

## Human Rights Conceptions in Gadaa Laws of Borana Oromo, Southern Ethiopia

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**Abstract:** Ethiopia, like most African countries has immensely endowed with cultural, natural, and historical heritages. Institutions like, Oromo gadaa system have played important roles in human rights protection for centuries within the framework of Indigenous democratic governance system. Despite the fact that, the egalitarian elements of gadaa system have been exhaustively studied, the human right perspectives of gadaa system hardly addressed. This study set an objective to investigate the legal conceptions of the Gadaa system in safeguarding human rights. Methodologically, in this research we employed qualitative research approach, implementing an exploratory research design. Our finding revealed that, gadaa laws broadly categorized into two: Cardinal and supplementary laws. Cardinal laws of Gadaa are those used as a baseline or legal framework, whereas supplementary ones are sub-laws. Cardinal laws are grand laws that are formulated to protect the right of a given subject. For instance; seeranadheni (women law), seerafarda (law of horse), etc. while supplementary laws are those details in the cardinal laws with a potential to be amended. Gadaa law of human rights are moral rights ingrained in the Oromo social values for centuries. According to my FGD discussants and key informants, gada laws address every aspect of life, but when we come to those human rights in focus, we can categorize them into social, economic and political dimensions of human rights.

**Key words:** Borana, Gadaa system, Gadaa laws, human rights

### 1 Introduction

The retrospective of human rights covers thousands of years, appears to be as old as civilization itself and draws upon religious, cultural, philosophical and legal developments throughout the recorded human history [1][2]. The central focus of human right at different development level of human society revolves around the concept of human dignity, justice and ethical behavior, that was used to entertain rights on the basis of laws, custom, traditions, and faiths. In its current definition, human right is a morally universal right that every human, everywhere, always, should have and that no one can be denied without seriously violating justice. When we hear the word 'human right', what

immediately comes to mind is the universal declaration of human rights that adopted by United nations in 1948, but that is not always the case. The way we conceptualize and implement human rights has greatly expanded in the last few decades[3]. According to cultural relativist perspective, human right is one of the moral values of society, which define how human dignity is protected and functions based on moral principles set on the ground by the society [3].

Promoting and implementing human rights principles can assist us in building the society we desire by fostering tolerance, equality, and respect upon values that can lessen conflict in society and promote coexistence in multicultural society [4]. It is easier for people to advance justice and social well-being when they have a greater understanding of human rights. Standards, values, morality related to human rights and ways exercising these things are relative to culture [5]. Therefore, the more human rights informed with local culture and world view, the more effective implementation it will have. Despite less concern from officials, the gadaa system is still widely accepted by a number of ethnic groups, and predominantly by the Oromo society residing in Ethiopia and Northern Kenya [6]. There are moral-oriented laws that indicate standard of behaviour and relation with person to person as well as community to community. In the gadaa system, Oromo believe not only in maintaining peace with fellow humans but also peace with uumaa (God or creator) and uumama (creature). These foundations are built on the concept of safu (moral and ethical order) and are enshrined in gadaa laws that were revised and declared every eight years by the general assembly or gumigayo<sup>1</sup>[7].

In the gadaa system, everything is governed by law. For instance, there is a law of God and a law of nature. The law of God is related to scared values and norms that related with human dignity that are inviolable. The law of nature related with environmental protection that encapsulates the laws of tree, animals, and all nature around human being [8]. All these laws are based on the egalitarian motive of keeping everything safe in its natural setting with less intervention. Such a view immensely contributes alternative looks at multicultural society and its governance. These approaches of keeping human dignity work both within the community and across the community as well. Having indigenous values that uphold human dignity in multicultural nations like in Ethiopia, fosters tolerance and mutual understanding with other diverse communities leaving adjacent. Since there are ample of useful models, institutions, and legal approaches in the gadaa system, the main concern of the researcher is to uncover useful elements of the gadaa laws in human rights protection within the context of a multicultural society like Ethiopia.

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<sup>1</sup>Gumi gayo is a general assembly of gadaa governance, where laws amended, reformed and ruling class evaluated.

## 2. Research gap

In the history of human development, nations that have built administrative and economic systems on the foundation of their philosophical civilizations and indigenous knowledge usually seen to achieve sustainable development. Some others adopted governance models from others and contextualize to their own settings to enhance all-rounded development. Perhaps, total ignorance of societal root of useful heritages and reliance on mere alien ideological framework as governance model seen as less likely productive. This is because the world view and mind set of a given nation are predominantly derived from its own way of progress. Ethiopia, like most African countries immensely endowed with cultural, natural, and historical heritages, but indigenous civilizations like gadaa governance system that have been widely and effectively used has been destructed in the name of nation building by early emperors and remains in juxtaposition [9].

