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The Potential Social Benefits of Gifaataa Celebration of Wolaita

Meshesha Make Jobo¹, Abraham Kebede Alambo², Simeon Emanie Tora³

ABSTRACT

This study was intended to explore the potential social benefits of 'Gifaataa' Celebration of Wolaita (GCW). The subjects used were 600 individuals selected by availability sampling and 12 elders selected by purposive sampling (by their deep knowledge of overall indigenous wisdom of Wolaita) from six selected Woredas of Wolaita Zone. The descriptive survey research design was used having the quantitative and qualitative data collected through questionnaire, face-to-face interview and FGD. The analysis was made using the eclectic approach of data analysis. The result indicated that GCW has various potential social benefits: It creates and strengthens social ties by different events. It is a venture through which Wolaitas avoid bad and evil activities through elders' counselling and it is a vehicle through which Wolaita's indigenous language and culture are transferred to the next generation. Furthermore, Gifaataa is also a venture for promoting the social transformation of individuals.

Keywords: Celebration, Event-Marketing, Gifaataa, Social Benefits, Wolaita.

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1. Introduction

A festival is defined as an organized set of special events on a specific cultural and man-made theme taking place on a specific day or period normally on a specific place gathering people in mutual and direct contact to the festival theme (Lyck *et al*, 2012). Ideally speaking, a good festival leaves an inspiring entertainment to its participants, gives educational insight to scholars and researchers, brings seductive gain to its organizers, and makes displayed the cultural heritage of the community. Besides this, a festival catches the attention of politicians, businessmen, artists and tourism operators. In other words, festivals can be the bridge through which all category of people contact each other and strengthen their social ties (LADCA, 2003).

As festivals have the connecting power of different categories of people (politicians, businessmen, artists, tourists, local people, tourism operators...), it contributes multidimensional social benefits. It is a

¹Assistant Professor, English Language and Indigenous Studies, Wolaita Sodo University

²Assistant Professor, English Language Education, Wolaita Sodo University

³PhD, Assistant Professor, Geography, Wolaita Sodo University

venture through which people strengthen their social ties. Besides, it is a tool through which a community defines itself. Confirming this idea, Bruce *et al* (2012) state that festivals serve all manners of social and cultural functions; like an affirmation of identity, and at the same time, provides opportunities to share cultural meaning with persons both inside and outside of that culture through social bondage.

Gifaataa is one among those festivals that contribute grand social benefits to its aboriginal people. It is the most well-known festival among those rituals in Wolaita that has been celebrated annually in the month of September (Mohammed, 2014; Asella, 2012; Haile Gabriel, 2007). There was no written document that tells when the celebration of Gifaataa was started, but according to oral witness by Wolaita elders, it was started before many hundreds of years ago as a bridge between the accepting of New Year and sending-off the old one. It had been celebrated with the display and marketing of various long-aged cultural heritages as identity markers of Wolaita People (Meshesha *et al*, 2016).

From the firsthand data obtained through participation (being in the celebration), the researchers realized that Gifaataa celebration of Wolaita has so many potential social benefits that are not yet efficiently exploited. This is obviously not because of Gifaataa has no potential social benefits rather it may be because of clear research gap on the issue and lack of promotion of the event via event-marketing. Therefore, the researchers initiated to conduct the current study to explore the potential social benefits of 'Gifaataa' Celebration of Wolaita.

This manuscript has five major parts. The first part presents the introduction of the paper that reflects its background, the uniqueness and importance of the work. The second part reviews the overall ideas of festivals giving adequate emphasis to event marketing. The third section provides briefing on the research methodology specifically used for this study. The fourth section provides the results and discussions of the potential social benefits of Gifaataa Celebration of Wolaita. Finally, the fifth section presents the conclusions and policy implications briefly.

