



Indigenous institutions of communication among the Sidama: challenges and prospects in the 21st Century, Ethnographic study in Sidama Regional State, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The Sidama have rich historical traditions that reflect a unique and egalitarian culture. Among such traditions, the most notable one is their indigenous communication system. Hence, the main objective of this study was to identify and analyze the indigenous communication systems that the Sidama people have employed for many generations. It further examines the patterns of changes, challenges, and prospects facing the development of these indigenous cultural institutions by taking Dara, Aroressa, and Hawassa Zuria Woredas of the Sidama region as cases. Moreover, we delved into understanding the competing performance of indigenous communication practices vis-à-vis modern institutions of communication and possible ways of integrating them for sustainable community development. To investigate these knowledge systems, the study employed a participatory research approach and used interactive research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations. The findings of the study revealed that the indigenous communication system has paramount importance in transmitting information between persons and groups for the Sidama society since the day's technologies and modern means of communication were not apparent. Despite the current dominant nature of conventional institutions of communication, the Sidama has continued to endure the indigenous institutions in the day-to-day communal context of rural society and serve their purposes to the satisfaction of the rural people by fulfilling their desire for information about local events, the necessity to spread information about political and religious decisions, as well as threats to security. The study also discusses the recognition and structural supports delivered towards the customary communication schemes as they help to enhance the continuity of cultural identities, values, and norms to be shared among members over many generations.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge, Communication, Sidama

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the study

Communication is the process by which a sender passes information to a decoder or receiver. It involves contacting, relaying, and transferring ideas, news, secrets, messages, orders, and information from people, groups, and communities to others. Communication, in general terms, can be described as the act of sending and receiving messages from a source through a medium. MacBride et al. (1981) describe communication not just as the exchange of news and messages but as an individual and collective activity embracing all transmissions and the sharing of ideas, facts, and data. Thus, communication may be looked at as a system or process. According to Okunna (1999:6), communication is a complex process because it involves the exchange or sharing of information or a message and requires certain basic components. These include the source from whom the message originates; the medium through which the message is conveyed; the audience who receives the message; and the feedback, which is the reaction of the receiver to the message. Man is a communicating animal or being. He is therefore almost always engaged in one form of communication or another, in a near state of perpetuity, and even in his sleep (Obiora, 2010). Thus, communication is central and critical to all human activities.

Definitions of the Indigenous Communication System (ICS) vary as there are scholars, movements, or schools of thought. Ansu-Kyeremeh (1998), cited in Odunlami (2006: 161) defines it as any form of endogenous communication system, which by virtue of its origin, form, and integration into a specific culture, serves as a channel for messages in a way and manner that requires the utilization of the values, symbolism, institution, and ethos of the host culture through its unique qualities and attributes. In addition, Hachten (1971) in Dele Odunlami (2006: 161) outlines it as an “informal channel of communication”. Other scholars like Akpabio (2003:3) perceive ICS as the process and systems which utilize symbols, values, and institutions which directly appeal to and readily connect with the people and thus enhance the variety and effectiveness of messages that circulate in the community.

Every society has evolved ways of transmitting information from one person to another, and Africa is no exception (Doob, 1966). In Africa, the indigenous or traditional communication system, apart from transmitting information, which includes the news function and other declarations, amuses, persuades, and is also used for social exchanges (Doob, 1966). It was stated by Olulade (1998) that traditional communication as used in Africa is an admixture of social conventions and practices that have become sharpened and blended into veritable communication modes and systems that have almost become standard practices for society. It is, therefore, composite coordination of communication, which spread through all aspects of rural African life. According to Denga (1988), cited in Mede (1998) and Aziken and Emeni (2010), it has varied characteristics, which include dynamism, and the tools employed in the course of disseminating information vary from place to place. It is perhaps the most important way in which rural people communicate among themselves and with others. Therefore, despite the advent of modern-day media in Africa, the use of traditional means of communication is still very common, acceptable, and recognizable by the people.

