

## ROOT CAUSES AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE ONGOING WAR BETWEEN THE TPLF AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA (2 NOVEMBER 2020 – 15 OCTOBER 2021)

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### Abstract

Abiy Ahmed, the current premier and Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2019, is the third prime minister to lead Ethiopia since the overthrow of Derg. Although he had high approval ratings at the beginning of his administration across the country including Tigray, the premier has lost the trust of the TPLF, and most of its leaders have left the capital Addis to settle in Mekelle. This situation increased tension between TPLF and the federal government, which resulted in the ongoing war. This research aims at identifying the main causes of the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia and its socio-economic consequences, utilizing informal methods of data collection and phone interviews. In addition, observations, assessment, and informal communications with members of the Ethiopian and Tigray defence forces were also included in the data collection. The root cause of this war was a matter of gaining power in the federal government. As a consequence of this conflict, people in the Tigray region and some parts of the Afar and Amhara regions have been suffering for several months. Hundreds of thousands of people displaced from western Tigray to Sudan and central Tigray and war zones in Afar and Amhara are currently searching for safety. The people of Tigray have not had electricity, banking services, and internet access for many months. In the past two months, some parts of the Amhara and Afar regions have also been similarly affected. The economy of the country has been impacted in many sectors including tourism. The military tanks, and aircraft that were destroyed in the war were resources for the country. Most importantly, the country is losing its work force while fighting in the war with many fatalities. The war has also had a psychological impact on community due to rapes and robberies. The other key finding is that most of the people are rather spending their time with arguing on who is responsible for the current war instead of focusing on the development of the economy. In conclusion, this war broke out due to a few politicians seeking power, which negatively impacted the livelihood of Ethiopian citizens and country's economy. As there is nothing more important than peace for the country and its people, it is recommended that politicians should sit down to work out their differences.

### Keywords

*TPLF, EPRDF, Tigray, Amhara, Afar, war/law enforcement, Ethiopian economy*

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## Introduction

Ethiopia is one of the oldest countries in the world with a known governance structure categorized as imperial, socialist and federal. Despite the presence of a political governance system and known to be unified in times of foreign invasion, the practice of democracy began at the introduction of the federal governance system when the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) led the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1991.

The Tigray Regional State is one of the eleven regional states in Ethiopia. The region is located at the northern part of the country with an estimated population of 5.6 million (CSA 2021). Based on the current geographical map, the region's neighbours are Eritrea in the north, Sudan in the west, the Afar National Regional State in the east, and the Amhara National Regional State in the south and southwest. As in other regional states, the majority of the people are smallholder farmers.

The region has been led by the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), which was founded in 1975. Seventeen years of the TPLF-led movement was guided by the need to "respect the rights of nations and nationalities", and the TPLF-led government was established in 1991 by overthrowing the Derg military government, forcing the former president to flee to Zimbabwe. Since this time the TPLF has been the main actor in Ethiopian politics, taking control of leadership positions in the federal government.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power with support of four political parties (EPRDF members) and citizens across the country. Following his inaugural speech, the overwhelming majority of citizens including the people of Tigray were happy to see new leadership with a promising vision for the future. He visited all the regions and some important towns, and he was warmly welcomed in all of these locations. However, people started to recognize some differences and tensions between the TPLF and the federal government, which led to the current war.

It has been over a year since the war (which the federal government refers to as *law enforcement*) broke out, and a lot of changes have been happening in the country. Foreign pressure by different countries including United Nations member states has been observed. Based on the researchers' observation, there are different opinions on the main causes of the war across political parties and ethnic groups in Ethiopia, and the depth of the impact is not well understood by the people who are in other parts of Ethiopia far from the war zone. Therefore, it is important to address the root causes and its socio-economic consequences in the country. Both primary and secondary sources of data will be utilized. The primary data was obtained through informal interviews with people affected by the war, with soldiers from both the federal and the TPLF sides. Informal methods were employed due to the sensitivity of the issue, which could have affected the responses of the participants. Furthermore, phone interviews were also made to confirm the media information. Moreover, the researchers' personal experience is also used since they were in the southern part of Tigray and had a chance to move to other parts of Tigray, Afar and Amhara. Secondary sources of information from official press releases and interviews were used to

meet the research objectives. The data were qualitatively analysed and pictures were used as evidence to assess infrastructural damage.