2. Literature review

Festivals serve all manners of social functions. They mark an affirmation of identity, and at the same time, provide opportunities to share societal meanings to individuals both inside and outside of that community. The festivals that Angelinos produce each year make manifest the many aspects of LA, love and interactions among individuals in such the society. Festivals such as the Israeli Fest, Thai Cultural Day, and the Brazilian Carnival celebrate the city's rich and motley social diversity. The Blooming of the Roses Festival, Country Garden Faire, and Arbor festivities create opportunities for the reunion of people from far geographic distances (LADCA, 2003).

As one of its social functions, festivals can be used as the bridges through which people connect to each other; again and again, and in ever-evolving ways (Clark-Ekong, 1997). In other words, through festivals, friends, family members and loved ones get opportunity to visit each other which is so central to the strengthening of social bonds among relatives and friends. For instance, Ditto for Nohrooz and Chol Chhnam Tmei, the New Year celebrations in the Persian and Cambodian communities are the typical examples of such the case. These celebrations bring people together, but in ways that reinforce a sense of home, old connections, and reaching back into lands left a lifetime ago. These festivals promote social bonds of individuals in the family; in the community and new acquaintances of people even outside the community giving their connection full social meaning (LADCA, 2003).

Festivals help communities define their social identity through event marketing. According to Clark-Ekong (1997), this is because public events often express, reflect, and reinforce community social relationships and cultural values through the use of special forms of language, music, and dance. They provide a public face for a community as well as a focal point for organizing community's heritage and cultural identities. This in itself builds community's social image; from the festival an expression of what

the community is emerging from the interaction and engagement of persons in the community. And the intensity of investment on such events makes the community well known by the participants and beyond. It's sort of like looking for the tallest building in a city; it says something about what that community values in its social life (LADCA, 2003).

As socio-cultural events, festivals have also become a symbol for ethnic citizenship. They are expressions or symbols with practical ramifications of a given group of people (Barne, 1991). Ethnic and lineage affiliations are important markers of self-identity that the members of a community validate the legitimacy of their traditional values and practice them in the midst of modernity (Clarke-Ekong, 1997). Thus traditional festivals are performed to observe certain rituals and/or types of events that communicate important cultural themes, often through the use of special forms of language, music, and dance to traditional leaders, local citizens, elected and appointed political officials, tourists and entrepreneurs (Clarke-Ekong, 1997).

According to LADCA (2003), festivals play a major social role making people of different walks of life meet at a stage. For instance, it promotes artists to interact each other giving them multiple opportunities to learn from each other's about their works. It makes weavers to examine refinements in techniques of weaving, and dancers to vet the works of apprentices in each other's companies. Crafts persons can buy each other's wares; storytellers can swap yarns. As the result, friendships and collaborations grow out of such interactions in the events of festivals which become a major way to deepen art works (Clark-Ekong, 1997).

Generally speaking, festivals provide a given society many social functions. One is that festivals can mark an affirmation of identity by displaying the symbol for ethnic citizenship in those events. Secondly, festivals provide opportunities to individuals to share their societal meanings both inside and outside of that community. According to Clark-Ekong (1997), such the societal meanings of individuals can be ensued through event marketing by the use of special forms of language, music, and dance. Thirdly, festivals have also become a means for promoting works of art by strengthening their interactions and making them learn from each other.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Design of the study

The descriptive survey design was used for this study. The rationale is that the researchers selected it as a suitable design to explore and describe the potential social benefits of Gifaataa Celebration of Wolaita. For the investigation of real social benefits of Gifaataa Celebration of Wolaita from the relevant sample of informants, three tools of data collection were used. These are interview, focus group discussion (FGD) and questionnaire and the mixed method (eclectic approach) of data analysis was used to analyze and interpret the data collected.