Ethiopia is very rich in different indigenous knowledge systems in such areas as communication systems, architecture, medicine, agriculture, and cottage industry. The following are some of these IK systems: Dagu (What have your ears heard?) communication of the Afar people of

north-eastern Ethiopia; the traditional skills of the Konso people in hillside terracing and banding (they also practice traditional irrigation to supplement the meager precipitation received during the cropping seasons). In Bale administrative zone, farmers prepare a trench around a potato plot to protect the potato from a porcupine. In Gondar, farmers shift their barns from one farmland to another to fertilize the land. The people in the Wolqite, Waliso, and Tilili areas are skilled in hornwork. Around Debre Birhan and Tigray, it is common for the residents to build their houses from stone, mud, and ash. In Addis Ababa and Hawassa, people can be witnessed engaged in producing and selling household furniture made of bamboo and/or sisal. The stelae of Axum, the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, and the castles in Gondar are some of the standing monuments of civilization in ancient Ethiopia in terms of architecture. With regard to metalwork, what is today known as annealing and hardening is very common with every Ethiopian traditional blacksmith. In rural parts of Ethiopia, if someone is struck by lightning, the survivor will be immediately brought into contact with the moist ground or dung (Report of the Ethiopian National [Workshop, 2002](#): 6). The Sidama people (one of the over 80 ethnic groups in the country) live in the southern part of present-day Ethiopia, in the Horn of Africa. They belong to the people of Cushitic origin that occupy the vast area of northeastern and eastern Africa, extending from Sudan throughout the Horn of Africa to Tanzania ([Wansamo, 2007](#): 1).

The Sidama, like their counterparts in Africa and Ethiopia, have rich historical traditions that reflect a unique and egalitarian culture. Among such traditions, the most notable one is their indigenous communication system. Even if this knowledge system is changing because of the emergence of modern-day information dissemination facilities, education, political changes, and contacts with different people from other regions and religions, it continues to play vital roles in every social context of the rural Sidama society of today. The main functions of traditional communication, among others, include being a medium for the participation of the people in their community affairs, a medium for the struggle against social disobedience, and a medium for the efforts to consolidate neighborhood unity. Thus, this paper stimulated the recognition and description of indigenous people vis-à-vis modern institutions of communication among the Sidama of southern Ethiopia.

1.2. Statement of the problem

The Sidama are one of the Cushitic-speaking people living in North-Eastern Africa in what is today South Ethiopia. The society has distinctive traditions and cultural life as regards traditional beliefs, the administration system (Luwa), judgment procedures, marriage ceremonies and arrangements, traditional dance and its clothes, the celebration of assorted culture-based holidays, its calendar, the New Year (Fiche) celebration, mourning ceremonies, and customary norms. These are among the most exquisite indigenous norms and social values of the Sidama that distinguish them from other socio-cultural formations.

Despite all these, the Sidama people also possess an assortment of traditional communication institutions that enable them to share information among themselves. These forms of communication occur within families, at meetings of village organizations, in the market place, or at the well. Much of the communication is informal and unorganized, interpersonal, oral rather than written, controlled locally rather than by outsiders, and uses no or low levels of technology. However, even with the dominant nature of modern institutions of communication, those indigenous institutions among the Sidama have continued to endure in the day-to-day communal context of rural society and serve their purposes to the satisfaction of the rural

people by fulfilling their desire for information about local events, the necessity to spread information about political and religious decisions, as well as threats to security. Despite having rich cultural elements and traditions, only a small number of studies on Sidama have been written, and not much data on their indigenous communication systems is available in a well-primed manner.

Early investigations on such indigenous institutions were carried out by Kifle Wansamo in 2007 and the Sidama Zone Culture and Tourism Bureau in 2009, soon followed by a broader study by Mesay Bogale in 2016. Mesay Bogale (2016) has investigated “Qeexaala” (public demonstration) as a cultural communication practice among the Sidama by taking Arbegona, Hawassa Zuria Woredas, and Hawassa city administration as the focus areas. However, with the presence of many other forms of media, the purpose of his study is solely restricted to the analysis of Qeexaala from a cultural communication point of view. The function of traditional communication media was well described in Kifle Wansamo’s (2007) essay titled “Sidama: An Overview of History, Culture, and Economy,” but only in a few words. The book published in 2009 on Sidama culture and history also points out a variety of traditional forms of communication in different parts of the society, yet barely gives a portrayal of them. Commonly, these documents, which were hardly interested in studying the Sidama media of communication, made little effort in associating them with the modern communication media on the one hand and the state institutions on the other hand, which significantly threatened the practices of indigenous communication media. Hence, given that no comprehensive research has been conducted on the indigenous institutions and their relevance in the contemporary world, it becomes exceptionally vital to carry out this study to value and conserve those communication systems that the Sidama people have employed for many generations. The study further attempted to assess the patterns of changes, challenges, and prospects facing the development of indigenous systems of communication institutions.

