



Starving Tigray

How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine

Foreword by Helen Clark



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ABOUT

The World Peace Foundation, an operating foundation affiliated solely with the Fletcher School at Tufts University, aims to provide intellectual leadership on issues of peace, justice and security. We believe that innovative research and teaching are critical to the challenges of making peace around the world, and should go hand-in-hand with advocacy and practical engagement with the toughest issues. To respond to organized violence today, we not only need new instruments and tools—we need a new vision of peace. Our challenge is to reinvent peace.

This report has benefited from the research, analysis and review of a number of individuals, most of whom preferred to remain anonymous. For that reason, we are attributing authorship solely to the World Peace Foundation.



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Cover photo: A Tigrayan child at the refugee registration center near Kassala, Sudan

FOREWORD

The calamitous humanitarian dimensions of the conflict in Tigray are becoming painfully clear. The international community must respond quickly and effectively now to save many hundreds of thousands of lives.

The human tragedy which has unfolded in Tigray is a man-made disaster. Reports of mass atrocities there are heart breaking, as are those of starvation crimes. There has been wanton destruction of health facilities and food supplies; pillaging of essential services, including of industries which provided employment to tens of thousands of people; and the obstruction of essential relief to desperate people.

This must end.

Whatever political differences may have sparked the armed conflict in Tigray, it is abhorrent for starvation to be used as a weapon of war at the expense of the civilian population. As affirmed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2417, adopted unanimously less than three years ago, this may be a war crime.

The fighting must stop: cessation of hostilities would then allow humanitarian agencies to reach people in need, and for those in need to receive assistance and restart their lives. An end to the fighting now would enable farmers to plough their fields and plant their crops in the coming months.

Killings of civilians, widespread rape, expulsion of people from their homes, and attacks on refugees in Tigray have been documented by international human rights organizations and the United Nations. These shocking events are not only human rights violations in their own right, but also, as this report shows, are contributing to destitution and starvation.

This World Peace Foundation report details how starvation crimes go beyond the immediate destruction or theft of food and other essentials. They also include dismembering the components of an elaborate food security system built up over decades. The poor of Tigray depend not only on their small farms, but also on family members who have jobs as seasonal laborers and in manufacturing and tourism, on their carefully-husbanded savings in micro-finance institutions, and on government-provided safety net programs. All of these are now gone or reduced to a bare minimum.

Over the years, the results of the slow and painstaking human development progress made in Tigray and elsewhere in Ethiopia in improving lives and reducing vulnerability to hunger have been impressive. It is very painful now to see decades of hard-earned gains reversed in a few months' spree of senseless destruction. It is distressing that people in a country which has worked so hard to meet national and internationally agreed development goals should suffer such a catastrophic and needless reversal.

At a time of over-stretched aid budgets and over-stressed multilateral institutions, the world cannot afford a man-made famine in Ethiopia today.

Rt Hon Helen Clark

Former Prime Minister of New Zealand, former Administrator of the United Nations Development Program and Patron, The Helen Clark Foundation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

They have destroyed Tigray, literally.'

*Mulugeta Gebrehiwot
speaking by phone from Tigray
January 27, 2021*

The people of Tigray, Ethiopia, are suffering a humanitarian crisis that is entirely man-made. This special report from the World Peace Foundation documents how Ethiopian and Eritrean belligerents in the war in Tigray have comprehensively dismantled the region's economy and food system. We provide evidence of their ongoing actions to deprive people of objects and activities indispensable to their survival—actions that amount to international crimes. We track the process of deprivation conducted in a widespread and systematic manner. We indicate where it is leading: in coming months, to mass starvation and a risk of famine; in the longer term, to sustained food insecurity and dependence on external assistance.

All the 5.7 million people in Tigray are affected by this crisis, of whom the United Nations estimates that 4.5 million are 'in need'. It is, first and foremost, an urgent humanitarian disaster demanding life-saving assistance. The World Peace Foundation urges all the belligerents to place the survival and welfare of the affected people above political and military goals.

Regardless of who is responsible for the outbreak of hostilities, the sole reason for the scale of the humanitarian emergency is that the coalition of Ethiopian Federal forces, Amhara regional forces, and Eritrean troops are committing starvation crimes on large scale.

This report does not go into legal details, but we believe that accountability for mass starvation crimes should follow.

The crisis is also a challenge to the international community, which invested substantial resources and expertise over 30 years in ensuring that the formerly famine-prone provinces of Ethiopia would never again be reduced to starvation—and be a charge on the aid budgets of foreign charities and donors. How are international partners to respond to the willful destruction of a shared project of poverty alleviation and famine prevention by their 'development partner'?

There is a severe deficit of information about the depth and spread of the humanitarian crisis in Tigray today. The established humanitarian crisis information and analysis systems have been disabled. There is not even an agreed figure for the number of people in need of assistance, though we cite the widely-used estimate of 4.5 million.

At every stage in the war in Tigray thus far, worst-case assumptions have been proven the most reliable. What we do not yet know has consistently turned out to be more dreadful than what we can document reliably. We have reason to fear that this may be the case for the crisis of forced mass starvation.

This report cannot fill the information void. It tries instead to put together what we know about Tigray's economy and food system with what we know about the processes whereby they are being dismantled. The report draws upon publicly available data and established frameworks of food security analysis.

Section 1 draws on existing information to provide a (blurry) snapshot of the current humanitarian emergency in Tigray. This is necessarily incomplete due to lack of access for humanitarian workers and journalists, and because standard food security forecasting breaks down in situations in which armed actors are deliberately causing starvation. The picture is extremely alarming. It points to a massive crisis for which national and international humanitarian actors were sorely underprepared, and to which the response to date is grossly inadequate. We conclude that given the food security status of Central and Eastern Tigray, it is likely that the populations of these areas have been suffering elevated mortality rates over the last two months due to the effects of hunger, acute malnutrition and disease. There are no validated methods for extrapolating mortality estimates from acute food security analysis that we are able to provide, but a figure in the range 50-100 excess deaths per day is credible.

Section 2 is a general analysis of the process of creating food crisis, with particular attention to the context of armed conflict. It brings together international law prohibiting starvation with the process of famine creation. The key concept here is that the crime of starvation is defined (in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and drawing on the Geneva Convention) as destroying, removing or rendering useless 'objects indispensable to survival.' We explore what this means in reality: not just 'objects' such as foodstuffs and medicines, but also activities such as moving freely to obtain these objects or having employment to earn money and purchase them.

Section 3 examines the structure of livelihoods and food security in Tigray prior to the outbreak of war. The region was historically a food deficit region dependent on migrant labor, and was the epicenter (with neighboring Wollo Province) of the famine of 1984-85. After 1991, the economy was developed and reconfigured by the government in partnership with international donors, determined that never again should people be reduced to starvation. Tigray became more food secure through the promotion of diversified and sustainable smallholder agriculture, commercial sesame production, artisanal mining, industries, and various components of the Productive Safety Net Program, among other initiatives. This was a major achievement that took three decades to build.

The paradox of resilience in Tigray is that this impressive development has exposed the population to new vulnerabilities should those new structures be dismantled. The economy and food system have been hard hit by the hostilities and consequent closure of banks and microfinance institutions and the interruption of government resource transfers, the seizure of land and forced displacement, and massive looting. This looting includes the systematic ransacking of industry and services along with the closure of migrant labor options. This framework provides a more comprehensive picture and indicates the trajectory of the crisis. Achieving basic food security in the next 12-18 months will be extremely difficult for the average Tigrayan, alongside the long-term challenge of impoverishment.

Section 4 compiles evidence for starvation crimes committed in Tigray. It is a detailed list based on public sources augmented by some confidential information from interviews. The evidence

listed is not intended to identify specific starvation crimes nor to identify specific perpetrators. Rather, it points to evidence indicative of various criminal acts that warrant further investigation. It includes a summary account of looting and asset stripping, asset destruction, and the pillage and vandalism of health facilities, schools, homes, banks, offices, hotels, water and sanitation services, and additional private and public infrastructure. It describes the obstruction of essential activities including through ethnic cleansing, sexual violence, impeding labor migration and destroying opportunities for employment. This section also examines the role of the information and communications blackout in preventing affected people from coping and briefly touches on the attacks on refugee camps for Eritreans.

Section 5 turns to the inhibition of an effective international response, including lack of timely and accurate information and lack of humanitarian access. The tight restrictions on information flows from Tigray mean that widespread and systematic atrocities are concealed from the world, including essential information about the perpetration of starvation and the impacts on the civilian population. Access for humanitarian actors remains limited in where they can go, what they can do, and their ability to assess the overall situation. Most of the affected population lacks full and safe access to humanitarian assistance.

Section 6 considers responses and remedies. This begins with a cessation of hostilities and humanitarian access (for humanitarian actors and affected people). Urgent steps are needed to keep farmers on their land and provide them with the necessities for cultivating in the fast-approaching rainy season. Freedom of communication is an essential element in the above. We then turn to responding to the element of intentional starvation, which begins with acknowledging starvation crimes, investigating and punishing them, and securing restitution and reparations.

Our stark conclusion is that the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea are starving the people of Tigray. Circumstantial evidence suggests that this is intentional, systematic and widespread. In today's predicament it may be necessary for international humanitarian actors to cooperate with the authorities to provide essential assistance to the victims. It is not appropriate to praise the Ethiopian government for permitting modest acts of mercy towards the survivors of its policies.

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1. A Blurred Snapshot of the Humanitarian Emergency

Prior to the outbreak of war in November, Tigray region had mostly achieved food security. That cherished achievement was precarious. Longstanding factors such as low crop yields and enduring levels of poverty contributed to chronic vulnerability. In 2020, these combined with a plague of desert locusts, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and national-level pressures including macro-economic difficulties. Underlying this were structural vulnerabilities that were fast emerging, especially the fact that the poorest relied on national-level safety-net programs which were in jeopardy as relations between the regional government of Tigray and the Federal Government deteriorated.

Armed conflict in Tigray began in November, involving four belligerents: the Tigray Defense Force (TDF) and associated militia; the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF); the Eritrean Defense Force (EDF); and Amhara Regional Special Forces and aligned militias. The ENDF, the EDF and the Amhara forces are allied against the TDF, popularly known as the *woyane*.¹ The command relationship among the three allied belligerents remains unclear but they share common goals and conduct joint operations.

The Food Security Situation Immediately Prior to the War

The most common humanitarian framework and set of tools for determining the food security status of geographic areas and populations is the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). It is the global humanitarian system's agreed upon method for warning about and identifying famine, as well as acute food insecurity of lesser severity, and uses a five-phase scale of severity. Although IPC was created in 2004, it was only recently adopted in Ethiopia to complement existing domestic systems. As in most countries where it has been adopted, IPC analysis in Ethiopia is led by the government and supported by a wide range of stakeholders, including UN agencies and other humanitarian actors.

The first IPC analysis in Ethiopia was conducted in November 2019.² The last analysis conducted that considered at least some areas of Tigray was in October 2020 when the food security of most of the region was only considered 'Stressed' (IPC Phase 2), which is not typically associated with any substantial loss of life due to food insecurity. Western Tigray was considered sufficiently food secure to not even be analyzed at the time. The October 2020 analysis include projections of the most likely food security situation extended to the period July-September 2021. This covered the period of the annual hunger season in much of Tigray, a large area of the region was expected to be experiencing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) levels of food insecurity.³ This is the first phase at which populations are generally considered in need of life-saving humanitarian assistance. The date for the regularly scheduled update to the last IPC analysis has yet to be publicly announced.⁴

Other analysis and prioritization systems remain in use, such as a biannual hotspot analysis focused on

1 A term for Tigray rebellion dating back to the 1940s and used for the TPLF and, TDF. See: <https://sabaofaxsum.medium.com/dont-call-me-woyane-i-don-t-deserve-it-5e6541d5912f>

2 'Collaboration to Underpin Sustainability of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) in Ethiopia - Government of Ethiopia, European Union and FAO,' Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAO, June 2, 2020, <http://www.fao.org/ethiopia/news/detail-events/en/c/1260259/>.

3 Ethiopia IPC Technical Working Group, *Ethiopia IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis*, 2020, Accessed March 24, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IPC_Ethiopia_Acute_Food_Insecurity_2020Oct2021Sept_Report.pdf.

4 'Ethiopia: Acute Food Insecurity Update (Dates TBC),' Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, Accessed March 25, 2021, <http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-website/events/events-details/en/c/1153065/>.

the second smallest administrative units (woredas). This analysis uses multisector indicators for national and regional-level analysis. It identifies priority woredas for humanitarian response for different levels of government as well as other humanitarian actors. Prior to the adoption of IPC, the federal Ministry of Agriculture and many humanitarian actors used woreda hotspots as a rough proxy for IPC classifications.⁵ This included the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN, which is the institutional home of the IPC.⁶

As of July 2020, hotspot analysis identified 13 of Tigray's 88 woredas, or about one sixth of the woredas in the region, as Priority 1, which can be a proxy for Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes, depending on the data considered. These hotspots were concentrated within the areas of Tigray that are today facing the worst food insecurity. An additional 18 woredas were considered Priority 2 and Priority 3 hotspots. Overall, prior to the armed conflict, the Federal Government and other humanitarian actors prioritized over one third of Tigray's woredas for humanitarian assistance.⁷

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), an independent organization funded by the United States government, has produced the only publicly accessible analysis of the food security situation in Tigray since armed conflict began there. While the arrangement may vary by country, FEWS NET usually conducts its own technical analysis and later consults other actors, especially host governments. Its analysis uses the IPC, though without the component requiring technical consensus among a wider range of stakeholders, making FEWS NET's analysis IPC-compatible rather than IPC products themselves. It also typically participates in national IPC fora, as well.

Immediately before hostilities started in early November 2020, FEWS NET classified most of Tigray as food secure (IPC Phase 1), with some areas Stressed (IPC Phase 2) and a limited area where humanitarian assistance was keeping the population from being in a phase higher than Stressed (IPC Phase 2 with an exclamation mark when mapped). This followed analyses over the previous five years in which Tigray was routinely classified as one of the more food secure regions of Ethiopia. In particular, FEWS NET considered the main harvests in Tigray to be average or near-average from 2016 through 2019, which meant that some farmers had built up food stores. The plague of locusts—the worst for 70 years—devoured crops in some areas. Farmers also rushed to harvest early in order to save their crops from the infestation.⁸ Overall, a near-average harvest was expected for the final months of 2020.⁹

5 Early Warning and Response Directorate (EWRD) of the Disaster Risk Management and Food Security Sector, of the Ministry of Agriculture, *Hotspot (Woredas of Concern) Classification Guideline*, Addis Ababa, May 2014, Accessed March 24, 2021, <http://www.ndrnc.gov.et/downloadable/Documentation/Hotspot%20Classification%20Guideline%20May%202014.pdf>. See also 'Ethiopia - Hotspot Woredas.' Humanitarian Data Exchange. OCHA. Accessed March 24, 2021. <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/hotspot-woredas>.

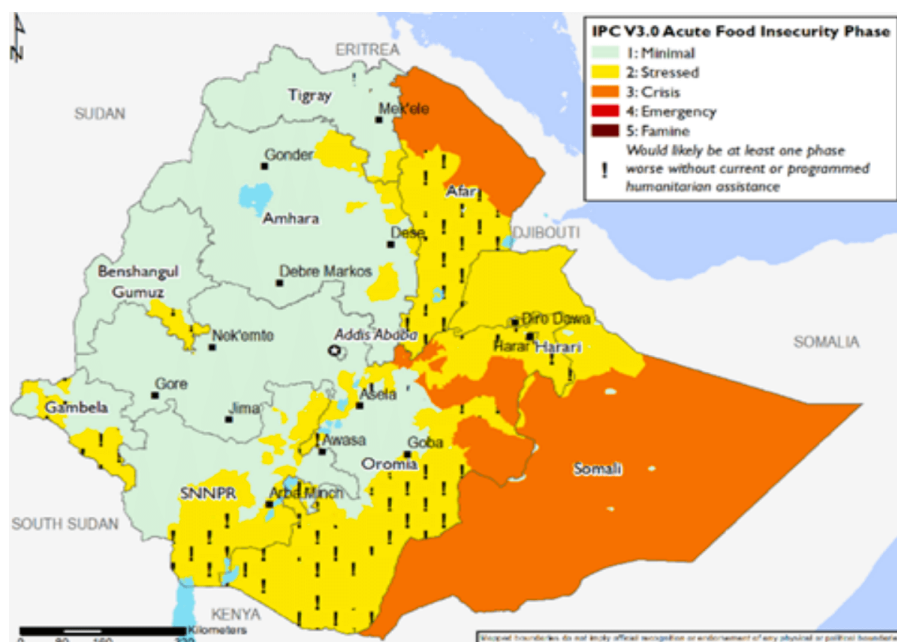
6 'Hotspot Classification in Ethiopia - June 2017,' Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, July 2017, <https://bit.ly/3ud-4ru3>.

7 Emergency Nutrition Coordination Unit of Ethiopia, *July 2020 Hotspot Woredas Classification Summary Report*, July 2020, Accessed March 24, 2021, <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1omoXeH39EYSMcOBqU5B5405H92IXzFJ1>.

8 Seppe Dekkers, Jan Nyssen and Sil Lanckfriet, 'Ethiopia's Tigray Region has seen famine before: Why it could happen again,' *The Conversation*, November 17, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/ethiopias-tigray-region-has-seen-famine-before-why-it-could-happen-again-150181>

9 See all of the Food Security Outlooks and Food Security Outlook Updates, and one Key Message Update covering the 2017 harvest, provided by FEWS NET using IPC-compatible analyses for the period 2016-20. The worst level of food insecurity documented reached Crisis (IPC Phase 3), with worse outcomes prevented by the provision of food assistance, for only small area of Tigray in one period of analysis. All products available at <https://fews.net/east-africa/ethiopia>.

Figure 1. FEWS NET Analysis of the Food Security Situation in Tigray, October 2020



The situation was complicated by the withdrawal of budgetary transfers from the federal to the regional government in September, the replacement of old banknotes by a new issue, with Tigray lagging in its ability to obtain the new currency, and worsening problems on the border between Amhara and Tigray Regions which was restricting inter-regional trade and movement.

