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# 'Our children are neither here nor there': an ethnographic look at children's right to education in Southern Ethiopia

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## ABSTRACT

Knowledge about how social changes affect children's access to education in Africa is still limited. Intending to bridge this gap, this article discusses the effect of the emerging social changes on children's right to indigenous knowledge and formal education among the Guji people— the agro-pastoral society in Ethiopia. The article demonstrates how children's present realities deprive their right to not only school education but also the indigenous ways of learning. It presents that the fast-changing social realities among the agro-pastoral society impacted children's right to education in two ways. Firstly, the changes affect the indigenous ways of intergenerational knowledge transmission. Secondly, the changes constrained the quality of children's learning in school and limited the relevance of formal education for children's local ways of life. Data discussed in this article were collected through six months of ethnographic fieldwork among the Guji people in southern Ethiopia.

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## Introduction

Parents and grandparents among the Guji people often say, 'our children are neither here nor there,' to express the failure of their children to obtain success in school education and indigenous knowledge. They believe that knowledge from school and everyday life is essential for the attainment of a group and individual accomplishments but their children are deprived of their rights to both. They need formal education that involves the development of knowledge and skill relevant to children's everyday life. So far, research findings on the human rights-based approach to education recommend the necessity to ensure an education that promotes children's contextual wellbeing and nurtures their capability to manage their social and natural environment (UNICEF and UNISCO 2007). In line with such argument, Lauwerier and Akkari (2015) present the right to education as a holistic process that encompasses access to school and indigenous knowledge. In explaining the right to education as a holistic process, Gaskins and Paradise (2010) assert that formal education that is connected to indigenous knowledge helps children to learn through participation, observation, and hands-on experience and to manage their everyday life. International laws such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's Convention against Discrimination in Education, Social and Cultural Rights, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child embody such arguments by putting education at the center of understanding and implementing human rights. Above all, the promotion of children's 'right to education' aims at achieving children's wellbeing and well-becoming through ensuring access to effective participation in formal education and indigenous knowledge (Johnny 2006; Liebel 2012b; Save the Children 2013). According to Deafenbaugh (2015) and Schafer et al.

(2014), indigenous knowledge situated within a community cultural setting and encompasses oral traditions, folk customs, material cultures, folk performances values, and norms—is important as it enriches school knowledge and makes learning meaningful. Grenier (1998) as cited in Abebe and Kjørholt (2013) also explains indigenous knowledge as local and culturally embedded ways of life, practices, and understandings that exists within a society and passes from generation to generation through indigenous education. Accordingly, indigenous knowledge is the knowledge that children acquire from everyday life through participation in and observation of cultural practices, economic activities, and social interactions among their communities (Abebe and Kjørholt 2013). What is called ‘indigenous education, on the other hand, refers to the ways of learning involve society’s established and culturally relevant contents and methods of life (Deafenbaugh 2015). It is a way of learning through participation, observation, and hands-on experience in everyday social, cultural, and economic practices (Schafer et al. 2014). The combination of school education with indigenous knowledge makes learning a holistic process that involves the acquisition of locally meaningful and relevant knowledge and skill useful for children’s social, cultural, and cognitive development (Gaskins and Paradise 2010; Schafer et al. 2014).

However, policy and research debates on children’s rights to formal education and indigenous ways of learning (indigenous education) are less functional in the context of Africa. Although the ‘education for all’ and the ‘sustainable development’ initiatives of the United Nations enforce the global communities and local governments to ensure children’s rights to enjoy quality education, educational policies and local development practices in the continent are less sensitive to these issues (Camfield and Tafere 2011; Laura and Harry 2017; Ng’asike 2011).

