

Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the Architecture of Sustainable Peace: Customary Norms, Restorative Ethics, and Social Cohesion in Ethiopia

Belay Sitotaw Goshu¹, Muhammad Ridwan²

¹Department of Physics, Dire Dawa University, Ethiopia

²Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatetra Utara, Indonesia

Email: belaysitotaw@gmail.com, bukharyahmedal@gmail.com

Abstract

This article critically examines the role of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in constructing sustainable peace in Ethiopia, a country characterized by profound ethnic diversity and recurrent conflict. Challenging the historical hegemony of Western, state-centric peacebuilding models, the study argues that Ethiopia's diverse indigenous peace frameworks, including the Oromo Gadaa system, the Dawuro peace system, the Jarssaa Gurachaa inter-ethnic institution, the northern Shimgline system, the Gurage Joka Shengo, and customary mechanisms such as Aba Gars, Joka Shengo, Songo, Woma, Mada'a, and Xeer, constitute a sophisticated "architecture" of sustainable peace. Drawing on a qualitative synthesis of ethnographic studies, policy documents, and theoretical literature, the article identifies three foundational pillars of this architecture: customary norms that regulate social behaviour and establish shared values; restorative ethics that prioritize communal healing, truth-telling, and social reintegration over punitive justice; and institutional mechanisms that foster social cohesion across ethnic, generational, and gender boundaries. The analysis demonstrates that indigenous peace systems operate through institutional redundancy, multilevel functionality, and cultural capital, addressing both the symptoms and root causes of conflict. However, these systems face significant challenges, including systemic exclusion of women and youth, state legal encroachment, urbanization, and the destructive effects of protracted conflict. The article concludes by advocating for hybrid peacebuilding frameworks that integrate indigenous knowledge with formal governance structures while addressing issues of exclusion and adaptation. Ultimately, sustainable peace in Ethiopia and multi-ethnic societies more broadly, requires the decolonisation of peacebuilding epistemologies and the recognition of indigenous systems as legitimate, effective, and essential components of national peace architecture.

Keywords

Indigenous Knowledge Systems; peacebuilding; Ethiopia; restorative justice; customary norms



I. Introduction

Peace, as both a concept and practice, has been a central focus of academic inquiry, policy discourse, and activist engagement for decades. Yet, as Galtung's (1969) foundational framework distinguishes, peace is not merely the absence of direct violence, negative peace, but requires the presence of structural conditions that foster justice, equality, and societal well-being, positive peace. This multidimensional understanding of peace has increasingly challenged conventional peacebuilding paradigms that privilege Western, state-centric, and top-down approaches, which have often failed to deliver

sustainable outcomes in complex, conflict-affected societies (Mac Ginty, 2011; Richmond, 2011).

Ethiopia, a country of immense ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity, presents a particularly compelling case for examining the role of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in peacebuilding. The nation has experienced recurrent ethnic tensions, governance failures, and violent conflicts that have perpetuated instability (Debisa, 2022; Goshu, 2025). Modern peacebuilding interventions have frequently proven inadequate and unsustainable, unable to address the deep-rooted cultural, historical, and social dimensions of conflict. Simultaneously, however, Ethiopia possesses a rich tapestry of indigenous peace frameworks that have sustained social harmony for centuries, often operating beneath the radar of formal governance structures and international peacebuilding discourse.

Indigenous knowledge systems are increasingly attracting the attention of scholars worldwide, yet indigenous peoples' conceptions of peace have never received the attention they deserve in scholarship and policy (Keno, 2025; Goshu and Ridwan, 2024). This neglect has undermined the recognition of indigenous knowledge systems and hindered the development of inclusive, culturally grounded approaches to peacebuilding. In Ethiopia, where ethnic tensions and governance failures perpetuate instability, indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms (ICRMs) demonstrate the efficacy of restorative, community-based approaches, yet they remain understudied (Genbezo et al., 2025; Goshu and Ridwan, 2024a).

This article addresses this gap by examining the role of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in constructing sustainable peace in Ethiopia. We argue that Ethiopia's diverse indigenous peace frameworks constitute a sophisticated "architecture" of sustainable peace, built upon three foundational pillars: customary norms that regulate social behaviour, restorative ethics that prioritize communal healing over punitive justice, and institutional frameworks that foster social cohesion across ethnic boundaries. By centering indigenous epistemologies, this study challenges Western peacebuilding hegemony and advocates for hybrid frameworks that integrate ICRMs into formal governance.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the theoretical and empirical literature on Indigenous Knowledge Systems and peacebuilding. Section 3 presents the conceptual framework guiding this analysis. Section 4 examines the major indigenous peace systems in Ethiopia, analysing their normative foundations, institutional mechanisms, and contributions to sustainable peace. Section 5 identifies the challenges facing these systems and explores pathways for integration. Section 6 discusses the implications for peacebuilding theory and practice, and Section 7 concludes with recommendations for policy and future research.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 The Decolonisation of Peacebuilding

The call to decolonize peacebuilding emerges from a critical recognition that mainstream peacebuilding has been shaped by Western epistemological frameworks, institutional models, and power relations that marginalize alternative ways of knowing and practicing peace (Sabaratnam, 2011; Mac Ginty, 2011). Decolonial approaches challenge the universalism of liberal peacebuilding, arguing that peace interventions must be grounded in local histories, cultures, and social realities (Richmond, 2011; Autesserre, 2014). This critique has gained particular resonance in African contexts, where post-colonial states have often been subjected to externally imposed peacebuilding templates that fail to resonate with indigenous traditions of conflict resolution and social harmony (Murithi, 2009; Francis, 2010).

Indigenous Knowledge Systems offer an opportunity to de-Westernize peace and security strategies, providing culturally grounded alternatives to dominant peacebuilding paradigms. However, the integration of IKS into peacebuilding requires more than tokenistic inclusion; it demands a fundamental rethinking of peace ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies (Maclean, 2017; Goshu and Woldeamnueal, 2024). As Genbezo et al. (2025) argue, centering indigenous epistemologies challenges Western peacebuilding hegemony and demonstrates how indigenous knowledge fosters resilient, inclusive peace in pluralistic societies.

2.2 Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Peacebuilding in Africa

Across Africa, indigenous peace systems have sustained social cohesion and resolved conflicts for centuries, often through mechanisms that prioritize restorative justice, communal healing, and social reintegration (Murithi, 2009; Zartman, 2000). These systems are characterized by several common features: elder-mediated deliberation, consensus-based decision-making, symbolic rituals of reconciliation, and material restitution (Boege et al., 2008). The Gacaca courts of Rwanda, the Mato Oput of the Acholi in Uganda, and the Xeer of the Somali have all been examined as examples of indigenous justice systems that offer alternatives to formal legal frameworks (Clark, 2010; Allen, 2006; Leeson, 2007).

In the Horn of Africa, indigenous peace systems have demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. The Xeer Ciise, the customary law of the Somali-Issa communities in Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia, was added to UNESCO's cultural heritage list in recognition of its role in uniting communities, promoting justice, and emphasizing universal principles such as the protection of women and children's rights, environmental conservation, and peaceful conflict resolution. Similarly, the Oromo Gadaa system has been recognized as one of the most sophisticated indigenous governance systems in Africa, incorporating democratic principles with a commitment to social accountability and human rights.

