Women's Strategy in Peacebuilding from Below in Ethiopia: The Case of Oromia Regional State

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Abstract

Women have different strategies for dealing with various actors in their interactions with local power structures in their homes, villages, and communities on a daily basis. The main objective of this article is to investigate the strategies that women use in their attempts towards peacebuilding from below in Oromia regional state, Ethiopia. In order to attain the intended objective, qualitative case study research design informed by subsidiarity and African feminist theories in its indigenous approach was employed where about 109 (one hundred nine) respondents participated. The findings revealed that despite many challenges, women use their own institutionalized material and non-material mechanisms through which they play their role in peacebuilding, particularly at the grassroots level. Nevertheless, these efforts are less acknowledged as an alternative approach, mainly because of the systematic interconnection between the indigenous and formal systems, which continued to discriminate women's role in peacebuilding.

Key words: *peacebuilding, from below, women's strategy, grassroots peacebuilding, formal mechanism, women's challenge, institutionalized mechanism, institutional mechanism ,indigenous approach, alternative approach*

1. Introduction

Comprehending sustainable peace is the motive of all stakeholders whether at international, national or grassroots level. This motive arises is due to numerous conflicts especially in Africa where the conflicts range from inter-state, intra-state to intra-ethnic conflicts. Peacebuilding is an umbrella term encompassing long-term activities in the conflict cycle aimed at addressing the root causes of the conflict (Jeong, 2003; Dulic, 2008; Matemba, 2008). It also aims to move a given population from conditions of extreme vulnerability and dependency to one of self-sufficiency and well-being (Matemba, 2008).

As it has been originally coined in 1975 by Johan Galtung, the term 'peacebuilding' is intended to encompass a wider range of activities than the earlier notions of peacemaking and peacekeeping, by acknowledging the importance of identifying and building structures that might militate against war, therefore addressing the root causes of conflict (Barnett et al., 2007). Further, according to the United Nations (1985), peace also means the enjoyment of economic and social justice, equality, and the entire range of human rights and fundamental freedoms. However, Lederach (1999) criticizes this approach to peace-building, stating that it fails to elicit the knowledge and information of the indigenous community that would know the ideal approaches to address their problems. In this regard, as de Coning and de Carvalho (2011) pointed out that factors surrounding peacebuilding are not just in the definitions, but guided by key determining characteristics. the unique qualities that characterize peacebuilding are the long-term nature of the process, the interdependence of the actors, the multidimensional nature of the process, and its concern with the consolidation of peace that concerned with ending or preventing the recurrence of violent conflict and supporting sustainable peace that strives to transform societal relationships (Haider, 2014). More basically this study takes a stand on Porter's argument that women's understanding of peacebuilding is broader and more holistic than the way the UN is using it (Porter, 2003).

It is obvious that women initiated to study how to deal with local authority configurations from within their homes, villages, and communities, struggling to pledge the gender bias that surrounds them in everyday life before stirring on to initiate larger-scale action (Scheyvens, 1998). It has also been demonstrated that grassroots women's groups mobilize to uphold women's political participation (Krook, 2007).

The meritorious thing in the recent peacebuilding study is that scholars have strained to show the different places of women in peacebuilding at the grassroots situation in terms of rallying, delivery, and enablement (Itto, 2006; Bamlaku, 2008; Burgess, 2013; O'Driscoll, 2017; and Ahmad, 2018). To some extent, Hairou (2016) tried to indicate the inauguration via establishing a network. In the case of Central America, the Women and Peace Network is driven by the wants of each country and is coherent by Fundación Guatemala, composed of six Mayan grassroots women's associations within Guatemala, and one pastoral or grassroots women's association from El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, each on behalf of a network of original grassroots women's chambers. The groups work to bring about women's safety and security and strengthen women's access to land and insertion through a distinct focus on post-conflict development while supplying that distinct training and specialized keep to them. Nonetheless, we know little about how women made those places possible virtually and the style of those networks is left untouched and fails to easily expose the strategies on how women interact with the conspiracy of the indigenous original community and the formal government system on women's part in peacebuilding from below, at the grassroots position, where women use their own different strategies contextually in their struggle towards peacebuilding. Thus, this composition was intended to identify the different strategies women use in formal and informal collaborative life. The study was guided by the feminist proposition, particularly the African feminist proposition. The indigenous approach was also employed. In line with this suggestion of women's strategy, several attestations have revealed that women struggle to organize and come active actors in all situations of decision making in their societies and that they need to develop rallying schemes for dealing with clashing circumstances, as well as to support networking with other women groups on crucial issues regarding peace and conflict training (Mwangi, 2013). As Osirim (2001) argued, an important source for empowering women is the conformation of social networks, precisely participation in associations that address their requirements and form a liaison with other women. accordingly, networking tips lead to the arrangement of alliances, increased status, and increased power to impact opinions and public programs (Gittell et al., 2000). In this intellect, grassroots women's groups, by developing networks and adding their compass of the act by extending their invention approaches to other poor communities, conceivably will press for the political changes that are mandatory and essential (The Population Council, 2005). In addition, strengthened perpendicular social cohesion (relations between the state and society) is brought about by addressing the mechanisms that connect state institutions with original communities and individualities. It also requires working collectively with sector systems, programs, and