In explaining the relationship between social changes and human rights, Debsu (2009) asserts that among the traditional societies in Africa, social and structural changes discourage the indigenous rights of peoples. Based on empirical research among the Guji people in Ethiopia, Debsu states that the transition from pastoral to agro-pastoral livelihoods changed the customary ways of life and deprived women of their rights to land, social participation, and property ownership by promoting patriarchy that did exist before. This reflects that the change in the ways of life may shape people’s access to human rights in different ways. Liebel (2012b) and Camfield (2010) states that although children’s rights to education among traditionally marginalized groups, indigenous populations, and remote rural societies are one of the focal points in the UNCRC, its dynamic relationship with social changes among such communities is still limited. According to Liebel (2012a) and Camfield and Tafere (2011) the rights-based approach to education can be affected by social and structural changes informed by economic, cultural, and environmental dynamics but such issues have less been a concern of governments and researchers at local and regional levels (Editorial 2014; UNICEF and UNISCO 2007; Save the Children 2013).

Therefore, although there is a substantial body of literature on children’s rights to education in the global context (Boon and Lewthwaite 2015; Hanson and Nieuwenhuys 2013; Hanson 2012), the way the fast-changing social and structural realities in the local settings of the agro-pastoral societies characterize children’s access to the formal education and indigenous way of learning has been given least attention. This article intends to bridge this gap of knowledge through qualitatively analyzing the emerging social realities that influence children’s rights to formal education and the indigenous ways of learning among the Guji people. Based on the notions of ‘knowledgeable person’ and ‘living rights’ (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys 2013), the article discusses how changes in social realities, caused by the transition from pastoral to agro-pastoral livelihoods, deep poverty, and increased connection to urban areas, affected children’s need to become knowledgeable persons. It answers the following questions. 1. What are the emerging social realities that characterize children’s rights to formal education and indigenous knowledge? 2. How do the changes in social realities impact children’s need to become knowledgeable persons? 3. Do the two ways of learning (the formal and indigenous ways of learning) inform and support each other? 4. How do children’s actual experiences of learning meet their goals of education? Through answering these questions, the article shows that in the present social realities, children among the remote pastoral societies

are at risk of being 'disconnected generation' as they have narrow access to quality school education and limited opportunity to learn from their local cultural environment.

## Social context

I collected the empirical data discussed in this article through ethnographic fieldwork that I did among Guji people in southern Ethiopia. The Guji people, whose population is estimated to be 2.6 million (CSA 2008), are one of the ethnic branches of the Oromo (Van de Loo 1991; Jirata and Benti 2013). They speak the Oromo language and live with the ancestral Oromo traditions that define the social responsibilities of individuals as well as generational groups (Hinnant 1977; Van de Loo 1991). The Guji people live in lowland and semi-highland areas and subsist on traditional animal husbandry and crop cultivation expressed as agro-pastoralism. As elaborated by Debsu (2009), the majority of the people live in remote rural areas with little access to health care, pure water supply, and literacy services. Among the Guji people 'knowledge' is expressed in terms of capability to understand societal values and cope with local realities (Jirata 2013). Accordingly, a knowledgeable person is someone who is well versed in the *seera* (customary laws), *safuu* (moral standards), and *aadaa* (customs) of the people (Van de Loo 1991; Jirata and Simonsen 2014). According to Jirata (2017), the Guji people believe that children grow knowledgeable through participation in the customary practices and everyday livelihood activities. Therefore, access to indigenous education is understood as a means by which somebody becomes a knowledgeable person who can shoulder social responsibilities. Such belief and exercise were embedded in the Guji people's traditional livelihood and value systems.

The indigenous education of the Guji people aimed at equipping children with values, norms, and customary practices of the people as well as developing their capability to work and live in environments full of hardships. According to the Guji ways of life, grandparents, parents, and adults in a neighborhood are responsible to equip children with indigenous knowledge and make them knowledgeable (Jirata 2018). However, the emerging changes in everyday life caused by the transition from pastoral to agro-pastoral ways of life, expansion of Christianity, recurring social conflicts, increasing population number, ever-increasing economic poverty, and increased connection to urban areas distorted the customary ways of life and forced children to think differently and participate in household labor divisions in different places from adults. The changes destroyed the ancestral Oromo tradition in which indigenous knowledge that involved storytelling, parental mentoring, and socialization through participation in cultural practices was integral. This new scenario strengthened changes in intergenerational relationships – the change from close intergenerational interdependence to emerging separation between social spaces of children and adults (Jirata 2015).