2.3 Peace Systems in Ethiopia

Ethiopia's indigenous peace systems are exceptionally diverse, reflecting the country's ethnic and cultural pluralism. The Oromo Gadaa system, the Dawuro peace system, the Jarssaa Gurachaa inter-ethnic institution, and numerous other customary mechanisms have sustained social harmony across generations. These systems are not static relics of the past but living, adaptive frameworks that continue to shape conflict resolution and peacebuilding in contemporary Ethiopia (Debisa, 2022).

The Oromo conception of peace (Nagaa) within the Gadaa system offers a particularly instructive example of indigenous peace epistemology. Keno (2025) reveals that the Oromo conceive of peace as a holistic concept that encompasses personal integrity, social justice, harmony with the environment, and spiritual wholeness. Peace, according to the Oromo, is being in the right relationship with oneself, with others, with nature, and with Waaqa (God) rather than merely the absence of physical or structural violence. This conception of peace aligns with established theories of peace and conflict in many ways, though it also transcends these theories in certain respects.

Similarly, the Dawuro people of Southwest Ethiopia conceptualize peace through the dynamic relationship between nagaraa (sin) and gomiya (misfortune), framing their understanding of the delicate equilibrium between societal harmony and discord (Genbezo et al., 2025). Within Dawuro cosmology, nagaraa encompasses violations of communal norms, whether through intentional deception or actions that contravenes collective ethics. Such transgressions transcend mere social breaches; they represent a fundamental defiance of divine order.

III. Research Methods

This article is grounded in a conceptual framework that integrates three interrelated theoretical perspectives: Indigenous Wholistic Theory, Practice Theory, and Everyday Peacebuilding. These perspectives collectively enable a comprehensive analysis of how Indigenous Knowledge Systems contribute to sustainable peace in Ethiopia.

3.1 Indigenous Wholistic Theory

Indigenous Wholistic Theory, employed by Genbezo et al. (2025) in their study of Dawuro ICRMs, provides a framework for understanding indigenous peace systems as integrated, holistic approaches to social harmony. This theory recognizes that indigenous conceptions of peace encompass spiritual, social, economic, and environmental dimensions that are inseparable in practice. Unlike Western frameworks that tend to compartmentalize peace into discrete categories, Indigenous Wholistic Theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of all aspects of human and ecological well-being.

3.2 Practice Theory and Everyday Peacebuilding

Practice Theory and Everyday Peacebuilding, as applied by Genbezo et al. (2025), focus on the quotidian practices through which communities construct and maintain peace. This perspective shifts attention from elite-driven, formal peace processes to the everyday actions of ordinary people; elders, women, youth, and community members, who engage in dialogue, ritual, and mutual assistance to prevent conflict and repair social relationships. Everyday peacebuilding recognizes that peace is not a static outcome but an ongoing process of negotiation, adaptation, and resilience.

3.3 The Architecture of Sustainable Peace

Building on these theoretical foundations, we propose the concept of the "Architecture of Sustainable Peace" as an analytical framework for understanding how Indigenous Knowledge Systems contribute to durable peace. This architecture comprises three interrelated pillars:

- a. Customary Norms: The shared values, ethical principles, and moral codes that regulate social behaviour and establish expectations for peaceful coexistence.
- b. Restorative Ethics: The commitment to healing relationships, repairing harm, and reintegrating offenders into the community, rather than punitive justice.
- c. Social Cohesion: The institutional mechanisms and practices that foster trust, cooperation, and solidarity across social, ethnic, and generational boundaries.

These pillars are not discrete but mutually reinforcing, creating a resilient system capable of preventing conflict, managing disputes, and rebuilding communities after violence.

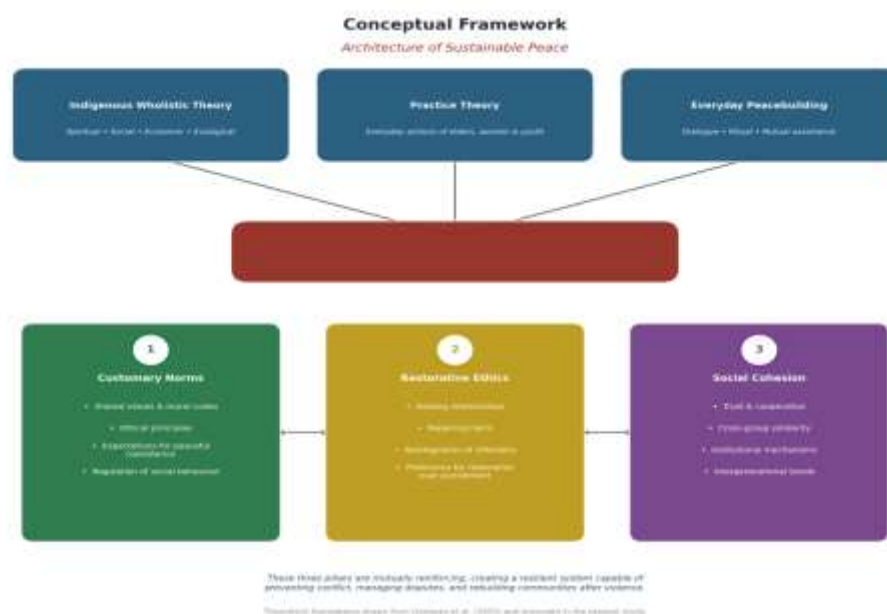


Figure 1. Conceptual framework illustrating the Architecture of Sustainable Peace, comprising three interconnected pillars; Customary Norms, Restorative Ethics, and Social Cohesion—grounded in Indigenous Wholistic Theory, Practice Theory, and Everyday Peacebuilding. Source: Adapted from Genbezo et al. (2025) and extended in the present study.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding this study, depicting the Architecture of Sustainable Peace as a tripartite structure grounded in three theoretical foundations. Indigenous Wholistic Theory, as applied by Genbezo et al. (2025), recognizes that indigenous conceptions of peace encompass spiritual, social, economic, and ecological dimensions that are inseparable in practice. Practice Theory and Everyday Peacebuilding shift attention from elite-driven formal processes to the quotidian actions of elders, women, and youth who engage in dialogue, ritual, and mutual assistance to construct and maintain peace (Genbezo et al., 2025).

Building upon these theoretical foundations, the framework identifies three mutually reinforcing pillars. Customary Norms comprise shared values, moral codes, and ethical principles that regulate social behaviour and establish expectations for peaceful coexistence. Restorative Ethics emphasize healing relationships, repairing harm, and reintegrating offenders into the community, prioritizing restoration over punishment.

Social Cohesion encompasses trust, cooperation, cross-group solidarity, and institutional mechanisms that foster intergenerational bonds.

These three pillars are mutually reinforcing, creating a resilient system capable of preventing conflict, managing disputes, and rebuilding communities after violence. The framework extends Genbezo et al.'s (2025) analysis of Dawuro ICRMs to Ethiopia's diverse indigenous peace systems.

3.4 Indigenous Peace Systems in Ethiopia: An Architectural Analysis

a. The Oromo Gadaa System

The Oromo Gadaa system is one of the most sophisticated and well-documented indigenous governance systems in Africa. It is an indigenous mechanism by which the Oromo shape their own ways of life and solve problems to maintain peace and security (Debisa, 2022). The Gadaa system incorporates proactive approaches that facilitate peace through values of *safuu* (morality), equality, respect and tolerance, law, and order.

