee and others culture that is mainly driven by women in the study area.

The discussants were added that their children are being colonized by globalization than following their family's culture and norms. They are being governed by different Social media than by their family's moral law. According to Jemal (2012), a family institution is a basic school that shapes the future life of anyone apart from the lessons learned in modern schools. Mothers have primary duty to teach children at an early stage about the culture of that area and the value of culture in achieving overall peace and social solidarity. This implies that peace is a very comprehensive concept that is inevitably linked with the daily activity of human beings and it is indispensable for developing countries like Ethiopia. Giving priority to humanity is the key feature of indigenous peace building mechanisms in the study area. To restore the decline of indigenous culture in the

¹⁰ Focus group discussion and key informant interview conducted at Kofale, Kokossa and Nagelle Arsi

district, West Arsi zone, Oromia region, September, 2020

¹¹ Ibid

study area, working at the grassroots level is very important. Particularly, working with family is very indispensable as a family is fundamental for all activities¹². Besides this, it seems that there is enthusiasm from young generations at least to know the culture of their family, particularly women participation in the indigenous peace building though it is rhetoric in the implementation. The role of women in indigenous peace building is not limited to ensuring negative peace, but also paving the way for the restoration of positive peace in society. Hence, peace building needs a continuation of all-inclusive not only in modern law but also in the indigenous mechanisms in a given society.

4.4 The Challenges of Women Participation in Nurturing Indigenous Peace building

Previously, the participation of women in conflict management was very high in the study area. Women through their solidarity weapon called *siinqee* were played a great role in peace building in the past time. By doing so, respect for women's decisions making was also acceptable in the community. Nonetheless, these trends were become declining gradually due to multi-dimensional challenges¹³. The participants were depicted that the central value of the practice of *siinqee* is being inappropriately understood by others including the government. The indigenous cultures are being politicized by politicians and there are great challenges from all religions on the continuation of the practice of *siinqee*. The current generations give priority to western culture and this is drastically declining indigenous cultures¹⁴. Youths are passive in learning and applying indigenous

cultures that are a key linchpin for peace building at the grassroots level. Families are rarely seen sharing their experiences on the potential role of women in peace building. The numbers of women who are actively exercising *siinqee* along with its general principles are being decreased from time to time.

The current generation is rarely seen in fearing and respecting women who hold *siinqee* to manage conflict as compared to the last time when all parties accept the initiatives of women indifferently¹⁵. In addition, there are certain sayings in society that are degrading the active participation of women in fostering peace both in the past and present. Underestimating the initiatives of women, suspicion on women's knowledge and skill, less coverage of indigenous cultures in modern education, globalization, negative interpretation of women initiatives in domestic culture, litigation, the reluctance of young females to share their mothers' custom, less emphasis of government on tradition, modernization and the explicit existence of great awareness gap among the young generation about indigenous cultures role for creating sustainable peace are among the key challenges that are explicitly or implicitly contributing in declining women participation in domestic peace building in the study area.

4. Conclusion and recommendation

Peace building is not only achieved through modern law. Hence, the role of indigenous cultures is also indispensable in the process of creating sustainable peace. Particularly, the inclusiveness of participants of peace

¹² Ibid

¹³ Focus group discussion conducted at Kofale, Kokossa and Nagelle Arsi district, West Arsi zone, Oromia region, September, 2020

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

building through indigenous mechanism is crucial as the process of peace building by its nature needs compressive approaches and this was/is true in the study area though there is great variation between the past and present. This study concludes that in the previous time, the roles of women in nurturing indigenous peace building were very important. Their contributions in the process of peace building in domestic were meaningful, especially in creating durable peace at the grassroots level. They contributed a lot in solving the majority of conflict between Arsi Oromo and Sidama nation on boarder area non-violently. Based on a discussion on findings, it can be concluded that the contribution of women in nurturing indigenous peace building was contributed relatively in ensuring positive peace though currently, such trends are declining drastically from time to time.

As peace building is fundamentally interested in the process of achieving peace and peace consolidation, the practice of *siinqee* system in the study area was contributed to consolidating peace at the grassroots level in the past time. Although the role of women in nurturing indigenous peace building is relatively functional in some west Arsi zone districts like Kokossa and Kofale, such culture is lacking its previous acceptance and deteriorating from time to time. Currently, there is less emphasis on the practice of *siinqee* and this may in turn lead to declining in the status that women have in the study area in the past time. The study also concludes that there are implicit and explicit critical challenges that are hindering the previous cultures of peacebuilding not passing to the future. Last but not the least, the study concludes that there is still a chance to restore the contributions of women in nurturing in-

digenous peacebuilding through strengthening the practice of *Siinqee* in the process of creating sustainable peace and positive peace in the study.

To restore and strengthen the role of women nurturing indigenous peace building mechanisms in the study area, the study recommends the following possible recommendations based on the findings of the study.

- ☛ The participation of women in fostering indigenous peace building is directly related to the Gada system. Hence, reinstating and strengthening the Gada system is a necessary condition.
- ☛ There is confusion on the difference between the Gada system, religion, and politics. Hence, it is recommendable if government strongly works with local elders, Abba Gada, and women practicing *Siinqee* and abates such confusion through continuous awareness creation.
- ☛ There is an association of women who are working to restore the value of *siinqee* and the cultural representation of women in the study area. Hence, let government plays its part to restore the special status of women in the society by sharing the skill of women in peace building, strengthening the current women association on the practice of *siinqee* to transfer to a future generation, giving reinforcement for key practitioners of *siinqee* to initiate others to participate in peace building through traditional means in the study area.
- ☛ Family is the basis for all events in society. The family will contribute a lot to restoring the status of women in indigenous peace building as teaching the family is teaching the whole

society. Particularly, mothers play a great role in reshaping their children in the line of indigenous culture and it is recommendable to work with family at a local level with facilitation of the culture and tourism of each district office and peasant associations coordinators to realize the futurity of previous cultures that contributed in creating peace and stability in the society.

- Education plays a great role in the process of declining and strengthening the culture of a given society. If it is properly managed, education will restore even the culture which is nearer to extinction. Although there are differences from one district to a district and zone to a zone in the Oromia region, the Gada system is relatively functional to some extent. Hence, we recommend designing¹⁶ curriculum for Gada System as an independent subject at a different level of education and teaching children about their identity appropriately to realize the futurity of previous cultures.

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Conflict of interest

As this study is financed by Madda Walabu University and as per the agreement, we will report one copy of a published article to the research and development directorate's office and the authors of the study also unanimously agreed to publish the study.

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¹⁶ This study was completed before Oromia National Regional Government declares Gada as independent subject at primary school.

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