Therefore, in light of the above, the study strived to address the following principal research questions:

1. What were the Sidama’s indigenous communication institutions before the advent of the digital era?
2. What are the evolving developments due to the interface of modern and indigenous institutions of communication?
3. How can the advent of the modern state in Sidama land be seen with their institution of communication? Is the state contributing to the enhancement or cramp of ICIs?
4. How can modern and indigenous institutions be integrated for sustainable local development?

1.3. Objectives of the study

The overall objective of the study is to carry out an empirical investigation of institutional contact and changes in the indigenous institutions of communication among the Sidama in southern Ethiopia.

The specific objectives of the study are:-

- To identify and describe Sidama's indigenous institution of communication before the advent of the digital era.
- To ascertain the evolving developments due to the interface of modern and indigenous institutions of communication.
- To examine how the advent of the modern state on Sidama land affected the indigenous institution of communication.
- To determine if the integration of modern and indigenous institutions of communication can be strategically used for sustainable local development.

1.4. Significance of the study

The following points highlight the significance of the research:

- The Sidama people use different forms of communication. Among such practices, the most prominent ones are Qeexaala, Iyyaha, Lalallawa, Lasa, Korora, Baderi Mayii Noo, and the Songo. These indigenous media are still playing a very significant role in the day-to-day social existence of rural society. Thus, the study analyzes and discusses the positive consequences of the aforementioned traditional institutions. Correspondingly, it shows the public how significant they are in terms of creating economic, social, religious, political, and cultural ties within the people.
- Indigenous and long-established communication media are unquestionably genuine tools for grassroots mobilization and development. In other words, these media, which are rooted in the people's culture, are considered very effective or more effective in grassroots mobilization for participatory development. But most of the time, those communication systems are rarely taken into consideration by development agents. This reluctance in turn led to the failure of agents in accomplishing their projects and communicating with and mobilizing the grassroots, who are mostly rural, poor, and illiterate, for development. To avoid such scenarios, there is a need for close collaboration between development agents and traditional communicators to make optimal use of the interactive power of the traditional communication system to stimulate people's participation.
- As an anthropologist, studying a certain society involves examining its culture, reconstructing its values, and giving meaning to its peculiar behaviors. Therefore, it is believed that scrutinizing the indigenous communication systems of the Sidama people will help to popularize, reconstruct, and conserve the cultural identity of the society and the appropriate aspects of their intangible cultural heritage.

The results of this study will also fill the existing research gap, serve as one source of literature for similar research, and perhaps provide a base for other scholars and students who would like to conduct further anthropological studies on the selected topic. Plus, if there are areas that are perceived not to be treated in detail, the study will help to bring forth curiosity capable of inciting research interest in this area. Besides, it could help to establish an information base that would enable the government, varied institutions, and other concerned bodies to preserve and maintain positive aspects of such kinds of intangible cultural heritages, advance knowledge in the field, and avail themselves of firsthand information that could be used as input for policymaking.

Given the above situation on the ground, the researchers believe that it is timely and reasonable to research the identified topic.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Considering the ontological dimension of the topic to be investigated, that is, constructivism (which stresses social phenomena and their meanings are deeply embedded in the social actors' accomplishments), the researcher utilized a qualitative research approach in this study. Unlike the quantitative technique, "which relies on collecting data that is numerically based and amenable to such analytical methods as statistical correlations, often in relation to hypothesis testing" (Walliman, 2006), the qualitative epistemological foundation of the study depends on methods that help in interpreting detail and sensitive human actions. Besides, it centers on the process of theory development rather than testing. Hence, throughout the study, I was totally dependent on qualitative research approaches, and data were qualitatively gathered, analyzed, and interpreted.

2.1. Description of the study area

Sidama is one of the Cushitic-speaking people living in South Ethiopia, and their region is bordered by the Oromia region in the north, east, and southeast, the Wolaita Zone in the west, and the Gedeo Zone in the southwest. The regional government is one of the administrative states of the country and was formed on June 18, 2020, from the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR). According to 2011 estimates, the total population of Sidama was 3.4 million (Sidama Zone Finance and Economic Development Sector, 2011). The major language is called Sidaamu-afoo, which, according to the 1994 national census, is the language of 99.5% of this ethnic. As per the existing conventional information, there are two ancestral groups and fourteen clans that constitute the Sidama Nation. The Sidama people regard Bushe and Maldea as their two ancestral forefathers, under which further sub-divisions within each subgroup descend down to the small hamlets, constituting each and every family. The Bushe group includes Hadicho, Holo-garbicho, Malga, Faqisa-Tumano, and Awacho, whereas Hawela, Qewena, Sawola, Alata, Darasha, Dafina, Alawa, Hoffa, and Fardano belong to Maldea (Markos et al. 2011).