Normative Foundations

The Gadaa system is grounded in a comprehensive worldview that emphasizes holistic peace. Keno (2025) identifies several dimensions of the Oromo conception of peace (*Nagaa*):

- 1) Personal integrity: Peace begins with the individual's relationship with oneself, requiring self-awareness, moral conduct, and spiritual alignment.
- 2) Social justice: Peace requires fair treatment of all community members, equitable distribution of resources, and respect for human dignity.
- 3) Harmony with nature: Peace encompasses the relationship between humans and the environment, recognizing that ecological disruption undermines social well-being.
- 4) Spiritual wholeness: Peace involves right relationship with *Waaqa* (God), acknowledging the divine source of harmony and order.

This holistic conception of peace resonates with Galtung's concept of positive peace while extending beyond it to incorporate spiritual and ecological dimensions often absent in Western frameworks.

Institutional Mechanisms

The Gadaa system employs both proactive and reactive mechanisms for peacebuilding. Debisa (2022) identifies several key institutions:

Proactive Mechanisms:

- 1) *Safuu* (morality): A moral code that guides individual behaviour and social relations
- 2) *Gadaa* law: A constitutional framework that establishes rules for governance, resource management, and conflict resolution
- 3) Age-based classes: Generational structures that transmit values and responsibilities across time

Reactive Mechanisms:

- 1) *Jaarsummaa* (Araaraa): Councils of elders that mediate disputes and facilitate reconciliation
- 2) *Siiqqee*: A women's institution that addresses gender-based conflicts and advocates for women's rights
- 3) *Gumaa*: A compensation system that provides material restitution for harms
- 4) *Qaalluu*: A religious institution that addresses spiritual dimensions of conflict

The integration of Gadaa peace-building approaches, values, and practices makes peace-building lasting and sustainable. The system's emphasis on peaceful approaches; dialogue, negotiation, and consensus-building rather than violence or coercion, ensures that peace is built through peaceful means.

The Jaarsummaa Institution

The *Jaarsummaa* institution, a council of elders within the Gadaa system, plays a central role in peacebuilding. As part of the Oromo Gadaa system, *Jaarsummaa* works to restore strained communal relations through truth and reconciliation. Elders are selected for their wisdom, experience, and moral authority and their decisions carry significant weight within Oromo communities. The *Jaarsummaa* institution exemplifies the restorative ethics that characterize indigenous peace systems, prioritizing healing relationships over punishment.

3.5 The Dawuro Peace System

The Dawuro people of Southwest Ethiopia have developed a sophisticated peace system characterized by institutional redundancy and multilevel functionality (Genbezo et al., 2025). This system operates through three operational tiers: individual self-regulation practices, familial conflict mediation through dialogue, and communal norms reinforcing cooperation.

Cosmological Foundations

The Dawuro conceptualize peace as one of the most required life necessities, governing harmony in both earthly and divine matters. The Dawuro firmly believe that God is the ultimate source and provider of peace. As one participant stated, "*Saru s'oosa imotadene*"—peace is a gift from God. This cosmological grounding means that peace is not merely a social or political arrangement but a sacred obligation.

The Dawuro understanding of peace is framed through the dynamic relationship between *nagaraa* (sin) and *gomiya* (misfortune). *Nagaraa* encompasses violations of communal norms, whether through intentional deception or actions that contravene collective ethics. Such transgressions represent a fundamental defiance of divine order, triggering divine retribution manifesting as misfortune. This cosmology creates a powerful incentive for maintaining social harmony, as conflict and transgression are understood to have spiritual as well as social consequences.

Institutional Mechanisms

The Dawuro peace system operates through several institutional mechanisms:

- 1) Elder-mediated councils (*Heezzaanaa*): Councils of elders that mediate disputes and facilitate reconciliation, prioritizing truth and restorative justice
- 2) Sacred institutions (*Geyyuwaa*, *Zabbaa*, *Dubbushaa*): Religious institutions that address spiritual dimensions of conflict and reinforce social norms
- 3) Oath-swearing rituals: Ceremonies that formalize commitments and restore trust
- 4) Communal labour systems: Economic cooperation that builds interdependence and social solidarity
- 5) Restorative ceremonies: Rituals that symbolically heal relationships and reintegrate offenders

These institutions create overlapping safeguards that collectively maintain harmony through institutional redundancy. Economic reciprocity systems and shared social spaces further institutionalize stability, creating structural incentives for peaceful coexistence. Crucially, this indigenous model proactively addresses conflict drivers through cultural capital rather than reactive intervention.

Challenges and Adaptations

Despite its sophistication, the Dawuro peace system faces significant challenges. Genbezo et al. (2025) identify systemic exclusion of marginalized groups, urbanization, and state legal encroachments as threats to continuity. The indigenous conflict resolution institutions are not inclusive to various sections of society, such as women, youth, and marginalized minorities, who constitute a significant section of society. These exclusions

undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of the system while also creating opportunities for adaptation and reform.

3.6 The Jarssaa Gurachaa Inter-Ethnic Institution

The Jarssaa Gurachaa is an inter-ethnic indigenous peacebuilding institution operating among the Libido-Mareko, Meskan-Gurage, Oromo, and Silte ethnic groups in South-Central Ethiopia (Yilma, 2025). This institution is particularly significant because it operates across ethnic boundaries, addressing conflicts that transcend individual communities and fostering social cohesion in a multi-ethnic context.

Normative Foundations

The Jarssaa Gurachaa system is rooted in indigenous values and beliefs, such as *Seera* and *Feroo*, and ritualistic practices like *Gudda*, *Qaala-Maala*, and *Hodaa*. These normative frameworks play a crucial role in sustaining peace by promoting social cohesion and addressing conflicts holistically, considering both immediate disputes and long-term relationships within and between communities.

The adaptability of these systems, especially in multi-ethnic settings, ensures the resolution of conflicts without the lingering animosities that modern legal frameworks often fail to address. By focusing on reconciliation, collective well-being, and the preservation of social bonds, the Jarssaa Gurachaa system offers a viable alternative to formal judicial systems.

Inter-Ethnic Peacebuilding

The Jarssaa Gurachaa institution demonstrates how indigenous values and beliefs in multi-ethnic settings contribute to peacebuilding. Its effectiveness across ethnic boundaries suggests that indigenous peace systems can serve as bridges between communities, creating shared frameworks for conflict resolution that transcend ethnic divisions. This inter-ethnic functionality is particularly relevant for Ethiopia, where ethnic tensions have been a persistent source of conflict.

3.7 Other Indigenous Peace Systems

Beyond the Gadaa and Dawuro systems, Ethiopia possesses numerous other indigenous peace frameworks that contribute to the national architecture of sustainable peace:

Aba Gars (Abo Gerebs)

In northern Ethiopia, the Aba Gars mediate over land, water, pasture, and livestock. These traditional bodies carry weight, sometimes more weight locally than a court decision. During the recent conflict in northern Ethiopia, the relationships and communication that made this traditional system work were torn apart. However, with support from local authorities, Aba Gars have been re-engaging to reconnect communities, restore trust, strengthen security, revive markets, tackle harmful practices such as early marriage and SGBV, and formalize rules.

The revitalization of the Aba Gars system through targeted training and structured dialogue has yielded measurable results. In Habru Woreda (Amhara), coordination among the Peace and Security Office, Aba Gars, and officials has been formalized. The outcome is measurable: recorded conflicts declined over time, and every recorded case in recent years was resolved after the partnership was strengthened. Accountability measures were also clarified, with standardized fines distinguishing between intentional (*Tiqur Dem* "Dark Blood") and unintentional killing (*Qeiy Dem*, "Red Blood"), reinforcing predictable consequences and discouraging retaliation.

