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Indigenous Social Protection Mechanism: The Practices and Challenges of *Buusaa-gonofaa* in the Borana Oromo, Southern Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study explored the essence, characteristics, mode of operation, and challenges of *Buusaa-gonofaa*, the Indigenous social protection mechanism among the Borana Oromo in Ethiopia. Data were collected through key informants, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and observations. The study participants were actors in the *Buusaa-gonofaa* social protection system. These included the custodians of Oromo wisdom and the beneficiaries and providers of *Buusaa-gonofaa*. Participants were purposively selected. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data. The findings indicate that *Buusaa-gonofaa* is a long-lasting, multifaceted approach to addressing the social problems of the Borana pastoralists and their neighbours. It solves community problems, sustains social unity, promotes peace, and develops a social bond between the Borana and their neighbours. However, *Buusaa-gonofaa* has faced challenges from external and internal factors since recently. These include perennial drought, ethnic conflict, population growth, alcoholism, and community leaders' loss of power to execute *Buusaa-gonofaa* as they used to. Finally, it is recommended that the government and other stakeholders that focus on social protection consider *Buusaa-gonofaa* as an example of a home-grown system that can serve as a benchmark to develop an effective system of social protection.

Keywords: *Buusaa-gonofaa*, Indigenous social protection, Borana, Oromo, clan solidarity

Mécanisme de protection sociale autochtone : pratiques et défis du Buusaa Gonofaa dans le Borana Oromo, sud de l'Éthiopie

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Résumé

Cette étude a exploré l'essence, les caractéristiques, le mode de fonctionnement et les défis du Buusaa Gonofaa, le mécanisme de protection sociale indigène parmi les Borana Oromo en Éthiopie. Les données ont été collectées grâce à des informateurs clés, des entretiens approfondis, des discussions de groupe ciblées (FGDs) et des observations. Les participants à l'étude étaient des acteurs du système de protection sociale de la Buusaa Gonofaa. Ceux-ci comprenaient les gardiens de la sagesse Oromo et les bénéficiaires et fournisseurs de la Buusaa Gonofaa. Les participants ont été sélectionnés à dessein. Une analyse thématique a été utilisée pour analyser les données. Les résultats indiquent que la Buusaa Gonofaa est une approche durable et multiforme pour résoudre les problèmes sociaux des éleveurs Borana et de leurs voisins. Cela résout les problèmes communautaires, maintient l'unité sociale, promeut la paix et développe un lien social entre les Borana et leurs voisins. Cependant, la Buusaa Gonofaa est confrontée depuis peu à des défis dus à des facteurs externes et internes. Il s'agit notamment d'une sécheresse perpétuelle, de conflits ethniques, de la croissance démographique, de l'alcoolisme et de la perte du pouvoir des dirigeants communautaires pour exécuter la Buusaa Gonofaa comme ils le faisaient auparavant. Enfin, il est recommandé que le gouvernement et les autres parties prenantes qui se concentrent sur la protection sociale considèrent la Buusaa Gonofaa comme un exemple de système local pouvant servir de référence pour développer un système de protection sociale efficace.

Mots-clés : Buusaa Gonofaa, protection sociale indigène, Borana, Oromo, solidarité clanique

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Social Protection

Social protection systems are a collection of benefits offered by individuals, communities, or states to people or families to lessen the impact of shocks, losses in income, or losses in employment due to illness, maternity, injury, invalidity, old age, or death (Ahenkan, 2018). Social protection is also defined based on the strategies, coverage, and nature of the social protection schemes (Nurfalah et al., 2018). For the International Labour Office [ILO], "social protection, or social security, is a human right and is defined as the set of policies and programs designed to reduce and prevent poverty and vulnerability throughout the life cycle." It includes benefits for children and families, maternity, unemployment, employment injury, sickness, old age, disability, survivors, and health protection (ILO, 2017, p. 1). Various international covenants promote social protection as a human rights agenda that is enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Although many nations have made great progress in extending social protection, the majority of people around the world still lack access to it (United Nations, 2018). According to Alfers and Moussié (2020), the World Social Protection Report (2017–2019) shows that 4 billion, or 55 percent, of the global population have no social protection benefit, while African, Asian, and Arab states have the lion's share. Still, the situation in Sub-Saharan African countries is the worst; only about 10% of the needy populations have access to some fragmented social protection schemes, mainly designed and provided by non-governmental organizations and faith-based associations.

Those who are excluded from contemporary, state-sponsored, or non-state-sponsored social protection programs are left to rely upon the Indigenous social protection of family support, mutual assistance, and communal living. Warria and Chikadzi (2020) show that there is no agreement on what community-based mechanisms of social protection should be termed. Terms such as Indigenous, traditional, informal, semi-formal, non-state, and non-formal are used. In this paper, we opt to call it Indigenous social protection. There are different definitions of Indigenous social protection. Mupedziswa and Ntseane (2013, p. 85) define an Indigenous social protection system as, "locally arranged social protection measures that are predicated on people's cultural beliefs, norms, and values." Olivier et al. (2008), cited in Mupedziswa and Ntseane (2013), note that the central principles of the Indigenous system include, among others, self-help, inherent solidarity, reciprocity, and contribution obligation and entitlement. According to Browne (2013), Indigenous social protection institutions are locally developed, family-based or community-based, and have a strong element of reciprocity. These definitions are relevant to the Buusaa-gonofaa, which the Borana pastoralists in southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya use to support each other.