Now, the initiation to study about the realm of human rights in the gadaa system does not only emanate from promoting the Gada values, rather from the rigorous look at low performance in both good governance and human right protection within the framework of imported models from abroad. So, if societal world view about human right protection is embedded in their own value construction and effective implementation mechanisms that have been tested in long-term development of social custom, why is it considered as a sin to reconsider in the spheres of governance and human right protection with indigenous eye glass?

Additionally, the UDHR did not shield the globe from horrific wars like the one in Rwanda, Sudan, and Vietnam or stop nations that had just emerged from colonial authority from being enmeshed in internal conflicts that killed millions of people in most part of the world [10]. More importantly, even if it does not really matter if the philosophical basis of UDHR<sup>2</sup> is underpinned by liberal ideology, but the very concern is that the declaration of human rights is seen to have minimal effect in management of human rights violations at the local level, especially in a cultural society like that of Ethiopia. There are various reasons that scholars on the area for the low achievement of human rights protection in Ethiopia, some of which includes: Political turmoil, ethnic federalism, institutional inefficiency, low civil society, limited enforcement capacity of Ethiopian human rights commission, low social awareness of human rights, limited human rights education, corruption, political manipulation of identity and lack of good governance [11], [12], [13], [14], [15], [16], [17], [18], [19], [20], [21], [22], [23]. Unfortunately, none of them claimed lack of indigenous approach as a factor for poor performance of human rights in the country.

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<sup>2</sup> Universal declaration of human rights

The other point to look at indigenous values over international declaration is that it is too abstract and local society in Ethiopia have less or no awareness about international conventions on human rights. Currently, there are more than 70 legally binding international human rights conventions, and 30 non-binding standards were adopted by the UN<sup>3</sup> general assembly in nearly 80 years of the existence [24]. Let alone to have an awareness of all these conventions and practice among cultural society of Ethiopia, the literate sect of society by itself has limited awareness about these conventions. That is why it seems that it is a time to challenge the ideally existing system and come up with supporting evidence to show viable alternatives to existing system. The objective of the study is to investigate the legal conceptions of the gadaa system in safeguarding human rights among Borana Oromo community of Southern Ethiopia.

### **3. Conceptual framework of the study**

#### **3.1 Legal Anthropological perspective of human rights**

At least two topics that are not typically used in legal human rights discourses are made possible by the legal-anthropological perspective used in the observations. The first is that this approach is not restricted to what is normally understood to be law, or the rules under the authority of the political agents like state. Perhaps a legal anthropologist reflects on all sorts of rules and norms, irrespective of their sources [10]. The second matters that legal anthropology is not bound to a given set of rules or to a code which describes what ought to be. Instead, legal anthropology takes note of what is, or in other words, what has an empirical dimension.

The empirical dimension allows judgements beyond the borders of estate-law-centered interpretation; it permits questions about the functioning of the law and about the way the law is applied by the people [10]. The American Anthropological Association was asked to comment on the draft of UDHR in 1947 and replied that the draft less likely universal or lacks pluriversality. Herskovits, one of the then Anthropologists rejected the possibility of a declaration of universal rights on three grounds, namely: the empirical, the epistemological, and the ethical. First, the statement argued that anthropology, as the science of mankind, had shown that moral or ethical systems varied both in form and content, such that any of universality assertion in a statement of rights could not be descriptive, but would remain prescriptive [25]. Second, because anthropology was a science that described and then explained social and biological processes empirically, it could not contribute to a project that required normative judgments to be made about cultural practices as they stood in relation to the set of universal rights outlined in the proposed declaration. And finally, the statement raised the specter of what has recently

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<sup>3</sup> United nations

been described as “moral imperialism”[10]. In other words, American Anthropologists consider the declaration as intent by the powerful subset of international community to reshape the world in line with certain preferred standards; then the consequences of this reshaping will include the denial of freedom to those individuals or cultures whose ideas about the relationship between the individual and the collective, or the value of human life, or the importance of private property, and so forth, are clearly unsuited.

So, this perspective directly conceptualizes this study based on these central tenets of argument like explaining human right not only from legal perspectives, rather; values and norms in society that govern action of people. More importantly, this perspective underlines that if certain laws are taken as a standard, it must be empirically supported. Otherwise, the imposing of alien standards can be taken as moral imperialism.