3.2 Description of the research setting

Wolaita is among 56 Nations and Nationalities in Southern Ethiopia (SNNPR) commonly known by its indigenous culture, beliefs, traditions, rituals, civilization and social identities that define them and make them distinct from other people in Ethiopia. These socio-political, economic and cultural realities of Wolaita people have been transferred from generation to generation solely through oral tradition (Mohammed, 2014; Haile Gabriel, 2007). Besides this, Wolaita is among highly populated areas in SNNPR having the population density of 385 per square kilometers (SNNPR SA, 2007). Wolaita has its zonal administrative structure having twelve Woredas and three city administrations. The major economic activities of Wolaita are mixed agriculture and trade. The Zonal city of Wolaita (Sodo) is located 330kms from Addis Ababa through Hossana and 160kms from the Regional capital (Hawassa) through Shashamane.

3.3 Participants of the study

The population of this study is all Wolaita people, but for obtaining pertinent information for the current study, elders who have relevant knowledge of Wolaita language, culture, celebrations (festivals) and heritage were the targeted ones.

3.4 Sampling technique

For this study the researchers used availability sampling for selecting any one of society members (except elders and FGD members) for filling the questionnaire. The elders were selected by using purposive sampling for interview and to be targeted respondents in focus group discussion (FGD) who were also selected by purposive sampling. For collecting data through questionnaire, 600 individuals were selected from six (6) Woredas of Wolaita Zone and for interview 12 elders having deep knowledge of Wolaita language; culture, festivals and heritage were selected from the same six Woredas. With the inclusion of two elders (selected for interview), ten individuals (from those selected for filling the questionnaire) were purposively selected in each Woreda (the total of 60) for collecting data through focused group discussion (FGD).

3.5 Tools of data collection

In order to achieve the intended research objectives by gathering valid, relevant and reliable data from the pertinent sample of the target population, the researchers used three tools of data collection: questionnaire, interview and focused group discussion (FGD).

3.6 Data analysis

For this study, the researchers used mixed (both quantitative and qualitative) method of data analysis. The data collected through the close-ended parts of the questionnaire were analyzed using quantitative method of data analysis using frequency and percentage those by the interview, open-ended parts of the questionnaire and focused group discussion were analyzed using narration; in a qualitative approach. Then, the result is presented in a systematic approach by describing, analyzing and interpreting the data.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 General demographic information of the respondents

Table 1: The general demographic information of the respondents

Woredas	Sex		Age				Education			Religion				
	M	F	18-30	31-45	46-60	>61	NE	EE	PE	HS	DA	FTB	CN	MLM
	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%
Boloso	70	30	12	20	40	28	10	26	32	20	12	8	82	10
Sore	11.7	5	2	3.3	6.7	4.7	1.7	4.3	5.3	3.3	2	1.3	13.7	1.7
Damot	65	35	14	25	36	25	12	21	36	18	13	11	76	13
Sore	10.8	5.8	2.3	4.2	6	4.2	2	3.5	6	3	2.2	1.8	12.7	2.2
Damot	76	24	10	28	38	24	15	22	33	14	16	6	85	9
Gale	12.7	4	1.7	4.7	6.3	4	2.5	3.7	5.5	2.3	2.7	1	14.2	1.5
Damot	72	28	13	42	28	17	18	23	30	15	14	14	82	4
Pulassa	12	4.7	2.2	7	4.7	2.8	3	3.8	5	2.5	2.3	2.3	13.7	0.7
Kindo	80	20	16	33	32	19	24	35	19	12	10	16	73	11
Koysha	13.3	3.3	2.7	5.5	5.3	3.2	4	5.8	3.2	2	1.7	2.7	12.2	1.8
Sodo	58	42	18	40	32	10	13	18	39	13	17	9	74	17
Zuriya	9.7	7	3	6.7	5.3	1.7	2.2	3	6.5	2.2	2.8	1.5	12.3	2.8

Total	421	179	83	188	206	123	92	145	189	92	82	64	472	64
	70.2	29.8	13.8	31.3	34.3	20.5	15.3	24.2	31.5	15.3	13.8	10.7	78.6	10.7

*In the above table (Table 1) f=frequency %=percentage M=male, F=female, NE=not educated EE=elementary education PE=primary education HS=high school education DA=diploma and above FTB=followers of traditional beliefs CN=Christian MLM=Muslim