governance. Working through original governance structures and enhancing their capacities is frequently an attainable way to achieve results for children in fragile surroundings where the legality of central governance is compromised or institutional capacities are weak. Also, strengthened vertical social cohesion (connections within and among groups) highlights the need to address vertical inequalities and rejection (and not inescapably poverty) to help conflict and make peace. This position of impact necessitates different strategies for women in working with original public actors and communities to strengthen positive connections within and among groups where women's diurnal base life sweats have a significant impact on the peacebuilding process. As a bottom-up approach, this composition investigates the multifaceted confines of grassroots women's strategies in their part in peacebuilding conditioning by espousing a set of peacebuilding conditioning contributed by Francis (2002).

2. Statment of the problem

In the widely untold history of Ethiopia's state formation, the Oromia regional state is one of the most mistreated, with a distortedly written history by the governing royal family writers in the state building of the country for centuries where the cultural barriers, combined with the most oppressive Abyssinian colonial rule, have curtailed the political participation of the Oromo women (Na'amat, 2016). As a result, Oromia regional state is one of the centers of gravity in Ethiopia's politics, which has been the peace and security concern of East Africa and is now attracting international attention.

Nevertheless, the attempt to address the root causes of intra-ethnic conflict is more exclusive. It lacks to consider the various strategies of the indigenous society, particularly women's, as an alternative peacebuilding strategy in a meaningful manner, particularly at the grassroots level. This can be explained in its contemporary nature: first, the understanding of peacebuilding activities and strategies is mostly external and mainly state responsibility, so the peacebuilding approaches mainly follow top-to-bottom approaches in which the role of the grass-root communities, particularly of women, is compromised. Furthermore, the understanding and concentration of peacebuilding responsibilities have been elite-oriented. Therefore, trends to use indigenous knowledge where a large number of women can be able to impact peacebuilding activities are also very limited. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to investigate the main strategies of women in their attempt to participate in peacebuilding activities.

3. Methodology

The study area covers Oromia regional state, which is one of the largest regions among 11 regional states in Ethiopia, particularly the Arsi zone because of its historical background and diversified experiences with a larger population that have a significant impact on addressing the root causes of recurring conflict in Ethiopia.

The study mainly employed a qualitative case study research design in order to handle the complex nature of the social phenomena under study, through which the researcher relied as much as possible on the views of participants in the situation under study through interviews, focus group discussions, and simple observation with the construction of open-ended research questions. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select a sample of well-experienced and knowledgeable women, local leaders, religious and indigenous leaders, NGO's leaders, regional and federal office leaders, and WCYAO expertise. Accordingly, a total of one hundred nine (109) participants were involved in the target group interviews, 14 key informant interviews, and 17 participants in three focus group discussions were held.

The data was collected from both primary and secondary sources, and three main types of instruments were employed: interviews, focus group discussion, and simple observation. The collected data was analyzed with a thematic qualitative data analysis technique and simple descriptive data presentation in the form of tables and figures.

In order to find out the strategies of women in peacebuilding, this article addresses the following questions: What mechanisms do women in Oromia regional state use on a daily basis to strengthen their role in governance, security, economic empowerment, and conflict resolution and peacebuilding? What must be done to promote those strategies ?

The study has both theoretical and empirical contributions to the overall peacebuilding literature and contribution is critical because it presents the women's strategy in their significant impact on peacebuilding from below, at the grassroots level, expressed in their own words from their own testimonies. The findings obtained from a contextually different socio-cultural and economic environment than that which exists in the literature may be of interest to several peacebuilding researchers and institutions as it widens their level of understanding.

4. Findings

4.1 Women's strategy towards peacebuilding

The study revealed the different strategies that women use in order to ease their daily lives under the identified four thematic areas of peacebuilding activities, namely: governance, security, economic empowerment, and conflict resolution. Women know how to deal with different actors and have different strategies in their interaction with local power structures within their homes, villages, and communities, struggling to counter the gender bias that surrounds them in their everyday life. They are mostly active in forming a soft and adorable informal network that leads to the formation of coalitions, increased status, and increased power to influence decisions and public policies. So that they increase their scope of action, extend their innovation approaches to other poor communities, and may press for the political changes that are required and necessary even though this role of women is not usually acknowledged.

3.1 Women's Strategy in Local Formal Governance

The findings revealed two dimensions of women's strategy in formal government structure through which women can participate in leadership, decision making, policy formulation, and also struggle for their rights in the formal government arena of their surroundings. On one hand, the formal institutional women's machineries strategy for women's issues on behalf of other women in the government system and on behalf of a mass of other ordinary women outside of the formal system. On the other hand, civilian individuals or women's group initiatives struggle for their right to participate in decision-making indigenously. Gender mainstreaming, training, assigning delegates/representatives, and using established task forces (ad hoc committees) were the most common strategies used by women's machineries in this regard, as explained below.