#### **4. Theoretical Framework**

##### **4.1 Cultural Relativism**

The theoretical ground behind the universalism of human right is natural law. But this theory already taken as out dated, because of the fact that it based on mere biological factors in defining human being. Gradually, the dynamics in social development revealed that there is other more determinantal factors than biological; like environmental, cultural and social ones. Cultural relativist theory committed to address the qualitative dimensions of human rights.

There are four recurring ideas underlie cultural relativist arguments against the conventional human rights framework: all cultures are legitimate but not acknowledged as such within the framework; the framework is imperialist and founded on the idea of liberal individualism; and more attention should be paid to cultural and economic rights rather than civil rights [26]. The universalist nature of right as traditionally constructed within the framework of human rights is contested by the first cultural relativist argument against the human rights framework based on two premises. First, according to cultural relativists, truth, rights, obligations and knowledge are all constructed by culture [27]. Even, according to this argument, because human nature is culturally produced, the term “human” actually does not have a universally accepted definition.

The second cultural relativist argument is that the human rights framework is reflective of liberal individualism, a construct that is common in the western hemisphere, but conceptually absent in many cultures where group identity and membership are more important than individual rights [28]. Cultural relativists frequently argue that the framework was developed based on a Western worldview, which not only ignores non-

western worldviews but also completely rejects the idea that all cultures are valid, albeit different, and cannot be contained by a set of rights that do not adhere to culturally constructed reality and knowledge.

So, in exploring non-western knowledge like that of Gadaa system, we can show the other side of the world, contributing for building equitable world. As gadaa system is already registered as world heritage by UNESCO, beyond recognition, world have to benefit from it if some useful values are found in it. Exploring useful Gadaa values can help us to see the viable ideology with potential of re-establishing our socio-economic systems on sustainable base. Finally, cultural relativism helps us to hold clear sight on how human right ontology is relative to culture. Since culture is human software, those culturally constructed values of human right have high probability of guiding our thinking and actions as well.

## 5. Methods and Materials

As philosophically informed by relativist ontological assumption and constructivism epistemic approach, this study is qualitative research that deployed exploratory research design to explore the untapped values in Gadaa system in relation to human rights. The research planned to explore the deep cultural knowledge. On the basis of this ground, we selected the area that this cultural ground is active in daily life. Borana Zone of Oromia regional state was purposefully selected as study area.

To address pertinent unit of observation in line with the scope of the study, non-probable sampling methods were used while selecting informants. In this study, in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, observations, focus group discussions were employed to collect relevant data. The rationale behind use of these methods is to triangulate methods of data collection. The recorded data were transcribed and translated from the local language (Afaan Oromo) into English. The process of data analysis involved transcription, translation, coding, and working with pattern development to arrive at a general description of the problem under study. Then, categorization and organization of data into themes were accomplished by putting the data into manageable patterns.

## 6. Result and discussion

### 6.1 Source of Data

In this section, the data collected from 10 (ten) key informants (KI), 1 (one) FGDs<sup>4</sup> and personal observations were presented in various manners. Data were described, discussed, and interpreted in line with objectives, research questions, and premises on

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<sup>4</sup> Focus group discussion

conception of human rights in the gadaa system of the Borana community. Data for this study were collected from 20 May to June 25, 2025 from two districts: Arero and Dubluk, as well as Yabello towns of the Borana zone. Participants were Abba gadas, Gada counsels, community figures, urban residents; including traders, government employers, and cultural experts from culture and tourism offices of Borana zone. In addition, experts from the Busa Gonofa office of the Borana zone, the planning office, and cultural courts of the Borana zone.

## 6.2 Pillars of Gadaa System

As noted by KI-I, and KI-IV, there are many points of similarity between the gadaa system and western democracy. Mainly: power transfer, limited years of reign, public vote, and many more. On the other hand, there are alsoa number of the peculiar features of gadaa system. Among others, from the beginning, gadaa as a system founded on three pillars. These are;

- Dhugaa – the truth
- Kabaja- respect
- Aadaa- culture

The Dhugaa dimension is related to the philosophical realm of the gadaa system which is the result of the Borana world view of human nature. In answering the question, where did Borana came from? There is a peculiar myth that starts with God. Accordingly, Waka or God is born dhuga(truth), while the truth born Borana. Similarly, Borana has born two basic things, these are:Kabaja or respect and aadaa(culture). Borana people believe that the basic ground that makes a human being a human is kabaja(respect), because; human being differs from other animals for its communalit, while respect is a main instrument for the human being to live together. Human rights in the gadaa system starts from looking at every human as respected beings beyond its material values. According to the gadaa philosophical view of human dignity, no one can devalue, disrespect, or undermine any kind of human being regardless of his or her age, sex, education level, or any other. Becauserespecting human being is already ingrained in social value and customs on a daily basis.