Shimglina (Shimgelena)

In the Amhara and Tigray regions of northern Ethiopia, Shimgilina (also known as *SheMegelna*) represents one of the most institutionalized and culturally embedded

indigenous peacebuilding mechanisms. The term itself translates to "the state of being an elder" and refers to councils of respected community elders (*Shimageles*) who are selected based on their wisdom, moral integrity, and deep understanding of customary norms (Alamineh et al., 2021). These elders serve as mediators, conciliators, and arbitrators in disputes ranging from interpersonal conflicts to complex communal tensions.

The Shimglina system is fundamentally rooted in a "win-win" philosophy that stands in stark contrast to the "zero-sum" nature of formal legal proceedings (Tefaye, 2021). Rather than determining a winner and loser, Shimglina prioritizes the restoration of relationships, the healing of social wounds, and the reintegration of all parties into the community. This restorative orientation distinguishes Shimglina from punitive justice systems and explains its enduring legitimacy among rural populations.

Procedural Framework

The Shimglina process follows a structured yet flexible procedural framework that has been refined over generations of practice. Alemneh (2026) identifies several key stages in the Shimglina process:

- 1) **Diagnosis and Fact-Finding:** The elders conduct a thorough investigation of the dispute, listening to all parties and gathering information about the context and causes of the conflict. This stage emphasizes truth-telling and transparency.
- 2) **Initiation of Mediation:** Once the facts are established, the elders facilitate dialogue between the parties, creating a safe space for expression of grievances and concerns. The elders guide the conversation toward mutual understanding and common ground.
- 3) **Forgiveness and Reconciliation:** A central element of the Shimglina process is the emphasis on forgiveness (*mihret*). Parties are encouraged to acknowledge wrongdoing, express remorse, and extend forgiveness. This spiritual and emotional dimension is essential for genuine healing.
- 4) **Oath-Taking and Ritual Closure:** The process concludes with formal oath-taking (*kile*), where parties commit to the agreed resolution. This ritual element reinforces the seriousness of the commitment and invokes spiritual sanctions against future violations.

Empirical Evidence of Effectiveness

The effectiveness of Shimglina has been documented in numerous studies. Alamineh et al. (2021) found that the Shimglina system has played a fundamental role in building sustainable peace, restoring social bonds, and rebuilding trust between opposing parties. The system is particularly effective in addressing rural land disputes, family conflicts, and communal violence.

In their study of Shimglina in Bahir Dar Zuria Woreda of the Amhara Regional State, Alemneh (2026) documented how the institution functions as an accessible and culturally resonant alternative to formal courts. The study found that Shimglina decisions were historically accepted by the formal justice system, demonstrating the deep legitimacy and effectiveness of this indigenous mechanism.

Tefaye (2021) characterized Shimglina as one of the "golden cultures of producing peace" in Amhara society. The research demonstrated that Shimglina's emphasis on restorative justice, community involvement, and cultural grounding makes it particularly effective in addressing the root causes of conflict rather than merely managing symptoms.

The Gurage People and Their Peace Traditions

The Gurage people, an ethnic group inhabiting the highlands of south-central Ethiopia, possess a rich tradition of indigenous peacebuilding that has sustained social harmony across generations. The Gurage are known for their entrepreneurial spirit, strong

social networks, and elaborate systems of mutual assistance and conflict resolution. Central to Gurage peacebuilding is the Joka Shengo (or *Yejoka Shengo*), a traditional assembly of elders and community representatives that facilitates dispute resolution and social cohesion (Worku, 2020).

The Joka Shengo Institution

The Joka Shengo functions as a council of elders who are selected based on their wisdom, integrity, and knowledge of customary law. Unlike some other indigenous systems that may operate within a single ethnic group, the Joka Shengo has demonstrated remarkable flexibility in addressing inter-ethnic and inter-communal conflicts (Yilma, 2025). This adaptability has made it particularly valuable in the culturally diverse context of south-central Ethiopia.

Normative Foundations

The Joka Shengo is grounded in several core values that define Gurage approaches to peace:

Seera (Customary Law): The body of customary norms and practices that regulate social behaviour, resource allocation, and dispute resolution. *Seera* provides the normative framework for Joka Shengo proceedings and decisions.

Feroo (Solidarity): The principle of collective responsibility and mutual support that binds Gurage communities together. *Feroo* emphasizes that individual well-being is inseparable from communal well-being.

Medemer (Consensus): A commitment to reaching decisions through inclusive dialogue and consensus-building rather than majority rule or coercion.

Gudda (Ritual Purification): The symbolic rituals performed to cleanse social relationships and restore harmony after conflict, often involving shared meals, gift exchanges, and ceremonial oaths.

Procedural Mechanisms

The Joka Shengo operates through a structured yet flexible procedural framework:

- 1) **Community Notification:** When a conflict arises, community members inform the elders, who then take responsibility for addressing the dispute. This informal referral system ensures that conflicts are addressed before escalating.
- 2) **Fact-Finding and Dialogue:** Elders conduct a thorough investigation, listening to all parties and gathering relevant information. The process emphasizes open communication and truth-telling.
- 3) **Mediation and Negotiation:** The elders facilitate dialogue between the parties, exploring options for resolution and guiding negotiations toward mutually acceptable outcomes.
- 4) **Restitution and Compensation:** Where harm has occurred, the Joka Shengo determines appropriate restitution or compensation. This may include monetary payment, in-kind restitution, or symbolic gestures of reconciliation.
- 5) **Ritual Closure:** The process concludes with ritual ceremonies that formalize the resolution and restore social relationships. These rituals may involve shared meals, oath-taking, or community celebrations.
- 6) **Monitoring and Follow-up:** Elders monitor compliance with agreements and address any emerging issues, ensuring the sustainability of the resolution.

The Gurage Experience of Indigenous Peacebuilding

Worku (2020) documented the profound significance of indigenous peace institutions in Gurage society. The research, conducted through interviews with elders and community members in Gurage Zone, found that:

- 1) Community Legitimacy: The Joka Shengo enjoys deep community legitimacy, with decisions widely accepted and implemented voluntarily. This legitimacy stems from the system's cultural grounding and the trust placed in elders.
- 2) Accessibility: The Joka Shengo is accessible to all community members, regardless of wealth, status, or formal education. This accessibility makes it particularly valuable for marginalized populations.
- 3) Cost-Effectiveness: Unlike formal courts, which may be expensive and time-consuming, the Joka Shengo provides low-cost, rapid resolution of disputes.
- 4) Restorative Outcomes: The system's emphasis on restoration and reconciliation produces outcomes that are more likely to be sustainable than punitive judgments.
- 5) Social Cohesion: Beyond resolving individual disputes, the Joka Shengo reinforces social cohesion and collective identity, contributing to long-term peace.

Challenges Facing Gurage Indigenous Peace Systems

Like other indigenous systems in Ethiopia, Gurage peace institutions face significant challenges:

Formal State Encroachment: The expansion of the formal legal system has undermined the authority and autonomy of the Joka Shengo, creating jurisdictional conflicts and confusion.

Urbanization: Migration to urban areas disrupts the social networks and community structures that sustain indigenous peace systems.

Youth Engagement: Younger generations may have less knowledge of and commitment to indigenous peace traditions, threatening the intergenerational transmission of these practices.