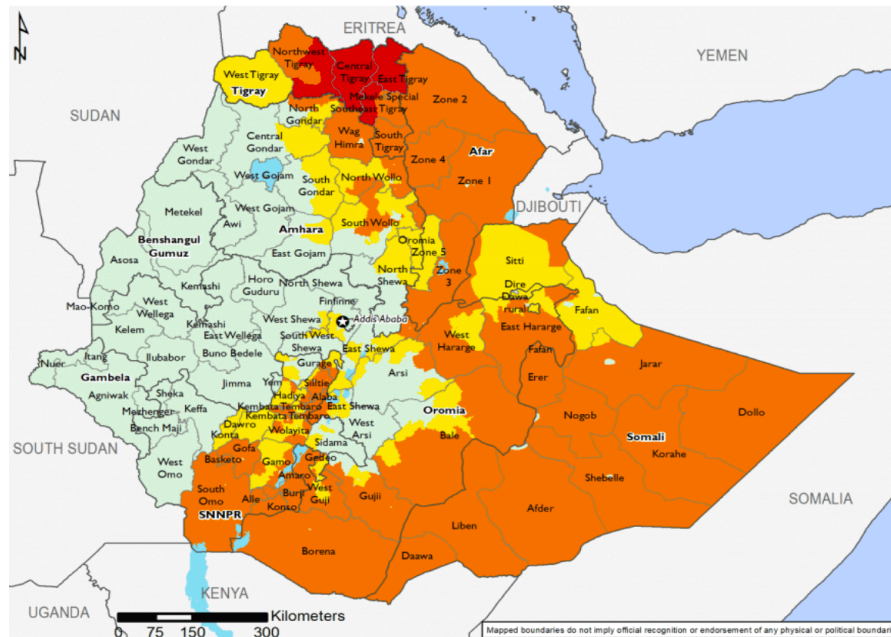
The Food Security Situation Since the Outbreak of the War

FEWS NET released updates on Tigray in December 2020, January 2021, and March 2021.¹⁰ Based on information available at the time of analysis in March, FEWS NET reaffirmed its January projection of the most likely food security situation in Tigray in the period February-May. This includes the classification of at least 20% of the population of both Central and Eastern Tigray, in addition to several sections of Northwestern and Southeastern Tigray, as experiencing Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of food insecurity. Only Western Tigray is not classified as food insecure –only Stressed (IPC Phase 2). As discussed later, this seems unlikely given how the conflict has unfolded there.

From nearly the entire region being food secure in October 2020 to widespread Emergency (IPC Phase 4) food insecurity across the most densely populated areas of Tigray by March is a very rapid deterioration. These outcomes were projected to continue through September 2021. No other areas of Ethiopia were classified as facing Emergency (IPC Phase 4) food insecurity in the period February-May or even projected to experience this through the period July-September outside of Tigray.

¹⁰ FEWS NET, *Food Security Outlook Update: Food security Crisis across much of eastern Ethiopia drives significantly above-normal needs for 2021*, December 2020, Accessed March 24, 2021, <https://fews.net/east-africa/ethiopia/food-security-outlook-update/december-2020>; FEWS NET, *Key Message Update: Continued conflict in Tigray coupled with low economic activity drives Emergency (IPC Phase 4)*, January 2021, Accessed March 24, 2021, <https://fews.net/east-africa/ethiopia/key-message-update/january-2021>; FEWS NET, *Food Security Outlook: Amid high national needs, Tigray remains of greatest concern with conflict driving Emergency outcomes*, Accessed March 25, 2021, <https://fews.net/east-africa/ethiopia/food-security-outlook/february-2021>.

Figure 2. FEWS NET Projection of Most Likely Food Security Situation in Tigray, February to May 2021



Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of food insecurity are lethal and deaths are expected at a high rate within a population experiencing it. As leading global experts on famine have argued, death due to the interaction of starvation, acute malnutrition, and disease is not limited to a period of time labeled ‘famine’.¹¹ Many lives are typically lost throughout the various stages of a famine process, including in the build-up towards the onset of famine and as a famine subsides. A population experiencing severe food insecurity for a prolonged period, while avoiding a collapse into famine, may still see a greater cumulative loss of life than a similarly sized population that enters into famine, but faces severe food insecurity for a shorter period of time overall.

Central and Eastern Tigray have a combined estimated pre-crisis population of about 2.5 million.¹² While FEWS NET does not publish the proportion of the population within each of the five IPC phases in a given geographic unit of analysis, the minimum threshold needed to classify a geographic area under the IPC framework is 20%. Given FEWS NET’s classifications, 20% is the minimum proportion of the population in these zones experiencing this severity of food insecurity. The true proportion is likely higher than 20%, however, due to the extent of displacement, asset-stripping, and other damage to livelihoods and coping strategies in these areas.

Emergency (IPC Phase 4) food insecurity is associated with a rate of death between 1 and 2 deaths per 10,000 people per day due to causes other than violence. Most commonly, death occurs through the combined effects of disease and acute malnutrition.¹³

11 Maxwell, Daniel, Peter Hailey, Abdullahi Khalif, Andrew Seal, Alex de Waal, Nicholas Haan, and Francesco Checchi, ‘Hunger Deaths Aren’t Simply about Famine or No Famine,’ *The New Humanitarian*, February 8, 2021, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2021/2/3/yemen-famine-aid-hunger-crises-south-sudan-malnutrition>.

12 ACAPS. *Ethiopia: The Pre-crisis Situation in Tigray*, February 22, 2021, Accessed March 14, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-pre-crisis-situation-tigray-secondary-data-review-22-february-2021>.

13 While an IPC classification is not on its own a true proxy for the direct measurement or inference of overall mortality and rate of

Given FEWS NET's analysis, by the end of February, we would expect the death rate in Tigray's two most populous zones to have risen. We cannot say by how much, but a figure in the range of 50 and 100 excess deaths every day as a result of causes directly related to food insecurity is a reasonable guess. Noting that death rates are expected to rise in IPC Phase 3 conditions (Crisis), it may be a conservative estimate.¹⁴

This is an alarming deterioration due entirely to the war and associated forced displacement and immobility, looting, disruption of essential economic activities, and destruction of objects indispensable to survival.

Prospects for Food Insecurity in 2021

Each of the pillars of livelihoods and food entitlement in Tigray have been destroyed or damaged by the war and the deliberate actions of the belligerents. In addition to the Crisis and Emergency conditions prevailing today, these actions also sharply raise the risk of famine in Tigray which would entail an exponential rise in the rate of death.

The situation is critical now and if the rural economy is not sufficiently stabilized in time for the start of the growing season then the 2021 harvest will also be lost. The current food crisis will not only continue for an additional 12 months but may worsen.

Smallholder agriculture and seasonal labor are two of the main pillars of rural food security in Tigray. Both have been directly attacked and will likely continue to be severely disrupted in the months ahead. The outbreak of war coincided with the peak of the September-January harvest season in Tigray. Large-scale and intense violence has continued in many areas since November, with ongoing military offensives, urban centers systematically looted, and dozens of rural settlements looted and destroyed, alongside the mass displacement of the civilian population.

Most of Tigray has only one rainy season, the *kiremt* rains lasting approximately June-September. The disruption of the 2020 harvest leaves many households waiting roughly 12 months until the first opportunity for another harvest. The early plowing and farm preparation season begins in mid-April 2021 for most of Tigray. Reports from the field indicate that farmers are determined to stay in their villages and return to cultivation if it is in any way humanly possible. A cessation of hostilities is a pre-requisite for many, perhaps most, farmers to be able to plow their own fields and plant crops and reap a harvest. They will also need seeds and tools, plow oxen, fertilizer, access to financial services, as well as food and other essentials. Diseases such as malaria become more common in the rainy season and health facilities will need to be rehabilitated. The time remaining for these preconditions for a full return to farming is desperately short.

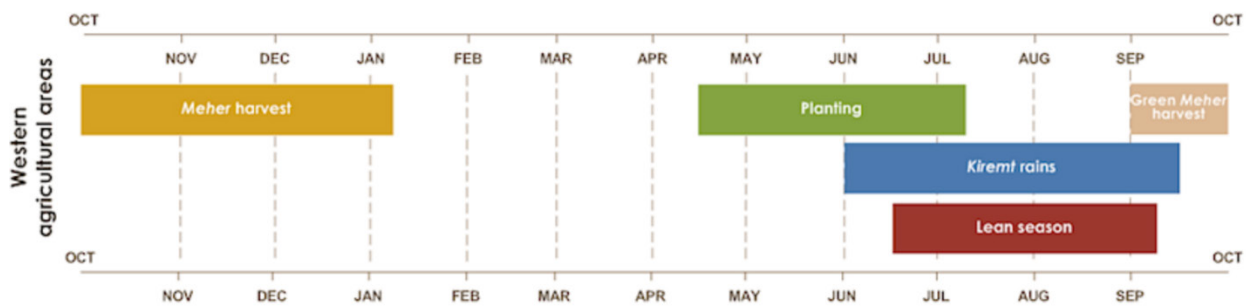
mortality, it can indicate a likely range. Due to a wide range of factors, including the natural time-lag between the onset of severe food insecurity and the occurrence of acute malnutrition, disease, and death, a population-level rate of death does not always fall within the expected range associated with a given IPC phase for acute food insecurity and mortality should always be directly assessed on its own. In the absence of mortality data, an understanding of the food insecurity can still help inform understanding of expected loss of life as a result.

¹⁴ A geographic unit of analysis is classified as within one of the five phases of acute food insecurity on the IPC scale when at least 20% of the area's population falls within that phase or it is the highest phase in which at least 20% of the area's population is cumulatively classified. See Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Global Partners, *IPC Technical Manual Version 3.0*, http://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/manual/IPC_Technical_Manual_3_Final.pdf.

Households unable to harvest and retain their full 2020 production are now relying on other means of obtaining sufficient income and food to survive the coming months, and those unable to cultivate during the 2021 rainy season will also rely on these other sources.

Most non-farm sources of income and strategies for coping with a lack of access to normal food depend upon freedom of movement. This does not exist.¹⁵

Figure 3. Seasonal Calendar of Livelihoods in Tigray, Adapted from FEWS NET¹⁶



There is an emergent de facto partition of Tigray into four areas of control. In Mekelle and one or two other towns and their immediate environs, the ENDF is the controlling military authority. In Western Tigray and parts of Northwestern and Southern Tigray, territory has been occupied and claimed by Amhara regional state. The northern belt of Tigray is under the control of the EDF. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has formally requested that Eritrea withdraws, but at the time of writing, details for how, when and on what conditions a verified withdrawal would take place are not known. The central and eastern highlands will meanwhile remain the focus of what an ENDF commanding officer has called a ‘dirty war.’¹⁷

This partition, in itself, is a major impediment to the normal seasonal migration of hundreds of thousands of laborers to areas of seasonal employment. Traffic along the roads is restricted, slow and hazardous. There are also checkpoints on most roads, at which people are subjected to harassment, theft of belongings, beatings and sometimes execution.

Prior to the war, a substantial proportion of the Tigrayan population obtained their livelihoods through employment in industry and services. This has almost entirely ceased.

Typically, a mix of basic services, safety nets, and humanitarian programs would support the most vulnerable households through periods of food insecurity. These include the government’s flagship Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), cash support from microfinance institutions and banks, family assistance provided through bank transfers and remittances, local government assistance. All of these are severely disrupted or halted, though there are reportedly efforts to revive the PSNP. In several large rural woredas, no humanitarian food assistance or PSNP assistance was reported as of late March. The logistics for registering recipients of assistance such as local government institutions have been damaged: offices and records have been destroyed, though individuals who know how to run the system may remain.

¹⁵ The restriction of seasonal labor migration was even an explicit assumption for the period July-September 2021 in the federal government-led IPC analysis that concluded in October 2020. Ethiopia IPC Technical Working Group, *Ethiopia IPC Analysis*.

¹⁶ FEWS NET, *Ethiopia Seasonal Calendar*, <https://fews.net/east-africa/ethiopia>.

¹⁷ RFI, ‘Ethiopian general tells diplomats of ‘dirty war’ in Tigray,’ March 16, 2021, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/ethiopian-general-tells-diplomats-of-dirty-war-in-tigray>.

Emergency humanitarian assistance is reaching a small proportion of those in need. In its March 22 update, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) described continuing impediments to distributing food assistance once it had physically arrived in Tigray. These included a limited capacity among deployed humanitarians and local authorities to register internally displaced persons (IDPs), making them ineligible to receive food assistance. OCHA noted that ‘This is particularly concerning given that distribution of food aid is currently limited to registered displaced people who are a very small fraction of the overall number of displaced people.’¹⁸

Over the longer term, the restoration of Tigray’s food economy then requires the restitution of destroyed, damaged or stolen assets, the resumption of migrant labor opportunities, the restoration of industry and services and associated employment, and the re-establishment of government safety net and welfare services. In short, sustainable food security requires that all the investments in poverty reduction and development over the previous 29 years, much of it achieved with international donor partnership, will have to be put back. In the meantime, urgent effort is needed to prevent famine.

2. Frameworks for Understanding Armed Conflict and Food Insecurity

This section provides a framework that brings together the analysis of armed conflict (including starvation crimes and faminogenic acts) with livelihoods and food systems.

Famine as a Process

For the global humanitarian system, famine is seen as a time-bound event. The term is applied to a geographic area when key quantitative thresholds for food consumption and livelihood change, acute malnutrition, and rates of death are met or surpassed for a sufficient proportion of the population.

Famine is also a *process*. To be exact, it is a non-linear process involving decreases in households’ and individuals’ inability to obtain food (through their own production, the market, or community or government programs, or other mechanisms) as a result of adverse events, and the self-reinforcing dynamics that can take hold over time if access to food is not regained. Individuals, households, and communities actively work to avoid and mitigate food insecurity to the best of their capacity, though they cannot sustain these efforts indefinitely.

If a situation endures or worsens, efforts to cope with insufficient access to food can become unsustainable and the ability to continue coping may collapse. Early coping strategies, like reducing the size or number of meals, may give way to the sale of poultry, or small ruminants like sheep and goats, before major productive assets like an ox plow are sold off. When many households all use these strategies simultaneously, a sort of tragedy of the commons of coping may occur, with all households worse off but unable to stop. A classic example is the mass sale of livestock within the same market network, which depresses livestock prices, creating a buyer’s market in which sellers see large losses in assets in exchange for only minor short-term gains in access to food.

¹⁸ ‘Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report,’ UNOCHA, March 22, 2021, <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/ethiopia/>.

In the Ethiopian highlands, such as Tigray, historic famines such as in 1973 and 1984 have seen large rural populations hitting this threshold of collapse all at once, resulting in sudden mass distress migration to towns.

A process of famine can be broken into five stages.¹⁹

1. ‘Pressure’ – the trigger(s) of the crisis;
2. A ‘hold’ – a sustained reduction in access to food;
3. ‘Self-reinforcing dynamics’ – a downward spiral in which people struggle to cope, and death rates begin to rise; which can lead to
4. A ‘famine system’ – the collapse of the food security system including coping strategies with a major rise in mortality, and
5. ‘Rebalancing’

In a peacetime food crisis with a responsive government, early action can halt this process as soon as ‘pressure’ is identified. Even without such action, the process will likely be slow. It may take two or three years to move from stage 1 to stages 3 and 4, and those may themselves be limited to one agricultural cycle. It is, however, common for a population that has reached stage 3 or perhaps has passed through famine into rebalancing to remain highly vulnerable.

The five-stage process of famine is useful for considering how armed conflict and the use of starvation as a weapon of war can be seen as causing famine.

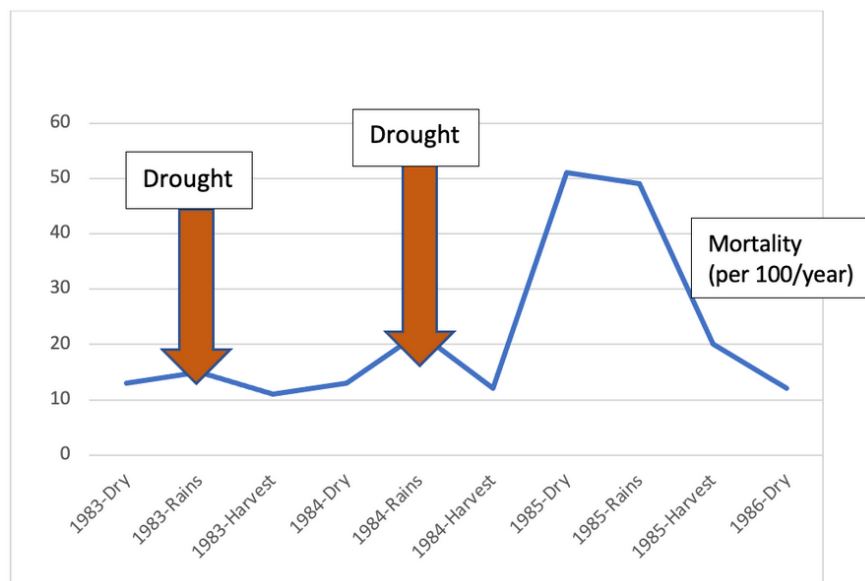
Table 1. The five-stage famine process for natural disasters and war-induced crises

	Natural disaster		War-induced	
	Example	Time period	Example	Time period
Pressure	Prolonged or repeated drought	Often considered in livelihood cycles; may take 1-3 cycles (12-36 months) to go through stages resulting in famine	Scorched-earth military offensive	Can shorten to less than one livelihood cycle, (less than 12 months) to go through stages resulting in famine
Hold	Coping strategies, migration		Coping deliberately limited or prevented	
Self-reinforcing dynamics	Distress sale of assets; land abandoned		Assets stolen or destroyed; distress sales; land abandoned	
Famine system	Collapse of resilience and excess deaths	3-9 months	Collapse of resilience and excess deaths	Can be prolonged
Rebalancing	Harvest	Following next harvest	Peace and rehabilitation	Following rehabilitation of livelihood system

We can see the timeline of these processes at work in two humanitarian crises in Darfur, Sudan. The first occurred in the 1983-85 period, brought about by drought-induced harvest failures. Two successive harvest failures led to elevated mortality, as shown in Figure 4.

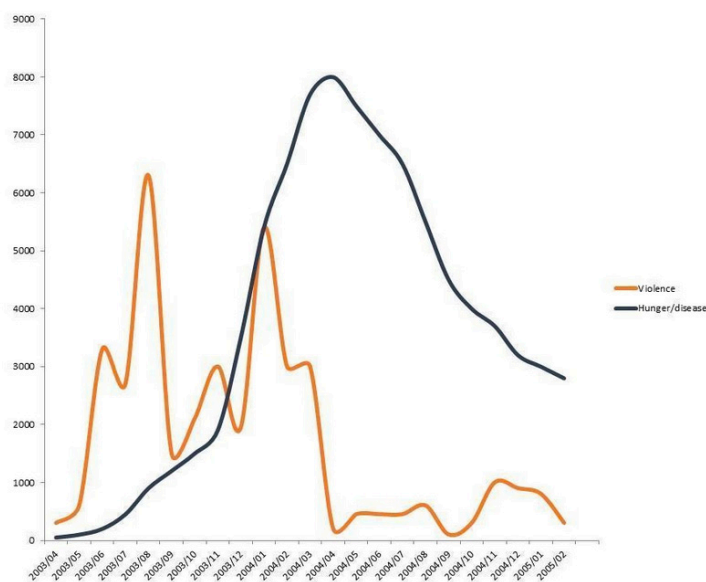
¹⁹ Howe, Paul, ‘Famine Systems: A New Model for Understanding the Development of Famines,’ *World Development* 105 (2018): 144–55, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.12.028>.

Figure 4. Drought and Famine in Darfur 1983-1986²⁰



Twenty years later, the same Darfurian population was stricken by armed conflict and moved through these stages at a much faster pace. Figure 5 shows two major military offensives (represented by the jagged peaks of violent deaths) followed rapidly and relentlessly by a climb in deaths due to hunger and disease.