The capital city of Sidama, Hawassa, is located 275 kilometers south of Addis Ababa. Land features range from lowlands of about 1500 m.a.s.l. in the Great East Africa Rift Valley that cuts through lakes Hawassa and Abaya up to 3000 m.a.s.l. in the eastern Sidama highlands of Arbegona, Bansa, and Arroressa districts. Sidama land is one of the most evergreen and fertile lands in Africa. As a result, for centuries, the Sidama people led one of the most stable and self-sufficient lives as an independent nation-state in northeastern Africa. They lived in indigenous egalitarian and democratic social, economic, political, and cultural systems. The society has distinct indigenous cultural life as regards marriage ceremonies and arrangements, resolution of problems between individuals and groups, religious practices, the celebration of culture-based holidays and ceremonies like the New Year festival (fichche), the classification of the generational system or Luwa, adherence to the yakka institution serving as Ombudsman for women, customary norms, and mourning rituals. These are among the most cherished customary norms and social values of the Sidama that distinguish them from other socio-cultural boundaries (Markos, 2014).

2.2. Methods of primary data collection

Participant observation: the researcher employed this technique to gather detailed and well-rounded data on the day-to-day activities of the study community in analogy to their socio-cultural events. Through this method of inquiry, attempts were also made to observe the general settings of the study area, communal places (such as Gudummale), villages, and places where traditional communication media are entertained.

Key informant interviews are of different types, and semi-structured interviews are one of the most widely used methods in qualitative social research. Thus, the researchers employed the semi-structured interview type for this particular data inquiry process. Key informants included community elders, leaders, representatives, experts of the Culture and Tourism Bureau, and heads of households. Interviews are carried out at different stages of the research process to gain in-depth qualitative data. Informants were recruited using a purposive sampling technique, where we identified samples based on an individual's specialist knowledge.

Focused Group Discussion (FGD) is distinctively advantageous, for it gives the respondents chances to ask questions of each other, thereby reducing the possible biases of the research (Dawson, 2002: 30-31). Thus, this is what makes FGD very important in the study and differentiates it from key informant interviews and observation. Through this time-saving method, the researchers attempted to obtain a wide range of relevant responses from a larger number of people within a single session. Accordingly, two focus group discussions were conducted with purposefully selected groups comprised of 6–10 community members in the study areas. During the discussions, people from similar backgrounds or experiences (for example, indigenous knowledge practitioners such as local farmers, elders, and community leaders) were brought together to discuss a specific topic of interest to the research process. Furthermore, the FGDs were carried out with discussants that were selected based on their specialist knowledge of the study topic and setting.

2.3. Methods of secondary data Collection

This data was utilized to support and argue the data collected through the primary methods, make the study reliable, and organize the related literature review. The secondary data was collected from diverse published and unpublished materials, such as books, dissertations, articles, magazines, journals, and the Internet.

2.4. Data analysis

As Walliman (2006: 129) stated, “Qualitative research does not involve counting and dealing with numbers but is based more on information expressed in words—descriptions, accounts, opinions, and feelings. In such circumstances, it is also important that we recognize that the analysis and interpretation of data occur in the field as the researcher takes notes. That means the process of data collection and analysis actually takes place together, all through the interview (Henn et al., 2006: 193). Therefore, corresponding to all the above procedures, like gathering, recording, and documenting the necessary raw data from the study setting, the parallel activity is analyzing those data. In this research, which is also qualitative, the data that was gathered all the way through the above qualitative research methods was reduced and analyzed descriptively in a sequential and continuous manner in such a manner that it answered or replied to the research questions while the details were fresh in the mind. In order

to prevent data overload and complications during analysis, coding or classifications were used for the purpose of organizing or arranging the bulky data in the form of notes, observations, transcripts, and documents. This classification mechanism helps the researcher gather the intended data through ¹

2.5. Conceptual framework

Indigenous communication systems refer to the means by which members of a certain society communicate among themselves, with other social groups, with nature, and with the supernatural. According to Aziken and Emeni (2010), these systems of communication are expressed through oral tradition, theater, drama, drumming, orators, songs, folk tales, proverbs, ceremonial occasions like initiations, funerals, weddings, announcements, and other related experiences passed from generation to generation. In the course of those systems, the Sidama were able to make sense of their everyday lives and structure their actions. Conceptually, we intend to analyze the indigenous institutions of communication among the Sidama from a holistic perspective. Put differently, we are going to incorporate all institutions of communication that are embedded in interpersonal relations, inter-group relations, the relations of the Sidama with their neighbors, local communities' relations with their natural environment, and also relations with the supernatural being. Below, we depict our conceptual framework in a diagrammatical format (Figure 1).

