

Elderly-Youth Indigenous Deeds Channeling Scheme of the Oromo and for Healthy Youth Development

Zelalem Namera Bultum and Tamene Kenei Walga

Abstract

This article presents the “gada age grades” as an Indigenous theory of lifespan development in which Indigenous socio-cultural, economic, spiritual and political deeds of the Oromo, the largest single ethno-nation in east Africa, are channeled from elders (seniors) to child and/or youth (juniors) for leading smooth secular and spiritual life and maintain the endurance of their Indigenous deeds. Gada system, in which ‘gada age grade’ is one of its components is a complex Indigenous institution that guides the Oromo in every aspect of life. According to gada age grades, all male members ought to pass through eleven age grades structured from birth to death and every member is expected to accomplish lifespan developmental role (s) associated to each age grade. It provides a clear structural reference that enables the Oromo to develop a consistent and stable sense of self and others. This article discusses the way in which gada age grades enable Oromo youth to learn their Indigenous deeds from elders and apply them in leading secular and spiritual life and in due course maintain the continuity of their Indigenous deeds. Having discussed ‘gada age grades’ in relation to modern western theories of lifespan development, particularly, Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development, the article draws implications and lessons that might be helpful for healthy child and youth development. It is deduced that a lot can be learned from the gada age grades for youth healthy development. It sets a clear elderly-youth knowledge channeling scheme with a comparable status to modern lifespan development theories in terms of its stage-orientation and theorization. It yields rich preventive, intervention, instructional, positive parenting and healthy child and/or youth development. Analysis of the result stipulated that the relationships and interactions across generations in gada age grades are transactional, democratic and mutual. The young cohort is obliged to respect the older generation and at the same time have the right to learn from, be mentored and cared for by the older generation, and able to peacefully and successfully succeed to their roles and responsibilities. The smooth and mutual relationships and interactions among successive generations in gada age grades might lessen the present tensions among generations which might be an obstacle to healthy child and/or youth development in the world of today.

Key Words: Gada age grades, elderly-youth deeds-channeling, life span development

Introduction

Gada system, an Indigenous institution of the Oromo (the largest single ethno-nation in east Africa) has three interconnected meanings that include the grade during which a class of people assumes socio-cultural, economic and politico-ritual leadership; a period of eight years during which elected administrators take power from the previous ones, and the institution of Oromo society (Legesse, 1973 & Hassen, 1994). It is viable spiritual, economic and sociopolitical systems of government where leaders are elected to assume authority that succeed each other every eight years through the will and active participation of the people they represent (Hassen, 1990; Baissa, 1994; Jalata, 1996 & Lewis, 1994). Gada holds a central place in the thinking of the Oromo, both because it represents the essence of Oromo-ness, a distinctive set of institutions uniquely theirs, and because it stands as a statement of the values they want to stress “egalitarianism and democracy” (Lewis, 1994). It is a system with several sub-systems that enable it to accommodate all domains of the Oromo people’s lives.

The gada system shares several features and principles of modern democracy (Jalata, 1996 & Hassen, 1994). At first place, it allows the Oromo people to formulate, change or amend laws and rules every eight years. The rule of law is the key element of the *gada* system. It accepts the people as the ultimate source of authority and believes that nobody is above the rule of law. The other important aspect that makes gada resembles to the modern democracy is that officials are elected by the people from one of the gada grade named Qoondalas. It is the fourth gada grade in which members are elected for leadership and preparation for holding offices start through rigorous training in *gada* philosophy and governance (Legese 1973 & Baxter, 1978). The *gada system* has also the principles of checks and balances of power among its officials as well as periodic transfer of power every eight years and balanced positions among the five *gada* cycles, and power sharing between higher and lower administrative organs to prevent power from falling into the hands of despots. Elected authorities are not only expected to abide by the laws and rules of the land but are also accountable for every decision they make during their term. Other principles of the gada system have included balanced representation of all clans, lineages and confederacies, accountability of leaders, the settlement of disputes through reconciliation, and the respect for basic human rights and liberties.