Formal education is a recent development among the Guji people (Debsu 2009). According to Deressu (2013), the first primary schools were established in a few urban villages at the end of the 1980s. Deressu (2013) and Jirata and Kjørholt (2015), two reasons that distanced the Guji people from formal education. The first was the livelihood tradition that the people exercised for a long period in the past. Before 1985, the people were entirely pastoralists and used to move from place to place in search of grass and water for their cattle. They did not have permanent villages, like today, where schools could be established. The second was that they used to give more value to their ancestral traditions than the 'exotic' knowledge; thus, did attach less importance to school education. However, the change of the political system in 1993 came up with the wider establishment of primary schools all over Ethiopia including the remote villages of the Guji people (Ministry of Education and UNICEF 2012). Following the changes in the policy of education (Ministry of Education 1994), which allowed primary school children to learn in their mother tongue, the people came to understand school education as a useful instrument to become a knowledgeable person. The informants emphasized that when their language, which is Afan Oromo, became the medium of instruction as well as the language of work at a regional level, the Guji people started to give value to school education.

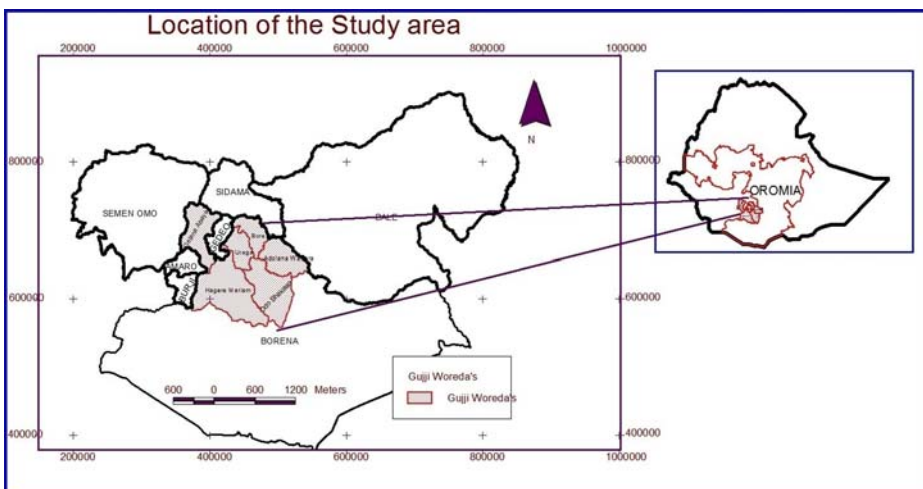
## Methodology

I carried out the ethnographic fieldwork in three rural villages among the Guji people in two phases: the first phase from October to December 2015 and the second one from May to July 2016 (in the Guji district shown below as [Figure 1](#)).

The fieldwork activity included participant observations in schools, in neighborhoods, and at homes. It also incorporated in-depth interviews with selected children, parents, teachers, and education officers. Thirty-five children (twenty boys and fifteen girls) whose ages were between 7 and 17 years, as well as 20 parents (10 women and 10 men), five teachers, and three education officers, were participants in the in-depth interview. The purposive sampling method was used to select the participants. The particular social contexts for these activities were children's peer interactions in schools, teachers' informal discussions, and adult social gatherings in neighborhoods as well as coffee drinking and family social events at homes. The participant observations were aimed at watching the actions and listening to the voice of children, teachers, and parents on what they do and talk about education and children's rights to education as well as goals of education and the interrelationship between the formal education and indigenous ways of learning. Observations were also made in the *Gada* ceremonies for transmission of power which took place over several days in May 2016. It was a ceremony in which the existing community leaders who assumed power for eight years passed the power to the next community leaders. The *Gada* system involves the age-based generation in which a man comes to the position of community leadership forty years after his father. The participant observation in the ceremony helped me to generate data on what the children's rights to indigenous knowledge constitute and how it is formulated and declared. As I am a native speaker of the Oromo language, familiar with the Guji-Oromo culture, I easily established a close relationship with adults and children, participated in social and cultural practices, and become friends with children, and observed their everyday activities. I used field notes and a digital audio recorder to record the data from the observations and interviews. All data used in this article was translated from the Oromo language into English.