### **Root Causes of the Ongoing War**

Ethiopia was ruled by an imperial system until 1974, when the military Derg came to power (Lyons 2019). The Derg formed a socialist unitary system where the central government dictated everything that happened in the country with a slogan of “Ethiopia First” that did not recognize ethnic diversity. Failure to recognize and respect the diversified ethnic groups in the country created the foundation for liberation movements. TPLF was one of these movements, and later several additional liberation movements emerged in Oromia, Amhara and other areas of the country to accelerate the overthrow of the socialist regime by the end of May in 1991 (Abbink 2006). The federal government was led by the coalition of four political parties representing southern people and nationalities in Tigray, Oromia, and Amhara. They were called the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). This coalition ignored the involvement of other regions such as Somali, Afar, Benshangul Gumuz, Gambella and Harari.

The political culture of Ethiopia before 1991 can be considered non-democratic. The current federal system is considered to be a system that respects ethnic diversity in the country. It has also brought the concept of good governance and democracy (African Development Bank, 2009; Hashim, 2010; Yonatan, 2012). Several improvements have been made under the leadership of EPRDF in the last two decades. Though the current federal system improved the socio-economic status of the country, there were still many grievances. The situation got worse after the death of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. The main source of these grievances was the government. The grievances started to be visible when the Addis Ababa city expansion master plan was proposed when the Oromo people – especially the young people called “Qerro” – started to protest. The main concern raised by the protesters was the fear that the master plan may leave farmers without any source of income.

Change of leadership might happen due to many reasons such as the end of term, death, and a coup. The leading party may also decide to change its leader following a series of public anti-government demonstrations. There were economic and social injustices, violation of human and democratic rights, lack of good governance, and a high youth unemployment rate (Siraw, 2015; Amnesty International, 2017; Freedom House, 2017). The main challenge was not the presence of grievances, but rather the way leaders responded to these grievances. They advocated for changes through ethnic channels. This way of advocating enabled several ethnic groups to participate in protests because they believed their ethnicity had caused the problems. It was very difficult to deal with such protests democratically. In addition to the protests, the internal political vacuum that was created after the death of the Prime Minister Meles was another reason for the increase in protests. Internally, the sister parties that formed the leading party EPRDF were not identical ideologically, and hard and soft liners came out over time. This situation enabled protesters to get power and

weaken the government, resulting in the change in leadership that can be seen in Ethiopia today.

There was also a request for constitutional revision in some parts of Ethiopia, especially in the Amhara regional state. The elites from Amhara Regional State, especially members of Amhara National Movement, believed that the people of Amhara were not represented in the process of the preparation of the current federal constitution and requested for amendment of some articles in the constitution. The main reason for the grievances mentioned above was lack of good governance. At all levels of administration in the country, the people of Ethiopia complained about lack of good governance. In general, the government has been a source of grievances in the country. Following the death of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, the grievances started to expand across the country.

This situation forced the former Prime minister Hailemariam Dessalegn to resign, opening the door for Abiy Ahmed to be the third prime minister of Ethiopia on April 02, 2018. He was the first prime minister who came from the Oromo people.

According to Ahmed (2019), the premier has made significant improvements in the country in reducing gender disparity in federal leadership positions. He has also constructed recreational centres and huge parking lots in Addis Ababa by mobilizing resources from the community with the slogan “Five million for a dinner in the government palace with the Prime Minister” (Embassy of FDRE in London, 19 August, 2019). This slogan was used when a call was made for all Ethiopians to support the government by contributing five million Ethiopian birr. The premier decided to have a dinner with them in the palace. He also freed political prisoners and called for collaboration. Moreover, he received a Nobel Peace Prize in 2019 for ending the silent war between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

All these decisions brought hope to the people of Ethiopia. Ethiopian people are now expecting to solve the problems that have arisen in the last two decades. The economy is expected to grow fast with economic reforms and job creation to decrease the unemployment rate. There has also been a high rate of corruption in the country and the Ethiopian people are hoping the leadership under Abiy Ahmed will address this problem in the country.

Although the official declaration of the war came immediately after the attack of the TPLF force on the national army base in Mekelle, the main internal cause was the TPLF’s rejection to the premier’s reforms. The following section provides an overview of the specific root causes of the ongoing war.