4.1.1.1 Gender Mainstreaming

As the interview findings from the key informant revealed, the gender mainstreaming strategy is one of the most commonly utilized strategies through which the women's machineries, mainly WCYAO's (Women, Children, and Youth Affairs Office), monitor and evaluate the status of women in formal government structures according to the gender mainstreaming guidelines. It is also a tool for administrative bodies to use in enforcing various international and national laws pertaining to ensuring women's participation, particularly in decision-making. In this regard, one of the performance evaluations for office leaders is their gender

mainstreaming level in their respective office plans, placement, support, and reports as a leader's political commitment in implementing government policies and strategies. Therefore, each institution is supposed to have a plan along with at least one gender focal person or delegates who is responsible for working on the plan to deal with women's issues as per their office's mission.

In addition the focus group discussions finding also showed that gender mainstreaming is a strategy through which women's machines can reach the community on women's issues and work with all the concerned government structures on women's empowerment. Further, it is also a tool to identify the gap and provide technical support in the formal government structure. This can be done mostly by WCYAO (Women, Children, and Youth Affairs Office) in evaluating the annual plan of each office and making a follow-up of the plan for its implementation through developing different check lists. They usually call this monitoring and evaluation. To this end, the Oromiya regional state WCYAB (Women, Children, and Youth Affairs Bureau) developed gender mainstreaming strategy guidelines in 2009 at the regional level. However, their report of 2018 indicated that the implementation was very insignificant and poor. The report attributed this inefficiency to the lack of government officials' commitment, lack of awareness, lack of capacity, shortage of human resources (expertise) and poor follow-up.

4.1.1.2 Focal Person

The interview with the administrators and WCYAO heads showed that in their attempt to mainstream gender in each sector, they use a gender focal person who is responsible for gender-related issues and women's interests as per their sector's mission. The assigned focal person is, therefore, expected to plan and report the gender-related activities in their respected office to WCYAO. However, the findings also showed that even though this strategy is common in all government offices, it is not always successful. They attributed this problem to the lack of interest of the experts in being assigned as focal people, especially if they are male experts, the absence of additional incentives since the role is additional, and in some offices, the absence of women's expertise because of the wrong assumption that it is women who should be assigned to women's-related positions.

4.1.1.3 Task force (Ad-hoc committee)

The strategy of using a task force is one of the mechanisms that can be formed by a combination of a high-take leaders committee that is usually established at the top decision-maker level of the organization. The common circumstances under which this task force committee is established are when a huge amount of aid is found, meaning that the budget needs the implantation and strict follow-up of the top leaders; when cases might worsen, requiring the serious attention of the top officials' involvement; or when the emergency mission accomplishment comes from the higher level of the government. For example, the participants cited a two-year FHI (Family Health International) project in community mobilization to combat GBV (Gender Based Violence) and the growing number of reported female genital mutilation (circumcision) cultures in the Arsi zone, which was successfully led by established task forces of the zonal districts and was able to reduce circumcision rates from 73% to 29% within six months. The members of the task force were from seven different concerned sector stakeholders, like: the court, justice office, police office, education office, health office, and social affairs office heads. They have a plan and a fixed schedule of meetings in order to evaluate and monitor the status of the project. As a result, they were able to manage the physical violence of women and harmful traditional practices by half. However, the participants also noted that there are currently no more task forces because the project is already phased out. As a result, the situation appears to have returned to its previous crisis level.

### 4.1.1.4 Women caucuses/ committee and party strategy

According to the target group respondents with the women members of parliament argument, women's caucuses committee that mostly established by a combination of women leaders from different government sectors and women members of parliament on women's issue, are also another impactful strategy that women's machineries use for women's leadership as a team or committee. It is mostly the strategy used to link women in different systems of the government with women's machinery, like with women members in the governing party, women in different government offices at a leadership position, and women members in parliament or council to broaden their network.

As the findings from the key respondents also revealed, this strategy is one of the best where women leaders create a spirit of unity and power in identifying the overall gaps and strengths, sharing information and ideas, and forwarding the possible solutions with regard to women's

issues, particularly women's leadership. Furthermore, as for the strategies that women use in order to participate in and be able to influence the local governance in a formal system, like the use of women leaders in any political position, more importantly, through women's affairs office, women members of Parliament, party membership, and even women's associations as a strategy through which women use to participate in and influence the decision-making process in their formal local governance.

The focus group discussion participants also argued that even though the number of women leaders in a given management is insignificant, at least one WCYAO head is a member of the executive body so that they can take part in the management decision-making process at each level of government structure. And also, they have an opportunity to be assigned to different committees. Further, the governing party is one of the main influential bodies in the formal governance system of decision-making where the majority of its members are women, particularly from low status. It is mainly this membership of women that the WCYAO can also use to push women's issues within the party system as a potential women's wing and strategy to make the voice of women heard. In support of these findings, Mwangi (2013) argued that women struggle to organize and become active players at all levels of decision making in their societies. They need to develop mobilization strategies for dealing with conflict situations and strengthen sub-regional networking with other women's groups on key issues relating to peace and training in conflict.