Gender Exclusion: Women are often excluded from elder councils and decision-making processes, limiting the inclusivity and effectiveness of the system.

The Gurage Contribution to Inter-Ethnic Peacebuilding

The Gurage experience offers valuable insights for peacebuilding in multi-ethnic contexts. The adaptability of the Joka Shengo and Yejoka Shengo to inter-ethnic conflicts demonstrates the potential for indigenous systems to serve as bridges between communities. This inter-ethnic functionality is particularly relevant for Ethiopia, where ethnic tensions have been a persistent source of conflict.

Yilma (2025) documented how indigenous values and beliefs in multi-ethnic settings contribute to peacebuilding, emphasizing the adaptability of these systems in ensuring the resolution of conflicts without the lingering animosities that modern legal frameworks often fail to address. By focusing on reconciliation, collective well-being, and the preservation of social bonds, the Gurage peace systems offer a viable alternative to formal judicial systems.

IV. Result and Discussion

4.1 The Architecture of Sustainable Peace: An Integrated Analysis

a. Pillar One: Customary Norms

Customary norms form the foundation of indigenous peace systems, providing the shared values, ethical principles, and moral codes that regulate social behaviour. These norms are not abstract ideals but are embedded in daily practices, rituals, and social institutions.

Table 1: Customary Norms in Ethiopian Indigenous Peace Systems

System	Key Norms	Function
Oromo Gadaa	<i>Safuu</i> (morality), equality, respect, tolerance	Guides individual behaviour and social relations
Dawuro	<i>Nagaraa</i> (sin), <i>gomiyya</i> (misfortune)	Frames understanding of harmony and discord
Jarssaa Gurachaa	<i>Seera</i> , <i>Feroo</i>	Regulates inter-ethnic relations
Aba Gars	Community responsibility, dialogue	Governs resource sharing and dispute resolution
Shimglina	Mutual compromise, reconciliation	Establishes peace through negotiation

The indigenous peace systems of Ethiopia, while culturally diverse, share common normative foundations that emphasize restorative justice, social cohesion, and community responsibility (Table 1). The Oromo Gadaa system's *Safuu* (morality) and the Dawuro's understanding of *Nagaraa* (sin) frame peace as holistic harmony encompassing spiritual, social, and ecological dimensions (Keno, 2025; Genbezo et al., 2025). The Jarssaa Gurachaa's *Seera* and *Feroo* principles regulate inter-ethnic relations, demonstrating the adaptability of indigenous systems to multi-ethnic contexts (Yilma, 2025). The Aba Gars and Shimglina systems prioritize dialogue, mutual compromise, and reconciliation over punitive justice, reflecting the restorative orientation characteristic of Ethiopian indigenous peacebuilding (Alamineh et al., 2021; Alemneh, 2026). Collectively, these systems constitute a sophisticated architecture of sustainable peace rooted in customary norms, restorative ethics, and institutionalized social cohesion.

The normative foundations of indigenous peace systems are characterized by several common features:

Holism: Indigenous norms address the whole person; body, mind, spirit, and relationships, rather than isolating specific behaviours for regulation. The Oromo conception of *Nagaa* encompasses personal integrity, social justice, environmental harmony, and spiritual wholeness. Similarly, the Dawuro understanding of peace encompasses earthly and divine matters.

Relationality: Indigenous norms emphasize the interconnectedness of individuals, communities, and the natural world. The Oromo philosophy of *Namummaa* (humanness) explains the ontological conception of peace the Oromo people hold, emphasizing that personhood is defined through relationships.

Sacredness: Indigenous norms are often grounded in cosmological or religious frameworks, giving them moral authority beyond mere social convention. The Dawuro believe that God is the ultimate source of peace, while the Oromo conception of peace includes harmony with *Waaqa* (God).

b. Pillar Two: Restorative Ethics

Restorative ethics distinguish indigenous peace systems from formal legal frameworks, which tend to emphasize punishment and retribution. Indigenous systems prioritize healing relationships, repairing harm, and reintegrating offenders into the community.

Table 2: Restorative Mechanisms in Ethiopian Indigenous Peace Systems

Mechanism	System	Function
<i>Jaarsummaa</i> (Araaraa)	Oromo Gadaa	Elder mediation and reconciliation
<i>Gumaa</i>	Oromo Gadaa	Material compensation for harms
<i>Heezzaanaa</i>	Dawuro	Elder-mediated councils prioritizing truth
Oath-swearing rituals	Dawuro	Formalizing commitments and restoring trust
Restorative ceremonies	Dawuro	Symbolic healing and reintegration
<i>Shimglina</i>	Amhara	Elder mediation through mutual compromise

Table 2 presents the key restorative mechanisms employed across Ethiopian indigenous peace systems, demonstrating their shared commitment to healing relationships and repairing harm. The Oromo Gadaa system utilizes *Jaarsummaa* (Araaraa) for elder mediation and reconciliation, alongside *Gumaa* for material compensation, reflecting a comprehensive restorative approach (Keno, 2025). The Dawuro people employ *Heezzaanaa* (elder-mediated councils prioritizing truth), oath-swearing rituals for formalizing commitments, and restorative ceremonies for symbolic healing and reintegration (Genbezo et al., 2025). In northern Ethiopia, the *Shimglina* system facilitates elder mediation through mutual compromise, emphasizing "win-win" outcomes over adversarial resolution (Tesfaye, 2021; Alemneh, 2026). These mechanisms collectively prioritize communal healing, truth-telling, and social reintegration over punitive justice, constituting the restorative ethics pillar of Ethiopia's indigenous peace architecture.

The restorative orientation of indigenous peace systems is evident in several key features:

Truth-Telling: Indigenous peace processes typically require parties to tell the truth about what happened, acknowledging harm and taking responsibility. The Dawuro ICRMs prioritize truth as a foundation for restorative justice.

Material Restitution: *Gumaa* in the Oromo system and compensation practices in the Aba Gars system provide material restitution for harms, addressing the practical consequences of conflict while also symbolically repairing relationships.

Community Involvement: Restorative processes involve the broader community, not just the immediate parties to the conflict. This ensures that peace is a collective responsibility and that the community supports the outcome.

Reintegration: Unlike punitive systems that may exclude or stigmatize offenders, indigenous systems aim to reintegrate offenders into the community, recognizing that social inclusion is essential for sustainable peace.

The emphasis on restorative justice over purely punitive measures is a defining feature of Ethiopia's indigenous peace systems. These systems focus heavily on compensating the wronged and actively repairing fractured societal bonds.

c. Pillar Three: Social Cohesion

Social cohesion; the trust, cooperation, and solidarity that bind communities together is both a precondition for and outcome of effective indigenous peacebuilding. Indigenous

systems foster social cohesion through institutional mechanisms that create interdependence, shared identity, and collective responsibility.