### ***Forming of Prosperity Party and the Peace Deal with Eritrea***

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came with the vision of coming together (“Medemer” in Amharic) so that all political parties leading different regions could be integrated into the federal government. In the past the federal government was led by a front of four parties who formed the EPRDF. The EPRDF system intentionally excluded five regions, namely the Afar National Regional State, the Somali Regional State, the Benshangul Umuz Regional State, the Harari Regional State, and the Gambella

Regional State. They were named as support rather than main actors. These regions were not involved in decision making at the central level despite being sovereign in their own respective regions. According to former leaders of the Afar Regional State, in the interview they stated that there were both direct and indirect interferences by the TPLF leaders. There were delegates from TPLF members in the region who supported politicians in the region. Yet, they were interfering in the decision-making process.

The formation of a unified political party was not a new concept for EPRDF. It was on the agenda for several years even when the TPF's most influential leader, the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, was leading the party. Despite this reality, TPLF opposed the formation of the prosperity party which allows all the regional political parties to engage in decision making at the federal level. The prosperity party was formed with all political parties leading every region except for the TPLF, which represented the Tigray Regional State. TPLF leaders believed that the procedure of formation of a unified political party (prosperity) was wrong since the decision was made at the centre by the council of ministers while they preferred to first discuss the issue of joining prosperity party with their members. Following this, the TPLF became one of the parties opposed to the Prime Minister's new political reform. Finally, the prosperity party was formed with all political parties leading every region except TPLF, which represents the Tigray Regional State. Following this, TPLF became one of the parties opposed to the Prime Minister's new political reform.

Lemma Megersa was very influential and one of the highly respected leaders in Oromia region. He was chairperson of the Oromo People Democratic Organization (OPDO), which is now the Oromia Prosperity Party. But, he was not member of the federal parliament. By that time, Abiy Ahmed was vice chairperson of OPDO, and member of the federal parliament. According to the Ethiopian legislation, any prime minister needed to be a member of the federal parliament as well. So, Lemma decided to leave the responsibility of chairing the OPDO so that Abiy Ahmed could have the opportunity to become the first prime minister of the country from the Oromia region. Hence, Abiy Ahmed was provided with the chance to be a nominee in the election of the EPRDF chairperson and got elected. After a while, the premier decided to form a unified political party called prosperity party. Such a unified party formation was not acceptable for Lemma who was president of Oromia region. Megersa said that forming the prosperity party was not completed in a timely manner because the country was under reform and the people who participated in the elections in 2015 did not vote for prosperity. He mentioned in his interview with the

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Voice of America (VOA, Oromia) that the idea of the establishment of the prosperity party had to be a point of discussion for everyone to agree on before implementation (Qero Media, 2019).

The other intriguing contributing factor of the current war was a lack of transparency following mutual visits and signing agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The two countries were in a cold war for almost twenty years after a war in 1998-1999 due to the border-issue. Prime Minister Abiy in his inaugural speech stated that the conflict between the two countries must come to an end and visited Eritrea to initiate the peace deal. TPLF leaders did not join the delegation to Eritrea even though Eritrea and Tigray share a long border with each other. In addition, there were no officially released statements to the people of Ethiopia on the points of discussion. By such step the premier fuelled distrust between the TPLF and the federal government.

Over time, the premier has reduced the power of the TPLF members in the federal government and they have moved from the country's capital where the federal government is located to Tigray's capital Mekelle. After their arrival in Mekelle, they asked for forgiveness from the Tigray people for not serving them well. The people of Tigray did not have an alternative for a strong political party in the region, so despite their disappointment with TPLF's efforts they agreed to support them. On the other hand, TPLF became a critic of the federal government and tried to use their platform to manipulate both the people of Tigray and other regions of Ethiopia through its state-owned media.

### ***Ideology Change***

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed not only aimed to form a unified political party, but he proposed an economic reform to replace state-led development strategy of EPRDF with a liberal economic system. Such shift became another significant factor dividing the TPLF and the federal government. The TPLF is against the liberal economic doctrine. They believe that the economic growth of the country will slow down, unless the big companies are owned by the state. So, they prefer that the country should improve the number of local investors who can compete with their international counterparts. If foreign investors dominate the economy of the country and decide to leave for some reasons, the economy would contract.