Figure 1 : Party structure
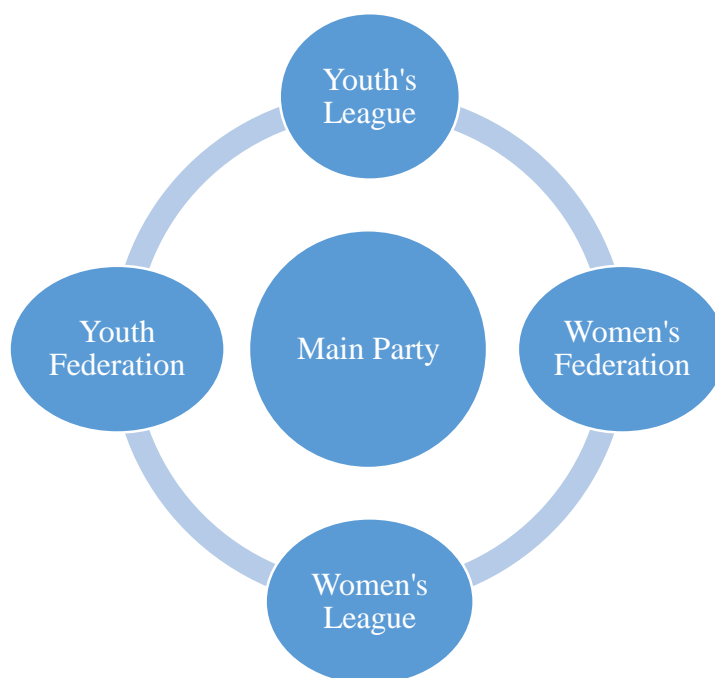
Source: Field survey (2021)

Further, as stated in the figure above, the findings showed that there are different party structures apart from the main party membership that are specific to women, like the Women's Federation and the Women's League.

According to the key informant interview findings, women members of parliament (council) and women's machineries are the main strategies that women use in local formal governance. women have been getting the opportunity to participate in councils or parliaments at each level and have an opportunity to influence the law-making process. The participants also noted that this body of the government is the place where women's share is almost equal to men's, and women's have been getting access to gain power, which enables them to influence the law-making process and resource allocation in previously male-dominated branches.

In addition, the role of women's associations as strong civil society actors in supporting the government itself in terms of finance, mobilizing women, implementing the government's strategies, paying tax and even creating employment opportunities is often overlooked. Women's associations have a greater voice to be heard by the government than those women's positions and also have the opportunity to participate in the most important stages and events organized by the government. Similarly, Stanford Social Innovation (2015) discovered that one way to empower women is through grassroots women's organizations (GWOs), which include locally based and, more broadly, women-led NGOs with a mission to advance women's rights

on multiple fronts. Gittell et al. (2000) reported that networking leads to the formation of coalitions, increased status, and increased power to influence decisions and public policies. The Population Council (2005) also noted that grassroots women's groups, by forming networks and increasing their scope of action, extending their innovation approaches to other poor communities, may press for the political changes that are required and necessary.

4.1.2 Women's Strategy in Indigenous Governance system

In the understanding of women's strategy in the indigenous informal governance system, the findings showed that the Oromo society has a well-known indigenous institution known as the "*Gadaa*" institution, where the Oromo women also have their own gender role. The "*Gadaa*" system of governance is common all over the region among the Oromo society. Nevertheless, the implementation level of the system is currently different from zone to zone. That means, there are zones that actively live in accordance with the "*Gadaa*" system's values and norms, and to the contrary, there are also zones that live only with the nomenclature of the "*Gadaa*" system without implementing the norms and values of the system, mainly because of the historically sustained feudal unitary state formation trends and attitudes since the 19th c. On the other hand, women have their own institutionalized women's only indigenous system named "*Sinqee*" institution.

4.1.2.1 Institutional Mechanism ('Sinqee' institution)

In different parts of the region where the indigenous institutions are still sustained and active, like in the areas of Arsi, East Arsi, Bale, Gujii, and Borena zones, women use their institutionalized strategy to participate in the local indigenous governance system and play a great role in managing, protecting, and transforming peace values for their security through the more indigenously organized and institutionalized manner of their "Sinqee" institution. *"Sinqee"* is a symbol of Oromo women's identity as having influential power in exercising their political, social, economic, and cultural rights in their community. Even though women's ratio and role in the system is doubtful, in the "Gadaa*"* governance system, women participate mostly through their senior "hadha sinqee*"* women so that they can hear the decisions made by the men ("Abba Gadaa*").

In continuance, women's participation in the 'Gadaa' governance is not a quota system, rather it is a mandatory representation that the system does not take place in the absence of women.

Therefore, women's strategy in the indigenous system is their "*S*inqee" institution in the "Gadaa" system, as a women's mechanism in their interaction in which women exercise their social, political, economic, and cultural rights in the culturally indigenous "Gadaa" governance system. In the areas where '*S*inqee' is weak, they use well-known elderly women (religiously known women, rich women, politically affiliated women, or it could be from a royal family) to take part in the decision-making process in their indigenous interaction with men locally in the form of representation with a very small number of votes.