Figure 5. War and Humanitarian Crisis in Darfur, 2003-05²¹



20 Derived. From: Alex de Waal, 'Famine Mortality: A case study of Darfur, Sudan 1984-5,' *Population Studies*, 43, 1989, pp. 5-24, at p. 12.

21 Alex de Waal, *Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine*, Cambridge: Polity, 2018, p. 33.

Starvation Crimes

This report does not explore the laws prohibiting starvation and their applicability in Tigray. However, a brief outline is required. The creation of famine is not a prohibited act *per se*.²² The act of causing starvation as a weapon of war is prohibited.

Article 8(2)(b)(xxv) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines the prohibited act of starvation as ‘intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare by depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including willfully impeding relief supplies as provided for under the Geneva Conventions.’²³

Note that this definition focuses on ‘objects indispensable to survival’ (OIS) which goes beyond food to include water, medicine and health care, shelter, maternal care for children and other essentials. In this report we consider conduct that impedes activities indispensable to survival to be a form of depriving the affected persons of objects indispensable to survival. Note that starvation crimes are prohibited regardless of whether or not they cause people to starve to death, that such crimes can occur at any stage in the process of creating a famine (deliberately or recklessly) and that halting starvation crimes should not wait for a humanitarian or other declaration of famine.

In addition, starvation is prohibited as a means of genocide and as a crime against humanity. The concept of ‘starvation crimes’ is used here to cover all such prohibited acts without having to refer to specific laws.

Deprivation of What is Indispensable to Sustain Life

The food security/food economy framework and the legal prohibitions link up with the concept of *what is indispensable to sustain life*. This subsection briefly examines what this means in practice.

The objects and activities indispensable for survival depend upon the economy, the food system and the particular circumstances in which people find themselves.

The concept that links these different approaches is ‘indispensability’—that which is necessary for survival. This is not a fixed quality. The degree to which objects, activities, and mobility are indispensable varies according to livelihood strategies and outcomes over time in a given context. In a normal year, a rural household may consider the basic objects of smallholder agriculture to be indispensable, like plow oxen, crop seeds, and irrigation systems. But when normal food supplies are disrupted, other objects not normally indispensable previously may become so. For example, wild grasses and berries can suddenly become essential for survival after a shock.

²² The lawyer David Marcus developed a potential schema for ‘faminogenic acts,’ but this remains an academic exercise, albeit an illuminating one. See: David Marcus, ‘Famine Crimes in International Law,’ *The American Journal of International Law* 97(2), 2003, pp. 245–281.

²³ In December 2019, an amendment to the Rome Statute introduced Article 8(2)(e)(xix) that extended the prohibition to non-international armed conflicts.

Objects Indispensable to Survival

There are four main ways in which objects indispensable to survival can be targeted in armed conflict:

- *Looting/pillaging*²⁴ – the forcible removal of objects, either for use by the looter or any other purpose. This can rise to the level of systematic asset-stripping.
- *Destruction* – the rendering useless of objects without their removal, often when an asset cannot be easily looted, like standing crops, or when perpetrators lack sufficient logistical capacity for further removal.
- *Separation of object and user* – a targeted population may be physically separated from essential objects such as farmland, through forced displacement or by confining people or preventing free movement, which also renders those objects useless, or through blockade.
- *Targeting activities indispensable to survival*. As either the outcome of other acts or separate efforts to inflict starvation, these are less visible but also devastating. Examples are inhibiting the collection of firewood or animal fodder, migration for seasonal labor, going to a market or accessing essential services ranging from health clinics to veterinary services.

Activities may be impeded without the direct use of violence, for example by checkpoints on roads or other measures that restrict movement. Policy decisions that suspend financial services may paralyze markets and the casual labor systems on which agriculture depends. Blocking telecommunications can sever flows of essential information and stop people from accessing support from social and kinship networks under duress.

Livelihoods and coping strategies are also gendered in the same way that the use and impacts of starvation as a weapon of war are gendered. Some forms of casual labor (e.g., working as domestic servants) are open mainly to women and girls. Some activities, such as gathering and preparing wild foods, require knowledge and skills that only women may possess. Sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation (SGBVE) can impede these essential activities. In conditions of conflict and displacement, families are often broken up and women and girls find themselves as household heads, required to undertake all activities essential to survival for themselves and their families. Maternal care, such as breastfeeding, is an activity indispensable for the survival of young children.

Some essential activities are easily overlooked because people resort to them only under conditions of extreme distress. An example is the collection and consumption of wild foods, including leaves, roots, fruits, nuts, insects and even bark.

Mobility

Mobility is essential in any livelihood system. The use of starvation as a weapon of war may involve forced mobility and forced immobility, including through concentration, dispersion, and immobilization. Mobility must be considered not only in terms of atypical movement, such as mass displacement, but also the absence of typical movement, like missing seasonal labor migration, travel to market, or walk-

²⁴ Formally, ‘pillage’ is looting in armed conflict; looting may also occur during or after a riot or state of emergency. This report does not distinguish between pillage and looting on a case by case basis. It also makes use of the concept of asset-stripping, which is in use in humanitarian analysis of armed conflict and famine to describe comprehensive pillage or looting particularly targeted at livelihood assets.

ing between scattered plots of land.²⁵ The quantification of displacement is often a primary humanitarian metric for the severity of a crisis, while consideration of forced immobility is overlooked. While forced immobility is often considered only in relation to urban sieges, it can also be achieved in rural areas, such as when a local environment constrains civilian movement alongside the deliberate actions of armed actors. Restrictions on movement and trade imposed as part of counter-insurgency were important factors contributing to the 1984-85 famine in Tigray and Wollo.²⁶

As coping collapses, mobility itself often functions as the last means of survival. A final coping strategy is to engage distress migration, usually to urban centers where people hope to find private charity or humanitarian aid. Highland Ethiopia has a historical pattern of mass distress migration at the point at which agrarian livelihoods collapse. This occurred suddenly and on a large scale in 1973 and 1984. In a situation where distress migration is blocked, famine may occur without such archetypal mass migration of people. It is quite possible that highland Tigray is coming close to such mass distress migration today.

Summary of Impacts that Cause Famine

The below table summarizes key impacts that can cause famine (‘faminogenic’), their general coverage in International Humanitarian Law (IHL), a concrete example of an object or activity of concern in rural Tigray, and examples of how the impact can occur through a natural shock and the use of starvation as a weapon of war.

Table 2. Faminogenic Impacts in the Context of Tigray

Faminogenic Impact	International Humanitarian Law	Tigray Example	Natural or Market Shock	Weaponized Starvation
Loss of Objects/Physical Assets	Deprivation of objects indispensable to survival – ‘attack, destruction, and removal’	Plow oxen	Livestock disease outbreak	Asset-stripping; pillage
Inhibition of Activities Utilizing Objects	‘Rendering useless’ aspect of deprivation	Labor migration	Fuel shortages	Use and threat of organized violence (including SGBV); pillage
Inhibition of Activities Not Utilizing Conventional Objects (Coping Strategies)	Contextualized and contingent deprivation	Collecting cactus pear/firewood/ other natural resources	Drought	Use and threat of organized violence (including SGBV)
Inhibition of civilian mobility: within and to exit from a given geographic area	Humanitarian access and mobility, but civilian mobility within targeted area and ability to exit the area unclear	Humanitarian access; rural/urban movement; distress migration out of Tigray	Flood	Use and threat of organized violence (including SGBV); siege

25 See, e.g., Matteo Rizzo, ‘Rural wage employment in Rwanda and Ethiopia: A review of the current policy neglect and a framework to begin addressing it,’ Geneva, ILO, Policy Integration Department, Working Paper no. 103, 2011.

26 Alex de Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics and the disaster relief industry in Africa*, London, James Currey, 1997, chapter 6.

Challenges of Declaring ‘Famine’ In Situations of Limited Information

The word ‘famine’ is controversial and carries a high political charge. Governments do not want to admit that their people are suffering famine and humanitarians want to make sure that the term is used in a consistent manner based on rigorously-obtained information and standardized analysis.

The current international process for declaring famine is based on the IPC. This has several challenges:²⁷

- It is a system that has strict requirements for data that are technically and logistically complicated. Where those data do not exist, there is no procedure for determining that famine is occurring or is imminent.
- Even with sufficient information, international agencies struggle to warn about or declare famine in humanitarian crises given the fraught politics of such a declaration.
- Systems are usually hosted and led by governments. If the government in question is using starvation as a weapon of war, it will of course try to control information and resist labelling the outcome ‘famine.’
- The IPC scale has five phases of which Famine is number five, but excess mortality also occurs in phases 3 and 4, which means that many people can die even without Famine being formally declared.²⁸
- The IPC scale has no means of taking into consideration the role of deliberate processes of creating starvation. Conflict analysis of any kind is routinely described as a major gap in IPC and other humanitarian early warning analysis.

The IPC system has made some adaptation for contexts of limited or no humanitarian access, including special protocols for analysis in the most recent technical manual. However, IPC analysis always needs *some* key data. Any declaration of famine requires data for either acute malnutrition or death.²⁹ These data are more technically difficult to collect than information for food security or livelihoods change and are especially fraught during an armed conflict.

An alternative approach to the most common data gathering methods to support IPC analyses is to rely on the Household Economy Approach (HEA). This uses in-depth pre-crisis baselines that stratify populations by locally defined wealth groups across livelihood zones, or geographic areas in which people live in more or less the same way. The HEA thereby allows for a running analysis of the expansion and contraction of household strategies for obtaining income and food, often in their calorie equivalent, as shocks occur.³⁰ This is useful in a situation where access is difficult and up-to-date data are limited. But it is still constrained. Data for acute malnutrition and mortality (or at least one of these) still need to be collected for the areas of greatest concern.

The Ethiopian government and international partners have made substantial investments in robust HEA baselines in Ethiopia, updated as recently as 2017-18, and this has allowed for some inference of how households may be responding to the deliberate dismantling of their livelihoods system in Tigray. Else-

²⁷ Daniel Maxwell and Peter Hailey, *The Politics of Information and Analysis in Famines and Extreme Emergencies: Synthesis of Findings from Six Case Studies*, Boston: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2020.

²⁸ Daniel Maxwell et al., ‘Hunger deaths aren’t simply about famine or no famine,’ *The New Humanitarian*, February 3, 2021, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2021/2/3/yemen-famine-aid-hunger-crises-south-sudan-malnutrition>.

²⁹ IPC, *Manual 3.0*.

³⁰ The Food Economy Group and Save the Children, *The Practitioner’s Guide to the Household Economy Approach*, 2008. <http://food-economy.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/The-Practitioners-Guide-to-HEA.pdf>

where, the HEA has been adapted to include the effects of conflict and displacement. However, it will struggle with the deliberate and wholesale destruction of the livelihood system on which its baseline is built.

The crisis in Tigray has been characterized by extremely limited access by humanitarian agencies and journalists. Most of the region is a black hole for recent data. Acute malnutrition data have trickled out of Tigray, though with only rapid methods and limited geographic coverage, so that its reliability is hard to determine. What has been reported is extremely concerning.³¹

The fear is that the combination of an informational black hole and the systematic and deliberate dismantling of a food economy means that best-practice food security assessment and forecasting is likely only to diagnose a famine when it is too late. We will only believe that there is famine is possible in Tigray when it has already claimed many lives.

3. The Food System in Tigray

Famine risk and trajectory is far more than a matter of calculating food availability in an affected region, just as humanitarian response is far more than matching an overall food deficit with emergency food assistance. This section explains how the livelihoods and food economy of Tigray functioned prior to the war, and the current and likely impacts of the war and starvation crimes on those livelihoods and the wellbeing of the population.

The central point is that thirty years of economic development including the establishment of sophisticated safety net systems—much of it with extensive international donor support—left the people of Tigray *more* exposed to a violent campaign of deprivation. It is deeply ironic that in the 1980s the Tigrayans were poorer but in some ways better able to withstand the kind of onslaught that they face today.³²

Tigray's Paradox of Resilience

Historically, the highlands of Tigray were a chronically food insecure area in which rural people faced the threat of famine following harvest failures. The stony soils of the highlands contributed to perennially low crop yields and rural livelihoods were dependent on off-farm activities to supplement meager harvests. These long-standing vulnerabilities combined with war, and especially a counter-insurgency strategy that used hunger as a weapon, to create the terrible famine of 1984-85.³³

Tigray's transformation from an agriculturally unproductive, chronically food insecure region into one of Ethiopia's most food secure³⁴ was founded on peace and on structural economic changes aimed at

31 "Ethiopia - Tigray Situation Update," UNOCHA, March 22, 2021.

32 Some Eritrean and Ethiopian leaders appear to have stirred resentment against Tigrayans on the basis of their supposedly unfair success in poverty reduction. Over the last 20 years, living standards in Eritrea have stagnated, while Tigray—once its poor relation—surpassed it. Ethiopia as a whole enjoyed accelerated economic growth over the period from approximately 2002-19. By objective measures, poverty reduction was achieved in all regions of Ethiopia.

33 De Waal, *Famine Crimes*.

34 See all of the Food Security Outlooks and Food Security Outlook Updates provided by the Famine Early Warning Systems Network using IPC-compatible analyses for the period 2016-2020. The worst level of food insecurity documented reached Crisis (IPC Phase 3 out of

poverty reduction. These changes increased regional resilience in the face of stresses such as drought while increasing exposure to other shocks, particularly armed conflict. Long-term reduction in the risk of food insecurity in Tigray was a government-led project and hence it was political.³⁵ Once Tigray's political status *vis-à-vis* the Federal Government was disrupted and its political and economic relations with the neighboring Amhara Regional State deteriorated, the region became vulnerable to extreme food insecurity once again. The current armed conflict is the shock that Tigrayan livelihoods were least capable of withstanding, in part because of how their livelihoods have positively transformed over recent decades.³⁶

Several key long-term changes in the livelihood systems of Tigray highlight this paradoxical shift in resilience and vulnerability. These include the measures to diversify food production and reduce risks, and the development of an enabling environment for seasonal labor migration, development of non-agricultural livelihoods, and the introduction and expansion of federal safety net programs. The net outcome of these developments was that Tigrayan rural people were highly vulnerable to the deliberate disruption of these sources of employment and support.

Rural Livelihoods, Labor, and Safety Nets in Tigray

After the end of the previous civil war in 1991, the Tigrayan authorities began an ambitious program of agricultural rehabilitation and risk reduction. This included:

- Rehabilitation of eroded hillsides with terracing and afforestation, which was also an element in Ethiopia's 'green economy' plan;³⁷
- Construction of small reservoirs to control run-off, develop small-scale irrigation and provide year-round water for livestock;
- Development of horticulture and orchards;
- Creation of micro-finance mechanisms for farmers to secure their savings in cash; and
- Provision of subsidized fertilizers.

These measures all contributed to rural food security but were inadequate on their own to overcome the structural food deficit in Tigray. There are simply insufficient land and other productive assets for agriculture in densely populated areas of central and eastern Tigray, where a typical rural household does not expect to be self-sufficient in agriculture even in good years. In part due to the pressures of population growth and the fragmentation of land ownership, average landholdings in much of Central and Eastern zones are less than one hectare, which is a threshold commonly identified for the amount of land needed by a household to meet its annual staple crop needs through its own production.³⁸ In addition to

5), with worse outcomes prevented by the provision of food assistance, for only small area of Tigray in one period of analysis. All products available at <https://fews.net/east-africa/ethiopia>.

35 De Waal, *Mass Starvation*, chapter 8.

36 This memo largely focuses on the estimated 80% of Tigray's population that resides in rural areas, though urban populations and livelihoods are also considered when applicable. For the 80% statistic, see, as one example, USAID, *Ethiopia – Tigray Conflict Fact Sheet #1*, February 3, 2021, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/02.03.2021_Tigray_Fact_Sheet_1.pdf.

37 See, for example, Aalen (2020). "The Revolutionary Democracy of Ethiopia: A Wartime Ideology Both Shaping and Shaped by Peacetime Policy Needs." *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 55(4), 653–668.

Abbink, Jon (2011). "Ethnic-Based Federalism and Ethnicity in Ethiopia: Reassessing the Experiment after 20 Years." *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, Vol. 5(4), 596-618.

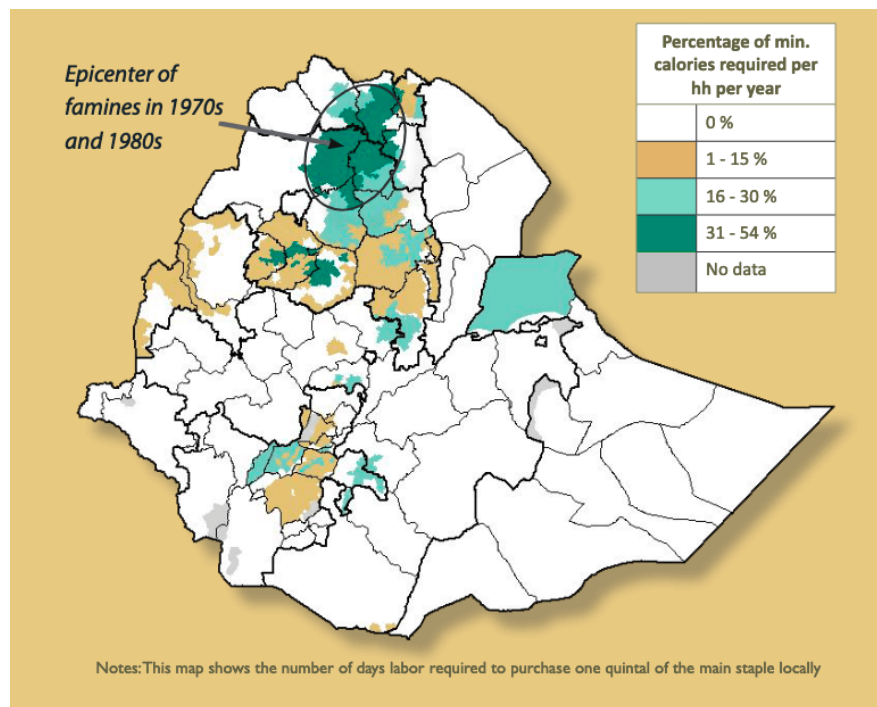
38 Government of Ethiopia: Livelihoods Integration Unit of the Disaster Risk Management and Food Security Sector, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, *An Atlas of Ethiopian Livelihoods*, 2010, 32, http://foodeconomy.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Atlas-Final-Web-Version-6_14.pdf.

insufficient land, most households own fewer than the necessary two draft animals needed for plowing, as mechanized agriculture is not widespread. The oxen used for plowing are often hired from better-off households and used to prepare the land of multiple families.³⁹

Households purchase a large portion of their annual food needs from markets, rather than growing this food on their own farms. Food security in Tigray therefore requires an analysis not just of local production but also non-farm incomes.