The other unique feature of the gada system is that it recognizes the three government organs of modern democracy that include executive, legislative, and judiciary. The structural complexities of the gada system have been officiated by the assembly of democratically elected officials known as *Salgan ya’ii Borana* (the nine Borana assemblies) that include *Abbaa Bokku* (carrier of the scepter holding a position similar to that of the president), two vices of *Abba Bokku*, *Abbaa Chaffee* (the chairman of assembly or father of legislative assembly), *Abbaa dubbii* (the speaker), *Abbaa seera* (the memorizer of laws or a

parliamentarian), *Abbaa Alangaa* (the judge or attorney *general*), *Abbaa duula* (the army commander or war leader), and *Abbaa sa'aa* /the economy/finance chief officer (Legesse, 1973).

As the gada system is an exclusively male institution, Oromo women had the *sinqe* institution or sisterhood, a parallel institution to the *gada* system that functions hand in hand with gada system as one of its built-in mechanisms of checks and balances (Kuwe, 1997). If the harmony between men and women was broken, a *sinqee* rebellion was initiated to restore the law of the land, the moral and ethical order of the society. The exclusion of female from gada system is with convincing argument that is related to women's fertility and reproductive duties. At the fourth and fifth gada grades, members are expected to take part in defensive or expansionist wars that may involve blood shading. Hence, the Oromo believes that women are "life givers and savers, and not life takers" and thus, they have to not kill or pass lives.

In spite of its merits aforementioned, currently, the gada system is not functional in most parts of Oromia due to the alien attacks against it though some of its aspects are still active and functional in some zones of Oromia, especially among the Borana where the *Gumii Gaayyo* (the assembly of multitudes) brings together gada leaders to make, amend or change laws and rules of the land every eight years (Legesse, 1973). All scholars and researchers who have worked on the gada system unanimously recommend it as a viable source of Indigenous knowledge to handle ill issues related to democracy and democratization, youth healthy development, conflict, parenting and intra and intergenerational relationships.

This article aims at exposition of gada age grades classification as an Indigenous theory of lifespan development in which youth learn their Indigenous deeds, knowledge and skills from elders and apply them in secular and spiritual life and; maintain their culture, tradition, Indigenous knowledge and systems. It then, tries to draw implications and lessons from the Indigenous system for positive child and youth development.

An Overview of Gada Age Grades

There are eleven gada age grades, to which a person belongs to, on the basis of age and all Oromo males are compulsorily recruited to the age-sets starting from birth. Males born in the same eight-year period belong to the same age-set even if; some may join an advanced grade at birth (Legesse, 1973). The age structure provides clear structural reference so that the members develop a consistent and stable sense of self and others and thus, identity confusion is unthinkable among the Oromo as any age set strictly provides values and ethos that guide all. At all the age grades, there is knowledge channeling from the seniors (elders) to the juniors (youth). Each grade may have different names in different parts of Oromia; nonetheless, the essence and meaning of it remains the same across the locales. In this

article, gada age grade nomenclature of the Borana who maintained the gada system to date has been used.

Grade 1: Daballe (Birth to 8)

Daballe age grade comprises all sons whose fathers are in the sixth age grade called *gada* grade (45 to 52 years old). It is a grade in which all members share a common identity by virtue of the fact that they are all the sons of the *gada* class who are in power as leaders. The *dabballe* is characterized by striking hairstyle, known as *guduruu*. They are not only wearing like girls and grow their hair like girls but also they are considered as girls (*intala*). *Deballe* is defined as a play age and the age at which proper care is accorded to the children. They are not allowed to go far from home for close supervision. There are no major roles and responsibility imposed on them and it is strictly prohibited by custom to punish them physically.