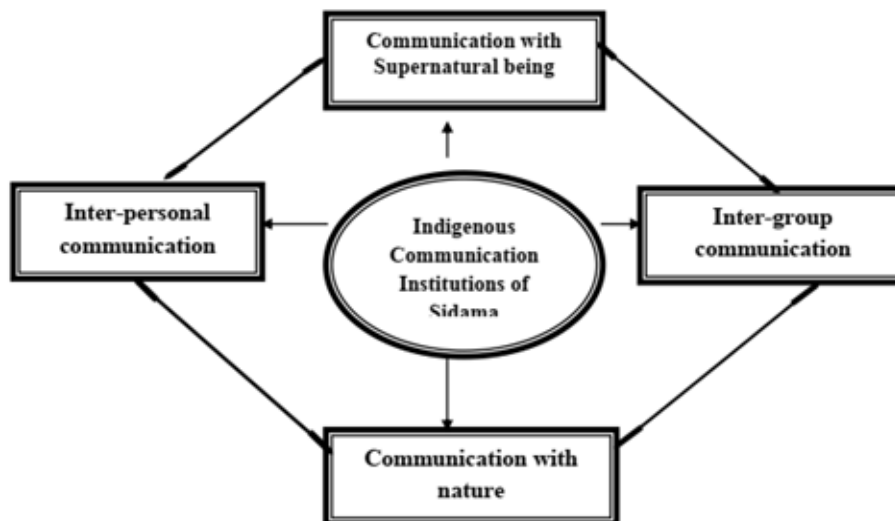


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Indigenous institutions of communication

Lallawa: Before the day to celebrate New Year festivity (Fiche Chemballala), elders communicate the advancement of the day through a messenger who conveys the message to the people by hanging fresh and wet skin on a stick at the local marketplace, Gudumaale, to signal the approaching of the calendar day. This process is called Lallawa (an announcement). Fichche is the most celebrated Sidama cultural holiday, which is based on the lunar calendar. Sidama elders known as 'Ayanto' (who have the wisdom ²

The ayanto are responsible for systematically constructing the calendar not only with regard to the celebration of the event but also taking responsibility for coordinating all other associated social, cultural, and ritual functions (Markos, 2014). Along with those duties, they also possess other functions pertaining to early warning systems for natural disaster management. They look into the number, size, nature, movement, and structure of stars in the sky to forecast future scenarios, particularly the nature of rain and drought, which range from one week to three years. It is neither spiritual nor hereditary, but a skill that anyone can learn. The reading is carried out at night for consecutive days. In rare cases, the Ayanto may find correct forecasting within a few days, but they continue reading the stars for up to a dozen days to prove the reading. According to key informants, ayanto considers different types of stars during the night, and it is based on these stars' movement (speed and direction), size, structure, and the days, months, and weeks of observation that the forecasting would be done about events and the social welfare of the community.

All suggested days that are suitable for conducting different social ceremonies, events, and rituals using indigenous prediction systems are then communicated through local innovation and a culturally built strategy: Lallawa. Matured youth would be called, informed in detail about the identified scenario, and sent to a market place with fresh and wet skin dangled on a stick to disseminate the information. The wet skin signifies the emergence of a new message from the community leaders, so the market people gather around to hear the confirmed account of events. Those primary community members from the market who are being informed about the proceedings are then expected to circulate the information through the snowball method. Accordingly, it will be dispatched to the whole community through the same channel within a very short period of time. On ways of communicating upcoming events, Mesay (2016) states that clan leaders use markets that are found in all woredas of the Sidama to announce decrees regarding 'Fiche' and other occurrences to the people. According to him, the markets have a channel role because, beyond the exchange of commodities, people attend to share information on various issues. An announcement concerning the celebration of the upcoming 'Fiche' is made in such places. In the same manner, Oduko (1987) outlines that village sectors in Africa communicate mostly via the market place of ideas contributed by traditional religion, divination, mythology, cult societies, the chiefs' courts, the elders square, secret and title societies, ³Baderi mayii noo is an inter-personal communication network among the study community. If two individuals come across each other on the road, traveling far from their dwelling villages, they are required to temporarily halt and exchange whatever information they have. This traditional communication system, which resembles the modern-day news media, is known as Baderi Mayino. The Sidama society had no newspaper but had institutions and cultural traits that, in several respects, served the same purposes as modern-day information exchange and dissemination facilities. Likewise, Baderi Mayii Noo, one of the social institutions with particular purposes in the livelihood of the Sidama, served the interests of all community members in pre-modernization. Even with urbanization and modern culture negatively affecting Baderi Mayino, the Sidama still practice the indigenous communication system to run their day-to-day activities. As most of society settles in rural areas, they principally depend on this interpersonal communication network. News about the arrival of a newcomer in the community reaches every nook and cranny of the village and beyond through the interpersonal network. Moreover, news of death, accidents, uprisings, floods, natural disasters, and epidemics spread like fire in society through Baderi Mayii Noo. Similarly, a key informant from Dikicha Kebele stated that