Labor migration is a widespread strategy for obtaining food and generating income as well as coping with inadequate access to food in difficult periods in Tigray, especially for the poorest households.⁴⁰ Freedom of movement and ample labor opportunities are essential for most households to have enough food each year. Many households rent out their land while sending members to pursue labor opportunities in agriculture, artisanal mining, construction, and other sectors. Seasonal labor migration within Tigray is the main concern here. Without these labor opportunities and the freedom of movement needed to access them, livelihood systems across Central and Eastern Tigray begin breaking down.

Figure 6. Cash Income from Migratory Labor: Very Poor and Poor Households⁴¹



In recognition of this chronic vulnerability and to support broad economic growth, Tigray Region saw massive investments in fostering an enabling environment for new patterns of seasonal and other labor. The growth of the road network is one example that also demonstrates how an essential economic investment can increase exposure to armed conflict as a shock. By 2016, the World Bank found that Tigray scored the highest of any region on the Rural Access Index, a measure of the proportion of the population living within two kilometers of what the World Bank’s engineers considered to be a road in ‘good condition’.

39 Livelihoods Integration Unit, *Atlas*. 34-35.

40 In Tigray, the lowest two wealth quintiles accounted for almost exactly half of the population as of 2016. See Central Statistical Agency (CSA) of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. *Demographic and Health Survey (DHS)*. 2016. Historically, Tigray was a labor exporting region, with seasonal labor moving to commercial farms and more productive smallholder farms in the neighboring provinces of Wollo and Gondar, some Tigrayans migrating further afield to work on coffee farms, and significant numbers earning incomes in Eritrea. The decline of these migration and employment opportunities during the years of military government (1974-91) was a contributory factor in the 1983-85 famine. The creation of the federal system and its associated restriction on the rights of those who were non-native to their region, along with the independence of Eritrea, meant that these historic patterns could not be re-established when peace came in 1991. See also Livelihoods Integration Unit, *Atlas*. 73.

41 Livelihoods Integration Unit, *Atlas*. 85.

Over 50% of the Tigrayan population reportedly lived within two kilometers of a road in ‘good condition’ by 2016, compared to a national proportion of less than 22%.⁴² While this is in many ways a strong boost to Tigrayan livelihoods and access to social services, it has also made it far easier for armed actors to use the road network of Tigray to loot and destroy civilian settlements. While a dispersed and remotely settled civilian population may have difficulty accessing markets and social services like healthcare during peace, inaccessibility may provide some protection against scorched-earth counterinsurgency.

Micro-credit and Banking

Another long-term development has occurred in access to financial services, which have come to support urban and rural livelihoods in many ways. Prior to the conflict the Dedebit Credit and Savings Institution was estimated to have more than 400,000 customers and a portfolio of over \$100 million.⁴³ It was one of Africa’s largest micro-finance institutions. In previous decades, farmers hedged against risk by storing grain and by acquiring livestock which could be sold or eaten in times of distress. These traditional saving mechanisms were considered inefficient and the Tigrayan authorities encouraged rural producers instead to monetize their savings and deposit them in the banks and microfinance institutions. By 2016, an estimated 35% of men and 22% of women had accounts with the formal banking sector.⁴⁴

This was an unexpected but very significant exposure to risk, when banks were closed at the beginning of the war and Tigrayans could not access their savings. Subsequently, some banks have been looted and those assets have been stolen. Records have been lost, stolen or destroyed. The financial assets at least 400,000 Tigrayan households have been frozen by the government—the same government that is inflicting destruction on them.

Seasonal Labor and Sesame Production

The importance of seasonal labor migration is best seen through sesame production, which is one of the most important economic activities in Tigray and for Ethiopia overall. Nationally, sesame accounted for \$347 million in exported goods in 2019, or about 11% of total product exports that year.⁴⁵ Tigray is the second largest regional producer, contributing nearly one third of total production, or over \$100 million worth of sesame exports.⁴⁶ Sesame is produced largely in Western Tigray and in Kafta Humera woreda, particularly, with additional production in the southern woredas of Northwestern zone. Sesame production is labor-intensive, particularly in the weeding (July) and harvesting (September) periods, and by some estimates can absorb more than 200,000 laborers each year in Tigray alone.⁴⁷ While some labor comes from outside Tigray, most comes from eastern zones, especially Central. Most of these laborers

42 The World Bank Group, *Measuring Rural Access: Using New Technologies*, 2016. Many of these roads were constructed with voluntary labor by the communities.

43 One recent set of estimates can be found in Peter Mackie et al., ‘Microfinance and Poverty Alleviation in Ethiopia,’ Cardiff School of Geography and Planning, 2015, https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/581509/Ethiopia-Report-Jun-2015-FINAL.pdf.

44 CSA, *DHS 2016*.

45 ‘Other Oily Seeds in Ethiopia.’ Observatory of Economic Complexity, Accessed March 24, 2021, <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-product/other-oily-seeds/reporter/eth>.

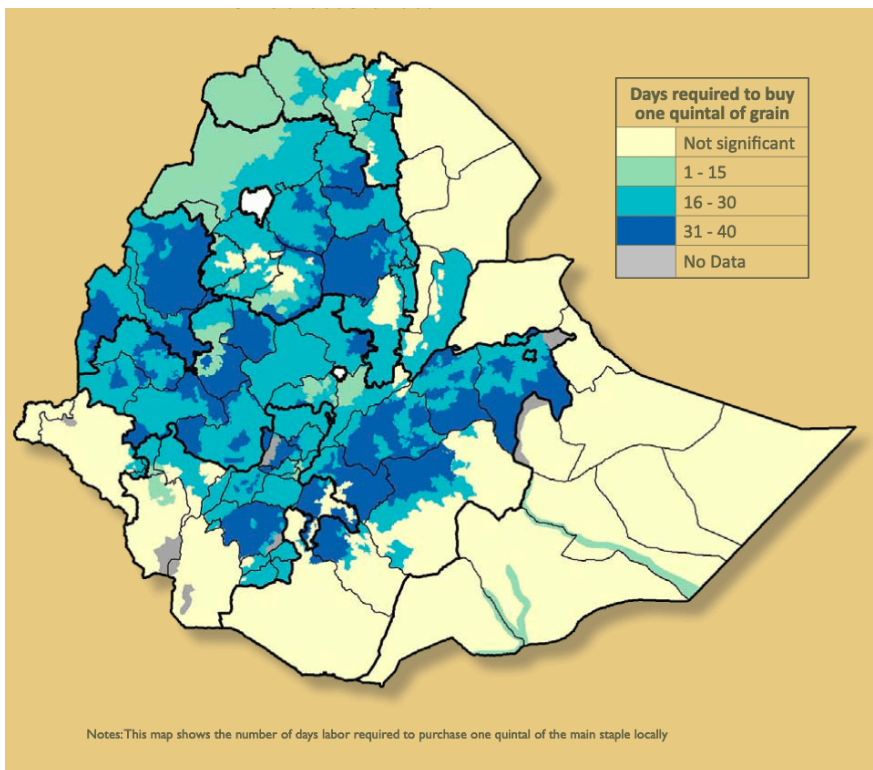
46 United States Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service, *Ethiopia Oilseeds Report Annual*, January 21, 2021.

47 Authors’ calculation using Sesame Business Network of Northwest Ethiopia (SBN) and Bilateral Ethiopian-Netherlands Effort for Food, Income, and Trade (BENEFIT). *Labour and Labourers in the Sesame Lowlands: Analysis and Action for Health and Wealth*, July 29, 2020, <https://sbnethiopia.org/2020/07/29/labour-and-labourers-in-the-sesame-lowlands-analysis-and-action-for-health-and-wealth/>; USDA, *Oilseeds Annual*.

are typically younger male members of poorer households.

It is reasonable to think that each laborer supports approximately one Tigrayan household.⁴⁸ Average household size in the region is estimated at 4.2 people. This means that sesame production may support around 15% of the regional population.⁴⁹ For Western Tigray itself, with an estimated pre-war population of around 467,000 individuals, many households are dependent on smallholder sesame production and other economic activities built around the influx of seasonal laborers into the region.⁵⁰ The average household in the zone typically generates more than 60% of the cash-equivalent of its annual food needs from cash crop sales each year, overwhelmingly sesame.⁵¹ This represents up to an additional 8% of the regional population dependent on unrestricted labor migration from the eastern zones to the western zones and the subsequent export of much of the sesame crop.

Figure 7. Terms of Trade for Labor



Scenario-building for balancing health and economic concerns within the COVID-19 pandemic already considered the costs of completely stopping seasonal labor migration in northwestern Ethiopia, covering the sesame-producing areas of Tigray and Amhara combined. With about 48% of national production, Amhara is the top sesame-producing region, above Tigray. Across these areas, each seasonal laborer might be expected to produce about \$600 in export value while taking home around \$145 each season on average.⁵² The terms of trade for sesame labor are some of the most advantageous for any casual labor in the country, with 1-15 days of work, depending on the laborer and the specific tasks,

equating to 100 kilos, or one quintal, of grain. One quintal represents about 40 days' worth of food for a family of five under common assumptions about consumption.⁵³ There is likely no more lucrative seasonal labor to be found in Ethiopia in terms of this metric.

48 ACAPS, *Pre-crisis Tigray*.

49 Authors' calculation using figures in ACAPS, *Pre-crisis Tigray*.

50 ACAPS, *Pre-crisis Tigray*.

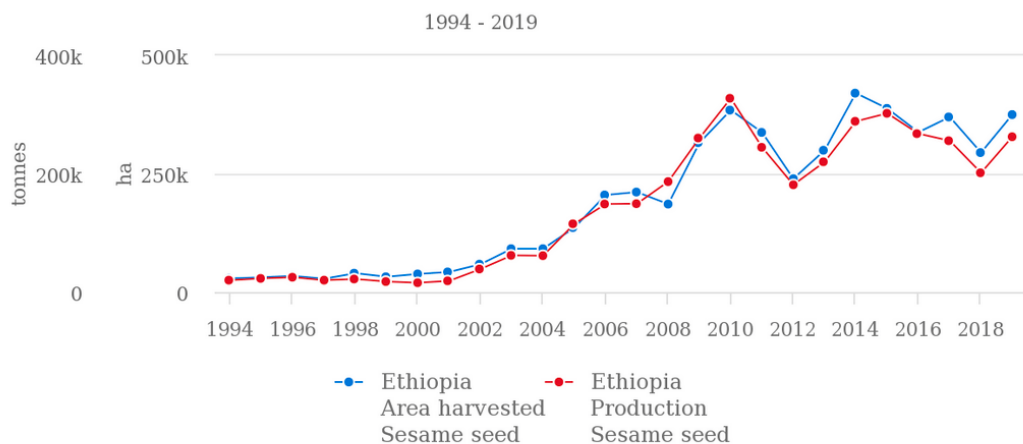
51 Livelihoods Integration Unit, *Atlas*.

52 SBN, *Labour and Labourers*.

53 This heuristic assumes that 85% of daily calories would come from cereals, with the remaining 15% coming from other foods like pulses. See Livelihoods Integration Unit, *Atlas*.

Viewed in terms of the core livelihoods of nearly one quarter of the Tigrayan population, Western Tigray and its sesame production illustrates the paradox of resilience. The area had been part of Gondar Province for some decades prior to the military defeat of the previous regime. It became part of Tigray with the creation of ethnically-based regions after 1991, though with an ethnically mixed population.⁵⁴ At the time, what is now Western Tigray was not nearly as productive as it is at present and the sesame industry was not the economic powerhouse that it is today. National sesame production was negligible through 2000, before beginning a sustained rise that saw production climb by more than a cumulative 1,000% by 2010.⁵⁵

Figure 8. Production/Yield Quantities of Sesame Seed in Ethiopia⁵⁶



Source: FAOSTAT (Mar 14, 2021)

Among the rationales for the Amhara Regional forces to occupy (and, reportedly, ethnically cleanse) Western Tigray is the increased economic value of the land. (The publicly stated rationale for the occupation is based on ancestral claims.)

A rump Tigray, reduced to its pre-1991 western and southern borders,⁵⁷ may be incapable of sustaining its population without massive resource transfers from the federal government and international donors. The Tigrayan economy could become dependent on the continued allowance of mass seasonal labor migration across a disputed regional border, subject to closure or inhibition at will. The acquisition of the sesame-producing areas of Tigray by Amhara Region would also be an enormous wealth transfer. An enlarged Amhara Region would account for roughly 75% of sesame exports, or over \$260 million in exports. It would also see a net gain of up to 200,000 of the highest paying seasonal jobs in the country, in addition to the smallholders that might settle in place of evicted Tigrayan farmers.

⁵⁴ Like many areas of Ethiopia, however, administrative control and the ethnic identity of the population of these areas has shifted several times in recorded history, including back to the 15th century in Tigray. Administrative boundaries and population identity are historically dynamic and subject to competing historiographies and claims of autochthony. See 'Administrative division' in: Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Nyssen, J., 2021, Tigray: Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation, Journal of Maps, preprint, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation.

⁵⁵ 'FAOSTAT,' Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Accessed March 25, 2021, <http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/QC/visualize>.

⁵⁶ FAOSTAT.

⁵⁷ The pre-1991 eastern border of Tigray included large areas that became part of Afar Regional state in 1991. Parts of south-eastern Tigray were within Wollo Province before 1991.

The US government reports that there is credible evidence of ethnic cleansing in Western Tigray by the Amhara Regional forces and aligned militias.⁵⁸ Most of the more than 61,000 refugees that fled into Sudan are from Western Tigray, as are many of the estimated 45,000 IDPs that began arriving en masse in urban centers to the east, like Shire, in March.⁵⁹ It is reasonable to conclude that the 2021 sesame harvest will be severely disrupted and seasonal labor opportunities for Tigrayans there will be sharply reduced.

In March 2021, the Amhara region petitioned the federal parliament to redraw the regional boundary to annex Western Tigray and parts of Southern Tigray to Amhara Region.⁶⁰ A spokesperson for the Amhara regional government issued a statement in response to the US accusation of ethnic cleansing:

There are not any Amhara forces in Tigray region. These areas are not Tigrayan areas, in history... If the Secretary [Blinken] is talking about these areas, these areas are not Tigrayan. Our forces are not in the Tigrayan areas, rather our forces are in Amhara region. That is our response.⁶¹

The recent FEWS NET assessment that leaves Western Tigray as the last pocket of food security in the region does not appear to take into account the fact that those residents who are food secure are not the same people who were residing there six months ago, who are now displaced. This is a striking example of how a geographically-based food security assessment and early warning system is not designed to take political vulnerability into account. The area today is no less productive than before, but the beneficiaries of that productivity have been forcibly changed.

Artisanal Mining

Tigray is famously rich in minerals, including gold, silver, copper and precious gems. In 2019, gold accounted for \$256 million, or about 8%, of national annual export value for goods.⁶²

Mining is organized into a formal commercial sector and an artisanal sector. Pre-crisis, there were approximately 20 licensed commercial mining companies operational in the region. The largest of these was EZANA Mining Development PLC, owned by the Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT), which employed an estimated 150 professionals and 300 other staff in addition to laborers and subcontractors. The others were private companies, each of which employed between 20 and 100 staff.⁶³

The artisanal sector was larger and provided informal employment to tens of thousands. This is a second example of how seasonal labor opportunities are impacted by war. In this case the impacts are severe even without direct attacks on the area of production. Commodity exports, especially for minerals,

58 Walsh, Declan, 'Ethiopia's War Leads to Ethnic Cleansing in Tigray Region, U.S. Report Says,' The New York Times, February 26, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/26/world/middleeast/ethiopia-tigray-ethnic-cleansing.html>.

59 Anna, Cara, "People Are Starving": New Exodus in Ethiopia's Tigray Area,' Associated Press, March 11, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/world-news-ethiopia-a25a50a774da284122c74a0bc1428052>; 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report,' March 13, 2021, <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/ethiopia/>.

60 Gebre, Samuel, 'Ethiopia's Amhara Seizes Disputed Territory Amid Tigray War,' Bloomberg, March 16, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-16/ethiopia-s-amhara-seize-disputed-territory-amid-tigray-conflict>.

61 'Ethiopia's Amhara Rejects Charge of 'Ethnic Cleansing' in Tigray,' Al Jazeera, March 11, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/11/ethiopia-s-amhara-rejects-charges-of-ethnic-cleansing-in-tigray>.

62 'Gold in Ethiopia,' Observatory of Economic Complexity, Accessed March 24, 2021, <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-product/gold/reporter/eth>.

63 Confidential source.

involve exchange with federal institutions like the National Bank of Ethiopia. Without this cooperation, as well as free inter-regional transportation, formal export fails or artisanal miners must turn to the black market.

There were an estimated 130,000 artisanal miners in Tigray, potentially representing around one quarter of all estimated artisanal miners in Ethiopia, as of 2018.⁶⁴ These miners may have supported up to nearly 10% of the total Tigrayan population.⁶⁵ Sapphires potentially account for roughly 10,000 of these miners, concentrated around Chila, north of the city of Aksum. The remaining 120,000 are overwhelmingly involved in gold extraction.⁶⁶ In the woreda of Asgede Tsimbla in Northwestern Tigray nearly every household within a population of around 135,000 individuals is thought to be involved in some way in artisanal gold mining. Most of the miners are young, male, and landless.⁶⁷

A crude calculation suggests that combining only the labor opportunities of sesame production and artisanal mining may account for a primary means of annual income-generation for up to one third of the total Tigrayan population and around 40% of the rural population. These activities in Tigray also contributed heavily to the second and third largest commodity exports by cash value nationally. While not all seasonal and other labor opportunities are mutually exclusive and these calculations are based on estimated population figures and even more roughly estimated labor figures, the importance of seasonal labor opportunities in Tigray remains clear, and the impact of their loss would be devastating.

Employment in Manufacturing and Services

Prior to 1974, many Tigrayans worked in Eritrea, mainly in the informal sector. After 1991, the TPLF government of Tigray and private investors massively expanded manufacturing in Tigray. EFFORT was the leading state investor. EFFORT is a conglomerate of more than 30 companies, involved in key industries like food production, construction, pharmaceutical manufacturing, and mining, with total assets estimated at more than \$500 million.⁶⁸ Most employment with EFFORT-linked businesses is in Tigray, reaching up to approximately 47,000 jobs. There were also private investors. In 2015, roughly 72,000 urban residents in Tigray were estimated to be employed in manufacturing, nearly one third of them in textiles.⁶⁹ Tourism has also become a major source of job opportunities in recent decades, including hotels, restaurants and associated services.

As detailed in the evidence section, many factories and other businesses have been targeted since November 2020. By only a rough tally of estimated employment at factories reportedly looted, damaged, or destroyed, up to 18,200 manufacturing jobs have been lost and are unlikely to return in the short-term. This is about one quarter of all manufacturing jobs in the region. These jobs may represent the primary means of income for households representing up to 76,440 people in urban centers and their immediate

64 Veljkovic, Zarko, Hilmi S. Salem, Benard Ayongaba, and Yohannes Yihdego, 'Mining Sector Challenges in Developing Countries, Tigray, Ethiopia and Inspirational Success Stories from Australia,' *International Journal of Mining and Mineral Engineering* 9, no. 4 (2018): 321, <https://doi.org/10.1504/ijmme.2018.10018510>.