1.2 Features of Indigenous Social Protection

Most societies have their own inter- and intra-household and intra-family transfers that promote resilience to risks and mitigate their negative effects (Adato et al., 2005). Sub-Saharan African countries have under-resourced and fragmented formal social protection systems but are full of Indigenous social protection systems that play a crucial role in mitigating social risks and human vulnerability (Verpoorten & Verschraegen, 2008). Rugaranganda et al. (2017), who wrote about the Buhera District of Zimbabwe, show that Indigenous social

protection systems have historically been used by communities to safeguard their members against shocks like death, illness, old age, disability, or starvation. These were arranged according to relationships with the community and kin. Both traditional support networks as well as self-arranged mutually beneficial arrangements fall under the category of the Indigenous social protection system. The foundations of the Indigenous social protection systems are reciprocity and solidarity. Traditional beliefs that contributed to instilling such a sense of obligation among community members are mentioned. These beliefs include the Ubuntu ideology, which is a spirit of togetherness, and the fear of punishment from ancestor spirits.

Scholarly works show the prevalence, nature, and changes in Indigenous social protection systems in Africa. For instance, in Botswana, the extended family continues to support its members during difficult times. Support entails financial, material, emotional, and labour. This is driven by the values of reciprocity and solidarity (Mupedziswa & Ntseane, 2013). Similarly, the Swazi people have incorporated Indigenous social protection systems into their way of life for many years. Reciprocity, social responsibility, trust, self-interest, equity, subsidiary, and risk sharing are the main pillars of supporting each other. The people summarize the value of their social protection system under the saying, "I am because we are" (Mabundza & Dlamini, 2018). Mokomane (2013) also reports a similar social protection system in Ghana. According to Warri and Chikadzi (2020), the Indigenous social protection system involves widely agreed-upon norms of obligation, reciprocity, cultural values, and religious obligations. These values and guiding principles are relevant to the current topic, Buusaa-gonofaa, of the Borana pastoralists.

1.3 Changes and Challenges of Indigenous Social Protection Systems

Despite some of the Indigenous social protection systems being relevant and active, they have undergone significant changes because of internal dynamics and external factors. Over time, the level of commitment and ability of the community to sustain Indigenous social protection have been constrained by demographic and social changes. Some of these changes have been because of colonialism, modernization and globalization, education, migration, and the changing dynamics of population and household structure (Kalusopa et al., 2012; Noyoo & Boon, 2018).

Urbanization has negatively affected kinship networks and the ability to practice Indigenous social protection systems. With the expansion of urbanization, people migrate to urban areas, where they adopt quite different lifestyles and population compositions. In the meantime, the rural setting is negatively affected because the young settle in towns, leaving the elderly alone. Further, in the global economy, some members of the family become either too poor themselves or have other competing demands for their resources and abandon their role in supporting the needy. As a result, the traditional social protection system has gradually lost its capacity to address social problems (Kalusopa et al., 2012; Noyoo & Boon, 2018).

Further, by its very nature, according to Browne (2013), the community-based social protection system is characterized by unequal access and limited coverage of services to the needy. The network can be inequitable and unreliable. In addition, this author argues that community-based social protection is vulnerable to covariate risk. Covariate risk is more likely because the community groups are more or less homogenous and vulnerable to the same risks, such as drought, floods, disease, market shocks, and so on, and they are, therefore, less able to help each other. On the contrary, Indigenous social

protection systems are more effective in addressing idiosyncratic or personal risk, including illness or death, than persistent or significant risk (Browne, 2013; Verpoorten & Verschraegen, 2008).

In Ethiopia, local communities have Indigenous social protection systems that respond to hazards such as drought, conflict, and epidemic diseases (Regassa et al., 2013). The tradition of mutual support is more commonly practiced in pastoral societies where resources are shared in the form of gifts of livestock, money, and food, channelled through the structures of social organizations (Tache, 2008). For instance, the Borana Oromo depend on kinship and institutionally prearranged clan social security networks for redistributing livestock (Bassi, 1990). Similarly, in Arsi Oromo, assisting one another is central to the customs; one's possessions or wealth belong to one's clan; and God is pleased when people in need are helped. Indigenous mechanisms of resource transfer cover all possible human difficulties and crises in people's socio-economic lives, such as injury, delivery, destitution, property destruction, and death, providing protective, preventative, and promotional functions (Hebo, 2013).

In the Borana Oromo, Buusaa-gonofaa is a kinship-based and mutually supportive system. It is a traditional mechanism built for helping people in need and serves to enhance survival, maintain solidarity, and redistribute wealth during hard and normal times. Except for some anthropological and historical studies, this culture has not piqued the interest of most Ethiopian researchers, local governments, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). There were a few works on Buusaa-gonofaa, but they did not focus on its practices. Tache (2008) focuses on the role of Buusaa-gonofaa as a poverty reduction mechanism. His finding shows that Buusaa-gonofaa can tackle transient poverty as long as pastoral production is able to generate resources for redistribution among clans and sub-clans, and that these resources are cattle and money during raids and droughts. Furthermore, Taye (2002) defines Buusaa-gonofaa as a voluntary practice by the community. His finding shows that the customary law of Buusaa-gonofaa allows only cattle and milk stock to be offered. However, this finding does not clearly show the complex nature of Buusaa-gonofaa, which demands further study.