During Baderi Mayii Noo, the two people who met along their way usually sit down and engage in a small talk exchange. The conversation typically begins with greetings and goes like this:

Person One: 'Gooba keerreho, Ooso keerreho, Laalu keerreho, Galte keerreho'?

Person Two: 'Keerehola'

Person One: Baderi Mayii Noo

Person Two: Kanchafara Qareseoo...

Here, the messages exchanged between the subjects are concerned with the desert locust invasion and the incalculable crop, pasture, and forest cover losses. The two people quickly share the relevant news or information with others on their way to daily practice. Then the message reaches a large mass of the population within a short period of time. A key informant who is from Hawassa Zuria Woreda equally asserts that Baderi mayii noo is one of the cultural methods to disseminate disaster early warning information to the rest of the Sidama society. Through these locally available and straightforward mechanisms, communities easily recognize the approaching risks, communicate them all the way through their Woreda by way of culturally built strategies, and prepare for the ⁴

Iyyaha (don't let the thief escape) is used by an individual whose cattle went missing or who has lost his or her property. Here, the person will go to a hilly area, speak out loud, and describe the missing animal or lost property, and, if found, he will request the return of them. Then, the one who recovered the lost property or cattle requires the claimant to provide proof of his belongings. If the finder is satisfied with what he has heard, he will return the possessions to the rightful owner. Hence, the Hallale cultural value, the indigenous belief systems, and honesty operating in an integrated manner with the customary communication organizations make losing something among the Sidama no big deal.

Songo and its role in communication The Songo is comparable to the contemporary parliament. Agendas for discussion used to be forwarded by every member of the Songo, and decisions were made by the associates and presented to the Moote for approval (Wansamo, 2007). As per Seyoum (2001), members of the Songo are selected from the body of "wise persons," or hayoo, elected from different clans. These councilors are, mainly but not necessarily, gerontocrats whose job it is to advise the Songo, to represent a person in dispute, to take one's case or appeal to the Songo of the higher order, or to lobby for assorted causes. Moreover, "the Songo councils discuss various community issues, and in the course of their chat members inquire "what is new" and exchange information on their respective localities" (FGD participants of Dikicha Kebele, Arroressa Woreda).



Figure 2. FGD participants of Dikicha Kebele, Arroressa Woreda, and Date: 21-10-2020, 3:18 PM

Summing up, the study has brought into focus the different forms and procedures involved in the indigenous communication systems of the Sidama people. Among such practices, the most prominent ones are Lalallawa, Baderi Mayii Noo, Iyyaha, and the Songo. These indigenous media are still playing a significant role in the day-to-day social existence of rural society. The functions of the institutions of communication are embedded in inter-personal and inter-group relations, the relations of the Sidama with their neighbors, local communities' relations with their natural environment, and also relations with the supernatural.

3.2. Indigenous-modern communication dichotomy

Human beings have evolved through several stages of development in many aspects. One of the evolutions is manifested through the way people communicate with each other, learn their culture, share information, and adapt to their environment. The same holds true for the Sidama, who practiced indigenous means of communication for so long and persisted in using this system up to the present on the one hand and the modern means of communication on the other hand interchangeably and sometimes simultaneously. Repeated contact with modern technology, increased access to the modern education system, and the presence of other “better” channels of communication resulted in choosing between the two systems of communication. However, the situation varies across the study woredas.