More importantly from my observation, I understood that the Borana community is a sociological community. Among the Borana Community, everything depends on and is based on collective ground. That is to mean that everything is defined from a societal point of view. Even basic resources like, grazing and farming land belong to the community. More importantly, to be respected and valued, someone needs to respect and value others on the basis of societal moral values. So, respecting others implies respecting oneself. This is where human rights is ingrained in the gadaa system.

### **6.3 Human rights conception in the customary Law of Gada system**

The retrospective of gadaa laws in a very formal manner trace back to the reign of Abba Gada Dawe Gobo (1696-1704) who was organized the first Gayyo assembly. On this historical assembly, a morally known earlier gadaa laws, that were previously known at moral level, stepped up to more formal laws and declared all over Borana (KI-I). After this time, these Gadaa laws passed through renovation every eight years of the Gumi gayo assembly. Gaada laws, as customary laws among Borana Oromo, is set of customs, practices and oral codes that every member is abide to. These laws are broadly categorized into two; cardinal and supplementary laws. Cardinal laws of gadaa are those used as a baseline or legal framework, whereas supplementary ones are sub-laws. Cardinal laws are grand laws that are formulated to protect the right of a given subject. For instance; seeranadheni (women law), seerafarda (law of horse) and etc. and supplementary laws are those details in the cardinal laws with a potential to be amended. Gadaa laws are not written and documented in written form, perhaps orally known by society. The good thing about the gadaa laws is that it is amendable every eight year at the gadaa general assembly. This posits that how fargadaa system is curious about social changes and developments. The main objective of the gadaa laws is to protect the moral and social values of society in various aspects of life. This implies that, human rights is a moral right that entrenched in social values for centuries. According to my FGD discussants and key informants, gada laws address every aspect of life, but when we come to those human rights in focus, we can categorize them as covering social, economic and political dimensions.

### **6.4 The conception of citizenship and collective rights**

A plenty of data from informants indicated that any one living on Borana land is considered as Borana citizen or member of the community. The only criterion to be considered as part of the community is to respect the values and culture of the community. Any person of different origin with interest to be a member of the Borana community, would be given a full right to be. One of the key informants for this study from Yabello town was an elder who was originally from Amaro community of Borana neighbors living within Borana community since his adulthood and now is jarsaargadhagetti<sup>5</sup> of Gada system. That means beyond membership that he is the leader of community.

Similarly, anyone who wants to terminate his membership from the community has a full right to leave the membership at any time, as far as the individual is free from any kind of anti-social crime. Any person who joined the community in the form of guddifacha or adaptation has a full right to be called by the name of his/her native family. This implies

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<sup>5</sup>Jarsaargadhagetti is a public figure of the community, having deep knowledge of the culture.

how other supports like care giving, economic or social supports never complement with the human right of a person in need.

According to Gada customary laws, both the individual and collective-based rights are fully guaranteed. A person has a full right to join or leave any kind of group that is run for legally defined interests, including: Economic, religious, rituals, cultural, and political as well. A 79 years old key informant from Dubluk town confessed that, not more than two decades ago, nearly 90 to 95 % of the Borana community used to follow the indigenous religion called 'Waqeffata', but currently only 50% of the community is following this religion. Approximately, half of Borana is gradually converted to other religions, mainly protestant Christianity and Islam. This indicates the religious freedom given to members of community living under active Gada administration. I have personally observed that the capital city of Borana zone, Yabello and two woreda towns; Arero and Dubluk are characterized by heterogeneous settlement on the ground of religion, ethnicity, and language as well, even if Afan Oromo is a dominantly spoken language.

## 6.5 Social rights

The social right that was officially amended for the first time by Abba Gada Dawe Gobo (1696-1704) was law of marriage. According to this law, women from Sabbo moiety can only get married to Gona moiety and vice versa. This law is still working within the community and it might be one of the major reasons why women cannot achieve the abba gada position directly. Since women exchanged across moieties and clans via marriage and her clan remains unknown before marriage, her constituency remains hypothetically incongruent with the expected early representativeness model of the gadaa system.