## Emerging challenges to children's rights to indigenous education

The Guji people believe that it is a right for children to grow knowledgeable persons through participation in cultural practices and values systems. As stated by informants, the indigenous education – education based on indigenous knowledge – of the Guji people contains children's



**Figure 1.** The Guji District in Southern Ethiopia.

learning through hearing stories and observing everyday life practices of their parents and grandparents. Such indigenous ways of learning are integral parts of the African traditions as discussed by Mawere (2015) and Munongi and Pillay (2018). In emphasizing the significance of intergenerational transmission of knowledge as the main part of indigenous education in the past, the informants remembered their childhoods during which they learned the Guji ways of life through participating with adults in social practices at home during night times and in cattle herding fields during day times. Morma (43 years old man) presented his memory as follows.

When I was a child, I used to listen to stories from my father and mother. There was no hardship in life. Time was plenty; the land was fertile; rain was sufficient, and cattle were productive. Adults used to come together and feast with each other. They heard cattle together, sing songs together and teach children through it. I and the children in the neighbourhood used to attend those social occasions of adults and learn from them. Today, our children do not have such learning opportunities.

Words of the informant reflect two realities in which the Guji children used to acquire indigenous knowledge and grow knowledgeable persons. The first was children's close relationship with their parents and grandparents in workspaces. Boys herd cattle with their fathers and girls work in a home with their mothers (Hinnant 1977; Debsu 2009). The second was the spaces of play practices that children share with adults. Those spaces help children to learn from adults through listening to stories and watching the activities. In both contexts, the Guji children used to acquire indigenous knowledge through participation in shared work and play practices. Words of Uddee (40 years old man) illustrated such tradition of children's learning.

When I was a child, I used to herd cattle with my father. I used to hear stories from him. I used to hear cattle songs from him. I used to stay in the cattle-herding places with him and come back home with him in the night. I used to work on the farm with him. There was no school during that time. My sisters used to fetch water and collect firewood with our mother.

Such tradition of intergenerational learning and knowledge transmission was common in many African cultures – for instance Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia etc-but seem to be overlooked following the expansion of the global information that cast a shadow on African indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing (Fratkin 2001; Mawere 2015; Ng'asike 2011).

In the present time among the Guji people, children's need to become knowledgeable people through indigenous education has been challenged because of the emerging changes in the livelihood tradition that resulted in a new model of a household labor division. Following the Guji people's transition from pastoral to agro-pastoral ways of life, children started to have separate work and play spaces from adults (Jirata and Kjørholt 2015). Besides, schooling separated children from adults and discouraged the ancestral tradition of learning in which they acquire knowledge through sharing work and play spaces with adults as also observed by Jirata and Kjørholt (2015). The voice of Guddisa (12 years boy) illustrates such lived reality of the Guji children.

Early in the morning, I go to school. At noon, I come back home, have my lunch, and rush to herd cattle. In the evening, I collect cattle to their shelter and come back home. After I have my dinner, I do my homework and go to bed. I rarely have time to play with my parents and siblings.

The change from pastoral to agro-pastoral livelihood and the introduction of schooling not only created separate places for children and detached them from learning through continuous interaction with adults but also affected their motivation for developing their indigenous knowledge. This is notable from the voice of Dureti (12 years girl), 'I do not like to see and hear the tales, songs, and acts of my parents and grandparents. They are backward. I want to attend school and live in a modern way'. This voice echoes that the emergence of formal education which the children perceive as a means to a 'modern' way of life has made them condescend to the Guji people's indigenous education. Such ways of putting distinction between formal education and local knowledge by labeling the former as 'modern' and the latter as 'backward' created the discontinuities of indigenous knowledge and ways of learning not only among the Guji people but also in the other

African countries (Schafer et al. 2014; Ng'asike 2011). In other words, the instance shows that the children started to accept formal education as a means to become knowledgeable persons.