As indicated in the above table (Table 1), the sample of 600 people was drawn from randomly selected six Woredas of Wolaita zone: Bolosso Sore, Domot Sore, Damot Gale, Domot Pulassa, Kindo Koysa and Sodo Zuriya. 100 informants from each Woreda; the total of 600, were drawn using availability sampling and filled the questionnaire. During the sampling, significant attention was given to informants' diversity in their demographical background. Thus the informants were drawn from multifaceted traits of demography: sex (males and females), age (young, medium-aged and old), education (not educated, educated at elementary, primary, senior secondary and higher education levels) and religion (followers of traditional beliefs, Christians and Muslims) were participated in the study.

4.2 The potential social benefits of 'Gifaataa' celebration of Wolaita

Table 2: Questionnaire responses of the respondents on the potential social benefits that Wolaita people can utilize from their Giffattaa celebration

No	Potential Social Benefits	Yes f%	No f%
1	A major event for social transformation of individuals in the society such as marriage, males' mutilation...	564 94	36 6
2	A nice event for conflict resolution between individuals and groups	542 90.3	58 9.7
3	Creates an opportunity for relatives and friends to visit each other	588 98	12 2
4	Creates an opportunity for the people to give gifts to each other	512 85.3	88 14.7
5	A nice venture that youths meet each other & discuss their common social issues	496 82.7	104 17.3
6	An event through which old people bless the younger ones	574 95.7	26 4.3
7	A nice venture for Wolaita people to promote their traditional culture, language and identity	483 80.5	117 19.5
8	A nice event of giving off bad or evil activities and starting a new and peaceful life	509 84.8	91 15.2
9	Creates an opportunity for the people to establish new social relationship through marriage, conflict resolution, males' mutilation...	533 88.8	67 11.2
10	A nice event to promote useful societal disciplines to younger generation	555 92.5	45 7.5

According to interview response of one of the elders, Gifaataa is a yearly celebration that plays a crucial role in strengthening social cohesion among individuals in each of Wolaita communities and other people from outside. Supporting this idea, another elder argues that Gifaataa is a celebration which strongly ties the social network of people in Wolaita. The elder added saying "In the Gifaataa celebration, the existing social cohesion of Wolaita people becomes strengthened and the new ones become created," which is clearly indicated in the above table (Table 2, item number 9) i.e., 533(88.8%) of the questionnaire respondents responded that Gifaataa creates an opportunity for Wolaita people to establish new social relationship through marriage, conflict resolution, males' mutilation and visiting each other.

For how Gifaataa strengthens social cohesion of Wolaita people, 542(90.3%) of the questionnaire respondents reported that it is through the opportunity created by Gifaataa that individuals and groups resolve conflict between or among them. As confirmation to this idea, one of the interviewed elders reported that Gifaataa is an excellent venture through which Wolaita people reconcile peace and security between or among family members and community dwellers. “They do this,” the elder says, “through resolving conflict between or among them by the use of cultural conflict resolution method”. “For this to happen,” as another elder stated, “a family members of Wolaita who live in any geographical distance come back to their original home (Wolaita) to celebrate Gifaataa with their relatives and friends” (which is also reported by 98% of the questionnaire respondents).

Not only Gifaataa creates and strengthens the social ties among the individuals in Wolaita it also promotes the social transformation of individuals through marriage, males’ mutilation and conflict resolution (as reported by the 94% of the questionnaire respondents). In almost all FGD sessions, the participants reached to the consensus that Wolaita people arrange such events like selecting fiancée, marriage, male’s mutilation and gift giving to be accomplished during Gifaataa celebration which is a major part of their traditional culture. As support to this argument, one of the interviewed elders stated that Wolaita people have a long-lived and strong traditional culture of making individuals pass through different steps of social transformation to be fully-fledged adult member of the society: being mutilated, select fiancée based on cultural merits and being married; each of them takes place in Gifaataa celebration.