In general, previous studies do not emphasise the holistic nature of the practice of Buusaa-gonofaa as an Indigenous social protection mechanism. Apart from that, details, operational processes, and patterns of practice are not yet well known. How this community-based support system can be shaped to be a knowledge base for the Indigenous social work practice model in Ethiopia is also not well examined. Therefore, this study is intended to fill the existing knowledge gaps by exploring the essence, feature, mode of operation, and contribution of Buusaa-gonofaa in the Borana community's problem-solving endeavours. To achieve these, the following research questions are addressed:

- What is the mode of operation of the practice of Buusaa-gonofaa in the Borana Oromo?
- What are the contributions of Buusaa-gonofaa as an Indigenous social protection mechanism to the Borana Oromo?
- What are the challenges to implementing Buusaa-gonofaa as an Indigenous social protection mechanism?

2.0 Research Methods

This study was conducted among the Borana Oromo (Yaballo district, Borana Zone), who are among the major Oromo groups. Borana are predominantly pastoralists who reside in the southern part of Oromia National Regional State, Ethiopia, and northern Kenya. The Borana primarily practice their traditional Oromo faith, which is based on a belief in the existence of a supernatural power known as *Waaqa* [God], who is believed to be omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. They are governed by the *Gadaa* system that encompasses every aspect of their political, social, cultural, economic, and religious matters (it is an egalitarian political system of the Oromo with elective leaders and an eight-year term of office). Culturally, the Borana social order shares collective rights and obligations among their respective clans and the Borana at large. Clan members discuss their issues at the clan's meeting and support one another in times of need through the Buusaa-gonofaa system. This mutual support system ensures everyone the right to be supported and confers on every able person the responsibility to support the needy.

Data were collected in 2017 and 2020 from Yaballo district, Borana Zone, Oromia National Regional State, Ethiopia. Initially, it was collected for a senior essay at Addis Ababa University for the requirement of a BA degree, and in 2020, the data were updated and enriched to write this article. This study employed a qualitative case study research design with the purpose of exploring the essence, characteristics, and mode of operation of Buusaa-gonofaa. The main data collection methods of this study were interviews (with key informants and in-depth interviews), FGDs, and observations. The participants of the study were the custodians of Oromo wisdom, beneficiaries, and providers of Buusaa-gonofaa. The study involved four participants for key informant interviews with men who were the custodians of Indigenous knowledge, three in-depth-interviews with adult women, and three adult men who were practicing Buusaa-gonofaa. There were also two FGDs with eight participants in each group (one with women and the rest with men from families who participated in Buusaa-gonofaa). These groups are composed of the givers' families and the recipients of Buusaa-gonofaa. A purposive selection technique was employed to identify all participants for the study based on their exposure to the practice of Buusaa-gonofaa.

In addition, an overt observation was carried out to dig out information that could not be obtained through interviews. We observed the practice of Buusaa-gonofaa during *kora gosaa* [clan meeting], *kora ollaa* [village meeting], and *marii garaa warraa* [discussion among the extended families]. Through such meetings, usually the Borana identify the needy families and the reasons for their vulnerability. For instance, whether the person loses his or her wealth because of extravagance or due to something beyond his or her control is important. Accordingly, they decide how, what, and how much to support someone. In the meantime, they inspect the resources at the disposal of the clan for support. In addition, we also observed naming, marriage, and mourning ceremonies to witness practically how the Borana support each other on these occasions.

Semi-structured interview guides and observation checklists were developed to collect data and secure a wide-ranging picture of the practice of Buusaa-gonofaa in the Borana Oromo. This study used thematic analysis to analyse the data. All interviews were captured through audio recording and transcribed into text along with the researchers' field notes. They were then reduced through the methods of coding, categorized into major themes and sub-themes that emerged from empirical data, and then analysed to generate meanings and implications. Data

source triangulation and member checking were undertaken to secure the trustworthiness of the data.

In this study, for ethical reasons, concerns like privacy, informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity have been taken into account. For instance, all of the participants were interviewed with their full consent and in a convenient location where their privacy was respected. Also, we ensured they fully understood the study's objectives, procedures, and possible outcomes. In order to uphold our commitment to confidentiality, we used codes as pseudonyms to give anonymity to the participants (K: I, K: II, KIII, K: IV, P: V, P: VI, P: VII, P: VIII, P: IX, and P: X) and strategies for the aggregate report (FGD discussants).

Finally, our topic of discussion is neither politically nor culturally sensitive in the context of the target population because Buusaa-gonofaa is practiced daily and is open to all unless you are against its values. Nothing is hidden in Buusaa-gonofaa, and this culture needs to be shared between the community and other surrounding ethnic groups. Buusaa-gonofaa's notion is communalism-focused by nature. It promotes the value of helping one another and sharing burdens.