65 Authors' calculation using figures in ACAPS. *Pre-crisis Tigray*.

66 Veljkovic et al., 'Mining Sector Challenges'.

67 G, Hagos, Sisay W, Alem Z, Niguse G, and Mekonen A, 'Participation on Traditional Gold Mining and Its Impact on Natural Resources, the Case of Asgede Tsimbla, Tigray, Northern Ethiopia,' *Journal of Earth Sciences and Geotechnical Engineering* 6(1), 2016, 89–97.

68 Hauge, Jostein, and Ha-Joon Chang, 'The Concept of a 'Developmental State' in Ethiopia,' Essay in *Oxford Handbook of the Ethiopian Economy*, edited by Fantu Cheru, Christopher Cramer, and Arkebe Oqubay, 824–39, Oxford University Press, 2019.

69 Central Statistical Agency (CSA) of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. *Statistical Report on the 2015 Urban Employment Unemployment Survey*. 2015.

surroundings. With an estimated 20% of Tigray's population residing in urban areas, this figure may account for roughly one of every 20 urban households.⁷⁰

Safety Net Programs

Throughout Ethiopia, including Tigray, economic growth has not been sufficient to protect the poor from food insecurity. Even though non-farm and seasonal labor opportunities were substantial, they did not absorb all available labor outside of the main agricultural season in Tigray. Additionally, not every household has members capable of participating in seasonal labor. Several national programs were established in order to mitigate these stresses.

Federal resource transfers contribute substantially to increasing the availability of seasonal labor opportunities through seasonal work schemes and to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable households not able to take advantage of these opportunities. This is achieved largely through the national PSNP, introduced in 2005 for rural households. It utilizes Public Works (PW) in the agricultural off-season to support vulnerable households capable of contributing labor and continuous Permanent Direct Support (PDS) for vulnerable households unable to contribute. In 2016, PSNP also expanded to begin covering urban households. PSNP support may take the form of cash, food vouchers, or food, depending on the local context. In a normal year, PSNP transfers may cover 30-50% of a poor household's food needs.⁷¹

As of 2018, there were 1,010,752 PSNP beneficiaries in Tigray, including 783,928 PW beneficiaries and 226,824 PDS beneficiaries.⁷² This represented around 18% of the Tigrayan population, including many of its most vulnerable households.⁷³ These are primarily individuals within households known by their communities to be especially vulnerable to food insecurity, often lacking access to other common sources of social protection.

Nationally, PSNP is generally regarded as a success in supporting chronically food insecure households and preventing the distress sale of productive assets in times of need.⁷⁴ The program was also found to be effective during the economic crisis brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, with the World Bank finding additional evidence of the protective effect of PSNP transfers on the food security status of participating households.⁷⁵ The PSNP is approximately 75% funded by international donors and 25% by the Federal Government. Control over disbursement of PSNP funds rests at the federal level though there have been proposals to decentralize it. Federal control provided a sort of kill-switch for a primary safety net upholding the food security of many at-risk households across Tigray.

PSNP transfers by the federal government ceased in October 2020 as relations between the regional government of Tigray and the Federal Government continued to worsen. Fourth quarter payments of 2020 did not occur and it is unclear if these will ever be given. The complete status of first and second quarter payments in 2021 is not fully clear. PSNP distributions have now been rolled into broader humanitarian

70 Author's calculation using remainder of 80% statistic from USAID, *Fact Sheet #1*.

71 FEWS NET, *Food Security Outlook February 2021 to September 2021*.

72 ACAPS, *Pre-crisis Tigray*.

73 Authors' calculation using ACAPS, *Pre-crisis Tigray*.

74 Sabates-Wheeler, Rachel, Jeremy Lind, John Hoddinott, and Mulugeta Tefera Taye, 'Graduation after 10 Years of Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme: Surviving but Still Not Thriving,' *Development Policy Review*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12515>.

75 Kibrom A. Abay et al., *COVID-19 and Food Security in Ethiopia: Do Social Protection Programs Protect?* The World Bank Group, 2020, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34794>.

programming and at least some transfers of food to some recipients have occurred unevenly by woreda, while cash transfers have reportedly not resumed. With much of the Tigrayan population displaced and in areas considered hard-to-reach or inaccessible by humanitarians and government staff, and many woreda-level government offices not functioning, the current functionality of PSNP in Tigray would appear to be poor.⁷⁶ The full return of PSNP in Tigray requires peace and the resumption of effective local government at all levels.

4. Evidence for Starvation Crimes in Tigray

This section provides a summary of public source evidence for actions by belligerents in Tigray that are likely to amount to starvation crimes, namely the destruction and deprivation of Objects Indispensable to Survival (OIS) including preventing activities indispensable to survival. Open-source evidence is supplemented in a few cases by eyewitness testimony obtained by the World Peace Foundation. There are numerous individual stories, unconfirmed, of actions that are probable starvation crimes.

The evidence listed in this section is not intended to identify specific starvation crimes nor to identify specific perpetrators. Rather, it points to evidence indicative of various criminal acts that warrant further investigation.

Key Elements of the Crimes

Starvation is prohibited as an international crime and a war crime.⁷⁷ There is no crime of creating famine as such. Those interested in specifying starvation crimes for the purpose of prosecution have a number of options. What follows is not exhaustive but is indicative of options that could be considered.

Article 270 of the Ethiopian Penal Code of 2004 is concerned with ‘war crimes against the civilian population’. Paragraph (i) specifically prohibits ‘the confiscation, destruction, removal, rendering useless or appropriation of property such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of food stuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works, health centres, schools.’ Additionally, Article 273 prohibits pillage, piracy and looting.

The elements of the international war crime of starvation are:

1. The perpetrator deprived civilians of objects indispensable to their survival.
2. The perpetrator intended to starve civilians as a method of warfare.
3. The conduct took place in the context of and was associated with an armed conflict.⁷⁸
4. The perpetrator was aware of factual circumstances that established the existence of an armed conflict.

⁷⁶ FEWS NET, Food Security Outlook February 2021 to September 2021.

⁷⁷ For details, see, *Journal of International Criminal Justice, Special Issue: Starvation in International Law*, 17.4, September 2019, <https://academic.oup.com/jicj/issue/17/4>.

⁷⁸ Either an international armed conflict or an armed conflict not of an international character, depending on the situation at hand. We will not delve into the question of an international versus a non-international armed conflict.

There are several options for prosecuting starvation as a crime against humanity, including murder, extermination, and other inhumane acts. A crime against humanity can be said to have been committed if the attacks are widespread and systematic and are conducted pursuant to a state or organizational policy. The elements of extermination as a crime against humanity are:

1. The perpetrator killed one or more persons, including by inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the destruction of part of a population.
2. The conduct constituted, or took place as part of, a mass killing of members of a civilian population.
3. The conduct was committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population.
4. The perpetrator knew that the conduct was part of or intended the conduct to be part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population.

The crime of pillage requires:

1. The perpetrator appropriated certain property.
2. The perpetrator intended to deprive the owner of the property and to appropriate it for private or personal use.
3. The appropriation was without the consent of the owner.
4. The conduct took place in the context of and was associated with an armed conflict.
5. The perpetrator was aware of factual circumstances that established the existence of an armed conflict.

Pillage, especially when conducted in a widespread and systematic manner, may also be evidence for starvation crimes.

War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity in the Armed Conflict in Tigray

The starvation crimes documented in this section are taking place in the context of other crimes including murder, rape, torture and forced displacement, as well as violations of the rights of refugees including refoulement.

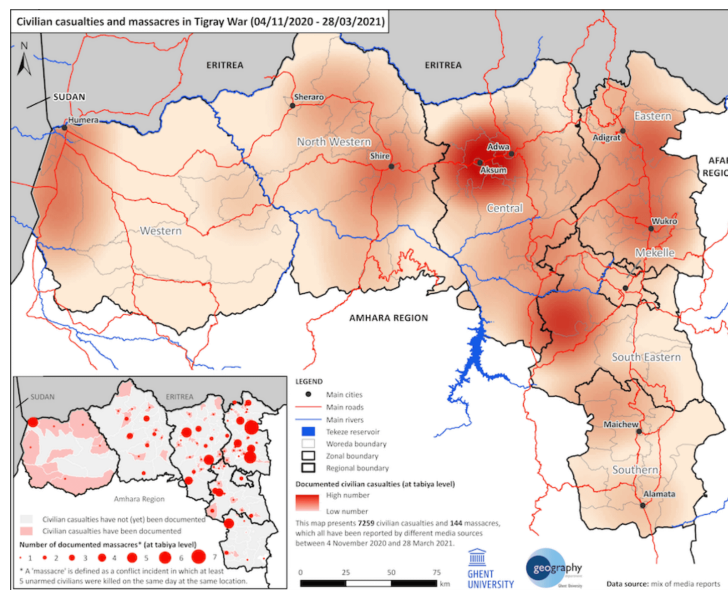
Human rights investigations and humanitarian organizations have documented:

- Massacres
- Rape
- Torture
- Ethnic cleansing
- Attacks on refugee camps including refoulement and forced conscription of refugees

In past exercises in transitional justice, including the Ethiopian Special Prosecutor's Office set up to investigate and prosecute crimes committed during the military regime (1974-91), prosecutors have preferred to focus their efforts on murder, rape, torture and forced displacement and have rarely pursued cases of starvation. This section reverses that focus.

The evidence compiled below reveals a pattern of violations by the Ethio-Eritrean coalition. Killing of civilians (in numbers ranging up to the hundreds) is accompanied by forced displacement (in some locations followed by taking over homes and farms), rape, torture and systematic looting, destruction of assets, destruction of sources of employment, destruction or rendering useless food, medicine and health facilities, and water supplies. Each of these are crimes in their own right, while it is the pattern of them perpetrated together that adds up to making it extraordinarily difficult and hazardous for the survivors to obtain what they need to sustain life. A large number of corroborating social media posts enumerate more than 150 different villages and towns which have endured massacre,⁷⁹ pillage and looting, and burning of land and homesteads.⁸⁰

Figure 9. Map of Civilian Casualties and Massacres (November 4, 2020 - March 28, 2021)⁸¹



In some instances, attacks on civilian targets have accompanied military engagements or the advances of forces into areas in which they might have expected resistance. Witness accounts from several areas, especially those along the northern border in the first days of the war, tell of an initial heavy bombing originating from Eritrea that found more civilian targets than military. On November 9, Human Rights Watch documented mortar and tank fire in Humera originating across the Eritrean border that damaged and destroyed, ‘homes and businesses, and [exploded] near schools, places of worship, the town’s main hospital, and a slaughterhouse.’⁸² In January, Oxfam reported IDPs in Southern Tigray returning to their settlement to find their homes destroyed, crops burned, and assets taken.⁸³

79 A ‘massacre’ is defined as a conflict incident in which 5 or more unarmed civilians are killed in the same place on the same day. A full list of massacres—including date, location, and number of casualties for each—occurring in Tigray since November 9, 2021, has been compiled by a team of researchers at Ghent University (Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Emnet Negash, De Sloover, L., and Nyssen, J.), available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation/stats.

80 ‘Massacres and documented civilian casualties’, in: Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Emnet Negash, De Sloover, L., Nyssen, J., 2021. ‘Tigray: Atlas of the humanitarian situation.’ <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181>.

81 *ibid.*

82 ‘Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling of Tigray Urban Areas,’ Human Rights Watch, February 11, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3rMppyX>.

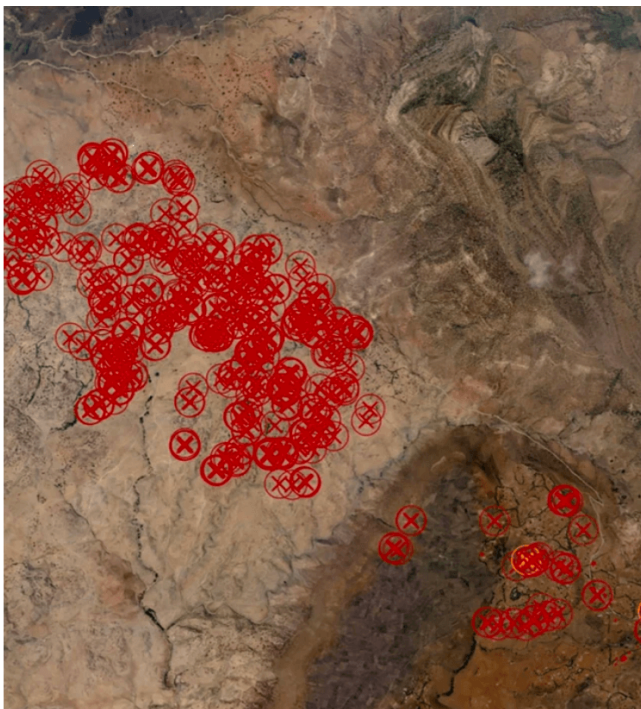
83 ‘Conflict compounded by Covid-19 and climate change pushes millions in Tigray to the brink,’ Oxfam, January 22, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3tb4AgW>.

However, as the war has continued, most of the attacks on civilians appear to have taken place either distant from active military engagements or as retaliation for casualties suffered by the belligerents and perceived TDF support. The massacre in Aksum, for example, began after a small militia attack on an Eritrean army post.

Amnesty International's report on the shelling and massacre of Aksum provides a detailed account of the items taken from civilians by Eritrean soldiers, many of which are directly related to food.⁸⁴

Journalists from the German television, ZDF, were able to reach Aksum in March and share footage confirming the events reported by Amnesty in late February. Videos show large artillery discarded on the sides of roads, injured civilians, and seemingly hundreds continuing to make their way out of the city.⁸⁵ After the massacre at Dengelat at the end of November, two weeks of looting, crop burning and livestock killing by armed forces followed. Soldiers reportedly also stole a large number of cars before eventually moving on.⁸⁶ The bombing of Debre Damo Monastery preceded looting by Eritrean soldiers of grains, televisions, generators, and other goods from surrounding farmers in the area.⁸⁷ Sky News documented the aftermath of a massacre in Gijet, Southern Tigray, where 180 were reportedly killed by the Eritrean military a week after forces had clashed in the area.⁸⁸

Figure 10. Fires Detected in Gijet on 23 February 2021⁸⁹



In most cases, such destruction appears to be a method, not a side effect, of Eritrean and Ethiopian military strategy. DX Open Network data analysts interpret the evidence from Gijet in the following manner:

The absence of fire clusters or scorch marks connecting burnt structures in the images it analyzed makes it unlikely that the fires were all accidental, and there was no evidence of craters to suggest they might be the result of shelling. These factors support the analytic judgment that this was an intentional effort by a conflict party to destroy this civilian habitation area, and not the product of combat.⁹⁰

84 'Axum,' Amnesty International, p. 21.

85 'ZDF-Mittagsmagazin,' ZDF, Video, 22:00-27:00, March 16, 2021, <http://bit.ly/38SbPm0>.

86 Barbara Arvanitidis et al., 'Massacre in the Mountains,' CNN, March 1, 2021, <http://cnn.it/2OuNI66>.

87 Martin Plaut, 'Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 92 – 25 February 2021,' EEPA, <http://bit.ly/3qKHVX5>.

88 'Ethiopia: 'Hundreds executed, thousands homeless – the human cost of fighting in Tigray,' *Sky News*, March 17, 2021.

89 From Reuters, 'Satellite image of Gijet in Tigray region with marked red crosses relate to number of structures significantly damaged, and orange crosses show limited damage. Lines to the right identify visible scorching.' 'Hundreds of Buildings Burned around Tigray Town, research group says,' Reuters, February 25, 2021, <http://reut.rs/3lhO0ZO>.

90 'Hundreds of Buildings Burned around Tigray Town, research group says,' Reuters, February 25, 2021, <http://reut.rs/3lhO0ZO>.

Pillage, Looting and Asset-stripping

There has been widespread pillage and looting, often reaching systematic asset-stripping. Many such instances have been videotaped, photographed, described through in-person accounts, or caught on satellite and fire-imaging software. A portion of the evidence will be presented here.

Pillage, looting and systematic asset-stripping has not only enriched those who stole the property but also left many Tigrayan households destitute and severely reduced their ability to earn income and produce, access, and utilize food. As of mid-March, there appears to be no part of Tigray left untouched. In many locations, communities have been left without so much as a sack of flour or packets of dried pasta.

An increasing number of reports, from human rights organizations and humanitarian actors, tell of soldiers inflicting damage to schools and universities, market stands, government offices, commercial shops including electronics and cosmetic businesses, grocers, food processing and manufacturing factories, health centers, water and sanitation offices, petrol stations, hotels, banks, microfinance institution offices, private houses, and other structures.^{91, 92, 93} Soldiers have destroyed and/or taken assets including ‘luxury goods, machinery (such as generators and water pumps), vehicles (including bicycles, trucks, three-wheel vehicles, and cars, sometimes taken from their garage), as well as medication, furniture, household items, clothing, food, and drink.’⁹⁴

First-hand accounts allege different pillage, looting and asset-stripping strategies among armed groups: Ethiopian federal forces in the region have apparently concentrated on taking cash from banks, government offices, banks and microfinance institutions, and agricultural and water offices, almost all of which belong to the Tigrayan regional government. Eritrean forces have focused on privately held possessions, commercial, personal, or otherwise, ranging from household goods, to grain stores, cars and generators.⁹⁵ A Tigrayan residing in the US told the Associated Press that she had ‘watched [Eritrean soldiers] try on dresses and other clothing looted from homes in a town in... Tigray,’ while stuffing jewelry into their pockets.⁹⁶ Videos on social media and those shared by Human Rights Watch show trucks loaded with stolen objects headed for the northern border, a sight also reported by AP news in January.^{97, 98, 99} Similar methods appear to be employed by Amhara militias occupying Western Tigray, who have allegedly looted almost everything from harvests, to generators, water pumps and medical equipment.

The authors of this report interviewed a witness who stayed in Adwa during the Eritrean and Ethiopian federal offensives. He described how Eritrean soldiers would break doors before being followed by young women, brought from Eritrea, who would loot the shops before returning to the vehicles:

On the streets, all you see is now looting, they break every store, every electronics store,

91 ‘Ethiopia: Eritrean troops’ massacre of hundreds of Axum civilians may amount to crime against humanity,’ Amnesty International, last modified February 26, 2021, <http://bit.ly/38zLfxR>.

92 ‘Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,’ OCHA, February 28, 2021, <https://bit.ly/30V64zX>.

93 World Peace Foundation Interview (name withheld), by Phone, March 6, 2021.

94 ‘Axum,’ Amnesty International.

95 World Peace Foundation Interview (name withheld), by Phone, March 6, 2021.

96 Cara Anna, ‘Witnesses: Eritrean soldiers loot, kill in Ethiopia’s Tigray,’ Associated Press, January 26, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3lek7ts>.