Statements of Uddee (52 years old man) further illustrate the emerging realities that affected the Guji people's indigenous ways of learning.

In the present time, our children do not have the opportunity to learn from us. Everything has been changed. There is no plenty of time as before. Our life is full of hardships. Grazing land is scarce and cattle become unproductive. We do not have social events as before because everybody is busy with winning daily survival. Let alone neighbor's family members cannot meet each other during day times. Now, the tradition that adults tell stories to children is absent. We toil a lot during day times and go to bed early during the night times.

Because of the changes in social realities, the multi-contact in the past left its places to the limited interaction in the present. As a result, storytelling is no more part of children's learning because the tradition of intergenerational interaction is constrained by changes in the ways of life.

In general, the Guji ancestral tradition of childhood learning and indigenous ways of knowledge transmission which is rooted in the culture of the society is in a continuous change. Although the people believe that the indigenous ways of learning are an aspect of children's rights to become knowledgeable persons, they regret that such tradition is becoming dormant in the present reality. According to Dube (65 years old man), who is a prominent cultural leader of the people, reinforcing the rights and duties of children is the central part of the value system, but socialization and knowledge transmission practices at family levels in the present time are less sensitive to the ancestral values and traditions. This shows two issues that demand research and policy attention. Firstly, among pastoral communities in Africa, children's right to learning through participation in indigenous practices is facing challenges because of the inevitable changes in the ways of life. This reality reflects how social changes in such societies impact children's rights to indigenous education. Secondly, there should be a mechanism that enables the emerging social changes to accommodate the traditional values and practices so that formal education and the indigenous ways of learning reinforce each other. Such mechanisms can address the interest of parents and grandparents which is the need for formal education to contain indigenous knowledge. It also enables children to combine the indigenous ways of learning with formal education (Seow 2015; Schafer et al. 2014).

### Conditions of children's rights to formal education

The relevance of formal education in the context of children's everyday life in African has been discussed by several researchers. For instance, Onyango-Ouma (2006, 1) presents that, 'children in rural western Kenya aspire to become educated and to acquire school knowledge to increase their chances of success in everyday life'. In the contexts of the Guji people and the other agrarian and pastoral societies in the southern part of Ethiopia, children want to become 'knowledgeable persons' through attending formal education, but there are multiple social realities that have constrained them (Jirata and Kjørholt 2015). These realities are commonly visible and inclusive of the dire economic poverty, inaccessibility of schools, frequently occurring ethnic conflicts, and the persistent drought that a primary school shown as Figure 2 reflects.

Economic poverty in the area constrains children's rights to formal education in many ways. Firstly, it harms children's right to food provision, which in turn makes them unable to attend school properly. This challenge was asserted by Almaze (13 years old girl) as, 'I often go to school without eating food. I always stay starved in school. I sit in the class but I cannot attend lessons attentively. Other days, I do not go to school. Why do I go to school if I cannot learn?' As it is notable from this statement, the deep economic poverty limits children's rights to food provision and discourages them from attending school regularly. The impact of food provision on children's success in formal education is articulated by Hanson and Nieuwenhuys (2013) as a strong interconnection between the right to food and the right to education. Secondly, a limitation in the right to



**Figure 2.** A primary school among the Guji.

sufficient food constrains children's right to play with each other as evident from Megersa's (12 years old boy) words, 'On many days, I and my brother go to school without eating something as we do not have food at home. On such days, we do not have an interest to talk to each other and other children. We do not have an interest to play with each other and other children. We often quarrel with other children.' The voice of this child informs how rights are interdependent and the limitation in one affects the availability of the other. It shows that children's lack of right to food affects their right to play and learning (Liebel 2012b). Thus, by limiting children's rights to appropriate provisions, poverty has continued to challenge their right to education (Camfield and Tafere 2011).