Yet, the widely addressed social right in gada law up to today is right of women. Gada law is highly committed to protecting the rights of women. For instance, it is obvious that a rape crime is less likely committed at a place with available evidence, but it is the most immoral act needing justice. According to the gada law, if a woman alleges that a man committed or tried to rape her, it is good if she can provide evidence, but if she cannot, justice officials swear her in the trial for the truth. They ask her if what happens to her is the truth of God, and if she said yes, it is the truth of trial, they make a decision accordingly. In this case, if there is a condition that she bear a false witness, the curse will get back to her and her family, the reason why no one try to tell lies. According to my informants, every penalty passed using cattle as a medium of penalty, if the accused person has no cattle, the estimate will be done. To address some more: If a man is found sleeping with a nursing woman, and other man's wife, the penalty is five heads of cattle. A man who forcibly slept with a widowed women before one year after the death of her husband is liable to fifteen head of cattle. More importantly, women are considered

themselves soft wood among Boranas. The fable of soft wood starts from considering family as a big tree having branches, trunk, root, stem, fruit and everything. A husband represented by trunk, the community can be considered as roots for a given family, but the community in general is assumed to be a forest. A child older than 18 years is considered as a fruit. Moreover, a mother and kids are considered as a germinating stem, the reason why mother is called soft wood. That is a thought behind believing that women in society deserve special respect and treatment (FGD-I).

The other most important law in the gada system is the education law. It was already declared on Gayo general Gada assembly that every child of school age must enroll school and it is not optional for the family to send their children to school without any discrimination between male and female. Any person who is not willing to send children to school is considered to have refused to raise children. Such disrespect of the right of children follows a liability of qakkee hangaa Rifeensaa mataa (the maximum penalty that can cost all the person has).

**6.6 Economic rights and Gada laws:** There is promoting custom in the gadaa system toward any economic activity. All types of economic activity in any form, in group or private, highly supported. The only restriction is to distort the truth, break social values and steal property in order to gain wealth. To provides economic empowerment, a family provide a fawn for a child in the gadaa class of gaammexixiqa (8-16 age). One of the expected roles of children of this gadaa class is to look after the cattle, then gain experience in economic activities.

### **6.7 Political rights**

In the first place, gada law clarified about citizenship, therefore no one is forced to be kept under Borana citizenship, and any other person from anywhere has the right to get Borana citizenship as far as interested and followed the necessary procedures. Being a member of the community, there are a number of rights to be exercised.

One of the prominent political human rights among Borana is reflected in the process of electing Adulas (gadaa counsels). The process of electing a representative starts at the clan level. Interested and illegible nominee conducts the election campaign at the clan level where he addresses every household for galatahimachuor the campaign speech. With this campaign he expected to address all sections of society; including abba gadaas, children, women and others. The instant response for the candidate at the time of campaign is yalaallato mean we will see. This is where competition starts. There is an annual assembly of every clan, one of the major activities during this time is to identify the representative of the clan for pan Borana election. On this clan assembly or kora gosa, hayugosa will coordinate the process of identifying the voice of members given for

candidates. In this clan assembly, every person notifies his favorite candidate. This is one of the ways that every member of the community practices political rights in voting their representatives. The very qualities that used as a medium of competition until the final election of counsellors on general assembly of gumigayo are; cultural knowledge, discipline, wisdom, leadership skills, and righteousness. While discussing expected qualities from leaders with my KI-II, I asked if a physically strong man is needed in the gadaa leadership, he replied that a muscular man never needed in gadaa leadership because muscularity may blur his wisdom and push him to forceful solutions to probable political problems. According to him if for instance, a given clan of Borana gets into conflict with non-Borana community, the abba gadaa never expected to lobby for Borana clans rather expected to find out and defend the truth. If the truth is with the non-Borana clans, the gadaa leader stands against his own clan to defend and admit the truth, so then justice prevail. This is another essential way to protect human rights in the gadaa administration. The other important political human rights in gadaa governance are the right to express an idea both on group base or individual. No one is forced to conform to the majority. If anyone has a different idea, there is room to argue and influence the decision.