For example, in Hawassa Zuria Wereda, individuals prefer to communicate with modern means of communication than the indigenous, mainly because they are prone to the urban way of life and somehow distant from the ICS. On the other side, in Arroressa Wereda, which is relatively remote from Hawassa town and other urban centers, members depend on indigenous communication systems over modern ones. To present a few means of communication, the Fichchee date is announced in rural markets across the Woreda through popular pronouncements known as Lallawa, miking or postering, videos, or social networking. The pronouncer, or ‘village messenger, would notify: “Fichchee will fall on this date. Be prepared

to usher in the New Year and inform those who have not heard! The messenger communicates the messages from the Ayyaantto, Sidama elders, and clan leaders within the community orally, and this is confirmed by the informants. On the other hand, Iyyaha, which is purposeful public shouting, is widely practiced among the Sidama, irrespective of the villages. Besides, Baderi mayii noo, which literally means “what is new?” is exercised in a reasonable number of Sidama villages. However, young people are losing these skills because they spend more time at educational institutions (which are Western-oriented) than with the teachers (elders) in the community. Thus, the preservation of this indigenous knowledge is critical because it ensures the continuation of the community and its knowledge.

The study participants correspondingly use the telephone (cell phone) and social media such as YouTube, Facebook, Google Docs, and Telegram as one means of accessing news and sharing information within the social community in the study area and among wider audiences. Therefore, this all shows how the two means of communication are visible among the Sidama, particularly in the study of Woredas. Moreover, it has been found that the two communication systems sometimes intermingle with each other. Sidama’s cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, is being introduced to members and non-members of the ethnic group through modern-day media such as television, radio, magazines, newsletters, and brochures, besides ICS. The establishment and service of Sidama Radio through the joint collaboration of the Sidama Development Program (SDP) and Irish Aid can be mentioned here. The Sidama radio, which was established in 1997 in Yirgalem town, has a medium wave frequency of 954 kHz. The frequency allocated to the station is 314 MW, and its transmission covers a 188 km radius. Thus, the transmission of the station covers the whole area of Sidama and some adjacent zones of the southern region, such as Wolayita and Gedeo, as well as some parts of the Oromiya region (Getahun, 2006). This modern system of communication is serving as a source of cultural, political, health, and other educational and enlightenment programs for the masses, leading them toward self-actualization and national development. It also gives expression to the cultural activities of the Sidama among neighboring groups of people. On the other hand, there are times when messages, news, and stories from modern media are shared among the Sidama using the local way of sending and receiving information.

3.3. Recognition of the modern state to the Sidama land

With the coming to power of the EPRDF, the Sidama people were under the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Regional State (SNNPR), entertaining their own group identity. For several years, they demanded to have their own state and were allowed to have a referendum per their constitutional right. Since 2012 E.C., Sidama has become the 10th regional state of the country. Throughout all this time, how Sidama’s ICS be approached should be a concern as an identity marker of the group. Does the modern state guarantee the continuation of its traditional institutions and the communication systems inside them? In both cases, the ruling government allowed the members to keep their culture intact, including the traditional institution that is the principal for ICS, as a mechanism to keep the existence of the ethnic group, their unique assets, and practices at the center of concern for national and international tourists. For example, the government’s effort in collaboration with elders of the group enabled Sidamas New Year Fiche Chambalala to be recognized as one of the world’s intangible cultural heritages by UNESCO. Besides, the fulfillment of statehood for the Sidama helps members work on their various IKS, including their language as a medium of instruction, and enhances the group’s ability to make indigenous communication systems visible to outsiders.

Modern and indigenous institutions for sustainable local development: Conventional communication networks have a limited range and are confined largely to urban households in the developing world. Even the most external channels, such as radio and extension services, fail to reach the masses (Mundy and Laney, 1992). Similarly, FGD participants in the study argued that “early warning alert information regarding impending natural disasters is often disseminated using either mass media (i.e., television or radio) and/or formal institutional structures. Nonetheless, the emergency warnings frequently fail to properly disseminate the information to end-users. This is because the accessibility of the communication channels is mainly constrained by circumstances akin to recurrent power cuts”. Indigenous channels, by contrast, have a much wider audience, reaching those who are outside the reach of external channels. Therefore, development programs can use these channels both to collect and disseminate information. ‘Keeping an ear to the ground’ by consciously tapping indigenous channels can help project officials discover the local situation and get reactions to project initiatives (ibid.). Moreover, the government should adopt and implement legal instruments and strategies, both at the national and regional levels, to work in cooperation with indigenous organizations.