Similarly, the limited availability of schools in the remote rural areas of the pastoral society has challenged children's right to have appropriate formal education. Because of the limitation in access to schools, the Guji children are forced to walk on foot for at least seven hours per day to attend formal education. As this is demanding and difficult, the majority of the children especially girls stop schooling after finishing primary school education. This reality was stated by Sore (15 years old girl) as, 'After I finished primary school, I could not continue to attend secondary school. As my school was far from my home, I could not walk for seven hours a day. I could not afford to rent a house and live nearby the school as my parents could not afford to pay.' This illustrates how children's lack of access to educational provisions is still constraining their right to school education. The distance from home to school affects girls more than it affects boys as it is unsafe for girls to walk long distances and stay far from home. The reoccurring conflict between the Guji and the neighboring ethnic groups is the other living reality that challenges children's rights to formal education. The ethnic conflicts could be attributed to the intensive poverty that creates disputes over limited resources and social uncertainty in which people in neighborhoods do not trust each other (Deressu 2013). Such conflicts often result in mass displacements, discontinuities of schools, and disruptions in everyday life practices. In such a situation, children are forced to stay away from formal education for an extended period. This reflects how the lack of a conflict-free environment limits children's right to appropriate school education. The other important reality that limits children's rights to education among the Guji people is the persistent drought that often causes the death of cattle and destruction of food crops. In the areas affected by such persistent drought, schools are closed for several months as children could not attend because of the abrupt lack of food and water. Depriving children's rights to food and water, drought severely affects the right to education and the need to become a knowledgeable person (Deressu 2013). The last but not the least reality is the extremely poor quality of formal education among the agro-pastoral society.



The statement of Boru (13 years old boy) is evidence, ‘I was in grade three last year. Now, I am in grade four. However, I even cannot write my name. I cannot identify letters and numbers. I reached grade four without knowing even letters. My teachers do not teach plainly. I do not understand what they speak.’ These words indicate that schools among the society do not provide children with quality education and this problem can be attributed to poorly trained teachers and unavailability of learning resources. Such educational problem is wider in Africa and has made African children lag behind the global development in learning as asserted by Fratkin (2001), Lauwerier and Akkari (2015), and Mawere (2015). In general, the complex and interwoven challenges in which the Guji people live has continuously affected children’s rights to formal education and their need to become knowledgeable persons. Thus, the right to education is affected by not only the accessibility and quality of formal education and indigenous learning but also the availability of other rights such as the right to food, water, health, and a safe environment.

### Are the Guji children in a social disorientation?

On one hand, the Guji people perceive indigenous knowledge as a means to become a knowledgeable person who can cope with the rural ways of life which include survival and accomplishments as individuals in society. This has been discussed above. On the other hand, the people, mainly, children interpret formal education as a means to become a knowledgeable person. There are reasons why the Guji children accept both formal education as essential. First, they perceive formal education as a means to attain literacy. Gemedo (13 years old boy) states his goal of formal education as ‘I am happy to attend school. I want to be able to read and write. I want to become an educated person who can read and write in Oromo and English languages’. This boy thinks that one of the advantages of attending school is that it enables him to become literate not only in his mother tongue but also in the English language. They also accept that formal education is a means to have employment opportunities. This way of perceiving formal education is clear from Asine’s (14 years old girl) words, ‘When I finish school, I want to get a job. I want to be a nurse. I do not want to be a farmer after I finish school. I do not want to live the way my mother has lived. I want to be a civil servant and earn a salary’. This girl understands that schooling is a means to attain a change in her livelihood. She thinks that through formal education that she gains from school, she can shift her livelihood from rural to urban as well as detach herself from the rural way of life. Again, the children think that formal education may help them to have the capability to support their parents and grandparents which Ashebir (12 years old boy) stated, ‘When I finish school, I can get a job and help my parents by giving them money. Helping my parents is one of my goals of education’. In this statement, the boy has expressed schooling as a means to play his role in the tradition of intergenerational interdependence. Parents among the Guji people have a similar perception. For instance, Waqoo (45 years old man) expressed purposes of school education as

I want my children to attend school. When they attend school, they get a modern education. When they get modern education, they become literate and get employment. When they get employment, they help themselves and me. I want my children to be educated and support themselves and their parents.