Grade 2: Gamme Didiqoo/Junior Gamme (9 to16)

It constitutes male children whose fathers assumed the position of gada officials for 8 years and in the first stage of retirement (grade 7). Transition to the stage of junior *gamme* is performed at sanctuary with a big ceremony in which naming of the members takes place. The naming ceremony of the oldest son is called *Gubbisa*, while the naming ceremony of the other sons is called *Moggassa*. The *gamme* hairstyle is also shaved during this occasion in the middle, and the rest is left to grow longer, and treated with butter be wavy. The members are no more viewed as “girls” but recognized ‘boys’. Members are also expected to act independently and take responsibilities that match their age under close parental supervision.

Grade 3: Gamme Gugurdoo/ Senior Gamme (17 to 24)

At this grade, the shaven (*gamme*) part of the hair during junior *gamme* is cut into smaller style. The oldest boys (usually those from 20 to 24) in the age grade are permitted to go on war parties that target territorial defense and cattle raids called *fora* backed by older gada classes. It is the time when young men take the family herds into the untamed river valleys. The age grade is characterized by different ceremonies. At the beginning of the grade, the small clusters of age-mates begin to celebrate the ceremonies of *harriyya*, group of people born in the same eight-year period. Many of the *fora* youths return to their bands before the ceremonies start. The whole process is repeated annually over a period of five years and during the last three years, the *gamme* themselves go through a ceremony that closely resembles the *hariyya cuch*. The ceremony is called *wal’argi* (to see each other) in the first year and *nachisa* (feast) in the last two years. It ends with celebrations known as *china* that takes place at a number of prescribed sites.

The effect of these ceremonies is to make the members of the senior acutely aware of the society and their deeds.

Grade 4: *Kusa/ junior warriors (25 to 32)*

This age grade begins with a big ceremony that marks transition to *Kusa* at which fathers shave the hair of their sons and on the fourteenth day of the ceremony, the *Kusa* (members of the grade) emerge wearing adult ceremonial customs and carrying whip to which they had attached a small scepter (*bokku*). The *Kusa*, who usually cannot marry for different reasons are allowed to keep mistresses from married women. It is appropriate however for *kusa* to search for wives, which they may marry when they enter next grade, *Raba*. *Kusa* thus, marks the transition from adolescent to adulthood. Candidates for gada officials are elected as senior councilors (*adula*) from this grade and for the next eight years they will be offered with rigorous training on leadership. The election is based on different criteria that include knowledge of tradition (history and laws), skill in arbitration, and popularity, hospitality, patience, within approved institutions, balance of generosity and skilful management, and military skill.

Grade 5: *Raba/ Senior Warriors (33 to 44)*

The *raba* is an age grade at which the members move to a big camp with defensive responsibility. Those members who are of the appropriate age (32 years) are allowed to marry, however, throughout the first eight years they are not allowed to give birth and raise children until the fortieth year. Unlike all other grades that last for eight years, the *raba* grade lasts for thirteen years.

Grade 6: *Gada/ the Stage of Political and Economic Leadership (45 to 52)*

This is the grade at which elected officials hold the actual leadership power for the next 8 years. The power take-over (*balli*) occurs in the forty-fifth year during this grade. At this grade, circumcision of members also takes place.

Grade 7-10: *Yuba/ Partial retirement (53 to 80)*

Yuba stage covers twenty-seven years from 53 to 80. It encompasses four sub grades that include Grade 7-Yuba1 (3years), Grade 8-Yuba 2 (8 years), Grade 9-Yuba 3 (8years), and Grade 10-Yuba 4 (8years). Youba are retired and they retain advisory authority, oversee political and military activities of the *luba*, the grade in power.

Grade 11: *Gada-Mojji /The terminal sacred grade (80+)*

Members of the grade are the fathers of those in *luba* grade the grade in power. They preclude themselves from material and/or secular life and become ritual leaders. They

should not carry arms and kill any living creatures. People seek their blessing and wherever they go they are highly respected.