3.0 Findings

3.1 *Buusaa-gonofaa: An Introduction*

Buusaa-gonofaa is the Indigenous social protection mechanism of the Borana Oromo in times of serious economic, cultural, political, psychological, and social loss by community members. It also entails a gift during normal times. The data from FGDs conducted with adult men show that the definition of Buusaa-gonofaa is derived from three basic cultural traits. These are custom, solidarity, and responsibility. Firstly, Buusaa-gonofaa is a custom, and custom guides the daily routines and activities of the Borana. Borana explain their daily lives in terms of *Aadaa* [custom]. They do and avoid things because of *Aadaa*. They approve or disapprove of actions and behaviours based on their *Aadaa*. According to one of the key informants (K: II, personal communication, February 16, 2017), the Borana practice Buusaa-gonofaa as a mechanism of maintaining and promoting custom and enhancing their livelihood to resist vulnerability. Similarly, an adult woman (P: VII, personal communication, August 27, 2020) stated in an in-depth interview that the major role of Buusaa-gonofaa is to address Borana's problems based on their resources and capacity. Beyond solving the problems of the vulnerable groups, Buusaa-gonofaa can sustain clan unity or develop inter-ethnic unity. It develops and sustains a custom of resource sharing. It is a home-based social security system in which the poor can benefit, perform, and participate in all social events.

Secondly, Buusaa-gonofaa emanates from clan solidarity, intimacy, and respect. For the Borana, cattle belong to a clan. No fellow clansman should go hungry or live in poverty while other clan members have plenty of cattle. In principle, the Borana have to share their resources based on their willingness without necessarily being coerced by the clan. For instance, one of the key informants (K: IV, personal communication, February 13, 2017) said, "*Sun jaalalaan kennite malee dirqama gosaatii miti,*" which means 'you contribute support based on your interest rather than pressure from one's clan', even without the knowledge of clan leaders. A family may transfer a lactating cow or camel voluntarily to a needy Borana or non-Borana family.

Finally, Buusaa-gonofaa is one of the ways of discharging one's responsibility in a clan. For the Borana, a wealthy person has moral and legal responsibilities to help needy brothers and sisters in times of hardship, save lives, and sustain

their usual pastoral life. In this regard, the practice of Buusaa-gonofaa entails moral responsibility and clan-based obligations, which clan leaders enforce. They force each other based on the resources of the potential supporter and the situation of the needy. In this sense, there is no one-to-one relationship between the potential supporters and the needy. However, a particular clan inspects its clan members and decides on Buusaa-gonofaa accordingly. Importantly, the Borana understand that Buusaa-gonofaa is a way of saving resources with fellow clan members. It presupposes that Buusaa-gonofaa is reciprocal. In this regard, an adult woman (P: V, personal communication, August 26, 2020) from an in-depth interview said, "If you support your fellow clan members today, they will support you tomorrow, and this is why we value supporting one another." There is a saying: '*horiin duumessa*' [resource is like a cloud]; the rich of today can be the poor of tomorrow, and vice versa. There is no specific category for givers or receivers. At one time, all able Borana men and women contribute to supporting the needy, and the same individuals or families can be beneficiaries at another time.

3.2 Process of Buusaa-gonofaa

Duality is one of the most fundamental aspects of the social organization of the Borana Oromo. They are divided into two intermarrying moieties, Sabbo and Gona. These, in turn, are divided into three and fifteen *Gosa* [clans]; each *Gosa* is divided into further sub-units as *Mana* and *Balbala* [house and door, respectively]. Buusaa-gonofaa has its own rules and procedures along these lines.

The data from FGDs among adult men show that Buusaa-gonofaa starts from a village and goes up to the intervention of the whole Borana. A village, whose residents are not necessarily blood relatives, intervenes immediately if an individual or a family faces a problem. In this regard, one of the participants said, "*Ollaa fi duddaan oli ejjan*," which implies one stands upright due to one's backbone and the support of one's villagers. This figurative expression shows the strong support that is expected among neighbours. To manage the mutual support among the villagers, there is *Abbaa ollaa* [the head of the village], with an obligation to follow, predict, and sustain the general life of the villagers. Any social crisis within a particular village is addressed at the village level when it is not beyond its capacity.

Next to the village is *Miiloo* [a sub-clan]. They have their own leader, and they support the vulnerable families within the capacity of the sub-clan. Since the Borana clans are not territorial, support from the sub-clan should be pulled together from different localities and villages. After *Miiloo*, there is *Gosa*, which has a head that is often referred to as *Hayyuu* [a knowledgeable person elected to lead a clan]. The *Gosa* evaluates the overall situation of the clan members to identify the vulnerable ones, if any. A clan also assesses the better-off families who can contribute to Buusaa-gonofaa. Accordingly, one of the adult male participants (P: X, personal communication, February 12, 2017) from an in-depth interview said, "We the Borana often ask each other, "*Bona baatanii rooba geettanii?*" which means, "Have you survived the dry season and attained the rainy season peacefully?" This question is broader than its literal meaning. It implies that people might lose their livestock during the dry season because of a drought. They may be exposed to raids as they move to peripheral areas in search of water and grass. They may encounter several other anthropogenic and natural risks, such as ethnic conflict, recurrent drought, illness, the death of family members, livestock and human diseases, raids, and the like.

The Borana conduct regular assessments to determine what social, economic, and psychological problems have occurred and what their causes and

consequences are. Leaders collect information from village heads, sub-clan heads, and vulnerable families. They proceed to identify how and by what means they should support the needy, if any. The Buusaa-gonofaa is a system that is readily at hand for the Borana to address these problems (K: I, personal communication, February 15, 2017). This is why the Borana call themselves the people of Buusaa-gonofaa, which means people who share resources together. For them, when there is no Buusaa-gonofaa, there is no clan solidarity or life at all. Buusaa-gonofaa unites the clan members and maintains their collaboration.