Similar to children, parents understand formal education as a means to knowledgeable person that includes being literate, having a job opportunity, and the ability to have a new livelihood style. This is what scholars call an instrumentalist view of education (Onyango-Ouma 2006). This instrumentalist view of formal education is connected to the emerging social changes observable in the areas.

However, the Guji children have challenges in accomplishing their goals of becoming knowledgeable persons through the integration of schooling and indigenous knowledge. First, although education based on indigenous knowledge has been accepted by adults as one of the means to become a knowledgeable person, children do not give value to it. The intergenerational

transmission of knowledge through storytelling, and adult–child interactions are accepted as ancestral ways of learning among the society, but changes in the ways of life have made children give the least attention and interest to learning through participation in storytelling and social interaction with adults. As a result, the Guji children have limited opportunities for learning from parents, grandparents, and their local cultural processes.

Similarly, the children are skeptical of formal education as it fails to meet their needs and expectation. This is clear from Temesgen (8 years old boy) statements.

Last year, I was in grade one but I did not learn anything. I did not understand what the teacher used to say. I did not know even letters and numbers. This year we (the whole class) have been told to enter grade two. I asked the school principal to allow me to repeat grade one but he refused. How do I enter grade two without even knowing how to write my name? Now, in grade two, I understand nothing. For example, I got zero out of ten in a reading test yesterday. Almost all the students failed the test. I am confused. I know nothing but I am in grade two.

The voice of this child alludes to the inefficient system of formal education in which children are imposed to pass from lower grade to higher grade regardless of their achievement and willingness. Added to the teachers' teaching incompetence and poor school pedagogical system, this system deprived children's right to decide on the matter that affects their present and future learning successes. The practice also underestimates children's agency in organizing their pace of learning.

Formal education, also, fails to enable children to obtain a job after they finish at least secondary school. Most of the children among the Guji people are unsuccessful to meet this goal as they could not pass the national secondary school leaving examination. Edema (16 years old boy) expressed this reality as follows.

When I started attending school, I aimed to finish grade ten and join higher education and get employment opportunities in a town. I was eager and energetic to achieve either of these aims. However, as I failed the national school-leaving examination, I cannot continue further education or get a job in a town. I cannot help myself and my parents. I feel ashamed to go back home and work on a farm as before. I do not know what I should do. I am confused. My younger brothers and sisters who are in primary schools are also discouraged to attend school as they may face a similar problem.

The discrepancy between children's expectation of formal education and their actual experiences with it is a reflection of the inefficiency of education to enable children to meet their goals of learning that entails becoming a knowledgeable and independent person (Boon and Lewthwaite 2015).

Adults also believe that formal education fails to enable children to attain children's goals of learning. Although they agree that children's access to formal education is relatively improved as schools are established in some remote villages, they question the relevance and quality of such education to enable their children to attain their goals of becoming knowledgeable persons. According to the adult informants, the Guji people want that school education is connected to their indigenous knowledge of farming, animal husbandry, social interactions, and relationship with the natural environment. They want the school system in which their children develop their knowledge and skill of daily survival in combination with enhancing their conventional knowledge. They aspire for a school curriculum and pedagogy that bridges the gap between everyday life at home and learning practices in school. They believe that this way can increase the relevance of school education and make learning meaningful for children.

However, they express that school education does not provide children with the knowledge that either enables them to get employment or keeps them connected to their local ways of life and society. Statements of Ellema (47 years old man) illustrate this situation.