Discussion: Gada Age Grades - an Indigenous Theory of Lifespan Development vs Erikson’s Theory of Psychosocial Development

Now, let us pick each *gada age* grade one after the other and compare with Ericson’s theory of human life development and see what lessons can be learned from it in facilitating elders-youth knowledge channeling so as to help youth acquainted with their Indigenous culture, tradition and knowledge; and apply them in their secular and spiritual life, and maintain the sustainability of their Indigenous society and deeds. .

In convergence with Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development, ‘Gada Age Grades’ views development as decades-journey that occurs in identifiable patterns of universal socio-culturally constructed stages. Put simply, in both cases, development is viewed as a life-course process which occurs in universal stages. According to Erikson’ s view of development (see table1), an individual passes through eight maturational-based but socially influenced stages of psychosocial development beginning from birth through death and an individual is expected to accomplish a series of psychosocial developmental tasks in each eras of the life cycle. Similarly, in the *gada age grades* an individual ought to passes through eleven socio-culturally constructed age grades across the lifespan and the individual is expected to accomplish developmental role (s) associated to each gada grade. But, the two diverge slightly in terms of the number of stages an individual is required to go through i.e. eleven in *gada age grades* and eight in Ericson’s psychosocial development theory.

Table 1: Summary of Gada Age Grades

Stage	Age grade	Typical feature
Daballe	0-8	Play age
Gamme Didiqo	9-16	Right to name
Gamme Gugurdo	17-24	Adolescent and role socialization
Kusa	25-32	Adolescent-adulthood transition
Raba	33-44	Early adulthood
Gada	45-52	Middle adulthood
Yuba 1-4	53 -80	Partial retirement
Gada Mojji	80+	terminal sacred

Source: Summarized from literature by the authors

As can be seen from table 1, gada age grade classification begins with *dabballe* which spans the time from birth to age eight. Individuals in this age bracket are entitled to special rights and privileges. Members share a common identity by the virtue of the fact that they are the sons of the gada class, the generation in power. The *dabballe* are identified by their hairstyle that signals members deserve special care and protection from the larger public. For example, among the Borana where the gada system currently is active, a child is seen as the Borana's child or minor, not somebody else's child, and every adult member is equally responsible to care for a minor Borana. The *dabballe* wear like baby girls and they are regarded as girls. This is to communicate that they are "delicate and weak physically, and immature mentally" implying that they need care and protection. This practice however, seems to elevate masculine ideal that considers women as care seekers. Punishing the *dabballe* corporally is strictly forbidden by custom and their *guduru* along with their girl-like wearing style shield them from corporal punishment and mistreatment in and outside home. Thus, child maltreatment is unthinkable in Oromo culture where the gada system is active. The *dabballe's* task is to learn some important norms and values of the society and other important skills such as counting via closely supervised play and child tales in the neighborhood. Data from Borana show that *dabballe* is considered as a ground-work for all later age grades and that is why a special care is accorded to them. Erikson's first three stages of psychosocial development correspond to the *dabballe* age grade. The two have several features in common. For example, Erikson emphasizes the importance of the quality of cares, supports, and guidance rendered to children in the first three stages of psychosocial development in laying foundation for later stages. The same holds true for *dabballe* in the gada age grades. Erikson advises parents to be sensitive, responsive and consistent in caring for and socializing children in the first three stages of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1968; Feldman, 2009). He also advises to avoid mistreatments, discouragement and other disciplinary practices that may interfere with children's present and future healthy development. Similar instructions and advices are found in the gada age grades either explicitly or implicitly.