Table 3: Mechanisms for Social Cohesion in Ethiopian Indigenous Peace Systems

Mechanism	System	Function
Age-based classes	Oromo Gadaa	Transmits values across generations
Communal labour systems	Dawuro	Builds economic interdependence
Shared social spaces	Dawuro	Creates structural incentives for coexistence
Inter-ethnic councils	Jarssaa Gurachaa	Bridges ethnic boundaries
Market revival	Aba Gars	Restores economic cooperation after conflict

Table 3 illustrates the diverse mechanisms through which Ethiopian indigenous peace systems foster social cohesion, the third pillar of sustainable peace architecture. The Oromo Gadaa system utilizes age-based classes to transmit peace values and governance principles across generations, ensuring institutional continuity and cultural reproduction (Debisa, 2022; Keno, 2025). The Dawuro people employ communal labour systems and shared social spaces to build economic interdependence and create structural incentives for peaceful coexistence, institutionalizing stability through everyday practices (Genbezo et al., 2025). The Jarssaa Gurachaa inter-ethnic council's bridge ethnic boundaries by creating shared frameworks for conflict resolution that transcend individual communities (Yilma, 2025). The Aba Gars system's market revival mechanisms restore economic cooperation after conflict, rebuilding trust and interdependence in post-conflict contexts. Collectively, these mechanisms demonstrate how indigenous systems proactively construct social cohesion through institutionalized interdependence, cultural transmission, and inter-ethnic dialogue, creating resilient foundations for sustainable peace.

Indigenous peace systems foster social cohesion through several interconnected mechanisms:

Interdependence: Economic reciprocity systems and communal labour create material interdependence that makes conflict costly and cooperation beneficial.

Shared Identity: Rituals, ceremonies, and shared social spaces create a sense of collective identity that transcends individual or group interests.

Inter-Generational Transmission: Age-based classes and oral traditions transmit peace values across generations, ensuring continuity and adaptation.

Cross-Ethnic Bridges: Inter-ethnic institutions like the Jarssaa Gurachaa create shared frameworks for conflict resolution that transcend ethnic boundaries.

The restoration of social cohesion after conflict is a central function of indigenous peace systems. In northern Ethiopia, the revitalization of the Aba Gars system has led to the return of stolen property, the resumption of market days, and the revival of communication between previously divided communities. As one elder mediator observed: *"We go to Yalo market, and the Afar community comes to Chercher market. Business has resumed, and we now truly understand the value of peace"*.

4.2 Challenges and Pathways Forward

a. Challenges Facing Indigenous Peace Systems

Despite their sophistication and effectiveness, indigenous peace systems in Ethiopia face significant challenges that threaten their continuity and efficacy.

b. Systemic Exclusion

Indigenous conflict resolution institutions are often not inclusive to various sections of society, such as women, youth, and marginalized minorities. This exclusion undermines the legitimacy of these systems and perpetuates inequalities that can themselves become sources of conflict. Women's voices are often marginalized in elder councils, despite the crucial role women play in peacebuilding at the community level. Similarly, youth who are often at the forefront of conflict are frequently excluded from peace processes, limiting the effectiveness and sustainability of outcomes.

c. State Legal Encroachment

The expansion of the formal state legal system threatens the authority and autonomy of indigenous peace systems. State legal frameworks often fail to recognize customary institutions, creating jurisdictional conflicts and undermining the legitimacy of indigenous processes. In some cases, state actors have actively suppressed indigenous systems, viewing them as obstacles to modernization or centralization.

However, there are also examples of productive synergy. In Habru Woreda, coordination among the Peace and Security Office, Aba Gars, and officials has been formalized, aligning community mediation with legal standards. This suggests that state recognition and support, rather than suppression, can strengthen indigenous systems while ensuring accountability.

d. Urbanization and Social Change

Urbanization, migration, and social change disrupt the social networks and community structures that sustain indigenous peace systems. As people move to cities, traditional authority structures may weaken, and the close-knit community relationships that enable effective mediation may erode. The adoption of new technologies, media, and lifestyles can also undermine traditional values and norms.

e. Conflict and Displacement

Protracted conflict and displacement can destroy the social fabric that indigenous peace systems depend on. In northern Ethiopia, the recent conflict tore apart the relationships and communication that made the Aba Gars system work. Rebuilding these systems after conflict requires not only institutional revitalization but also the restoration of trust and social relationships.

f. Pathways Forward: Hybrid Peacebuilding

Addressing these challenges requires a hybrid approach that integrates indigenous knowledge systems with formal governance structures while addressing issues of exclusion and adaptation.

Recognition and Legitimization

The first step toward integrating indigenous peace systems is formal recognition by the state and international actors. This recognition should extend beyond symbolic acknowledgment to include legal status, resource allocation, and institutional support. UNESCO's recognition of the Xeer Ciise offers a model for how international recognition can validate and strengthen indigenous systems.

Addressing Exclusion

Indigenous peace systems must be reformed to address systemic exclusion of women, youth, and marginalized groups. This requires both internal reform, changing the composition and procedures of indigenous institutions, and external support, providing

resources and capacity building for inclusive participation. The inclusion of diverse voices strengthens the legitimacy and effectiveness of indigenous peace systems while also addressing underlying inequalities.

Synergy with Formal Systems

Creating synergy between indigenous and formal systems requires careful attention to jurisdictional issues, procedural compatibility, and accountability mechanisms. The Aba Gars experience in Habru Woreda, where community mediation was aligned with legal standards and outcomes were documented and submitted to authorities, offers a model for productive synergy. The result is a system where tradition doesn't bypass the law; it helps communities' access resolution in places where court processes may be slow or distant.

Adaptation and Innovation

Indigenous peace systems must adapt to contemporary challenges while maintaining their core values and principles. This adaptation can include incorporating new technologies, addressing emerging issues such as environmental conflict and gender-based violence, and developing new institutional forms that respond to changing social conditions. The adaptability of these systems, especially in multi-ethnic settings, ensures the resolution of conflicts without the lingering animosities that modern legal frameworks often fail to address.

4.2 Natural Resource Governance, Financial Investment, and Environmental Peacebuilding: The GERD and Indigenous Greening Initiatives

a. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam: A Catalyst for Regional Peace

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) represents Ethiopia's most ambitious natural resource investment, embodying the intersection of financial commitment, energy sovereignty, and peacebuilding. Inaugurated in September 2025, the dam stands as a powerful symbol of national unity, cooperation, and triumph, marking the beginning of a new phase of transformative projects aimed at achieving food and economic sovereignty (Prof. Brooke Hailu Beshah, as cited in ENA, 2025). With a capacity of 5,500 megawatts, the dam will provide electricity to over 16 million Ethiopians while improving energy supply to neighbouring countries (ECOWAS, 2025). Ethiopia has already begun supplying clean energy to Sudan, Kenya, and Djibouti, with talks underway to export electricity to Tanzania and other nations.

The GERD's peacebuilding potential extends beyond national borders. As Ezugwu and Adebajo (2026) demonstrate through game-theoretic analysis, the dam's completion has shifted Nile hydro-politics from confrontation toward pragmatic restraint and potential cooperation. The transition from conflict to cooperation is contingent upon trust-building, inclusive dialogue, and adaptive governance (Almesafri et al., 2024). Ethiopia has consistently emphasized that its hydropower resources are not intended to create divisions but rather to bring regional nations together, reinforcing this message through years of diplomacy, technical exchanges, and open-door policies that have allowed delegations from regional and international organizations to visit the construction site. As one leading water expert observed, "GERD is a clean technology project, providing sustainable energy for Ethiopia and the region. It's a tool for economic growth, peace, and stability" (Yakob, as cited in AllAfrica, 2025).