In this case, women use the "Sinqee" institution in exercising their leadership in parallel to the "Gada*a*" system as a check and balance strategy between the two institutions. They usually participate in the name of women and as "Haadha Sinqee's" like senior women, the wives of the "Gadaa" leaders ('Abba Gadaa's') and women who belong to a clan in a leadership position in their "Gadaa" system as a strategy to participate in decision making and follow the rights given to them in the "Gadaa" indigenous institution. Therefore, in informal governance, women use their representative senior in order to participate in the indigenous 'Gadaa' system of governance and also use their own institutional collective leadership where all women can have full rights to participate in their decision-making system in their "Sinqee," women's only indigenous institution.

4.1.2.2 Women's Strategy Towards Security

In this section, the findings present the different strategies that women use in their role as keepers of security. Even though safeguarding the citizen's security is the primary role of the government, women also play a great role in security by preventing and transforming conflicting situations into peaceful ones through the use of different material and non-material strategies. The findings showed the different strategies that women use in the prevention of violence and promoting peace for sustainable peace as well.

3.1.2.2.1 Women's strategy in prevention

As discovered below, women have their own mechanisms or strategies to prevent themselves and their families from violence.

3.1.2.2.1.1 Personal and psychological redness

Women use personal and psychological redness in their protection mechanisms
against violence as a strategy. According to the target group participants'

argument, women are usually psychologically conscious and have the characteristic of suspecting things in relation to their security and their family's as well. One of the target group respondents said:

> *Women are usually known for their fear, but it is not fear, rather*
> *a preventive strategy for women. If you suspect something, you*
> *devise a strategy for escaping and protecting yourself. As a result,*
> *it is not a fear, but rather a women's preventative warning sign.*

Therefore, the physical and psychological reactions are a strategy of initiation for women to take preemptive measures or decisions in order to keep their security, like: taking care of themselves, not going alone, trying to shape themselves in terms of their style, communication limit. Furthermore, women's mothers play a great role in advising and warning their children and husbands to take care of themselves because of the feeling of fear for the safety and security of their family.

### 3.1.2.2.1.2 Cooperative Strategy

Women cooperate with men and also within themselves in their attempt to keep themselves from violence strategically. Particularly with male families, relatives, and religious brothers or relatively innocent male friends. The cooperative strategies of girls are mainly because of the assumption that men are physically stronger than females, which enables them to protect their female sisters from violent actions.

Moreover, girls use a cooperative relationship with male relatives with some sort of incentives like preparing delicious foods and drinking things like milk to make them security guards. Such cooperative approaches are common in both rural and urban areas, with few differences. For instance, mostly in rural areas, whenever a wedding ceremony is held, youths dance at night on the eve of their friends' weeding. The girls also enjoy the company of their male counterparts without any fear because their male relatives are with them to look after them. Whereas in urban areas, girls look to their male relatives for their protection as a guard to be saved from other male harassers/gangsters for their free movement, for instance while going to school. Similarly, as Wane (2011) stated, African feminist thought is also embodied through collectivism and collaboration. However, the participants also mentioned their evaluation of the status of such indigenous cultures, as they are not fully functional all over the region.

3.1.2.2.1.3 Use Symbolic / Material Mechanism

As shown in the figure below, women use different symbolic cultural materials as a protection mechanism, particularly to protect themselves from physical violence especially when they give birth and to stop war or ongoing conflict.

Figure 2: The most common women's cultural preventive materials

'Siinqee' stick

'Mutaa', 'Qanafaa'

Spear

'Sabbata' (women's belt)
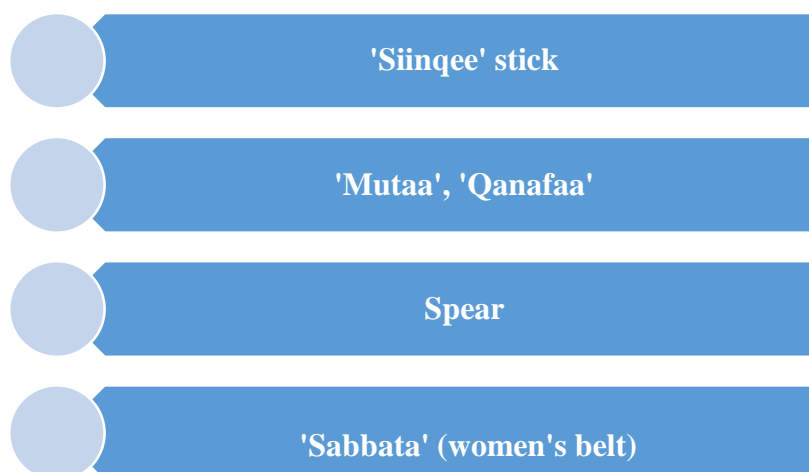
Source: Filed survey (2021)