The data from FGDs among adult men show that supporting severe problems that are beyond the capacity of the village, sub-clan, and clan go to the attention of the whole Borana as such. No case is seen at the highest level without being seen first at the lowest levels. The Borana are sparsely settled in Ethiopia and northern Kenya and need time and resources to call and mobilize their people and resources. They organise a general assembly called *Gumii Gaayoo* [Gayo Assembly] once every eight years. This assembly is the most important meeting in the Borana community, which takes place at Gaayoo and is where important social, political, and economic issues are discussed at the highest level, whereby all interested and able Borana come together. It is a legislative assembly where they enact new laws and amend existing ones.

Gumii Gaayoo gives a solution to major socio-economic problems that remain unsolved by village, sub-clan, and clan, probably because they demand high-level decisions and interventions. Provided that some social problems have been overlooked or individuals or groups of individuals have been mistreated, the general assembly takes corrective measures. It punishes those who fail to discharge their responsibilities by omission or commission.

A key informant (K: III, personal communication, August 24, 2020) said that sponsoring Buusaa-gonofaa is a source of honour and respect. According to him,

In the Borana community, a person who duly contributes and practices Buusaa-gonofaa is respected, called a morally and culturally upright person, and blessed by the community. The community remembers, praises, and passes on the name of a person who has made remarkable contributions to Buusaa-gonofaa across generations.

3.3 Classification of Buusaa-gonofaa

Our data from both FGDs show that Buusaa-gonofaa is multiple in type and inclusive in scope. It is classified into three types based on its scope, processes, and aims. These are *Dabaree*, *Irbaa*, and *Gumaata*. Each is divided into further categories.

3.3.1. Dabaree. *Dabaree* is a support mechanism that transfers resources to the needy. It is about giving ownership rights over certain resources, mostly lactating cows, to address the recipients' lack of milk. This can be more important when the receiving families do not have lactating cows for their recently born babies. Further, giving *Dabaree* is more than giving the right to use milk; it is also giving livestock and other resources. *Dabaree* may be given for the short-term or long-term support of the needy family. *Dabaree*, in turn, is classified into five types. These are: *Dabaree ameessaa*, *Dabaree qotiyyoo*, *Dabaree kormaa*, *Dabaree lafaa*, and *Dabaree geejjibaa*.

Dabaree ameessaa means milk transfer, which is the first and most common Dabaree. It is a tentative transfer of a lactating cow or camel to a needy family for daily consumption when the recipient has no lactating livestock. Someone can transfer Dabaree based on personal willingness or, at the request of the recipient family, without any clan interference. In the Borana tradition, such support is very common. It is an expression of community solidarity and mutual help. When the cow or camel stops giving milk, it may be given back to its original owner or remain with the recipient based on the owner's willingness. If the animal for Dabaree dies, the recipient is not obliged to substitute it. If the animal has to be slaughtered for some reason, such as when it falls and is seriously harmed, the recipient family consumes its meat. What is expected of the recipient is to take care of the animal and protect it from any potential harm. If the recipient family fails to do so, it is quite against the Borana custom, and the owner of the animal can take the animal back at any time.

Dabaree qotiyoo refers to giving an ox to someone who does not have an ox for cultivating the land. The recipient should protect the health of the received ox as if it were his or her own. This Dabaree could be for a particular farming season or more.

Dabaree kormaa is another form of support in which a Borana family transfers a dominant and quality bull when the recipient family does not have any for cattle reproduction. This Dabaree has both reproductive and symbolic roles. Biologically, it aims at procreating quality offspring for cattle. Symbolically, in Borana, the lack of a bull in a herd signals a lack of prosperity and productivity. To the contrary, the presence of a bull in the herd signals a hope of productivity.

Dabaree lafaa is also another form of resource transfer for the needy. This Dabaree refers to the transfer of farmland for ploughing. It is given when an individual or family has no land or has small or infertile land, and sometimes it is given to newcomers who settled in the Borana land due to raids, drought, and human and animal disease.

Finally, Dabaree geejjibaa is the transfer of pack animals for transportation services. In this type of Dabaree, the Borana families support each other by providing pack animals for transportation. These animals are horses, mules, donkeys, and camels. The Borana community uses those animals when they move from place to place due to raids, droughts, and ritual ceremonies to fetch water, collect wood, transport items to and from markets, transport agricultural products to their homes, and carry salt for livestock. They also serve to transport dependent, sick, and elderly (those who are physically incapable due to age) family members.

The Borana practice Dabaree in their interactions with other neighbouring Oromo and non-Oromo ethnic groups like the Guji and Gabra Oromo, who share territories and boundaries with the Borana, and the Konso, Erbare, and Burji, who are non-Oromo but share resources with the Borana. In line with this, one of the adult female participants (P: VI, personal communication, August 26, 2020) from the in-depth interview said,

Dabaree promotes love, peace, and support among ethnic groups, and it is one of the ways to address ethnic conflict. It serves as a means of maintaining social integration and ties among individuals within and outside the Borana community.