Before finishing school, my children were hard workers. After completing grade 10, they become useless. They often refuse to look after cattle and work on a farm. They undermine our rural life. They often rush to town with the pretext of finding a job. They come home for food. What do they eat without working? They used to be hard workers but now they are lazy. If school education erodes the courage of children, what is the use of sending them to school? They do not have either the 'traditional' knowledge or the 'modern' one. They are neither here nor there.

In contrast to their common expectation of education to open entry to the future for their children (Editorial 2014), the Guji people are suspicious of school education. The failure in school education led the people to believe that sending children to school is harming their present and future lives. This shows that against the expectation of children and their parents, school education eroded the indigenous knowledge of children and made them unfit for the local ways of life.

Such a failure of school education has disoriented the Guji children in two ways. Firstly, formal education has failed to equip children with the knowledge to meet their goals of learning. This problem stems from the poor quality of education that entails the lack of well-trained teachers, shortage of student textbooks, rough student-teacher relationships, and poor teachers' motivation to support the children. Secondly, formal education could not help children obtain jobs. As a result, the majority of children who finished secondary schools are floating in crisis as they are incompetent to cope with the indigenous and the 'modern' ways of life. The reason for such a problem is the disconnection between formal education and indigenous knowledge. This disconnection comes from the emerging wrong assumption that indigenous knowledge is less relevant for formal education and formal education has a limited role in empowering indigenous knowledge systems (Jirata and Benti 2013).

In general, such educational disorientation of children is a reflection of interconnected issues that deserve more research and policy attention. First, this problem needs the attention of the Ethiopian government to give due concern to the contextual translation of children's rights laws and policies. The government may implement the UNCRC that prescribes for children to benefit from education, school functions should be friendly with children's cultural realities so that they can reach the highest level of education of which they are capable (UNCRC , Article 28). The same document emphasizes that it is when formal education is responsive to children's indigenous realities that education can develop each child's personality, talents, and abilities to the fullest. The government and its subordinates have to ensure that formal education encourages children to know and respect the indigenous knowledge of their society and other cultures. Therefore, attention can be given to revising the school curriculum and schedule to synchronize formal learning activities with indigenous knowledge systems so that both contexts of children's learning can mutually support each other. It is such a context of learning that can enable school children to grow connected to the indigenous knowledge of their society. Above all, the government may note the fact that society values education when learning outputs meet its expectation. If the school education undermines the indigenous knowledge of a society, both adults and children suspect its plausibility to serve their needs and expectation.

## Conclusion

Discussions in the article center on three points related to children's rights to formal education and indigenous knowledge. Firstly, the emerging social changes have challenged the customary ways of life among the Guji people, It has deterred the indigenous ways of intergenerational knowledge transmission through which children learn from adults. This implies that social changes among agro-pastoral societies need to be managed in such a way they do not disturb the customary ways of children's learning and development. Secondly, there is a clear gap between children's goals of learning and their actual experiences with formal education. Children and adults interpret formal education as a means to a better life but their accomplishment with it falls far short of their expectation. This scenario has led both children and adults to suspect formal education as a force that has detached children from their indigenous knowledge and left them impotent. Such a societal attitude towards formal education originates from the mismatch between schooling and the customary ways of learning. Discussion in this article shows that there is a need for policies and mechanisms to protect children's right to education through sustaining the indigenous ways of learning and knowledge transmission. As an integral part of their right to education, children deserve not only access to quality schooling but also socialization and learning from parents in particular and the

society in general. What is discussed in this article indicates that different factors have deterred the variable combination of formal and indigenous education although this can help children acquire knowledge that they can easily utilize to become knowledgeable persons and capable citizens.

Similarly, children's right to education among the Guji people is constrained continuously as the livelihood of the society is increasingly exposed to multiple social changes. This scenario implies that children of the agro-pastoral societies in Africa are deprived of their rights as human beings and becoming because of the continuous social and cultural changes. The changing realities have made the children unable to cope with local cultural practices and global social dynamics. This reflects the need to obtain quality formal education and sustain the indigenous ways of knowledge transmission in the way both contexts of learning can reinforce each other to ensure children's right to education.

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