3.1.2.2.1.4 Rituals and religious mechanisms

Women usually use rituals and prayer in both of their preventive mechanisms and also in their attempt to transform conflicting situations into peaceful ones. As a prevention strategy, women perform rituals annually even without the occurrence of any problem just to have communication with their divine for their care and protection from bad things like war, drought, disease, and overall wellbeing and blessings. One of the target group respondents argued:

> *…We have different rituals that we celebrate individually or collectively on an annual basis by going to streams or holy places. So that God will prevent us from the occurrence of problems like droughts or heavy rainfall, or the transmission of diseases like Ebola. If such problems arise, we pray to God for mercy. God will also respond to our prayers. If we miss the celebration of those rituals, we may face many challenges and problems, including those with our family. Therefore, we usually take care and give due consideration to the celebration of those rituals.*

3.1.2.2.1.5 Information sharing mechanism

The findings also revealed that women's capacity for having rich and pre-hand information to share with each other was greater than men's. Women are one of the major sources of information for the security sector and are believed to have full information about the root causes of conflicts in their surroundings. They are also innocent and easily give more valuable and tangible information to the police than men.

Women's capacity is primarily due to gender role divisions, which allow women to meet each other frequently and easily in their daily activities such as going downstream to fetch water, collecting firewood, going to the market, visiting and participating in the ceremonies of female friends who gave birth, meeting each other at weeding and burial ceremonies, to name a few. that they can exchange timely and varied information from diversified sources.

3.1.2.2.1.6 Networking

In both formal and informal ways, there are small groups of women in their locality that enable them to identify, discuss, and find a solution to problems in their surroundings. In terms of formal structure, the findings revealed that there are different networked teams organized by different strictures of the government for the execution of their offices' missions in a decentralized structure up to the grassroots level, like women's affairs offices, party offices, security offices, health offices, and agriculture offices, as well as small and micro-enterprise offices. Those structures may use networked teams organized by one of them, or they may organize their own teams. Most of the commonly utilized teams in the study area are those organized by health centers and security offices. Therefore, those networked teams are informal by their nature, organized under the formal structure of the government for multiple missions of the government to be more accessible to the grassroots community, particularly women and youths. So it has been said that the women's group is more successful and committed in this regard.

Similarly, a formal structure similar to the government structure known as *Rayya misoomaa dubartootaa* (women's development team) has been addressed by organizing people into 1–5 member groups in their neighborhoods. in these groupings, the women's wing is so active and efficient. They are supervised and supported by the concerned government structures because they are the essential channels through which cases have been reported to the government

bodies. Similar results with findings by Gittell et al. (2000) reveal that networking leads to the formation of coalitions, increased status, and increased power to influence decisions and public policies. Therefore, as the Population Council (2005) indicated, grassroots women's networks or groupings, by forming networks and increasing their scope of action, extending their innovation approaches to other poor communities, may press for the political changes that are required and necessary.

4.2 Women's Strategy in their Economic Empowerment

Women contribute to food availability through their roles in crop production, animal production enterprises, fishing, and agro-forestry too, and further, they also have a trend of supporting each other economically. In order to contribute to those economic aspects, they use different strategies that are contextually understood. As Scanlan (2004) argued, the empowerment of women has a direct impact on the improvement of hunger and the provision of basic needs, such as education, health, and income. Bullard and Johnson (2000) have shown that women have organized, educated, and empowered themselves to improve the way government regulations and environmental policies are administered. Accordingly, the findings also revealed the different strategies that women use for their economic empowerment. These strategies could be formal and organized and run by the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or they could be informal and organized within themselves.

3.2.1 Trends of using different socio-economic events

Such trends are mostly organized by the initiation of the community themselves as trends and are also managed by them informally. In this case, women use different social events as a strategy to support each other. Those strategy events are intertwined, and they all share a common goal: to improve communal health and development through mutual benefit.

Figure 3: Common social strategies through which women economically support each other
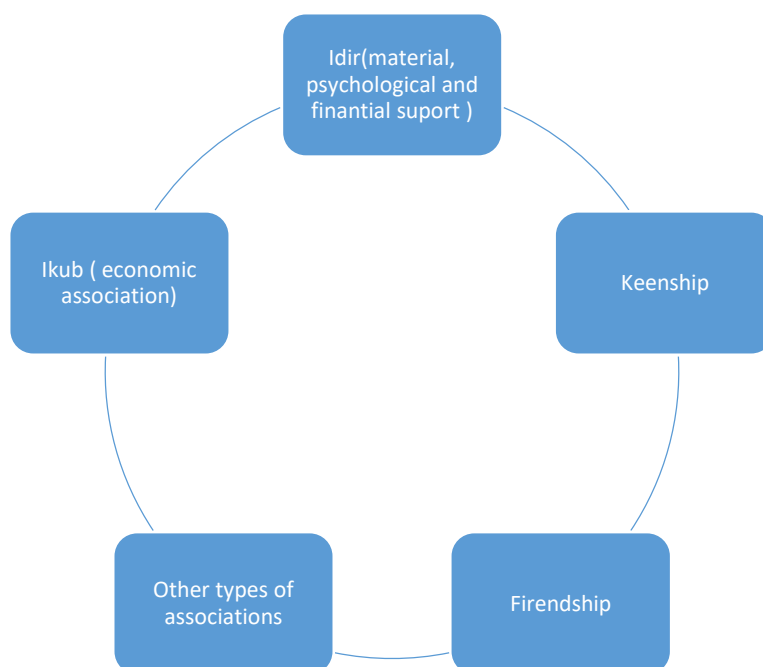
Sources: Field survey (2021)