3.3.2. *Irbaa*. This is a type of Buusaa-gonofaa, which refers to mutual support in response to a loss of cattle by raiders or loss of resources because of incidents of fire, emergency, or epidemic disease. The vulnerable families in such scenarios need *Qulaammoo* [immediate support] from the surrounding community. *Qulaammoo* is a resource for short-term relief instead of long-term rebuilding of the lost herd of the family. In this situation, providing support is mandatory. Anyone who fails to do so is liable to punishment, and the sanction of the community is very strong.

The data from FGDs show that if one refuses to participate in Buusaa-gonofaa with one's clan, it signals renouncing his or her membership in the Borana community. The Borana say to a person who refuses to practice Buusaa-gonofaa, "*Wannii Booranaa si bira hin jirtu*," which means you have nothing in life and death with the Borana. This leads to total stigmatization and discrimination. The sanctions limit individuals' social, cultural, and political participation, including the denial of greetings. The rationale behind applying these punishments and sanctions is to strengthen the culture and develop Borana solidarity towards collectively solving their problems. Also, it is applied to deter individuals from violating this Borana custom, which they consider an identity marker because the Borana say, "We are the people of Buusaa-gonofaa." This is partly why the custom remains functional and active in Borana Oromo.

Following the immediate support, the clan members usually organise a meeting to assess the cause, nature, and severity of the problem and respond accordingly. One of the male participants (P: IX, personal communication, August 23, 2020) from the in-depth interview said, "We ask whose cattle or resources are lost. Are the lost resources ours or personal ones?" The questions are to know whether a person had Dabaree with his or her villagers, sub-clan, clan, or the whole Borana in previous crisis situations and to know whether the lost resource benefited the community beyond its immediate owners before it was lost. It is to know whether the person was always ready to support his or her needy fellow Borana men and women.

If a person had Dabaree with the Borana at all levels or the lost animals benefited the community before being lost, those resources belong to the whole Borana, not just to the individual. Thus, the needy person gets support immediately. If not, based on the family situation of the person, for instance, if there are dependent older people, pregnant women, children, ill persons, and persons with disabilities in the family, he or she can get only *Qulaammoo*. A key informant (K: II, personal communication, February 16, 2017) said, "The intention is to sustain the lives of these vulnerable groups because they are not expected to be punished for the faults of other adult family members or parents, and they must be protected fairly." One of the adult male participants (P: VIII, personal communication, February 18, 2017) from the in-depth interview narrated his lived experiences in Buusaa-gonofaa as follows:

I belong to the Karayyuu Suuqqannaa clan. I live in Abbunuu Kebele [the kebele is the local unit of administration], Yaballo District. My clan did for me very respectable and memorable things. My cattle were taken by the enemy (he referred to the Somali Abbo in the 1970s). The enemy had taken around one hundred head of cattle, and I was left with only twenty head of cattle. Due to Buusaa-gonofaa, I managed to recover from such a loss. In our Aadaa [custom], Buusaa-gonofaa is mutual

support on which victims can rely. Our clan members called each other to discuss my issue. They asked, "Whose resource was lost"? Since I always participate in Buusaa-gonofaa with my clan, they concluded that their cattle were taken, and they contributed sixty head of cattle to me. As a result, today I have more than two hundred head of cattle, and I have also redistributed them to my clan members during their hardships and normal times. The two hundred head of cattle that I have today do not belong only to me; rather, they are the resources of the clan members or simply Borana's wealth. One can own or develop one's clan's love not because of one's resources but because of one's respect for all Borana, avoiding bad and doing good, helping and respecting old people, helping ill persons, vulnerable women, children, and the poor. If you do well today, it will be passed down to and support your children tomorrow; if you do not do well today, it will affect your descendants or generations.

This case shows not only that the Buusaa-gonofaa is a mutually supportive system that the Borana families use as a coping mechanism to solve crises but also its long-term effects. In the above long quotation, the person narrated that he had more than two hundred head of cattle, which are for his family's use as well as ready to be transferred to the needy through Buusaa-gonofaa whenever he is called on. For the Borana, cattle better stay in the hands of those who are good at taking care of them. That is why the clan immediately restocked the family herd, as this case indicates. It equates to reserving the common wealth in the hands of those who are able to protect it. These cattle are ready for clan use at any time in the future. Thus, in the Borana, there is no resource exclusively belonging to an individual because members are expected to share what is in their hands with their clan members, villagers, and the community at large.

3.3.3. *Gumaata* [gifts]. Data from both FGDs show that under this type of Buusaa-gonofaa, gifts are given to the needy, which are not expected to be taken back like the Dabaree. *Gumaata* is the support given during normal times, contrary to *Irbaa*. It is contributed during ceremonies, such as marriages, *Daboo* [cooperative work], and naming (*Gubbisa*). It is customary to bring gifts as a contribution to a celebration one attends. Affordable gifts are cattle, milk, yogurt, butter, water, wood, money, and human labour. In the practice of Buusaa-gonofaa, vulnerable groups receive labour support as well. The Borana protect them by ploughing their land, herding their cattle, feeding their cattle, constructing their houses, and providing enclosures for their cattle. In this type of Buusaa-gonofaa, the role of women is significant. They are at the forefront of *Gumaata* gift provisions, such as milk, water, firewood, and food. They participate and provide support during funerals, weddings, naming ceremonies, and other ritual events. Their participation can be with or without the knowledge of their husbands.