As seen earlier, the second gada age grade, *Gaammee Didiqqoo* spans from 8 to 16 years of age. An individual child's passage from *dabballee* to *Gaammee Didiqqoo* at the end of eighth year is marked by the rite of passage held commonly for all *dabballees* in a given village; all *dabballees* in a particular village are promoted from *dabballee* status to *Gaammee Didiqqoo* status officially and now they are no more treated as *dabballee* but as *gaammee-didiqqoo*. Two important events that take place at the festivity of the rite of passage are naming and hair shaving. Each member of the *dabballee* is now given a personal name through *Gubbisa* (for the first son) and *moggaasaa* (for all sons other than the first son). Each member of the *dabballee* grade undergoes hair-shaving; their *guduru* is shaved partially from all sides of head and some hairs are left unshaved on the top. This hairstyle is not without purpose. It is to signal and communicate to the larger public that the

individual is not a *dabballee* but a junior *gaammee*. But they are not entirely dependent but partially independent. They are neither *dabballee* (dependent children) nor senior *gaammee*. They should be treated neither as dependent children nor as fully independent adults. They are also no more considered as girls as in the previous stage, but attained the status of maleness to communicate that the child is now partially strong and mature both physically and mentally but still deserves some support. This particular point reflects the way masculinity and femininity develop in the society. Compared with Ericson's theory, the grade, *gammee-didiqqoo*, corresponds to some parts of Erikson's fourth and fifth stages of psychosocial development i.e. it covers some parts of childhood (9-12) and of adolescence (12-16) and the assertion that the individual is not independent enough is acceptable from developmental point of view. This age grade can be taken as a preparatory time for adolescent role socialization. It is the stage at which the junior *gaammes* prepare themselves for the next stage under the mentorship of the senior *gaammees*. The scope of socializing agents widens and includes older adolescents who are ahead of them by one age grade in addition to immediate family members and neighborhoods since the junior *gaammes* are allowed to go far away from home still under close supervision. They are now able to assume some age-appropriate roles and responsibilities, for example; herding calves, sheep, goats, and cows. All these points are apparent in Erikson's fourth and fifth stages of psychosocial development.

The third gada age grade, *Gaammee Gurguddoo*, an extension of the second grade, *gaammee didiqqoo* extends from 17 to 24 years of age. Junior *gaammes* are promoted to the *gaammee gurguddoo* (senior *gaammes*) after undergoing extensive preparations under the mentorship of the senior *gaammes*. Promotion from junior *gaammee* to senior *gaammee* is marked by a hair-shaving as a rite of passage. At this grade, the shaven part of the hair of the junior *gamme* is cut into smaller style than in the previous grade to communicate that the individuals in this stage are more independent, strong, and mature than those in previous stage. This age grade also corresponds to some parts of Erikson's fifth and sixth stages of psychosocial development. All members who belong to the grade need to make intensive and extensive preparations through a series of assemblies and ritual festivities that take place throughout the first five years of the grade. This is because they are nearly to enter a grade in which they assume some extended roles and responsibilities. The senior *gaammes* make the necessary preparations and apprenticeships under minimal supervision and around the end of the age grade they are allowed to go far away from home with their herds. Overall, they are required to possess as much as possible knowledge and skills that enable them to accomplish the roles and responsibilities ahead of them in the *Kusa* grade.

The fourth age grade, *Kusa* extends from 25 to 32 years of age. Transition to the grade is marked by hair-shaving ceremony in which a father shaves the hair of his sons in the grade and they are kept in isolation in a camp or at home for fourteen days. On the fourteenth

day, they come out of the isolation camp wearing adult custom cloths and carrying *bokkuu* (symbol of heading leader) to announce that the *Kusaa* are independent, strong, and mature and are at the level in which they can contribute to the well-being of their society. However, the *Kusa* are not yet fully deemed as independent beings; they are junior warriors in that they are not allowed to marry even if they are allowed to keep mistresses. This may be perhaps because of the fact that a serious responsibility of the society is ahead of them. Here, it can be said that the system gives a prior attention to the public over the private. They are allowed to keep mistresses of already married or widowed women to permit them to acquire sexual behaviors and skills necessary for formal marriage ahead of them. *Kusa* is also the grade in which members are required to make intensive and extensive preparations for about eight years that enable them to fulfill the roles and responsibilities in the next grades. The *kusa* grade corresponds to young adulthood featured in Erikson's sixth stage of psychosocial development- 'Intimacy versus Isolation'. According to Erikson, the developmental task of this stage is to form positive close relationships with others. Erikson underscores the importance of fulfilling such developmental task for success in developmental stages ahead. Similarly, in the gada age grade classifications, success in the next grade is premised on the preparations and fulfillment of roles and responsibilities in the *kusa* grade. For example, to discharge military and defense roles and responsibilities required in the next stage as adequately as possible implying that success in prior grades is believed to be crucial.