97 Leul Alula, Twitter Post, February 20, 2021, https://twitter.com/Leul_alula/status/1363162535139155969.

98 Human Rights Watch, ‘Axum, Ethiopia: Trucks and buses moving along the main road through town,’ YouTube Video, 0:47, March 4, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tkqNBxMVbU&t=18s>.

99 Cara Anna, ‘Witnesses: Eritrean soldiers loot, kill in Ethiopia’s Tigray.’

every shop. Could be cosmetics store, or groceries, or small stores. Everything is broken. ... they were maybe 6 or 7 young girls, who came with them from Eritrea, they broke the door for them, and they loot, they take everything in that store, put it in a bag and carry it out, and return it to the truck which is holding everything outside. Everywhere this is what you see. They break it, they get in, and they take everything in their bag, and they put it in the trucks. And a couple of armed Eritrean soldiers would be waiting for them in the safety of the [vehicles]. And they take everything.

Not even the smallest items were spared:

The small boxes that the shoeshine boys carry, where they store their things overnight, they broke these things, took brushes and polish, and cookies and maybe candies... They were taking every smallest thing.¹⁰⁰

In Hawzen, Eastern Tigray, houses have been stripped of all possessions. With no electricity to grind grains or medical supplies, some of the surviving residents have fled to Mekelle.¹⁰¹ In a late January update, Belgian professor and geographer, Jan Nyssen, elaborated on the impact of non-functional grinding mills and level of resulting hunger:

Even if farmers have grains, in many villages and towns, there are no operating mills. Thus people can't make bread or *tayta* (fermented flatbread) and many are living on roasted barley and whatever else they can find. Traditional grinding is done between two stones shaped for that purpose, but many homesteads do not have such stones anymore, as mechanized grain mills have been built all over the place. The situation is even more difficult for the internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have no way to obtain such grinding stones. (...) Two sources tell us that people go to the bushes and collect branches and leaves of non-toxic thirst-quenching plants such as sorrel (*Rumex nervosus*) in order to have at least something in their stomachs. In some places there are not even matches available to light a fire for cooking.¹⁰²

On January 3, a camel caravan of EDF troops was spotted in Enticho in northern Central Tigray loaded with looted items such as household furniture.¹⁰³ Residents of Humera told the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) that Eritrean soldiers had emptied food and grain storages.¹⁰⁴ Aid workers and residents continue to report incidents of house to house searches and the looting of household items.¹⁰⁵ Forced displacement in response to the conflict has further enabled belligerents to engage in looting of houses and food stores with little to no resistance.

Amnesty International's report on the massacre at Aksum (Axum) detailed Eritrean soldiers looting sugar and flour from Guna Trading store, the looting of May Akko (a large community store), the taking of truckloads of sugar, cooking oil, lentils, flour and animal fodder from the Dejen Flour Factory, and the emptying of the budget student grocery store at Aksum University.¹⁰⁶ As well, soldiers looted from,

100 World Peace Foundation Interview (name withheld), by Phone, March 6, 2021.

101 Ibid.

102 Nyssen, J., 2021. Catastrophe stalks Tigray, again. Ethiopia Insight, 19 February 2021. <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2021/02/19/catastrophe-stalks-tigray-again/>.

103 Hayet Alem, Twitter Post, January 25, 2021, https://twitter.com/hayet_alem/status/1353850196694867969.

104 Cara Anna, 'Witnesses: Eritrean soldiers loot, kill in Ethiopia's Tigray.'

105 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,' OCHA, February 28, 2021, <https://bit.ly/30V64zX>.

106 'Axum,' Amnesty International.

the university, private houses, hotels, hospitals, grain store facilities, petrol stations, banks, electrical and maintenance stores, supermarkets, bakeries, jewelries, vendors' shacks (known locally as 'containers') and other shops, breaking through entrance doors with automatic weapons.

In Adigrat, Eastern Tigray, a witness captured a video of a failed attempt to loot what looks to be a grain storage by an Eritrean soldier, identifiable by his uniform and plastic shoes (see Figure 11).¹⁰⁷ Another described how Eritrean soldiers captured him and other Tigrayans from the city and forced them to travel shop to shop and factory to factory. At each location, they loaded generators, water pumps, and other machines onto trucks that were then driven back to Eritrea. After two weeks, when he refused to continue, the Adigrat native was tortured and kept in captivity for several weeks before escaping. He was subsequently captured by Amhara militia forces, before finally making it to Hamdayet refugee camp in Sudan.¹⁰⁸

Figure 11. Eritrean Soldier Attempted Looting, Adigrat, Eastern Tigray¹⁰⁹



With regard to economic infrastructure, markets have traditionally provided a large portion of Tigrayan civilians' access to food. However, the threat of violence, the disruption of trade, and the ransacking of commercial establishments has resulted in the rising prices of food items and have left local markets at or near collapse, particularly in Central and Eastern Tigray. The UN has said that food in markets is either extremely limited or not available in many areas.^{110, 111} OCHA reported in January that major commercial food supply routes were cut off in November. Moreover, the closure of the border with Sudan likely means continuing limited commercial access.¹¹² However, in a phone call from TDF-controlled areas on March 27, Mulugeta Gebrehiwot indicated that international food aid is being sold on the market and reaching some rural areas:

Whatever amounts [of food aid] are being stolen, it is being sold and it is getting to the rural areas. So it is accessible for the peasants to buy at a reasonable price. The ENDF is selling it, and the PP [Prosperity

107 John Gebregzabher, Twitter Post, February 21, 2021, <https://twitter.com/JGebregzabher/status/1363457120612593664>.

108 Fritz Schaap and Andy Spyra, 'An Ethiopian Doctor Records the Destruction of His Homeland,' Spiegel International, March 15, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3tDWCgD>.

109 John Gebregzabher, Twitter Post, February 21, 2021, <https://twitter.com/JGebregzabher/status/1363457120612593664>.

110 Cara Anna, "Extreme urgent need": Starvation haunts Ethiopia's Tigray,' Associated Press, January 17, 2021, <http://bit.ly/38zMdtZ>.

111 'Ethiopia - Tigray Regional Humanitarian Update,' OCHA.

112 'Ethiopia Access Snapshot - Tigray,' OCHA, January 19, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3rSxaUc>.

Party] officials in charge are selling it, and some of the operators for the INGOs, they are not people of integrity, not the established people they used to work with, and they are selling it.... We are seeing food in the market. It might support [the villagers] for a few weeks.

In January, the Ethiopian Commodity Exchange reported a disruption in the supply of oily seeds such as sesame, produced in Tigray.¹¹³ In Western Tigray, a major sesame production zone (see Section 3), Amhara militiamen have reportedly raided large stores of sesame and owned by Tigrayan agricultural investors. These were likely loaded into trucks taken over regional borders to Gondar and on to Addis Ababa. Eyewitnesses allege that a very large portion of the harvest has been taken in this way, evidenced by a huge number of *laissez passers* (movement permits) made to sesame, sorghum, and cotton merchants originating from outside the region.¹¹⁴

Figures 12 and 13. Destruction of a Market in Adigrat, December 5



Public service infrastructure, including administrative offices, vehicles, banks, factories, schools, universities, dams, and agriculture, water, and sanitation facilities, have been repeatedly targeted for total pillage since November. The Mekelle City Administration building was ransacked and looted sometime in early February, all electronics and other valuables were taken. Several banks, aside from having been rendered non-functional due to electricity outages, were looted of their cash and equipment.¹¹⁵

An eyewitness to Ethiopian federal forces' looting of the Dedebit microfinance and credit institution in Adwa described it,

It was being broken—right there, you know I was right there—the Ethiopian army with their flag and their tank, breaking it. It took them three days to break the safe deposit, even though they were hitting it with heavy hammers, and whatever irons they were hitting it with, and a drilling machine, and they still couldn't do it; so they brought another guy from somewhere, maybe from Aksum or somewhere, he came and broke it open. And I saw them with my own eyes loading the pickup truck with stacks of money, stacks and stacks of money.¹¹⁶

A video posted to Twitter shows that the bank in Abiy Addi was completely looted and appears to have

113 Loza Seleshie, 'Ethiopia: How Is the Tigray Conflict Hurting the Country's Economy?'

114 Confidential sources, interview transcripts shared with authors.

115 Amanuel Tedros, Twitter Post, January 25, 2021, https://twitter.com/emmanuel_tag/status/1353697920877527041.

116 World Peace Foundation Interview (name withheld), by Phone, March 6, 2021.

been burned. Numerous schools have been looted. Mulugeta Gebrehiwot said that in rural central Tigray, ‘all the school chairs and tables are gone.’¹¹⁷ Neksege secondary school in Endamekhoni, South Tigray has had all of its electronics taken. Eritrean troops burned Enticho Technical and Vocational College, an incident captured on video.¹¹⁸ Numerous agricultural extension and water management offices have been emptied of their equipment and valuables (*see below*).

Destruction of Foodstuffs

A combination of open-source satellite imagery, internal US Government reporting, and fire tracking data from NASA Fire Information and Resource Management System (FIRMS) and Fires in Settlement (FIRIS) reveals that Eritrean and Ethiopian and Eritrean forces appear to be burning what they are not able to carry with them. Independent analyst, Ryan O’Farrell, revealed a trail of fires, verified through satellite and FIRMS data, following Eritrean and Ethiopian forces throughout their offensives in Southern Tigray.^{119, 120, 121} Beginning January 15, FIRIS detected fires on the outskirts of Humera that, over four days, destroyed warehouses and the surrounding fields.¹²² Recent satellite imagery shows the burnt remains of at least 508 structures in the town of Gijet, Southern Tigray, where a Sky News team later corroborated the damage and documented the burning of grain stores for humans and livestock.^{123, 124}

Figure 14. Burned Grain Store in Gijet, Southern Tigray¹²⁵



Figures 15 and 16. Destroyed Settlements in the Raya Highlands, Southern Tigray¹²⁶



117 Phone call, March 27, 2021.

118 ‘Fire at Enticho technical college confirmed,’ <https://twitter.com/ViiHaakon/status/1375599998902153216>

119 Ryan O’Farrell, Twitter Post, November 11, 2020, <https://twitter.com/ryanmofarrell/status/1326398149460709378>.

120 ‘FIRMS FAQ,’ NASA FIRMS, Last Modified February 22, 2021, <https://earthdata.nasa.gov/faq/firms-faq#ed-user-guides>.

121 To be detected through FIRMS, fires must be approximately greater than 1000 square meters, or about 0.1 hectares, a measurement that suggests significant damage for subsistence level and small farmers.

122 FIRIS Fire Alert, Twitter Post, January 15, 2021, https://twitter.com/FIRIS_FireAlert/status/1350302487199158274?s=20.

123 Reuters Staff, ‘Hundreds of buildings burned around Tigray town, research group says,’ Reuters, February 25, 2021, <http://reut.rs/31-h00ZO>.

124 ‘Ethiopia: ‘Hundreds Executed’ in Tigray,’ Sky News, YouTube, March 16, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3s4mYb5>.

125 ‘Ethiopia: ‘Hundreds Executed’ in Tigray,’ Sky News.

126 Hailu Kebede, Twitter Post, February 4, 2021, https://twitter.com/HailuKebede_/status/1357411474369622016.

As early as October, Amhara militias were targeting standing crops and farmland in rural areas of Tigray, bearing certain consequences for food availability in the short term. One eyewitness recalls in an interview with *The Week* writer, Matthew Walther,

In the countryside... militias were stealing food and burning crops... Women were raped, children were murdered. At a farm owned by one of his relations, all but one of the farmhands were killed; at a looted factory owned by a business associate, no one survived. Ethiopian military personnel claimed that nothing could be done. At first it was rumored that children were responsible. This guy was telling me, 'They are burning our farms.' 'Who is burning them?' 'They are kids.' Then we would hear, 'Oh, at this church the priest was killed.' People were running away. The militia would come to the houses and rape indiscriminately, saying 'We'll take your food, whatever is not good enough, we'll burn it.'¹²⁷

The above testimony echoes accounts from destruction in Aksum, Dengelat, and numerous villages near the Ethiopian-Eritrean border.¹²⁸ Videos posted to Facebook show crops destroyed through burning as a result of airstrikes in early November.¹²⁹ Further video evidence has emerged of Eritrean soldiers burning farmers' rural homesteads and cultivation fields in the Digum region.¹³⁰ *The Economist* interviewed witnesses from Edaga Hamus in late February, who told of Eritrean soldiers who systematically burned crops during door-to-door raids.¹³¹ Oxfam interviewed a Tigrayan farmer in southern Tigray who pointed to his loss of approximately 1.5 tons of crops—enough to feed his family for at least ten months—to fire damage.¹³² Soldiers cut down mango orchards at Adeba and Tseada Sare, which will likely take five to six years to regrow.¹³³

Figures 17 and 18. Razed Compound South of Edaga Humus, Eastern Tigray (Burned between November 14 - 19)



Satellite imagery from Dansheha, Western Tigray, reveals the destruction of crop fields, an airstrip, and other civilian infrastructure, including homes and warehouses, beginning in November and continuing through February.

127 Matthew Walther, 'An eyewitness account of atrocities in Tigray,' *The Week*, February 28, 2021, <http://bit.ly/2NIIGZ8>.

128 Zecharias Zelalem, 'They Started Burning the Homes': Ethiopians Say Their Towns Are Being Razed in Ethnic Cleansing Campaign,' *Vice News*, <http://bit.ly/3bNrAwo>.

129 Dimtsi Weyane, Facebook Video Post, November 20, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1761224357377884>.

130 Thomas V. Linge, Twitter Post, February 21, 2020, <https://twitter.com/ThomasVLinge/status/1363498827144179717>.

131 'Soldiers have killed hundreds of civilians in Tigray,' *The Economist*, February 27, 2021, <http://econ.st/2Q5xDUT>.

132 'Conflict compounded by Covid-19 and climate change pushes millions in Tigray to the brink,' Oxfam, January 22, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3bLEISZ>.

133 Alex de Waal, 'The Mango Orchards of Zamra, Tigray,' *World Peace Foundation*, March 3, 2021, <http://bit.ly/2OWge04>.

Figures 19 and 20. Satellite Imagery of Destruction of Civilian Infrastructure in Dansheha, Western Tigray (November)¹³⁴

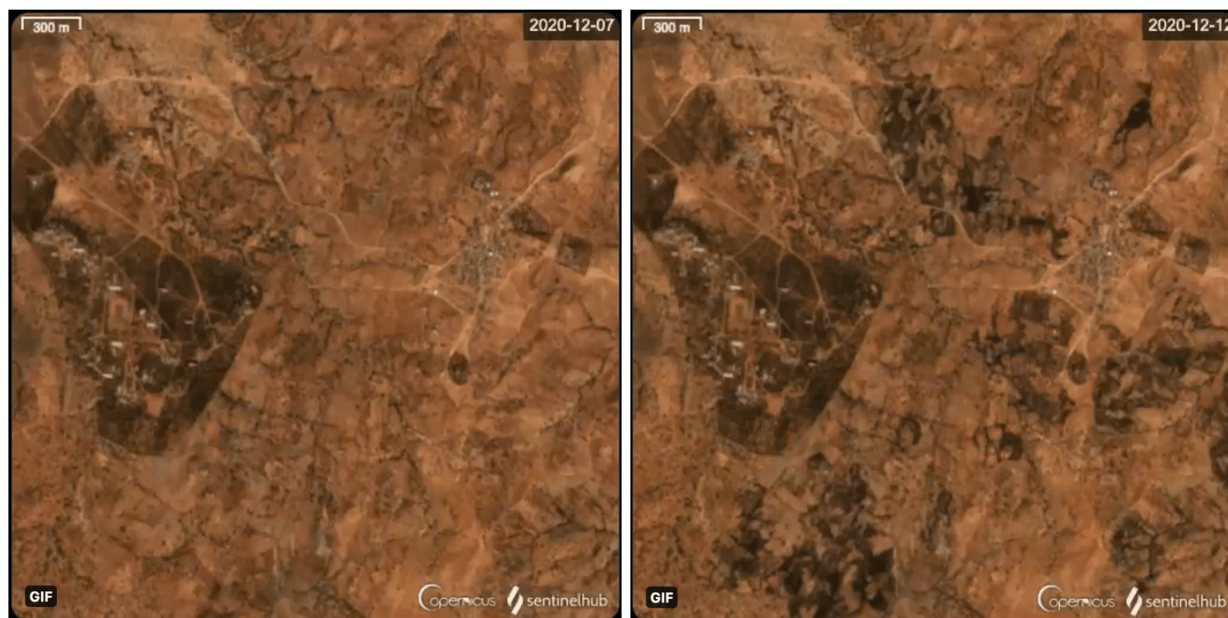


The consequences of asset destruction have been acute for the rural populations as the conflict has interrupted harvesting season. A Sentinel satellite image of Maychew (approximately 3 km by 3 km) reveals the burning of 70 to 80 farm plots with standing crops, alongside dozens of homesteads, between December 7 and 12, 2020.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Katherine Houeld and Andrew Cawthorn, Reuters, 'Ethiopia rejects African mediation, pushes towards rebel-held Tigray area,' November 21, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/instant-article/idUSKBN281092>

¹³⁵ Jan Nyssen, 'Late 2020 personal diary of the war on Tigray,' Ghent University, January, 2021, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348356294>.

Figure 21 and 22. Satellite Imagery of More Than 50 Farm Plots Burned in Maychew, Southern Tigray (December)¹³⁶



Given their critical role in agricultural production, and usage as complementary sources of food and income, the capture and killing of livestock, including large animals and small ruminants, is especially concerning. Cattle, camels and oxen have been taken as loot, or killed by their owners under the direct instruction of soldiers. One account from Adi Mendi provided to Vice News tells of farmers being forced by Eritrean soldiers to slaughter their cattle and prepare food for soldiers, before having their homesteads doused in gasoline. Similar reports of looted cattle and camels have emerged from Adi Mengedi, Adi Berbere, and Haftom villages in central Tigray.¹³⁷

Looting and Destruction of Health Infrastructure

Military campaigns have rendered regional health infrastructure largely non-functional. Confirmed by the Regional Health Bureau of Tigray and OCHA, many hospitals have been struck by artillery or looted of their equipment, medications, and other vital items.¹³⁸ A video documents a ransacked room of Slekleka Hospital.¹³⁹ Teams from Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) visited 106 health facilities between mid-December 2020 and March 2021, finding only 13% functional with nearly 70% looted and 30% damaged. In many cases, MSF identified the damage as deliberate.¹⁴⁰ The MSF team found destroyed equipment, smashed doors and windows, scattered medicines across the floor, and few remaining staff members. Further to this, Ethiopian and Eritrean armed forces were occupying one in five of the health facilities visited by MSF, using them as temporary military bases and to stabilize injured soldiers.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Vice News, 'They Started Burning the Homes.'

¹³⁸ Cara Anna, 'Report: Hospitals in Ethiopia's Tigray struck by artillery,' Associated Press, January 9, 2021, <http://bit.ly/38D95ZP>.

¹³⁹ Kassa HaileMariam, Twitter Post, February 5, 2021, <https://twitter.com/Kuluhama/status/1357701647418486790?s=20>.