The financial dimensions of the GERD are equally significant for peacebuilding. Funded predominantly through domestic resources; including public bonds, diaspora remittances, and government revenue; the project has mobilized unprecedented national financial participation. This grassroots financial investment has fostered a sense of collective ownership and national pride that transcends ethnic and regional divisions. Scholars have emphasized that Ethiopia's national mega-projects are the cornerstone of its

foreign policy and economic sovereignty, positioning the country for sustainable development and stronger regional economic integration and cooperation (Prof. Brooke Hailu Beshah, as cited in ENA, 2025).

b. Indigenous Greening Initiatives: Planting Peace through Native Species

Alongside large-scale infrastructure investments, Ethiopia's indigenous greening initiatives demonstrate how environmental restoration and the planting of native species contribute to peacebuilding. The Green Legacy Initiative, launched by Prime Minister has mobilized millions of Ethiopians from all walks of life, including government officials, community leaders, students, and ordinary citizens. Large-scale tree planting events bring together diverse groups, encouraging interaction and understandings among different ethnic communities, which can help reduce tensions and promote peace. The shared objective of improving the environment provides a common purpose that transcends political, ethnic, and religious differences. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed emphasized that the main purpose of the Green Legacy Initiative, held under the motto "Let's Plant Hope," goes beyond planting trees; it aims to solidify dialogue, forgiveness, and standing together (PM Abiy Ahmed, as cited in EBC, 2026; Goshu, 2026).

The Green Legacy Initiative builds upon centuries of indigenous environmental conservation practices deeply rooted in Ethiopia's cultural and social fabric. Key traditional mechanisms include:

Sacred Church Forests: The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has long protected forests around churches and monasteries, preserving patches of native forest that serve as biodiversity refugia and spiritual sanctuaries. The Sacred Church Forest Initiative plants fruit and indigenous trees, establishes nurseries, and promotes sustainable land use. These efforts enhance livelihoods while reinforcing the cultural values that sustain peace.

Indigenous Agroforestry: Ethiopian farmers have long practiced agroforestry, integrating trees and shrubs into agricultural systems. Indigenous species such as *Cordia africana* (*Wadesa*) are valued for their timber and ecological benefits, while fast-growing exotic species are frequently favoured by farmers even where government programmes formally promote indigenous species for ecological restoration. This tension highlights the need for culturally sensitive approaches that respect local knowledge and preferences.

Sacred Trees and Reconciliation Rituals: Among the Guji Oromo, the *Muka Dhiigaa* (blood tree) is used in the *Gondooroo* ceremony for settling homicide cases, serving as a symbol of reconciliation and restoring peace and harmony between the families of the murderer and the murdered. The *Odaa* tree (*Ficus sycomorus*) serves as a gathering place for Gadaa assemblies, arbitration, and decision-making, and is considered a symbol of peace and development.

Customary Environmental Stewardship: Traditional societies manage natural resources communally through rules and regulations enforced by local elders. The Gadaa system of the Oromo includes environmental stewardship as a key component, promoting sustainable land and water management. Indigenous irrigation techniques, terracing systems, and sustainable grazing practices have been developed to cope with Ethiopia's varied climate.

c. The Abogerebs: Fathers of the Trees as Peacebuilders

In Ethiopia's Tigray-Afar border region, customary leaders known as Abogerebs ("fathers of the trees") exemplify the integration of environmental management and peacebuilding. Following years of conflict and with rising impacts of climate change, pressure on natural resources has grown, creating tensions between communities. Building on traditional knowledge, the Abogerebs promote cohesion and environmental collaboration within communities. With support from the Pastoral and

Environmental Network in the Horn of Africa (PENHA), the Abogerebs have strengthened their role in natural resource management and conflict resolution by involving women and youth in decision-making. As the Abogerebs stated in their joint statement: "We recognize that effective resource management is important in avoiding conflict over natural resources".

d. Synthesis: Natural Resources, Investment, and Sustainable Peace

The Ethiopian experience demonstrates that natural resource governance and financial investment can serve as powerful pathways to sustainable peace when grounded in indigenous knowledge and inclusive participation. The GERD exemplifies how strategic investment in natural resources when accompanied by transparent governance, regional cooperation, and collective financial participation can foster national unity and regional stability. Simultaneously, indigenous greening initiatives demonstrate that environmental restoration, particularly through the planting of native species, creates shared purpose, builds social networks, and reinforces the cultural values that sustain peace.

However, these initiatives also face challenges. The GERD's hydropolitics remain contested, requiring continued trust-building and adaptive governance. The Green Legacy Initiative has faced criticism regarding the prioritization of exotic over indigenous species. Religious leaders have called for greater attention to planting indigenous plants, noting their significant value for medicine and their cultural significance.

Nevertheless, the Ethiopian case offers a compelling model for how natural resource governance, financial investment, and indigenous knowledge can converge to build sustainable peace—a model that honours both national development aspirations and the cultural heritage that has sustained social harmony for generations.

4.3 Discussion

a. Implications for Peacebuilding Theory

The Ethiopian case offers several important implications for peacebuilding theory.

Challenging Western Hegemony: The sophistication and effectiveness of indigenous peace systems challenge the assumption that Western, state-centric models are superior or universally applicable. By centering indigenous epistemologies, this study challenges Western peacebuilding hegemony and demonstrates how indigenous knowledge fosters resilient, inclusive peace in pluralistic societies.

Rethinking Peace Ontologies: Indigenous conceptions of peace, such as the Oromo *Nagaa* and the Dawuro understanding of harmony, expand our understanding of what peace is and how it can be achieved. These holistic, relational, and spiritually grounded conceptions offer alternatives to the negative/positive peace dichotomy that has dominated peace studies.

Everyday Peacebuilding: The Ethiopian case demonstrates the importance of everyday peacebuilding, the quotidian practices through which communities construct and maintain peace. This perspective shifts attention from elite-driven, formal peace processes to the everyday actions of ordinary people.

Implications for Peacebuilding Practice

The Ethiopian case also offers practical implications for peacebuilding practitioners.

Hybrid Approaches

Sustainable peacebuilding requires hybrid approaches that integrate indigenous knowledge with formal governance structures. This integration must be carefully managed to respect the autonomy and integrity of indigenous systems while ensuring accountability and compatibility with human rights standards.

Community Ownership

Indigenous peace systems derive their effectiveness from deep community legitimacy and ownership. Peacebuilding interventions should support and strengthen these systems rather than replacing them with externally imposed models.

Addressing Exclusion

Indigenous peace systems must be reformed to address systemic exclusion. This requires both internal reform and external support, with attention to the particular barriers facing women, youth, and marginalized groups.

Adaptation and Resilience

Indigenous peace systems are not static but adaptive. Supporting adaptation and innovation while maintaining core values and principles can enhance the resilience and effectiveness of these systems in the face of contemporary challenges.

The National Dialogue as a Contemporary Manifestation

The ongoing National Dialogue in Ethiopia represents a contemporary, nationwide manifestation of the enduring tradition of indigenous peacebuilding. By relying on this deep, indigenous heritage of listening, the country aims to heal its political fractures, solidify its democracy, and ultimately transform its current challenges into historic achievements.

The National Dialogue draws on the principles that have long characterized indigenous peace systems: dialogue, forgiveness, restitution, and consensus-building. The Warka, or sycamore tree, serves as a living symbol of tolerance, magnanimity, and patience, reminding participants of the cultural values that underpin the process.

However, the National Dialogue also faces challenges that mirror those facing indigenous peace systems more broadly: ensuring inclusion of diverse voices, managing expectations, and translating dialogue into tangible outcomes. The success of the National Dialogue will depend in part on its ability to draw on the strengths of indigenous peace traditions while addressing their limitations.