The fifth gada grade, *Raba* extends from 33 to 41 years of age. The *raba*, individuals, who belong to the grade are senior warriors and thus, the *raba* grade is an extension of the *kusa* grade and yet it is a preparation grade for the next stage. The *raba* are now allowed to get married but they are not allowed to give birth to child. This is because, the *raba* grade is a grade during which individuals are mainly required for military and defensive roles and at the same time make all the necessary psychosocial preparations for fatherhood and leadership roles in the stage ahead. This grade also converges with sixth stage of Ericson's theory.

The sixth gada grade "gada age grade also called *luba*" spans from 45 to 52 years of age. Members of this grade are termed as *Lubaa* and it is a grade at which individuals are deemed as "full adults"; they are now a member of the gada generation in power and are expected to shoulder actual economic and socio-political roles and responsibilities. From developmental point of view, this grade corresponds to the middle adulthood during which individuals are assumed to reach climax in terms of cognitive and psychosocial development. This age grade overlaps with Erikson's seventh stages of psychosocial development- *Generativity versus stagnation*. Generativity is a means by which middle-aged adults achieve a sense of immortality by leaving legacies to the next generation. It is adults' desire to leave legacies to the next generation which can be expressed through childbearing (biological generativity), nurturing and guiding children (parenting Generativity), developing

and passing skills to others (work Generativity), and renovating and conserving some aspects of a culture (cultural Generativity). Contrary to generativity, stagnation develops when middle-aged adults are not satisfied with what they have done during their past life times; when they feel that they have done nothing for the next generation (Dacey & Travers, 1999; Erikson, 1968; Hoyer, et al., 1999).

In convergence with Erikson's theorization, generativity appears implicitly to be a crucial issue of middle adulthood in the *gada* lifecycle. In the *gada* system, every generation is responsible to care for, nurture, mentor, and guide the next generation-set. For example, the junior *gaammes* are responsible to care for and nurture the *dabballees* who are successors of them. But, the responsibility to care for and prepare the next generation-sets appears to peak during the *gada* age grade. Unlike Erikson's theorization, in the *gada* lifecycle generativity is not an issue unique to middle adulthood. But, rather it is an issue that an individual is required to deal with beginning earlier in the lifecycle probably in the second *gada* age grade. In fact, later theorists who expanded Erikson's theory hold the view that generativity is a psychosocial developmental issue that preoccupies adults at varying degrees at all ages. These theorists have further argued that generativity is a developmental issue of the entire adulthood years. But, it may be particularly intense during specific periods and may take different forms at different adult ages. According to the *gada* lifecycle, generativity is a developmental role of the entire lifecycle which emanates from societal and cultural demands and gets intense with age grade. The *gada* system keeps each generation set responsible to nurture the next generation on the basis of the age grade to which it belongs and generativity begins at the second age grade, peaks at the sixth age grade and then, begins to decline.