### ***Handling Corruptors and Territory-related Problems***

In the first place, the popular protest was mainly driven by violations of democratic rights, massive corruption, and a false historical narrative. While implementing the economic reform, the primer focus was put on state-owned corporations that manage large amounts of national capital, including Ethiopian Metal and Engineering Corporation (METEC) and Sugar Cane Corporation. Unfortunately, the leaders of these sectors were from Tigray and they were removed from their position. After some time, the director for METEC, General Kifle Dagnew, was under the radar of the federal government. He was captured in the western Tigray and taken to the

capital of Ethiopia for further investigation. After his arrest a documentary film was released on official state-owned media about the corrupt director. Another documentary was also released on Medias on the human rights crimes committed in the EPRDF period not long before the documentary on General Kinfe.

While analyzing these documentaries, they suggested that human rights violations were committed by TPLF, specifically mentioning “Tigrigna language speakers” despite the fact that all EPRDF members were responsible for the violations (Fana, 2018; EBC, 2018). This action was considered an anti-Tigray movement by TPLF, and this was also a point of concerns for the upcoming inclusive democracy that the Premier specified in his inaugural speech.

The current regional classification was made before the approval of the current constitution. Some of the areas included as parts of Tigray were previously administered under the current Amhara region. There are people in some parts of Tigray who prefer to belong to the Amharic region. For example, the issue of Wolkait in the west and the issue of Raya in the southern part of Tigray are among the main factors for the territory-based tensions between Amhara and Tigray Regional States.

### ***Postponing Federal Elections and Holding Regional Elections***

Ethiopia’s past five elections in the period of EPRDF were criticized for electoral vote theft and lacking transparency, and the country has frequently experienced postelection protests. The new premier, in his inaugural speech, promised that the 6<sup>th</sup> national election would be transparent and democratic. To ensure this goal, he has freed political prisoners to widen the voting electorate. Furthermore, he assigned Birtikuan Mideksa as a head of electoral board. She was one of the leaders of the opposition party imprisoned by the EPRDF under the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, though now she is not a member of any political party.

Although the election was planned to be held in August 2020, which was the last year of the EPRDF term, the government decided to postpone it due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A couple of options were raised by the government prior to the decision of the office responsible for making such decisions. The options were either to dissolve the parliament, call for a state of emergency, or extend the term of the current government and approve postponing the election. The House of Federation<sup>1</sup> passed the decision to postpone the election after consulting lawyers and other professionals for judicial review of the constitution. The decision was not welcomed by TPLF and their supporters, who argued that the COVID-19 pandemic was not a justifiable reason to postpone the election. They decided to reject the legitimacy of the federal government as well as its laws and proclamations after last day of the government administration on September 30, 2020. Once the decision was passed on postponing the election, the Tigray regional government decided to hold its own election without the approval of the Ethiopian election board, which is the only organization responsible for managing elections. The TPLF-ruling Tigray government established its own election board and conducted the election with five opposition parties participating. TPLF was declared to be the winning with 99% of the seats and the party formed its

government. This decision of TPLF was totally against the constitution of the federal government. The Ethiopian constitution clearly states that the election board is the only responsible body to manage the elections both for regional and federal seats. However, the federal government did not take any measures to prevent this from occurring. In his interview on the issue of Tigray conducting election, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said that it did not matter as long as the TPLF came to power. He said that problems would result if another party won the election that was not legally a part of the federal government.

### ***Attacking the Ethiopian Defence Forces in Tigray***

There have been several efforts by religious leaders and elderly Ethiopians across the country to settle differences through dialogue. This is one of the traditional methods for conflict resolution in Ethiopia. A peace and reconciliation committee was also established at the federal level to explore ways of finding compromise. Despite the efforts made, the situation worsened because the history of governmental corruption before Abiy Ahmed was linked to the TPLF. Tensions peaked when TPLF forces brutally attacked the Ethiopian Defence Forces based in Mekelle.

Following this attack on 2 November, 2020, the federal government announced a law enforcement order for the Ethiopian Defence Forces to enforce. The Amhara Special Forces and Eritrean Defence Forces were involved in the war alongside Ethiopian Defence Forces. The federal government gave nine days in three rounds (three days in each round) for the TPLF leaders to surrender, though they never accepted this offer.