In the practice of *Gumaata*, someone who has a ceremony should inform one's village, family, or all nearby residents. If one fails to do this, the omission has a negative message, indicating that he or she is not willing to receive gifts from fellow Borana men and women or that the person is not ready to offer *Gumaata*

to others in the time to come. This is against Borana custom, for the custom demands that they collaborate, be ready to stand by, and show their love to their fellow villagers, clan members, and friends at a time of happiness and grief. A key informant (K: IV, personal communication, February 16, 2017) expressed the importance of giving Gumaata by saying, "*Harkii harka dhiqa*," which means 'hands wash each other'. It is equivalent to the saying, 'a single hand cannot clap.' This implies that for the successful accomplishment of a certain ceremony, the cooperation of others is mandatory. A person who contributes Gumaata to his or her fellow Borana person will receive similar gifts another time. It is expected that at some later date, the recipient will reciprocate in one way or another.

3.4. Challenges of Buusaa-gonofaa

Despite the Buusaa-gonofaa Indigenous social protection system of the Borana being still relevant and a living practice, it has undergone several changes and faces several internal and external challenges. The participants mentioned three major challenges. These include the recurrent drought, the ever-expanding alcoholism in Borana, and administrative interventions.

The data from both FGDs and participants in both key and in-depth interviews show that one of the severe challenges facing the Borana pastoralists is the recurrent drought that negatively affects livestock production. On the other hand, the life of the community and the practice of Buusaa-gonofaa are dependent on livestock production. The Buusaa-gonofaa primarily serves to survive shocks, including drought. However, drought has had a serious effect on pastoralists. They have lost their livestock in large numbers and have failed to support each other. In line with this, one of the adult female participants (P: VII, personal communication, August 26, 2020) from the in-depth interview said, "The drought causes resource scarcity; the majority become poorer; the drought also causes mobility, which separates the families, friends, and clan members who are close to supporting one another through Buusaa-gonofaa." This participant stressed that there are two ways in which such a recurrent drought affects Buusaa-gonofaa. Primarily, it causes serious resource scarcity and secondly, it causes unregulated mobility in search of water and grass, and the social units miss close contacts. These issues have grown in magnitude and frequency in recent years. This implies that the Borana do not have sufficient resources to support one another as they did in the past. Some who have been unable to survive have abandoned pastoralism and migrated to another area in search of alternative means of livelihood.

Data from the participants from key (K: III, personal communication, August 24, 2020) and in-depth interviews (P: VII, personal communication, August 26, 2020) and FGDs show that the ever-expanding alcoholism in Borana land is the second major challenging factor that deters the effective implementation of Buusaa-gonofaa. This happens in two ways: primarily, alcoholism has affected the officials and leaders of the different social units who are in charge of organizing Buusaa-gonofaa. As a result, these leaders fail to address social issues, including Buusaa-gonofaa, on time. This social support system has been under serious threat as clan solidarity, family, and village relationships are weakened owing to a leadership problem. Secondly, locally brewed alcohol, which is called *Araqee*, and factory-brewed beer are found at every corner of the Borana land and have caused the Borana pastoralists to engage in consuming alcohol. This is more common for male household heads. Under this scenario, a significant number of pastoralists lose their livestock, moral uprightness, and economic capacity to support the needy. The other way around, the custom does

not demand full support for a Borana person who unfairly handled family wealth despite being vulnerable. The minors, women, and elderly in the family may receive only Qulaammoo for subsistence. This has resulted in an increasing number of needy people and a decrease in those who can help.

Further, the data from FGDs underscored some challenges emanating from government interactions with community leaders in relation to the execution of Buusaa-gonofaa. The social support system of Buusaa-gonofaa entails custom, solidarity, and obligation among the clan, sub-clan, extended family, and village members. However, the obligatory elements of Buusaa-gonofaa have faced challenges due to direct government intervention in the system. The community leaders, both territorial and clan-based units, are denied the power to impose sanctions on those who fail to discharge their obligations to support the needy as they used to. The government relegates the power of local leaders with all their mandates in favour of government-appointed officials. Some of the community leaders are engaged in state political activities instead of their traditional mandate. The following sentence is a translation of a direct quote from one of the key informants (K: I, personal communication, August 27, 2020). He said

The intervention of the government into Borana custom obstructs the obligatory-based practice of Buusaa-gonofaa, which the community has practiced since time immemorial. Some outlier Borana men and women, who are not willing to contribute to support the needy, often appeal to government laws to resist Buusaa-gonofaa, against Borana custom and their clan responsibilities. They also receive support from the local administration to abscond their role.

4.0 Discussion

This qualitative study focused on Buusaa-gonofaa, with the major objective of exploring its essence, characteristics, and mode of operation. Buusaa-gonofaa is a mutually supportive system for hardship and normal times. It is practiced among Borana in villages, clans, sub-clans, and the Borana community as a whole. It starts in a village and extends to the whole of Borana based on the severity of the case. The classifications of Buusaa-gonofaa include Dabaree, Irbaa, and Gumaata. The major role of Buusaa-gonofaa is to solve Borana's economic, social, political, cultural, and psychological problems based on the resources and capacity of the Borana pastoralists at different levels. Like other parts of the world and Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, the Borana Oromo mainly rely on their Indigenous social protection system, Buusaa-gonofaa. Despite local specificity, authors such as Ahenkan (2018), Warri and Chikadzi (2020), and Mupedziswa and Ntseane (2013) have shown that similar social protection systems are common in Africa.