3.4. Strengths, weakness, and challenges of ICS

Strength: It is important to note that oral media are more highly effective than all other means of communication because they are interactive, interpersonal, combine verbal communications with non-verbal codifications, and are simple, natural, and less expensive. The high content of nonverbal in the oramedia actually makes them more effective because nonverbal communicates the mind more than verbal. When anybody wants to lie, it is non-verbal, which readily contradicts the verbal lies. Hence, the oral and indigenous communication systems have paramount importance in transmitting information between individuals and groups for the local community since the day’s technologies and modern means of communication were not apparent. Its importance highly exhibits the strength of the ICS, and the Sidama people highly rely on it. The most basic strength is that it enhances the continuity of cultural identities, values, and norms to be shared among members over many generations. This form of communication existed for so long, even during these days, that it became the first choice channel for sending and receiving information by the study community over the modern media. Furthermore, FGD discussants claim that “the customary means of disseminating information is very easy to understand because it is very familiar and friendly to the message recipients and transmitted in a way that the locals can catch the message”. Thus, society obeys it and acts accordingly in their routine lives.

In addition, indigenous communication is money-saving for the Sidama and easy to disseminate intended information of various types, such as weather forecasts, natural hazards, epidemics, and any form of catastrophe, for many folks at one time, hence reaching wider audiences. This form of communication is believed to be credible by the locals as it is conveyed by respected individuals such as medicine men, religious fathers, elderly people, and community leaders, thus helping to sustain development interventions made by outsiders and governments. Indigenous means of communication improve laws and order and play a great role in maintaining peace in a community and country at large when the modern means of communication get weak and fail to address societal issues. Moreover, they are fundamental to communicating and looking for solutions for problems that can’t be explained by modern means of communication technologies. Its strength is that indigenous institutions, symbols, and values signify and enrich the transmitted message, making it effective. Therefore, among the Sidama people, the locals

choose to keep this native form of communication, which is very intertwined with their daily lives. It is their means of getting updates and news about their locality.

Weakness: Indigenous communication has been successful for many centuries and has been practiced from one generation to the next. Despite the fact that the indigenous communication system has been playing an indispensable role for communities like the Sidama people until now, it has its own limitations. One of the limitations is that since it is one means of maintaining the cultural identity and practices of one's ethnic group, sometimes there are communication barriers in which messages get distorted when passed from person to person. This is because the transmission of the correct message depends on the trustworthiness of the transmitter, or the one responsible for disseminating the needed information. While communicating, timeliness is one of the basic components that emphasize the significance of the message conveyed. In line with this, indigenous communication takes even more than a month before the information reaches the whole community. On top of this, messages are transmitted to all sections of the community irrespective of age, sex, or status of the message recipient, which leads to the occurrence of misunderstandings and the validity of the message being contested.

Challenges: We now have the new communication culture of the electronic age that perhaps enslaves man on websites and the internet. More and more knowledge is being lost as a result of the disruption of traditional channels of oral communication. Neither children nor adults spend as much time in their communities anymore (for example, some people travel to the city on a daily basis to go to school, to look for work, or to sell farm produce; many young people are no longer interested in or do not have the opportunity for learning traditional methods). This was maintained by key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Hence, it is harder for the older generation to transmit their knowledge to young people. In the past, outsiders (for example, social, physical, and agricultural scientists, biologists, and colonial powers) ignored or maligned IK, depicting it as primitive, simple, static, "not knowledge," or folklore. This historic neglect (regardless of its cause—racism, ethnocentrism, or modernism—with its complete faith in the scientific method) has contributed to the decline of IK systems through a lack of use and application. This legacy is still in evidence. Many professionals are still skeptical. Also, in some countries, official propaganda depicts indigenous cultures and methodologies as backward or out of date and simultaneously promotes one national culture and one language at the expense of minority cultures. Often, formal schooling reinforces this negative attitude. Local people's perceptions (or misperceptions) of local species and of their own traditional systems may need to be rebuilt. Some local people and communities have lost confidence in their ability to help themselves and have become dependent on external solutions to their local problems.

4. CONCLUSION

The Sidama people perform different forms of communication, such as Iyyaha, Lalallawa, Baderi Mayii Noo, and Songo. These indigenous media are still playing a very significant role in the day-to-day social existence of rural society. It is also important to note that traditional media are more effective than all other means of communication because they are interactive, interpersonal, combine verbal communication with non-verbal codifications, and are simple, natural, and less expensive. It is, however, observed that the advent of the new communication culture of the electronic age has its downside for the perseverance of the indigenous knowledge

system in the study area. Repeated contact with modern technology, increased access to the modern education system, and the presence of other “better” channels of communication resulted in choosing between the two systems of communication. Besides, young people are losing their knowledge and skills about the customary systems of communication because they spend more time at educational institutions (which are Western-oriented) than with the teachers (elders) in the community. Thus, the preservation of this indigenous knowledge is critical because it ensures the continuation of society at large and its knowledge.

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7. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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