After a week had passed, the premier informed the public through his twitter page that the law enforcement was going as planned and would end when the TPLF was disarmed.



▲ Figure 1. Prime Minister's Twitter post. Source: Office of the Prime Minister of Ethiopia



Following this post, the war only took two more weeks and the federal government seized control over nearly the entire territory of Tigray and the capital city of Mekele where the regional government operated. In the three-week war between the TPLF and other allied forces (the Amhara Special Force, Ertirean Defence Force, and Ethiopian Defence Force), some of the founding members of the TPLF were killed including Siyoum Mesfin (foreign minister during the EPRDF period and Ambassador of Ethiopia to China), Abay Tsehaye (minister of federal affairs and leader of Sugar Factory Corporation), Asmelash Woldeselassie (former Ethiopian parliament chief whip), Sekoture Getachew (the TPLF spokesperson), Daniel Assefa (former head of the Tigray finance bureau), and Zeray Asgedom (former head of the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority).

After controlling Mekelle, the capital of Tigray, the federal government established an interim government at both regional and lower administrative units in Tigray. At the regional level, oppositional political parties based in Tigray formed a coalition to share the power and tried to convince the local community members to vote for them. In the meantime, the Ethiopian Defence Force continued searching for the remaining TPLF leaders such as the president of Tigray, TPLF chairperson Debretsion Gebremichael, spokesperson Getachew Reda, and other senior staff. One of them included Sibhat Nega (called him Aboy Sibhat), who was the founding and most senior member of the front. Despite the continued search, they could not capture the majority of them including the president and other former Ethiopian Defence Forces generals who were leading the war for the TPLF.

Finally, on 28 June 2021, after eight months of being in Tigray, the federal government left most areas of Tigray except in the south and west where the Amhara Regional State claimed and passed a unilateral ceasefire to give the TPLF time to re-think and rural farmer a chance to return to their normal agricultural activities to reduce vulnerability to food insecurity in the region. The measure taken by the federal government on unilateral ceasefire was appreciated by the United Nations (UN), which requested the TPLF forces to respect this decision (UN, July 2021).

Despite the decision made by the federal government to cease fire, the TPLF continued to not only control the southern region but advanced to the Amhara and Afar territory. Although the government declared victory over the TPLF and claimed they would continue hunting members down, during the eighth month of the interim period the TPLF started a guerrilla war and grew stronger when the defence forces left the region.

### **Consequences of the Ongoing War**

The conflict between TPLF and the federal government has affected the country and the regions involved in the war. The following section discusses the main consequences of the war.

### *Socio-economic Consequences*

Civilians were killed by the crossfire and people were displaced from their homes, becoming dependent on aid. According to the UN in July 2021, more than 2 million people were displaced because of the war. In the first few months after the war, Tigray experienced a complete blackout. There was no electricity in Tigray because the electric powerlines were damaged. There was no telecommunication access or banking services. Lack of access to drinking water and transportation were additional problems resulting from the guerrilla war. Businesses shut down and trade with other regions stopped. Banking access was blocked for those accounts opened in Tigray regardless of where people lived and their ethnicity. This situation forced all citizens including wealthy individuals to become dependent on aid, which was limited due to the number of displaced people in the three regions and road blockage to Tigray by the TPLF.

According to a UN meeting in July 2021, the ceasefire was not followed by the TPLF and they continued the war. As a result, basic support to humanitarian services was halted, and there was widespread destruction and looting of communication centres by the Ethiopian Defence Forces while withdrawing (UN, 2 July 2021),

Massacres were committed, which killed more than 1,000 people in Mai-Kadra and Axum. More than 200 sexual and gender-based violence reports were submitted to the UN (UN, August 26, 2021), which were reportedly perpetrated by soldiers involved in the war. According to the informal interview with the TPLF soldiers and the rural community in southern Tigray and the phone interviews conducted with residents from Axum, Shire, and Mekelle, most members of the Ethiopian Defence Forces had high ethical standards, though some were involved in rape and theft. According to the interviewees, members of the Eritrean Defence Forces were responsible for killing and raping family members and burning down houses.