The seventh *gada* grade, *yuba* lifecycle extends from 53 through 80 years of age. Unlike the other *gada* age grades, *yuba* covers about 27 years and is further subdivided into three sub-stages: *yuba 1*, *yuba 2* and *yuba 3*. In the *gada* lifecycle, retirement is a gradual process. Once they enter the *yuba* cycle, individuals stop direct involvement in leadership and military but they remain a key player in advisory roles. Especially, during the first phase, *yuba1*, individuals are required to be actively involved in leadership and military issues as close advisors to the generation in power. As they move to the second phase, *yuba 2*, however, their advisory roles decline to arbitrations, mediations and conflict resolutions. After 80 years of age, individuals enter the final phase of *gada* lifecycle, *yuba 3*, known as *gadamojiii*, literary mean oldest old. Individuals at this cycle are totally retired from any secular roles but they do spiritual roles yet. They are considered as sacred symbols that possess extraordinary wisdom and spirit that enables them to bridge the Oromo with their *Waaqaa* (God). It is believed among the Oromo the *Gadamojiii* are righteous spiritual symbols whose role is to maintain peace between *Waaqaa* (God) and the Oromo. Therefore, the elderly are respected and all the young generations are expected to care them. As a

result, elderly abuse is minimal among the Oromo as a whole and it is unthinkable in locales where the *gada* system is still functional enough.

Conclusion and Implications for Healthy Youth Development

Gada system is a blue-print with which the Oromo used to direct secular and spiritual life in which healthy development of youth is its central part. Childrearing and socialization into productive adults, is one aspect of lifespan development. Socialization of children is not a task and responsibility that is left to parents and families; rather it is a difficult task that demands the concerted efforts of the entire society to which the child belongs. Gada system was cognizant of the notion that socialization of children for adult roles is a society's responsibility long before the emergence of the concept childhood in Western literature. According to Feldman (2009), the concept childhood came into existence in Europe as late as the seventeenth century. But, the concept of childhood was built in the gada system very earlier and historians claim that gada system was in existence long before the first century AD. Childhood and the uniqueness of the period compared to adulthood were recognized among the Oromo so long before its recognition in Western theories of lifespan development. Built in the gada system are socio-culturally constructed gada age grades, eleven in number, also termed as gada lifecycle, through which male members are expected to pass in all the grades from birth to death. These socially constructed age grades serve several functions.

First, it was believed among the Oromo that a member who is not able to go through the *gada* age grades is not and cannot be able to be a productive and responsible warrior, leader, advisor, and contributing citizen. The *gada* age grades are the path through which an individual should pass in order to become a competent member of the Oromo. Passing through these sets of grades allows an individual to learn behaviors, skills, values, virtues and other personal and interpersonal qualities that the Oromo value; maintaining one's place in the Oromo ladder is closely tied to successful transitions and promotions on part of the individual.

Second, they are socio-culturally constructed stages by which age-appropriate tasks, roles and responsibilities are assigned to an individual or a group of individuals. By doing so, the *gada* age grades protect an individuals from engaging in tasks, roles, and responsibilities that are beyond their developmental level and entitle them to rights, privileges, cares and protections they deserve due to their age or grade. For example, in the *gada* lifecycle children under 8 years are not allowed to participate in field works or even domestic works; they are entitled to play around residence under special care and supervision. The society imposes sanctions on those who violate this custom. Any type of abuse and neglect, including corporal punishment, against the *the child* is considered not only as a crime against the victim child but also a crime against the Oromo and the "*Waaqaa*" (God). In the languages of developmental psychologists such as the authors of this manuscript, in the

gada lifecycle, roles and responsibilities are developmentally-appropriate. Child maltreatment, such as child abuse, child trafficking and child labor, is a high profile social and human rights problem in poor countries such as Ethiopia. In spite of few preventive and intervention endeavors, the problem remained high to date. These preventive and intervention programs put in place appear to be derived from non-Indigenous approaches but were not found to live up to their name and therefore, incorporating such best practices extracted from the *gada* lifecycle might be a panacea for such kind of high profile social and human rights problem.

Third, it dictates and obliges parents, leaders and the entire society to render the care, privileges, apprenticeships and protection that children deserve due to their age grade. The *gada* lifecycle regards the task of nurturing and guiding the successive next generations as a collective responsibility. This in turn might lessen the childrearing burden of parents. In many ways, the *gada* age grade, which is an element of the entire *gada* system, is comparable to modern stage theories of child/lifespan development in terms of its stage-orientation, theorization and thus, it can yield rich preventive, intervention, instructional, positive parenting and child/youth development.