As shown in Figure 3, of the different interconnected social strategies through which society can fairly support each other, the majority of the respondents argued that they use "Ikub" (economic association) as one of the most common ways of economically empowering each other, particularly women, by coming together and contributing some amount of money and using the lottery method for its fair share turn by turn. They especially use it when one of their friends has a ceremony to celebrate, like a weeding or graduation ceremony. When they need to build a house and need to get some home furniture, they usually organize or join the organized "Ikub" team intentionally as a supporting strategy. One of the respondents argued:

> *…If we have a plan to celebrate or do something, we share the information with our friends and organize an "ikub" team to support our friend who has a plan so that she can do her program without suffering so much financially.*

Another social strategy was locally known as 'Iddir' where almost all of them have their own 'Iddir' in which they participate and support others and also get support from based on the regulation of the team. The focus group findings also showed that women have a documented or non - documented evidences of their friends contribution support on their events in kind or in cash so they will re -fund it in the events of their friends mostly by adding the amount and changing the kind in a more valued than what they got it before.

Most of the informal women groupings were organized by the government initiation by the government's intention of empowering women economically. The government organize their groupings, facilitate loan's and market opportunities. According to the annual report from East Wollega Women, Children and Youth Affairs Office (2020), about 216 organized women's associations by the collaboration with WCYAO and Small and Micro Enterprise Office. Similarly, the NGOs also have been playing a great role in organizing women to enhance their economic status by organizing and providing material, financial and technical support to women in more better than the government's attempt. For instance, the 'Harmee' NGOs is one of the popular and acknowledged institution in all over the rural areas of Arsi and East Arsi zones and Asella town too in organizing women based on their indigenous knowledge and culture by providing material, financial and technical support. Therefore, women use both their initiation amongst each other informally and the government's initiation in order to be beneficiary from the system and the trends in their economic empowerment.

3.2.2 Strategies to Increase Their Savings

As saving is one of the main aspects of economic empowerment, the findings showed both formal and informal saving strategies used by women. As a result, in formal strategy, the trends of using modern financial institutions have improved over time, which was primarily influenced by various factors such as religion and culture.

Figure 4: women's strategy in their saving trends
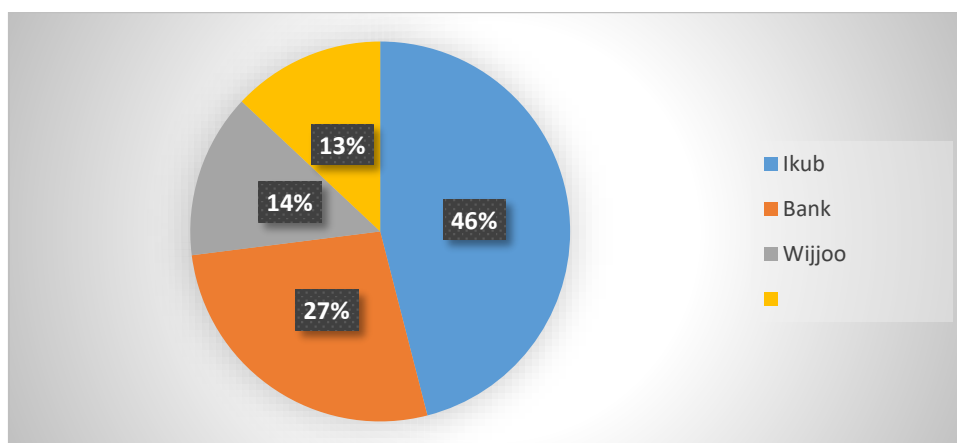
Sources: Field survey (2021)

As indicated in Figure 4, the majority of the respondents, about 46%, use "Ikub″ (a financial saving association in a small group) in which they come together and save some amount of money and use the lottery method for the fair distribution of the chance each month. About 27%

of them use the formal saving system, 13% use "Buusaa Gonofaa" (traditional saving at home) in which women usually save in cash or usually in kind for their emergency, and 14% use "Wijjoo" only for their social contribution. Therefore, the findings revealed that women use different types of saving strategies and that the informal strategy like "Ikub" is the most common and widely used, followed by the modern banking system. However, the number of women who don't save except for the savings for their social contribution was also quite small.

4.3 Women's Strategies in Conflict Resolution

Women use them in their activities towards resolving conflict. Even though the different conflict resolution mechanisms look exclusive to women, women have different strategies through which they can resolve conflict. Those conflicts were used in both formal and informal spheres of conflict resolution, as discussed below.