Buusaa-gonofaa is all-encompassing in terms of its accessibility and forms. Taye (2002) describes it as a voluntary practice in which the community supports each other by giving each other a lactating cow for milk consumption. However, this research shows that Buusaa-gonofaa is more inclusive, whereby the Borana use it to address different social and economic problems beyond addressing poverty through cattle offerings and its products. Instead, Buusaa-gonofaa promotes unity, peace, and integration at different levels. It maintains resource-sharing customs and promotes the collective life of the Borana, and it develops brotherhood among the Borana and their neighbouring groups for amicable

relations. It supports organizing different ceremonies, including marriages, whereby the poor can marry with the clan's contribution.

Buusaa-gonofaa is a living institution, a clan-based system, wide in scope, and guided by the morality attached to it. For instance, under the umbrella of Buusaa-gonofaa, Dabaree provides temporary relief assistance through the transfer of milking cows to a family in need. It is not just about transferring milking cows; it is also about transferring a bull for a reproductive role, an ox to plough, land for agriculture, and packing animals for transportation and loading. Moreover, this study shows that Buusaa-gonofaa is not only a voluntary practice because there are also elements of social sanction towards the refusal of the practice by the community members. Regardless of the variations in context and execution, the findings of this study corroborate other studies from Sub-Saharan Africa. Mokomane (2018) shows similar practices of Indigenous social protection in sub-Saharan Africa.

Scholars who have written about Indigenous social protection systems, such as Browne (2013), Kalusopa et al. (2012), and Noyoo and Boon (2018), argue that an Indigenous social protection system does not provide equal access to all members of a community. In short, they argue that the poorest are excluded from the service. However, this does not hold true among the Borana, who have strong societal, clan, sub-clan, lineage, extended family, and territorially based village structures to inspect the economic, social, and political lives of their members and respond accordingly. The very unreliable rainfall upon which the availability of water and pasture is dependent makes the Borana individual pastoralist vulnerable to the loss of livestock, regardless of their economic status. This highly demands reciprocity, voluntarism, and the obligation to practice Buusaa-gonofaa. Equally important is that there are repeated ethnic conflicts between the Borana pastoralists and their neighbouring groups, and consequently, livestock raids and the loss of human lives are most likely. As a result, all Borana men and women consider Buusaa-gonofaa as their reliable social insurance that does not segregate people across wealth.

However, the Borana compensate a family proportional to its loss of livestock. There is no way in which someone who lost a few head of cattle will receive more than someone who lost more. They also keep livestock with different families in the form of support proportional to their ability, experience, and commitment to take care of the livestock.

Literature also doubts whether the most vulnerable groups, like children and women, are accommodated in community-based social protection systems. On the contrary, the Borana clan members protect women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and children. In some cases, the clan has the responsibility of restocking the destitute. If the father or the male head of the household is extravagant, violent, or abusive, the clan puts him under sanction for using the restocked livestock, except for milk and meat.

Browne (2013) argues that Indigenous social protection systems are able to address personal risk but not persistent or significant risk. This partly does not hold true for Buusaa-gonofaa, which also restocks the family livestock to let the family re-join the usual lifestyle. It has both immediate support systems (Qulaammoo) as well as long-term rebuilding of the livestock resources (Irbaa).

Furthermore, the Borana case lends support to scholarly works demonstrating that Indigenous social protection systems are vulnerable to covariate risk due to the homogeneous nature of their livelihood and the environment in which they live. The natural and anthropogenic challenges have also impaired the effective implementation of Buusaa-gonofaa. These challenges also affect the economic,

institutional, and moral status of the Borana pastoralists as a whole. In short, the Buusaa-gonofaa is vulnerable to covariate risks like drought, ethnic conflict, floods, disease, market shocks, and so on. Thus, this corroborates the scholarly work by Browne (2013). Finally, the study shows that Buusaa-gonofaa is facing challenges from internal and external factors. These include drought, ethnic conflict, an increase in the size of the human population, alcoholism, and government interference. Consistently, the Indigenous systems of social security have been threatened by several factors. The challenges to the sustainability of traditional forms of social security are climate change, diseases, and natural disasters (Ruparanganda et al., 2017).

5.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following points are recommended to promote the Buusaa-gonofaa Indigenous social protection system and address its challenges: These recommendations will be the basis for further research and will be useful for the community, administrators, or government and non-governmental institutions working on social protection systems.

- Diversification of livelihood to reduce the potential covariate risk, which challenges the Buusaa-gonofaa.
- Promoting and raising awareness about environmental protection, building peace with neighbouring communities, and promoting the culture of saving for effective use of Buusaa-gonofaa.
- The government should refrain from any negative interference in the practice of Buusaa-gonofaa and let the community leaders abide by the customary rules and regulations with regard to their leadership roles and relations with state structures, so that the communities can sustain their Indigenous social protection system.
- Since 2022, after the data for this paper were collected, the regional government of Oromia has introduced a social protection system by the name of Buusaa-gonofaa. Yet its implementations, efficiency, and objectives demand a detailed investigation to determine to what extent it goes with the real value of the Indigenous support system, Buusaa-gonofaa.

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