Fourth, in the *gada* lifecycle the relationships and interactions among all generations are transactional, democratic and mutual. The young generations are obliged to respect the older generations and at the same time have the right to learn from, mentored and cared for by the older generations. These smooth mutual relationships and interactions among successive generations in the society might lessen the tensions among generations which might be an obstacle to positive youth development across the modern globe.

Fifth, in the *gada* lifecycle special respect is accorded to the elderly whose ages are eighty or so and a responsibility to care for such sect of the population is collective. Therefore, it can be adopted into elderly welfare system and can be used to reduce elderly abuse which is becoming a world-wide problem of our planet. The *gada* system encourages “*guddifachuu*” means adoption and “*Oroomsuu*” making an Oromo. The *gada* system as institution keeps all Oromo families responsible to adopting orphaned and abandoned children of Oromo origin or outsider. When orphaned or abandoned child of outsider origin is adopted the process ends in *Oroomsuu* which means making him/her an Oromo. This is done with purpose to avoid discrimination that the child adopted from outsider society is likely to face. Once made an Oromo the child adopted from outsider society is no more considered as Non-Oromo and therefore, any discrimination against him/ her is considered as crime against the Oromo and *Waqaa*/God. This can be incorporated to child policy to overcome the problem our world is currently facing specially-child trafficking and deprivation of rights. Though, it is difficult to know the exact number of Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC) in Ethiopia, the country stands first in terms of the number of OVC it contributes to the world (Haile, 2008; Selman, 2009). 13 percent of children (4.6

million) in Ethiopia have lost one or both of their parents for various reasons (Haile, 2008; Selman, 2009). Ethiopia also stands first in sending children to the U.S.A. for inter-country adoptions from Africa. This problem can be addressed by encouraging in-country adoptions and a lot can be learned from the gada system.

References

- Barissa, L. (1994). Gada Values: The Building Blocks of Democratic Oromo Polity. *The Journal of Oromo Studies*. Vol.1, No.1 Winter 1994
- Baxter, P.T.W. 1978. Age, Generation, and Time: Some Features of East African Age Organization. St. Martin's Press, New York.
- Dacey, J.S., & Travers, J. F. (1999). Human development across lifespan (4th eds.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Dahl, G. 1996. "Sources of life and identity". In PTW Baxter, J Hultin, A Triulzi (eds.). *Being and becoming Oromo*. Asmara: The Red Sea Press, Inv.
- Erikson, E.H. (1968). Identity, youth, and crisis. New York: Norton.
- Feldman, R. S. (2009). Development Across the Life Span. 5th eds., New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Haile, Z. (2008). Review of the legal and policy frameworks protecting the rights of vulnerable children in the EFDR. Addis Ababa: Save the Children UK.
- Hoyer, W. J., Rybash, J. M. , & Roodin, J. F. (1999). Adult development and aging. 4th eds., Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Hassen, M. 1990. The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History, 1570-1860. The Red Sea Press, Trenton.
- Hassen M. (1994). Some Aspects of Oromo History that Have Been Misunderstood. *The Journal of Oromo Studies*. Vol.1, No.1.
- Jalata, A. 1996. The struggle for knowledge: The case of emergent Oromo studies. *African Studies Review*, 39 (2): 95-123
- Kuwee Kumsa. 1997. "The Siiqqee institution of Oromo women". *The Journal of Oromo studies*, 4:115-52.
- Legesse. 1973. Gada: Three approaches to the study of African society. London.
- Lewis Herbert S. (1994). Aspects of Oromo Political Culture. *The Journal of Oromo Studies*. Vol.1, No.1.
- Selman, P.S. (2009). Adoptions from Ethiopia 1998 – 2008: Countries ranked by number of children received in peak year 2008. *International Social Work*, 2009.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our informants whose information has a crucial place in the success of this study.