Most rural residents depend on agriculture to get the food they consume and cash they need to survive. Agriculture in Ethiopia accounts for almost half of the gross domestic product (41% of GDP), 80% of the employment, and the majority of foreign exchange earnings (Zenebe et al., 2011). Many research findings (Zewudu and Bam-laku, 2014; Bezabih et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2013; Wagesho et al., 2013) revealed the importance of agriculture for economic growth and reducing poverty. Due to the war, hundreds of thousands of young Ethiopians have joined the Ethiopian Defence Forces instead of working in the labour market. Moreover, farmers from Amhara and Tigray regional states are involved in the war. These farmers should be ploughing and harvesting their lands so that they can feed themselves and other Ethiopians. This situation affected farming and reducing production, which in turn has led to food insecurity.

The destroyed tanks, cars, mortars, and other military equipment have resulted in a loss of millions of dollars. For a country suffering with hard currency, it is too costly to recover these resources, especially because the federal government is being forced to buy additional military equipment while the war continues. Due to the war,

the IMF Projection for 2022-2026 has excluded Ethiopia from its global economic projection citing the unusual high degree of uncertainty (IMF, 2021).

### ***Diplomatic Issues***

Diplomatically, Ethiopia is far from where the country used to be. The European Union, the United States, the United Nations Security Council and other countries are calling for a ceasefire. Several meetings have been held to discuss the crisis in Ethiopian. Individual sanctions were imposed by the USA on some of the leaders at the federal level. For example, leaders of the Amhara region and the TPLF are on the lists who are denied to get USA visa.

Moreover, recently the U.S. government gave information on the upcoming sanctions to be imposed unless there is a ceasefire. Authorities said that the United States will remove Ethiopia from the AGOA (African Growth and Opportunity Act) agreement that allows Ethiopia to import from the USA free of tax. Following this decision, the special economics advisor of the prime minister requested the USA not to take such a measure as it would affect more than one million Ethiopians who are not directly involved in the war (DireTube, October 15, 2021).

### ***Infrastructural Damage***

Infrastructure is one of the main enablers for economic growth of African countries. It has a significant contribution to poverty reduction, assuring food security and sustainable development. The role of infrastructure in enhancing the economic growth is mentioned as it is a prerequisite for any development. It is also very difficult to assure sustainable development without proper infrastructures. As it can be seen in the pictures above, schools, health facilities, tourist destinations, and transportation



^ Figure 2. U.S. Announcement. Source: United States Embassy in Addis Ababa

facilities such as airport and roads were damaged as a consequence of the conflict. Education is key to human capital development. A country's healthcare, labor force, and transportation facilities are key to facilitate economic activity by transporting goods and providing services.

Based on several studies, Fan and Rao (2003) indicated that public spending in rural infrastructure is one of the most powerful instruments that governments can use to promote economic growth and poverty reduction. Teklebirhan (2015) has strengthened the importance of investing in public infrastructure to boost output and growth. The government of Ethiopia invested a huge amount of money on several infrastructural developments in the country.

The important role of international development co-operation can be seen in the preceding overview of infrastructural development. China has built much-needed transport infrastructure that can increase Africa's connectivity with the rest of the world (Tarrósy and Vörös, 2018; Erdeiné Késmárki-Gally, 2015; Vörös, 2010), but the role of India has also been increasing in this area. Moreover, India is now more interested in training African personnel than bringing in its own professionals (Tarrósy, 2011).

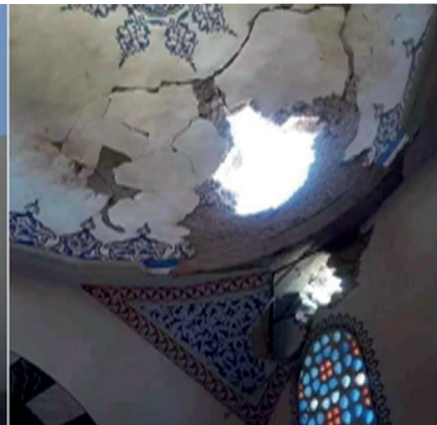
Due to the ongoing war, infrastructure has been damaged. Examples are highlighted in the pictures below: the Axum airport located at the city of Axum, known for being a UNESCO registered world heritage site; the Al Nejashi Mosque, the first mosque in Ethiopia; tourist sites, bridges, and health and educational facilities. Furthermore, educational infrastructures have been damaged and will take time to recover from the effect of the war. Additionally, health centres and other social services have been damaged by the war. These are resources that the country has invested in to ensure sustainable economic development and improve the livelihood of communities.