As another potential social benefit, Wolaitas use Gifaataa as an event through which they give gifts to each other (as reported by 85.3% of the respondents). As natural behavior of human beings, gift strengthens the existing social cohesion and creates a new social relationship. In the interview, one of the elders replied that Wolaitas give each other different kinds of gifts during Gifaataa celebration: traditional decorations like necklaces, bracelets, rings and various types of traditional clothes like dresses, shirts, trousers, coats... which promotes and strengthens their social relationship.

Gifaataa is also a nice venture through which youths of each community in Wolaita meet each other and discuss their common social issues (as reported by the 82.7% of the respondents). During Gifaataa occasion, youths of a given community in Wolaita meet at ‘Gaziyaa place’ (a play field for Gifaataa songs and dances) and make discussions on their common issues being blessed by the elders of their community (replied by the 95.7% of the respondents). “The major focus of their discussion is strengthening their social relationship, promoting their common interests and avoiding factors that impede their relationship,” reported by one of the interviewed elders. In majority of the FGD sessions, the participants deeply discussed and agreed that Gifaataa is a nice event through which youths of Wolaita discuss their common social issues and resolve conflicts among each other.

It is also argued by one of the interviewed elders that Gifaataa is not only the venture through which Wolaita elders bless their young siblings. It is also the event through which the elders transfer their traditional culture, language and identity to younger generation and to the invited guests of the celebration (as reported by the 80.5% of the respondents). The elders also promote the useful societal disciplines to their younger generation (as 92.5% of the respondents reported). “The elders do this,” as one of the interviewed elders said, “for transferring their indigenous culture to the next generation”. In other words, Gifaataa creates opportunity for elders to transfer lessons of indigenous culture, language and wisdom to the younger generation through group advising, by traditional songs and by performing traditional chants to youngsters during Gifaataa celebration.

In the traditional belief-legends of Wolaita, Gifaataa is also considered as a nice event of giving off bad or evil activities and starting of a new and peaceful life (as 84.8% of the respondents reported). One of the interviewed elders underlined that Wolaitas use Gifaataa as a turning point for many individuals to stop evil activities: stealing, banditry, corruption, rumor, cheating and the like. Supporting this idea, another elder says, “Wolaitas send off all bad and evil activities with the old year and accept the New

Year with renewed safe mind, peaceful spirit and positive behavior”. The FGD members also agreed in their discussion that Gifaataa celebration is a turning point for some individuals in Wolaita to start every activity with refreshed and renewed mind, spirit and energy.

Therefore, we can conclude that Gifaataa is a grand opportunity that Wolaitas create and strengthen their social ties through marriage arrangement, conflict resolution, gift-giving, avoiding bad and evil activities through elders’ counseling and it is a vehicle for transferring their indigenous culture, language and wisdom to the younger generations through event marketing. Besides, Gifaataa is also a great venture that Wolaitas promote the social transformation of individuals from one stage to another (from kid to younger stage and then to adulthood through different traditional ceremonies taking place in Gifaataa event).

5. Conclusions and policy implications

5.1 Conclusions

Based on the analysis and discussions presented above, the following conclusions have been reached:

- Gifaataa is a great opportunity that Wolaitas create and strengthen their social ties through marriage arrangement, conflict resolution and gift-giving.
- Wolaitas use Gifaataa as a venture to avoid bad and evil activities through elders’ counseling.
- Gifaataa is a grand venture for promoting the social transformation of individuals through events like males’ mutilation and wedding.
- Gifaataa is a magnificent venture that transfers indigenous language and culture of Wolaita to the next generation through event marketing.

5.2 Policy implications

Based on the discussions and conclusions above, the following policy implications have been drawn:

- The visible current image of Gifaataa celebration has come because of the fertile policy environment that definitely promotes cultural plurality in Ethiopia.
- Gifaataa celebration of Wolaita can be continued as an invisible heritage of the people if and only if the Zonal Administration of Wolaita will cultivate it via the strategic planning.

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