¹⁴⁰ MSF, 'People left with few healthcare options in Tigray as facilities looted, destroyed,' March 15, 2021, <https://www.msf.org/health-facilities-targeted-tigray-region-ethiopia>

Individual accounts report that, as of mid-March, Eritrean soldiers were still using the Mulugat health facility in east Tigray as a base.¹⁴¹ OCHA's March 13 situation report reported that the Abiy Addi hospital remained occupied by the ENDF, preventing up to 500,000 people from accessing health services there.¹⁴² In May Deli, Western Tigray, Amhara militiamen took all health center accessories, including laboratory equipment. Armed groups have also seized ambulances, including more than 20 in and around Adigrat.¹⁴³

As of February, the WHO estimated that only 22% of health facilities were functional in the region, likely due initially to electricity cuts and later by active fighting. Nearly 80% were not accessible.¹⁴⁴ In January, the Regional Health Bureau said that approximately 600 health workers had fled to Mekelle.¹⁴⁵ A UNICEF mission to Shire between February 4-7 found a majority of hospitals were closed and vaccine stocks expired due to electricity cuts.¹⁴⁶ Medical supplies are running dangerously low.¹⁴⁷ Health workers were reportedly not paid until February, when a partial salary was received by some.¹⁴⁸ As of late March, both of the region's referral hospitals, 6 of 14 general hospitals, 7 of 24 primary hospitals, and 31 of more than 260 health centers in Tigray were functional. The UN continues to receive reports of lootings of hospitals and health centers on a weekly basis.¹⁴⁹

The effects of little to no healthcare provision on civilians are severe: partners on the ground have witnessed an increase in mothers dying in childbirth as their deliveries go unaccompanied by skilled birth attendants. Vaccination campaigns have all but ceased, especially hampered by an inconsistent supply of electricity to maintain cold chain storage. Increasingly poor water and sanitation conditions have caused an uptick in diarrheal diseases, which can be especially deadly in young children, especially in combination with rising acute malnutrition. Those with chronic diseases, including diabetes and HIV, are going without treatment. Many people have died as a consequence. MSF reported that women have died in childbirth because they were unable to get to a hospital due to rampant insecurity on the roads and a night-time curfew.¹⁵⁰ With heavy armed presence on major roads, and continued volatility in the security situation, humanitarian actors struggle to transport essential medicines, nutrition supplies, and other medical supplies.^{151, 152, 153}

Health care is also essential for people to remain in their villages during the farming season. Asked what were the most important actions for enabling the rural population to stay in situ and cultivate, Mulugeta Gebrehiwot identified health care as the number one priority.¹⁵⁴

141 'People left with few healthcare options in Tigray as facilities looted, destroyed,' Press Release, MSF, March 15, 2021, <https://www.msf.org/health-facilities-targeted-tigray-region-ethiopia>.

142 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,' OCHA, March 13, 2021, <https://reports.OCHA.org/en/country/ethiopia/>.

143 'People left with few healthcare options in Tigray as facilities looted, destroyed,' Press Release, MSF.

144 'Tigray Crisis Response - Situation Update #7,' World Vision, February 5, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3ctGQOq>.

145 'Ethiopia Access Snapshot - Tigray,' OCHA, January 19, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3rSxaUc>.

146 'Children in Tigray in acute need of protection and assistance,' UNICEF, February 12, 2021, <http://uni.cf/3vIPWFr>.

147 Cara Anna, 'Report: Hospitals in Ethiopia's Tigray struck by artillery.'

148 'Conflict compounded by Covid-19 and climate change pushes millions in Tigray to the brink,' Oxfam.

149 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,' OCHA, March 13, 2021, <https://reports.OCHA.org/en/country/ethiopia/>.

150 'People left with few healthcare options in Tigray as facilities looted, destroyed,' Press Release, MSF.

151 Ibid.

152 'People left with few healthcare options in Tigray as facilities looted, destroyed,' Press Release, MSF.

153 Cara Anna, "'Extreme urgent need': Starvation haunts Ethiopia's Tigray,' AP, January 17, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/ethiopia-United-nations-kenya-ef0b6b2db2994d4c3042cf19f3d92a2a>

154 Phone call, March 27, 2021.

The Covid-19 pandemic places further strain on an already devastated healthcare system. While Ethiopia has reported nearly 200,000 confirmed cases reported to WHO,¹⁵⁵ Covid-19 surveillance, control, and treatment in Tigray has been severely interrupted, and officials have yet to say whether they are receiving Covid-19 data from the region.¹⁵⁶ Forced population displacement and relocation, combined with cross-border travel, and the lack of adequate physical space in IDP sites all further raise the risk of transmission alongside a barely functional regional health system. Preventative measures such as social distancing, quarantining and shielding the vulnerable are impossible to implement at scale.

Figures 23 and 24. Damaged and Vandalized Health Facilities in Sebeya and Debre Abbay, Central Tigray^{157, 158}



Looting and Destruction of Water and Sanitation Infrastructure

Water infrastructure has also been targeted for destruction and looting, with the Water, Hygiene, and Sanitation (WASH) Cluster reporting that more than 250 motorized pumps in towns were out of order by the beginning of March. Due to access constraints, the status of some 11,000 handpumps in rural areas is still unknown.¹⁵⁹ Without electricity, many were immediately rendered useless in early November. Médecins Sans Frontières told AP News in January that just two of the 21 wells still worked in Adigrat, a city of more than 140,000.¹⁶⁰ Much of the urban water and sanitation infrastructure was built with donor funds. Whether those donors will consider it a legitimate or worthwhile use of their taxpayers' money to rebuild what has been destroyed by a government (or at the behest of a government) that was a development partner, remains to be seen.

155 World Health Organization, '[WHO Health Emergency Dashboard \(COVID-19\) Homepage](https://covid19.who.int/region/afro/country/et) – Ethiopia, accessed March 28, 2021, <https://covid19.who.int/region/afro/country/et>.

156 Cara Anna, 'UN fears 'massive' COVID transmission in Ethiopia's Tigray,' Associated Press, January 8, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3tU1XAu>.

157 'People left with few healthcare options in Tigray as facilities looted, destroyed,' Press Release, MSF.

158 The writing on the wall reads: 'Fuck you the people of Tigray: now we have handed you over to sha'ibiya [the Eritrean regime] and they will roast you'.

159 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,' OCHA, March 8, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3rQHiwo>.

160 Cara Anna, 'Extreme urgent need.'

All water office buildings in 36 assessed towns were looted or vandalized, including that of Adigrat, found fully destroyed by fire. UNHCR described a lack of clean water available in refugee camps after regaining access in January.¹⁶¹ The same February UNICEF mission to Shire discovered no access to drinking water for more than 170,000 residents and 52,000 IDPs, many of whom have been drinking from nearby rivers, though this marginally improved by late March.¹⁶² Humanitarian workers, arrived finally in January, described weakened children dying from diarrhea after drinking from rivers.¹⁶³

Sexual Violence and Its Impact on Starvation

Rape has been used as a tool of terror, oppression, collective humiliation, and ethnic cleansing against Tigrayans. This report can only touch on this element of the mass atrocities in Tigray, highlighting its horrendous implications for health, livelihoods and food security.

In March, the Europe External Programme with Africa released a briefing on reports of sexual and gender-based violence emerging during the Tigray conflict. The organization conservatively estimates that ten thousand women have been sexually assaulted thus far. The hospital in Adigrat, alone, has received over 174 cases of rape since the start of violence in October. Dedebit media, a Tigray-based media company, reported approximately 750 cases of rape admitted to Ayder Hospital in Mekelle. Of these cases, the report highlights, ‘One documented incident involved more than ten soldiers raping a single victim. Victims include girls as young as ten years old as well as grandmothers.’ Without doubt these are a small proportion of the victims, because of the shame and stigma associated with rape, and the inaccessibility of health care. Men and boys have also been victims of such assault.

The UN has repeatedly voiced serious concerns about rising numbers of rape cases. In January, UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, highlighted a high number of alleged rapes in Mekelle. She also described reports of ‘individuals allegedly forced to rape members of their own family, under threats of imminent violence.’ Medical centers have reported increased demand for emergency contraception and testing for sexually transmitted diseases.¹⁶⁴ As of mid-March, OCHA stated that more than 500 individuals reported having survived sexual assault.¹⁶⁵ These claims have been corroborated by members of the Ethiopian government, including in a report from the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and a statement by the Ethiopian Minister of Women, Children and Youth, Filsan Abudhalli Ahmed.^{166, 167} Reuters previously released eyewitness accounts of rapes by men in Ethiopian federal army uniforms, militia fighters from Amhara, Amhara special forces, and Eritrean soldiers in January.¹⁶⁸

One woman, who said she had escaped from Rawyan town in Tigray, told of three soldiers she identified as Amhara special forces knocking at her door, the doctor said. When she refused them entry, they broke in and assaulted her...An aid worker in the town of Wukro

161 Tigray Situation Update, UNHCR, January 21, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3qR1Xix>.

162 ‘Children in Tigray in acute need of protection and assistance,’ UNICEF.

163 Cara Anna, ‘Extreme urgent need.’

164 ‘UN warns of ‘serious’ rape charges in Ethiopia’s Tigray,’ Associated Press, January 22, 2021, <http://bit.ly/30I9VA1>.

165 ‘Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,’ OCHA, March 22, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3rlJoDz>.

166 ‘Current Situation of Residents in Tigray Region Brief Monitoring Report,’ Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, February 16, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3bJNfpi>.

167 Filsan Abdullahi Ahmed, Twitter Post, February 11, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3qNbHKW>.

168 Michael Georgy, ‘‘Choose - I kill you or rape you’: abuse accusations surge in Ethiopia’s war,’ Reuters, January 25, 2021, <http://reut.rs/3csPjBn>.

told Reuters victims had recounted how a husband was forced to kneel and watch while his wife was raped by soldiers they identified as Eritrean...A medical worker in Adigrat said he treated six women who had been raped by a group of soldiers and told not to seek help afterwards. They found courage to come forward days later, but there were no medicines to treat them, the medic said.¹⁶⁹

A coordinator for a gender-based violence crisis center in Tigray told CNN reporters that they now receive up to 22 women and girls a day seeking treatment for rape. Survivors' ages range from 8 to 60 years.¹⁷⁰ One survivor told Channel 4 News that herself and five other women were drugged, tied to a rock, and subsequently raped by a group of Eritrean soldiers while they joked and took photos.¹⁷¹

Sexual violence may be a contributory element in a pattern of starvation crimes insofar as survivors of sexual violence are less able to obtain the essentials for life and to support their families, especially providing maternal care for children, and fear of sexual violence can prevent women and girls from undertaking activities essential for survival. Survivors of rape are at risk of a range of subsequent social and economic deprivations. The link between economic desperation and vulnerability to sexual abuse also operates in the other direction. Many women have allegedly been forced to exchange sex for basic commodities.¹⁷²

Severe trauma associated with violent sexual assault has long term effects for survivors, including mental and physical debilitation. Committed *en masse*, sexual violence can severely limit a generation of laborers and mothers. According to the briefing, 'women and girls are targeted as the (future) mothers of children who might (one day) take up arms against the invading army.'¹⁷³

Report received that a girl from Abyi Adi [Abyi Addi] was shot 4 times on her hands by a soldier who first went into their home asking where *woyane* is. Her father, a blind man, responded they didn't know and he was ordered to rape his own child. He was taken into another room and beaten by another soldier after he strongly refused. The girl was then ordered *lawtash*.¹⁷⁴ When she refused, he fired a shot wounding her left hand small finger and then followed it with three shots on her right arm leaving her now amputated.¹⁷⁵

Forced Displacement and Forced Immobility

Residents of Tigray have been forcibly moved away from their lands and livelihoods, including farms and places of paid employment. Armed forces have also prevented residents from moving *to* such places, including through their occupation of major highways and targeting of key labor migration destinations for pillage and ethnic cleansing.

169 Ibid.

170 Bethlehem Feleke et al., 'Practically this has been a genocide' Doctors say rape is being used as a weapon of war in Ethiopia's conflict,' CNN, March 20th, 2021, <http://cnn.it/3f2PPsv>.

171 Jamal Osman. The Horrors of Hidden War: Inside the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia. Channel 4 News. March 18, 2021. <https://www.channel4.com/news/the-horrors-of-the-hidden-war-inside-the-tigray-conflict-in-ethiopia>

172 'United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, urges all parties to prohibit the use of sexual violence and cease hostilities in the Tigray region of Ethiopia,' Press Release, UN, January 21, 2021, <http://bit.ly/2NiLx55>.

173 'Gender Based Violence in Tigray - Special Briefing No. 3,' EEPA, March 8, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3liaOsM>.

174 This is an offensive term widely used referring to sexual intercourse in the context of violence or rape.

175 'Gender Based Violence in Tigray - Special Briefing No. 3,' EEPA.

There are several patterns of forced migration and distress migration. In Western Tigray, people have been forcibly removed *en masse* and their land taken over (see below).

Some people have fled across Tigray's borders. IOM reported a surge of arrivals in Amhara and Afar from Tigray in December.¹⁷⁶ Approximately 62,000 Ethiopian refugees have arrived over the border in Sudan as of the end of February.¹⁷⁷ In December, this line of escape was blocked with closure of the Ethiopian-Sudanese border. One displaced Tigrayan told the BBC in December that they were repeatedly blocked from fleeing the area by Amhara forces and other ENDF-aligned militias. The informant reported feeling that 'it is almost like we are in a prison. Some people have nothing to eat hiding in the bush.'¹⁷⁸

Many people have moved to cities. The interim head of the regional administration, Mulu Nega, said that 900,000 had been displaced in the current conflict.¹⁷⁹ UNHCR places the total number of internally displaced at nearly 2 million. Most IDPs have been identified in the cities of Adigrat, Mekelle, and Shire.¹⁸⁰ However, most rural Tigrayans regard this as a last resort. Heavy EDF and ENDF presence along major roads severely inhibits movement. Military roadside camps are feared as places where ethnic Tigrayan men, routinely assumed to be rebels or sympathizers of the TPLF, are exposed to arbitrary violence.

Rural Tigrayans are determined to remain near their villages if at all possible. The following is an exchange between the authors and Mulugeta Gebrehiwot on March 27, 2021:

They are not leaving their villages except in the western part of Tigray where they have literally cleaned them out. ... The rest of the Tigrayans are staying in their villages. When the Eritreans come they move out, they hide, and they return to their villages.

Even in villages where people suffered serious massacres they are staying in their villages.

What are they eating?

They say in most of the places they had a good harvest, and those that were not stricken by the locusts or had everything burned, they are living on those things. They cannot access their savings because the microfinance was shut down. But they are surviving. But the signs of hunger are becoming visible.

How long can people continue on their reserves?

Not long.

176 'Northern Ethiopia Crisis - Situation Report 1,' IOM, January 18, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3tk0sex>.

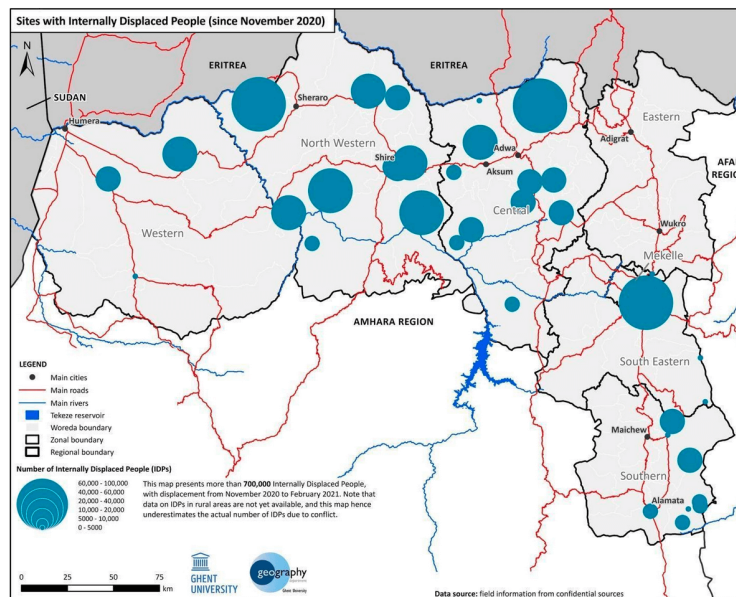
177 'Ethiopia Situation (Tigray Region),' UNHCR, February 28, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3vGf4ac>.

178 'Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: Cutting through the information blackout,' BBC, December 5, 2020, <http://bbc.in/30LUrLe>.

179 Helen Tadesse, 'Tigray Interim Admin CEO Hold Discussion with US Ambassador, USAID Director,' Walta Media and Communication Corporate, March 22, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3cjspO3>.

180 Tigray Situation Update, UNHCR, January 21, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3qR1Xix>.

Figure 25. Magnitude of Internally Displaced Persons in Tigray¹⁸¹



Those sites receiving internally displaced persons, including schools and universities, face a lack of basic health services, extremely poor water and sanitation, and a high risk of gender-based violence due to inadequate sleeping conditions and broken windows and doors of housing facilities.¹⁸² In Adwa, Aksum, Shire and Abiy Addi, up to 60 people are staying in a single classroom. Many have been forced to reside in the open air, exposing women and children to gender-based violence and other protection risks. Such a situation will be especially complicated at the upcoming onset of the rainy season. Those living in overcrowded situations also face significant health challenges.

A rapid assessment, conducted by the Bureau of Labor and Social Affairs (BoLSA) and humanitarians in Mekelle Town, found a high incidence of diarrheal diseases and women delivering within displacement centers, as no emergency services are provided during the night. Lack of drugs and medical supplies continues to complicate health service delivery in these settlements. Another assessment of one settlement in Abiy Addi found extreme vulnerabilities due to individuals' having been displaced multiple times due to recurrent episodes of fighting. Repeated displacement also severely undermines registration for and attendance of food distributions. Nearly 107,000 displaced people arrived in Adwa over the previous four months have so far only received very limited humanitarian assistance of any kind.¹⁸³

Ethnic Cleansing

In November 2020, Amhara forces occupied Western Tigray and several woredas of Northwestern and Southern Tigray and expelled Tigrayan residents, especially from lowlands, where many Tigrayans were resettled in the previous three decades.¹⁸⁴ An estimated 140,000 people have been forcibly removed.¹⁸⁵

181 Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Nyssen, J., 2021, Tigray: Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation, Journal of Maps, preprint, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation.

182 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,' OCHA, February 20, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3vhG7Z4>.

183 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,' OCHA, March 22, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3rIJoDz>.

184 Cara Anna, 'Witnesses: Eritrean soldiers loot, kill in Ethiopia's Tigray.'

185 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,' OCHA, March 22, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3rIJoDz>.