#### **6.8 Rule of law and accountability**

In the gadaa system there is no hierarchy or monarchy; all humans deserve to be treated with almost equal respect without regard to human differences. Political power is shared equitably among the parties and across generations[29]

On the date of appointment, abba gadaa with his executive committee commit an oath that they practically follow during his reign. The abba gadaa swear by saying; I will never deviate from the custom, truth, law, and Borana. This is not for the sake of formality, perhaps followed as a guiding principle of governance. For instance; if the son of abba gadaa gets into conflict with a non-Borana person, abba gadaa is not expected to defend his son, rather defend the truth. One of the strengths of gadaa administration is its judicial organization. The retired Abba gadaas with rich experience are always preferred to be a judiciary council. Those elderly leaders with wisdom of justice will be appointed on Gumii Gayo general assembly. They do have two principal roles; the first is to advice those in power and the second is to assume power to ensure rule of law, accountability and responsiveness from the side of ruling class. Regarding the rule of law, the gadaa law is more draconian to officials than ordinary people. While stipulating this condition, one of my key informants stated his idea as follows.

There is a saying that keeps the abba gadaa alert of his responsibility. During his reign, abba gadaa has been given a right to sentence up to ninety-nine people to death, but; if any one of them judged unjustly, he is the one hundredth who is sentenced to death.

Abba gadaa belongs to Borana not Borana belongs to abba gadaa, as Borana belongs to truth, he is the result of system of the community, he is not the one to provide us his own way to let us follow him rather we appointed him to lead based on established system. If he cannot manage that way, the power is in the hands of the community to uproot him, such system is known as 'buqqisu'. So, it is the gadaa officials that fear the community, not community fear abba gadaa. Whenever gadaa officials commit omission of law, they do not judge with equal standard to ordinary people, rather harshly penalized, because they are the one who know the law better than anyone and expected to be model for others. According to KI-I, noted good example; abba gadaa Gobana Allaa Nuraa (1689-1696) was remembered for his extremely cruel governance. He tried to impose his undemocratic desires on the democratic governance of gadaa system by killing countless innocents including children, leaders, and above all he refused to hand over baallii to his successor abbaa gadaa Dawwe Gobboo. But finally, he was not only overthrown but also sentenced to death. This incidence was the under-pinning factor for the establishment of judicial organ in the gadaa administration, which properly working to ensure rule of law and accountability.

### **6.9 War law (Seera waraanaa)**

Basically, war is never be appreciated in the gadaa administration of Borana, even leaders do not prefer to have war weapons like a pistol in their hand; because, they think it may alter their mind from justice. My informants confessed that war may be considered as a solution only when the opponents are not ready for other options. However, conducting war is not destroying everything, so there are clearly stated laws of war intended to control war crime and protect basic human rights. Consequently, it is strictly forbidden to kill women, children, sleeping person, surrendered soldier, and home animals. My key informant from Yabello stated his words on this issue as follows;

In our community, it is not customary to kill people unless forced into the army. If a man killed someone in the battle, he shaved his hair and stayed in mourning for one year. Campaign has levels and hierarchies, there is a war agreement with neighboring Oromo groups and other ethnic groups like Konso, Sidama and some clans of Somali to not to fire with gun in case there is a fight, perhaps using harmless handmade tools. Even when you control a given area, it is forbidden to take all cattle, grains, foods, and home equipment. You take these all means killing children, pregnant women and elders with hunger who had no contribution in the war. You may take some cattle, but you cannot take all, and the bull, because it is assumed as the seed to continue the rest breeding. This shows how the gadaa law governs every phenomenon in society with deep concern for human rights.

## 7. Conclusions

The origin of human right under gadaa system is not coined by some individuals at some point of time, rather it is one of the three pillars of gadaa system. The conception of human rights in the gadaa laws was intended to consolidate the respect and values that have been built for centuries. In exploring the peculiar approach of gada governance to huma rights, this inquiry attested not only the content wise but also the implementation. A child in the gadaa class of gaammexiqqa (8-16 years old) mentored to learn right and responsibility from family and important others, where awareness and practice of human rights begin. This process continues through life, and every member of society knows what is expected of him or her and how to act in every communication of daily life. Even when there is an amendment to the law on the general assembly of Gumi Gayo, the leaders of each clan have the responsibility to teach the newly amended law to every member of his clan with supervision from the gadaa counsels. There is a feeling of ownership of such respectful culture among Borana, so that no one feels imposition rather motivated to protect the culture.

This is what differentiates gadaa laws of human rights, in contrast to the universal declaration of human rights (UDHR). Throughout my stay in Borana, I did not meet any educated informants in the community who knows about the universal declaration of human rights except experts and writers. But practically human right is better respected as a result of internalizing the one they know in their culture. To scale up such incredible social values, gadaa laws of human rights is very conducive for bottom-up approach of human right protection at regional or national level.

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