4.3.1 Women's strategies in preventing conflict

4.3.1.1 Trainings

In the findings, a modern conflict resolution strategy through which women take part directly or indirectly was trained. Accordingly, the findings revealed training as a strategy in two dimensions. In the first place, taking conflict resolution training and implementing it in practice is one of the main qualities that women have. As a result, women are active participants in training where they have been given the opportunity. They discuss freely the issues of training transparently and honestly to get clear about the what, how, and when concerns in the training section. This dimension showed women's trend not to participate in different public meetings, trainings, and conferences because of the negative attitudes towards women that consider women incapable of resolving conflict. Cultural and religious norms were also hindering factors that label women's role in routine roles like cooking and child care.

Secondly, the findings also showed women's training provision strategy in formally and informally ways. Formally, there are already many women in teaching learning processes through which they share their experiences and knowledge. In this regard, the education curriculum of the country (2000) directs the nursery and primary schools to be handled by women teachers for the socialization nature of women in building children's psychological and attitudinal development. Furthermore, women also impart through their individual initiation into different forms of social strata. For instance, women started to preach in the church when

they were not allowed to teach in churches in previous times. As stated by Vischer (2001), that is why subsidiarity holds that where families, neighborhoods, churches, or community groups can effectively address a given problem. However, the findings also revealed the gaps with regard to inviting women to trainings in that the trainings lack sustainability and only benefit a few enlightened women.

4.3.1.2 Looking for sponsorship

The use of this strategy, particularly by women machineries, eases their service's accessibility to reach a mass of women's problems. According to the findings from the key-respondents, one of the main responsibilities of WCYAO at each level is to invite and look for potential donors to expand their capacity to support women. The participants also stated the roles of those NGOs, as they have been playing a great role in providing financial support for needy women's capacity building and attitudinal change training. Similarly, WCYAOs of both zones also witnessed the incredible roles of NGOs in capacitating women better than government institutions. For example, *Harme* local NGOs in the Arsi, Bale, and Eas A rsi zones formed the "Sinqee" association and provided them with adult education, savings, and various types of capacity-building training. They more emphasized creating awareness of women's knowledge about modern saving and providing adult education and also how to resolve conflict by using their indigenous knowledge. They also support women by organizing them and creating an enabling environment for keeping their security in their localities by themselves, supervising their status, training or giving awareness, and providing human resources to be available at any time for their problems. With the help of *Harme* institution, they have also established a well-furnished waiting center in a police station with the necessary facilities, human resources, and food provisions at the station, which attempts to solve the problems of women, especially when their husband lets them out of their home alone or with her children. It could be at night or day time, but there is no place to stay. They also link them with the women's affairs office to psychologically counsel them until the legal process will facilitate. They teach the community to protect human rights, particularly women's rights. If something happens to them, they will give them priority in their cases.

4.3.1.3 Indigenous institutional approaches for conflict resolution

Having 'Sinqe' at home, in the meeting, while traveling, at rituals, and during weeding has its own set of implications for indigenous women in the study area. The implication is that the

Oromo women's identity is peace, having a peace celebration norm and a value of respect, not to get into conflict, not to make a bias, not to lie, not to cheat, and not to kill. It preaches peace and is a means of sustaining peace.

Women play a great role in managing (stopping) conflict and creating transforming values based on the deep-rooted values and norms of their society to sustain their positive relationship. One of the respondents had to say:

> *… we plead and convince the conflicting parties by saying, 'Please forgive him/her because of my breasts that feed you' and we put down our 'Sinqee' and tie our belt together so that they forgive each other. Our community knows what will happen to them if they refuse our say. So no one can get around our process for forgiveness. The conflict solved in this way will never erupt again.*

Therefore, 'Sinqee', with its institution, is an indigenous peace weapon of Oromo women used to stop violence and build a sustainable, mutually peaceful environment and relationship based on the values and norms of a society.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Women have their own various strategies towards their peacebuilding activities in local governance, security, economic empowerment, and conflict resolution that range from formal to informal, technical to material, and institutional to individual strategies. Formally, women use women's machineries established by the government in order to deal with women's issues at a government level for the accomplishment of international and national norms through the participation of individuals or civilian women's group initiatives to fight for their rights and participate in decision-making in the formal governance system. Indigenous women have institutionalized shared values and norms, as well as symbolic and material mechanisms, allowing them to play their roles and influence indigenous decision-making arenas.

However, the findings also indicated that the formal strategy of women is characterized by poor implementation, complexity, and overlap of procedures and responsibilities. It also lacks appropriate and transparent policy directives that result in ineffectual. Further, it is also characterized by a lack of effective organizational, meaningful, and sustainable relationships

with other stakeholders and the majority of indigenous women's knowledge and potentials on women's issue.

The study has proposed that the government should re- consider the power and responsibilities of women's institutions with appropriate policy directives. It also suggests that the government should need to take care of its one-dimensional approach of imposing the imported needs solely by subduing the existing institutionalized indigenous knowledge, which has a significant impact in addressing the root causes of their conflict by themselves as the ownership in their peacebuilding by exhausting all efforts towards assuring women's full participation in a meaningful manner.

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