V. Conclusion

This article has examined the role of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in constructing sustainable peace in Ethiopia. We have argued that Ethiopia's diverse indigenous peace frameworks constitute a sophisticated "architecture" of sustainable peace, built upon three foundational pillars: customary norms that regulate social behaviour, restorative ethics that prioritize communal healing over punitive justice, and institutional frameworks that foster social cohesion across ethnic boundaries.

The Oromo Gadaa system, the Dawuro peace system, the Jarssaa Gurachaa inter-ethnic institution, and customary mechanisms such as Shimglina, Aba Gars, Joka Shengo, Songo, Woma, Mada'a, and Xeer collectively demonstrate the richness and effectiveness of indigenous peacebuilding in Ethiopia. These systems operate through institutional redundancy, multilevel functionality, and cultural capital, addressing both the symptoms and root causes of conflict.

However, these systems face significant challenges, including systemic exclusion of women and youth, state legal encroachment, urbanization, and the destructive effects of conflict and displacement. Addressing these challenges requires a hybrid approach that integrates indigenous knowledge with formal governance structures while addressing issues of exclusion and adaptation.

The Ethiopian case offers important implications for peacebuilding theory and practice. It challenges Western peacebuilding hegemony, expands our understanding of peace ontologies, and demonstrates the importance of everyday peacebuilding. It also

offers practical guidance for hybrid approaches, community ownership, addressing exclusion, and supporting adaptation and resilience.

Ultimately, sustainable peace in Ethiopia and multi-ethnic societies more broadly, requires the decolonisation of peacebuilding epistemologies and the recognition of indigenous systems as legitimate, effective, and essential components of national peace architecture. By drawing on the deep, indigenous heritage of listening, dialogue, and reconciliation, Ethiopia can heal its political fractures, strengthen its social fabric, and build a peace that is not only sustainable but also deeply rooted in its own diverse cultural soil.

References

- Alamineh, G. A., Anteneh, K. S., Ali, M. S., & Dinberu, A. D. (2021). The nexus between shimgline as ADR and the formal criminal justice system: The case of the Amhara regional state, Ethiopia. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 21(1), 1-22.
- Alemneh, A. S. (2026). Customary rural land dispute resolution in Ethiopia: The case of shimgline in Bahir Dar Zuria Woreda of Amhara regional state. *Ethiopian Journal of Governance and Development*. <https://doi.org/10.20372/g4wmap84>
- AllAfrica. (2025, September 10). Ethiopia: GERD will transform regional relations through energy cooperation - Leading water expert. AllAfrica.
- Allen, T. (2006). *Trial justice: The International Criminal Court and the Lord's Resistance Army*. Zed Books.
- Almesafri, A., Abdulsattar, S., Alblooshi, A., Al-Juboori, R. A., Jephson, N., & Hilal, N. (2024). Waters of contention: The GERD and its impact on Nile Basin cooperation and conflict. *Water*, 16(15), 2174. <https://doi.org/10.3390/w16152174>
- Autesserre, S. (2014). *Peaceland: Conflict resolution and the everyday politics of international intervention*. Cambridge University Press.
- Boege, V., Brown, M. A., Clements, K. P., & Nolan, A. (2008). *On hybrid political orders and emerging states: State formation in the context of 'fragility'*. Berghof Research Center.
- Clark, P. (2010). *The Gacaca courts, post-genocide justice and reconciliation in Rwanda: Justice without lawyers*. Cambridge University Press.
- Debisa, N. G. (2022). Building peace by peaceful approach: The role of Oromo Gadaa system in peace-building. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 8(1), 2023254.
- ECOWAS. (2025, November 1). ECOWAS President pledges continued cooperation with Ethiopia to advance peace and stability in the Horn of Africa. ECOWAS.
- ENA. (2025, November 5). Ethiopia's mega-projects cornerstones for economic sovereignty, regional integration. ENA English.
- Ezugwu, O. A., & Adebajo, A. A. (2026). Hydro-politics and strategic interaction in the Nile Basin: An interpretive game-theoretic analysis of the GERD after inauguration. *Journal of International Dispute Settlement*, 17(2), idag019. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jnlids/idag019>
- Francis, D. J. (2010). *From pacification to peacebuilding: A call to clairvoyance*. Routledge.
- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167-191.
- Genbezo, D. G., Gatisob, M. M., & Adafrea, M. T. (2025). The cultural roots of peace: Peace formation, everyday peace practices, and institutional frameworks for

- sustainable peace in Dawuro society, Southwest Ethiopia. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 11(1), 2605722.
- Goshu, B.S. (2025), Mitigating polarization in Ethiopia's political system: An adversarial collaboration framework, *Academia Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, 2, 314-329
- Goshu, B.S. and M. Ridwan, (2024), Bridging religion, science, and spirituality: A holistic approach to peace and understanding, *Britain International of Humanities and Social Sciences (BIOHS) Journal*, 6 (3), 196-216
- Goshu, B.S. and M. Ridwan, (2024a), Harmonizing Heritage and Innovation: Leveraging Ethiopia's Cultural and Religious Values with Science and Technology for Peace and Sustainable Development, *Lakhomi Journal Scientific Journal of Culture*, 5 (4), 265-281
- Goshu, B.S. and M.M. Woldeamanueal, (2024), Stars, Seasons, and Spirituality: The Astronomical Roots of Ethiopian New Year Celebrations, *Britain International of Exact Sciences (BIOEx) Journal*, 6 (3), 169-202
- Goshu, B.S., (2026), From Billions of Seedlings to Sustainable Livelihoods: A Critical Review of Ethiopia's Green Economy Strategy, Afforestation Outcomes, and Community Co-Benefits, *Rowter Journal*, 5 (1), 68-89
- Keno, G. I. (2025). The Oromo conception of peace (Nagaa) within the Gadaa system: Its indigeneity and resonance with peace and conflict theories. *Peacebuilding*.
- Leeson, P. T. (2007). An-arrgh-chy: The law and economics of pirate organization. *Journal of Political Economy*, 115(6), 1049-1094.
- Mac Ginty, R. (2011). *International peacebuilding and local resistance: Hybrid forms of peace*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Maclean, K. (2017). Indigenous knowledge and peacebuilding. In O. P. Richmond, S. Pogodda, & J. Ramovic (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of disciplinary and regional approaches to peace* (pp. 435-449). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Murithi, T. (2009). *The ethics of peacebuilding*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Richmond, O. P. (2011). *A post-liberal peace*. Routledge.
- Sabaratnam, M. (2011). *Decolonising intervention: International statebuilding in Mozambique*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Tesfaye, K. (2021). Indigenous knowledge of conflict resolution for transformative peace building: Amare of Jama Woreda, Amhara – Ethiopia. *International Journal of Peace and Development Studies*, 12(1), 30-37. <https://doi.org/10.5897/IJPDS2018.0337>
- Tropenbos International. (2025, April 21). Supporting inclusive customary institutions for environmental peacebuilding in Tigray-Afar region, Ethiopia. Tropenbos International.
- Worku, M. (2020). Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms among the Gurage people of Ethiopia: The case of Yejoka Shengo. [Master's thesis, Addis Ababa University].
- Yilma, D. M. (2025). Indigenous values, beliefs, and systems for peacebuilding: The case of the Jarssaa Gurachaa inter-ethnic indigenous institution in South-Central Ethiopia. *Ethiopian Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities*, 21(2).
- Zartman, I. W. (2000). Traditional cures for modern conflicts: African conflict "medicine." Lynne Rienner.