### ***Interruptions to Education***

Recently, education has not only become a human rights issue, but also a key factor in reducing poverty and improving living standards (Debebe, 2014; Kadzamira and Rose, 2003). Education is key for improving the quality of life, and it is difficult to survive in the current knowledge-based competitive world without education. It is a way to build bridges between communities from different nations to foster political understanding and socio-economic progress, which in turn enhances local and regional economic development (Petros, 2015).

Education has been interrupted in the Tigray, Amhara, and Afar regional states. Most soldiers in TPLF are young children who should be attending school. Furthermore, university students who were studying in graduate and post graduate programs in Tigray universities located were forced to stop their educational careers.

Interruption of schooling means not only stopping for the duration of the war, but it also raises challenges when children go back to school. Moreover, for those who are displaced, it is difficult to settle and engaged in education due to cultural differences in new locations.



^ Figure 3. Photographs of structural damage resulting from the war. Source: Social Media and Google

It is crucial to improve the health of the population in order to achieve development goals (Panda and Thakur, 2016; Obrist et al., 2007). According to Ram (2012), health is not only a determining factor to development, but it is also a human right.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The root cause of this war was a matter of gaining power in the federal government. Specifically, the main reasons included the formation of the prosperity party during the EPRDF period, ideological economic development changes made by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed from a developmental state economy to a liberal system, and lack of transparency on details of agreements signed between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Additionally, postponing the federal election was not welcomed by TPLF leaders. The other root cause for the current war between TPLF and the federal government

was the attack on the Ethiopian Defence Forces following the illegal regional election they held. According to the informal interviews and discussions with different residents in Tigray, this kind of attack on the Ethiopian Defence Forces from within is intolerable for all Ethiopians including the Tigray people.

The impact of war is multi-dimensional. The economy of the country in general and the war zone area in particular are affected. Lack of social services is an issue that is key to survival. Displaced people including mothers with children in Tigray, Amhara, and Afar Regional State are suffering from hunger and they are dying. They are dependent on aid, though the transportation system for the assistance has been affected by the ongoing war as well. Young boys who should be at school and young adults who should be working in the labour market are instead fighting in the war, which will affect the future of country.

In general, the economy of the country is suffering. Military equipment has been destroyed, infrastructure has been damaged, the young citizens who should be part of the labour force are dying in the war. This situation is decreasing economic transactions and having negative impact on Ethiopia's economy. Moreover, this war is reducing tourism and foreign investment in the country.

Most importantly, many people are involved in discussing the current crisis in Ethiopia, with most debating which side is right and which side is wrong. This means that more energy could be spent on discussing economic development, entrepreneurship, and other social developments issues related to the war. Therefore, these arguments over the war are often a huge waste of time and resources.

Governmental systems are expected to play a pivotal role in maintaining food security and sustainable development of the region. As long as there is good governance (i.e. a system that is participatory, accountable, transparent, equitable, inclusiveness, responsive, well-structured, and law-abiding), there will be a better social development.

The only possible way to make improvements is to sit down and talk about potential solutions. Dialogue is the foundation for peace. Of course, peace is a broader concept, but first we must stop the senseless deaths of young children and military personnel in our nation. In its meetings on the crisis in Ethiopia, the United Nation has been calling for a ceasefire without any preconditions set by TPLF. Furthermore, the crimes committed should be investigated by an independent and neutral body. Peace has to come first and there should not be any preconditions for peace. Peace deals can be made before, during, and after war. Despite the delay in reaching an agreement, it is better to agree to end war face-to-face while sitting around a table. The longer the conflict, the more famine and suffering people will have to endure. The recommendation we make is to save the people and the country by being responsible. Both sides should sit down and start making a ceasefire agreement so they can agree on a solution. Additionally, a dialogue forum on national issues should be urgently organized for all active political parties in the country. ☀

## Note

- 1 The House of Federation is the upper house of the bicameral Federal Parliamentary Assembly, the parliament of Ethiopia.

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