An eyewitness to this process told the authors that during official meetings among themselves and with Eritrean soldiers, Amhara militia leaders openly expressed their intention to ‘clean up the junta,’ in reference to TPLF and its supporters. Western Tigrayan witnesses tell of hearing soldiers yell that this place was for Amhara as they forced the Tigrayans out of their homes and took their belongings.¹⁸⁶

The UN Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, warned of the scale up of ethnic cleansing events in early February 2021. A US government report, leaked to the *New York Times* in February, outlines a deliberate and rapid effort by the Ethiopian army and allied forces to ‘render Western Tigray ethnically homogenous through the use of force and intimidation.’ The report also noted that ‘whole villages were severely damaged or completely erased.’¹⁸⁷ This has since been confirmed by Google Earth images released in mid-March, which revealed the comprehensive nature of the scorched earth policy of various Amhara forces (see Figure 26). In a statement made on March 10, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken used the term ‘ethnic cleansing’ to describe atrocities and human rights abuses committed in Western Tigray.¹⁸⁸

The authors of this report received additional private accounts regarding the Amhara occupation of Western Tigray. In their wake, Amhara authorities have reportedly moved quickly to formally occupy the region, going so far as to replace the Tigrayan governing administration apparatus with their own. Members of the Amhara forces have reportedly framed looting and occupation as the reclamation of the wealth and development, of which the Amhara were supposedly cheated by the rule of the TPLF. Such framing reflects increasingly popular messaging by those opposed to the TDF that ‘Tigrayans got rich on our back.’ Many larger towns, such as Mai Kadra, Humera, and Baeker, are now filled with empty houses. The most recent situation update by OCHA confirms that several major towns in Western Tigray are now empty of Tigrayan people, with new residents, claiming to be Amhara, occupying vacated houses.¹⁸⁹ Non-Tigrayan individuals have also allegedly taken over empty hotels and businesses and reopened them as their own. These businesses are supposedly registered with a new Amhara administration already in place.

This new administration has issued a land redistribution plan, under which thousands have registered, and it is actively issuing permits for the movement of people—including displaced Tigrayans—up to the Tekeze River. In the beginning of March, the Amhara administration reportedly began a census process to issue identity cards to newly occupying residents.¹⁹⁰ OCHA confirms that the region is now only accessible through Amhara, and Amhara forces are reportedly managing its security.¹⁹¹ A witness in Hamadyet refugee camp described how during his journey through western Tigray he encountered almost no Tigrayans and the people mostly spoke Amharic.¹⁹² A spokesperson for the Ethiopian government, Gizachew Muluneh, announced that the Abiy administration was reincorporating the territories of Welkait, Tegede, Humera, Telemte and Raya districts, into Amhara region, though this action has yet to be legally recognized.¹⁹³

186 Confidential source, interview transcript passed to the authors.

187 Declan Walsh, ‘Ethiopia’s War Leads to Ethnic Cleansing in Tigray Region, U.S. Report Says,’ *New York Times*, <http://nyti.ms/3cub-CXj>.

188 Jennifer Hansler, ‘Blinken: Acts of ‘ethnic cleansing’ committed in Western Tigray,’ *CNN*, March 10, 2021, <http://cnn.it/3tnM3y7>.

189 Ibid.

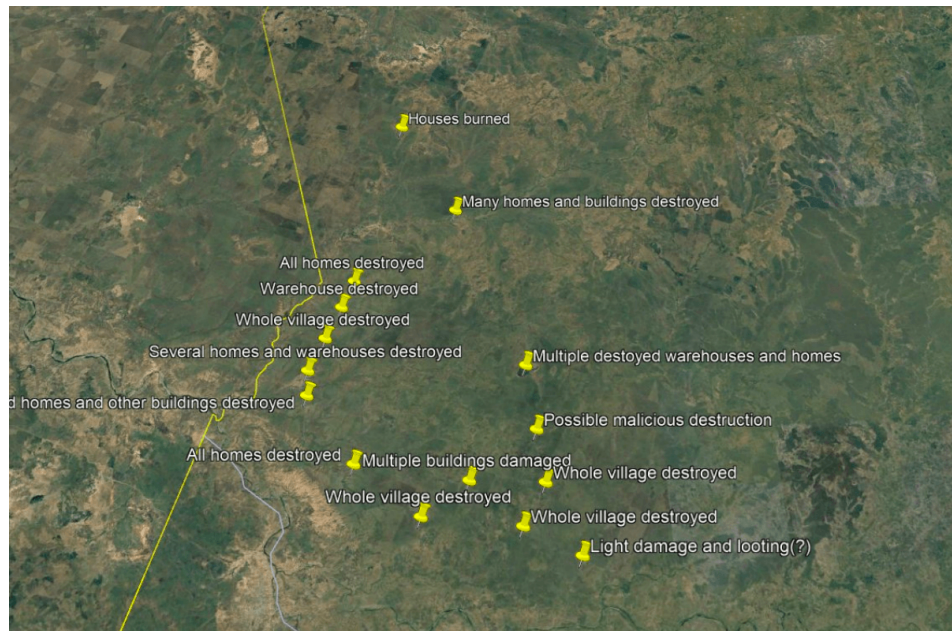
190 Private account received by the authors; source and name retracted for privacy.

191 ‘Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,’ OCHA, March 22, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3rlJoDz>.

192 Fritz Schaap and Andy Spyra, ‘An Ethiopian Doctor Records the Destruction of His Homeland.’

193 Samuel Gebre, ‘Ethiopia’s Amhara Seizes Disputed Territory Amid Tigray War,’ *Bloomberg*, March 16, 2021, <http://bloom.bg/3c08rYf>.

Figure 26. Satellite Mapping of Razed Settlements in Western Tigray¹⁹⁴



Destruction of Industry and Employment

The Ethiopian Trade and Industry Ministry projects \$20 million in export losses per month due to the ongoing conflict, especially due to disruption to manufacturing and mining output.¹⁹⁵ Factories in Adigrat and Mekelle have endured significant damage, including the Addis Pharmaceutical Factory, the largest pharmaceutical manufacturing plant in the country.^{196, 197} Including Addis Pharmaceuticals, a large portion of targeted factories (reported in the below table and confirmed through photographic evidence) were managed, at least in part, by EFFORT. In total, EFFORT factories provided some 47,000 jobs for the people of Tigray.^{198, 199} The EFFORT-owned enterprises were the largest revenue generator for the regional Government, providing 60% of its regionally-generated revenues. In early November, the Ethiopian government froze the bank accounts of EFFORT and its 34 subsidiaries and halted budget subsidies to Tigray's government, instead redirecting the proposed 10.4 million birr (\$272 million) to local authorities.²⁰⁰ It then dissolved EFFORT and transferred its assets to various federal institutions.²⁰¹

194 "Internally Displaced People and refugees", in: Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Emnet Negash, De Sloover, L., Nyssen, J., 2021. 'Tigray: Atlas of the humanitarian situation'. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181>.

195 Loza Seleshie, 'Ethiopia: How Is the Tigray Conflict Hurting the Country's Economy?', The Africa Report, February 24, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3tov1zT>.

196 AFP, 'Tigray Official Slams Damage by Troops from 'Neighbouring' Country,' Yahoo! News (Yahoo!), accessed March 15, 2021, <https://news.yahoo.com/tigray-official-slams-damage-troops-152009648.html>.

197 'Addis Pharmaceutical Factory (APF) - Addis Ababa,' Ezega, accessed March 15, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3viSqEF>

198 Hayet Alem, 'Tigray interim official says 100 billion Birr needed to repair destroyed EFFORT companies in eastern and central Tigray,' interview with EFFORT Official, for Tghat, a group of anonymous Tigrayans reporting on the damage done within Tigray during the current conflict, March 7, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3bLgjrZ>.

199 Befeqadu Hailu, 'Analysis: Inside the Controversial EFFORT,' Addis Standard, March 25, 2019, <http://bit.ly/30Fb3oa>

200 Samuel Gebre and Simon Marks, 'Ethiopia Tightens Economic Clampdown on Rebel Tigray Region,' *Bloomberg*, November 19, 2020, <http://bit.ly/3tbnHrc>.

201 Bloomberg News, 'Ethiopia tightens economic clampdown on rebel Tigray region,' November 18, 2020 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-11-18/ethiopia-freezes-assets-of-fund-accused-of-backing-war-in-tigray>

Table 3. Confirmed Factories Damaged in Tigray (November 2020 - March 2021)

Factory, Location (Ownership)	Damage	# of Employees ²⁰²
Addis Pharmaceuticals Factory , Adigrat (EFFORT) ²⁰³	Looted, destroyed by fire	3,000
Almeda Textile Factory , Adwa (EFFORT) ²⁰⁴	Looted, destroyed by fire	8,000
Zenith Hair Oil , Shire (Private) ²⁰⁵	Looted, destroyed by fire	500
Mesebo Cement Factory , Mekelle (EFFORT) ²⁰⁶	Looted	3,000
Oil Processing, Shire (Private) ²⁰⁷	Destroyed by airstrike	1,000
Sheba Leather Factory (EFFORT) ²⁰⁸	Looted, destroyed by fire	1,000
Guna Trading , Aksum (EFFORT) ²⁰⁹	Looted	1,000
Saba Dimensional Stones PLC , Adwa (EFFORT) ²¹⁰	Looted	1,500
Semayata Dimensional Stones Factory, Wukro (EFFORT) ²¹¹	Destroyed by fire	500
Dejen Flour Factory, Aksum (EFFORT) ²¹²	Looted	200
Goda Bottle and Glass Factory, Adigrat (Private) ²¹³	Destroyed by airstrike	325
Sur Construction, Mekelle (EFFORT) ²¹⁴	Destroyed, unknown cause	7,000
Mesfin Industrial Engineering , Mekelle (EFFORT) ²¹⁵	Looted	1,000
Garment Factory (Private) ²¹⁶	Destroyed, Looted	<i>unknown</i>

In addition, the Gereb Geba dam construction site in Enderta was ransacked.²¹⁷

202 Privately obtained information from EFFORT affiliate.

203 Hayet Alem, 'Tigray interim official.'

204 Ibid.

205 Tghat, 'Zenith hair oil factory in Shire destroyed,' YouTube Video, 0:38, January 13, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3cs89bW>.

206 Atsbaha Hailema, Twitter Post, March 7, 2021, <https://twitter.com/AtsbahaHailema3/status/1368651155266560001>.

207 Negassi F. G., Twitter Post, March 7, 2021, <https://twitter.com/NegassiFG/status/1368472333774581761>.

208 Hayet Alem, Twitter Post, February 14, 2021, https://twitter.com/hayet_alem/status/1361074290540621824?s=20.

209 'Axum,' Amnesty International.

210 Tghat, 'Destroyed: This is a list of facilities, industries, buildings, cultural heritages, and infrastructures that have been destroyed, looted, burned, or damaged by the invading forces in the war on Tigray,' accessed on March 14, 2021, <https://www.tghat.com/destroyed/>.

211 Tghat, 'Destroyed.'

212 'Axum,' Amnesty International.

213 Fijian Armadillo, Twitter Post, March 14, 2021, <https://twitter.com/FijianArmadillo/status/1370910745827901443?s=20>.

214 Hayet Alem, 'Tigray interim official.'

215 Gebrekirstos Gebreselassie, Twitter Post, January 28, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3cuK2cD>.

216 Walsh, Declan. 'Fear and Hostility Simmer as Ethiopia's Military Keeps Hold on Tigray.' The New York Times, March 19, 2021.

217 'Dam down, water supplies failing in Ethiopia's conflict-hit Tigray,' Reuters, January 20, 2021, <http://reut.rs/3lfKxes>.

Figures 27 and 28. Almeda Textile Factory in Adwa, Before and After Shelling (November 30 - December 6, 2021)²¹⁸



At the Almeda Textile Factory in Adwa, soldiers first dismantled all of the sewing machines and equipment they could loot and then bombed the remaining heavy machinery and infrastructure. The factory was part of a wider industrial area that contained privately owned water bottling, shoe, and flour factories, all of which followed the same pattern.²¹⁹ Satellite imagery confirmed the major fires in the industrial areas of Adwa, including the notable destruction of parts of Almeda Textile factory.²²⁰ The textile factory alone employed approximately 8,000 laborers at full capacity.

An eyewitness described the factory's looting and destruction:

They came from Eritrea just to take things to Asmara. They looted, they collected, they looted

218 The Intel Lab, Twitter Post, December 2, 2020, <https://twitter.com/TheIntelLab/status/1334157776705245185>.

219 World Peace Foundation Interview (name withheld), by Phone, March 6, 2021.

220 Ryan O'Farrell, Twitter Post, Nov 27, 2020 <https://twitter.com/ryanmofarrell/status/1332200855836221440>.

and looted. Everything was gone. There was one textile factory in the outskirts of Adwa, it had roughly 8,000 employees, you can say one employee, one family, assists maybe 3, so like 24, 25 thousand people were left with nothing. Because they came first with heavy trucks, they dismantled all the sewing machines, all the equipment, all the things they could loot. Then the difficult ones, the heavy machines, the things they couldn't dismantle, they hit them with artillery, they bombed day and night, continuously.

Then, there was some clothing—they are imported, by agreement with different companies, from Malaysia or Singapore—those were looted. And then they took aim at the stores of chemicals, and they bombed, there was bombing for four days, you know with all the smoke, with all the chemicals burning. They didn't [care] the consequences on the human and animal's lives, they didn't care, they burned it. And it was, there's another factory, a marble factory next to it, they took the machineries they need, they took things they can carry, they cannot load all the heavy marble in the trucks, so they just shoot it with the heavy artillery and destroyed some of it. A privately owned flour factory; privately owned bottled water making company; shoe company; all these were literally destroyed, they took whatever they wanted to take, and destroyed the rest.

Looting and destruction has also targeted mining infrastructure. A witness in the mining sector described how EZANA Mining Development PLC, a subsidiary of EFFORT and the largest publicly held commercial mining operation in Tigray, has been shut down and looted along with other private mining operations, resulting in a loss of approximately 750 jobs. Information about who controls the dispersed artisanal mining locations has not been possible to obtain.

Other businesses have suffered due to the incapacitation of financial, agricultural extension, and veterinary services. OCHA's latest situation report on March 13 tells of outbreaks of foot and mouth disease in at least two woredas in East and Southeast zones. However, a third of assessed woreda-level veterinary clinics have had their equipment destroyed, and drugs and vaccines looted.²²¹ Banks rendered nonfunctional due to looting and electricity cuts no longer provide crucial sources of credit and microfinance to such businesses, much less access to savings with which civilians may sustain themselves.²²² Agricultural offices throughout the region have had all official vehicles and equipment looted, and farming equipment has been taken during door-to-door lootings.²²³

Tigray had a thriving pre-crisis and pre-pandemic tourist industry. All travel and tourism ceased with the outbreak of hostilities. Hotels and restaurants have been ransacked. One visitor described the systematic looting of the hotel in which he was staying in Adwa:

Around 8 or 10 pm I heard some voices downstairs, but as I said I was the only one at that hotel that night, and the following two nights. When I heard the voice, I knew it wasn't the guard, I knew it was somebody looting, because you can hear glasses breaking, you can hear drawers being opened and televisions being removed, you can hear a lot of things. I mean you can hear, you cannot see, it was so dark. The next morning, I went down, I saw, first of all, where the restaurant is, and the lobby was totally looted.

Everything broken—the cash register, the ATM machine, the coffee machines, the computers at reception, everything looted, everything broken, you know? What I found out, the secu-

221 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,' OCHA, March 13, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3qMOicn>.

222 Amanueal Tedros, Twitter Post, January 25, 2021, https://twitter.com/emmanuel_tag/status/1353697920877527041.

223 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,' February 28, 2021, <https://bit.ly/2OQkbDQ>.

rity system for the door, the owners spent 500,000 birr to set up a new system, and that was broken. Not only that, also the computers that accompany this security system, they were all taken, removed. Everything broken. They took the kitchen stuff, utensils, glasses, everything broken or taken away.

Lack of power and network has severely inhibited economic activity. Internet and phone service was cut as of 1 a.m. on November 4, 2020, the start of the war.²²⁴ Since then, network and electricity have only intermittently reached the region. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported in January that electricity, phone, and some services were partially restored, mainly in the cities of Mekelle, Adwa, Shire, and Adigrat.²²⁵ Electricity and phone service was temporarily restored in Southern and Western zones in mid-January, however switched off again in mid-February.^{226, 227} Internet connection remains switched off as of mid-March.²²⁸

Destruction of Refugee Camps

A particular concern is the destruction and emptying of refugee camps. Al Jazeera reported the targeting of Eritrean refugees in atrocities committed by their country's forces in early December, confirmed later by AP.^{229, 230} A testimony by one Eritrean refugee describes the absence of food rations in the camps for two to three months, 'We ate what we could find, even plants and leaves.'²³¹ Access to two (May Aini and Aidi Harush) of four refugee camps managed by UNHCR and its partners resumed at the beginning of January. Camps in Shimelba and Hitsats were finally accessed by aid workers in the third week of March for the first time since the beginning of the conflict. Those aid workers confirmed that all humanitarian facilities in the two camps were destroyed by parties to the conflict, and that both camps were empty.²³² Emerging satellite imagery shows systematic burning of 721 structures within Shimelba camp occurring sometime between January 8-16.²³³ The camp was formerly home to 96,000 refugees. World Food Programme food storage facilities, schools, health care facilities, and refugee shelters appear to have been intentionally targeted in late December (see Figure 29.) In Hitsats camp, another 531 civilian structures were destroyed. Images of cratering indicate that the camp was shelled at some point in November. Further imaging shows remaining heavy military presence in both camps, preventing resumption of humanitarian access.²³⁴ Early in 2021, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) reported the vandalizing of their refugee-serving facilities.²³⁵ According to OCHA, May Anini and Adi Harush camps are now at maximum capacity, with no alternative settlements identified.²³⁶

224 'Ethiopia's Tigray Crisis: Cutting through the Information Blackout,' BBC News, December 5, 2020, <http://bbc.in/30LUrLe>.

225 'Northern Ethiopia Crisis, Situation Report 1,' IOM, January 25, 2021, <https://bit.ly/2OW0ryl>.

226 'Ethiopia Response to the Tigray Crisis, Situation Report 1,' UNFPA, Feb 19, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3tkoBl4>.

227 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,' OCHA, February 28, 2021, <https://bit.ly/2OQkbDQ>.

228 'Ethiopia Response to the Tigray Crisis, Situation Report 1,' UNFPA.

229 "'Overwhelming' reports of killings of Eritreans in Tigray: UN,' Al Jazeera, December 11, 2020, <http://bit.ly/3eDHoUA>.

230 Cara Anna, 'Witnesses: Eritrean soldiers loot, kill in Ethiopia's Tigray.'

231 Jan Nyssen, 'Late 2020 personal diary of the war on Tigray,' Ghent University, January, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3tk0nYc>.

232 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,' OCHA, March 22, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3rlJoDz>.

233 '08+16 January 2021 - Shimelba Refugee Camp, Ethiopia - Likely fire-based attacks,' Planet Labs Inc, January 16, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3tcJKh4>.

234 Zecharias Zelalem, 'Refugee Camps in Ethiopia Appear to Have Been Systematically Destroyed,' Vice News, February 3, 2021, <http://bit.ly/2NnSvpu>.

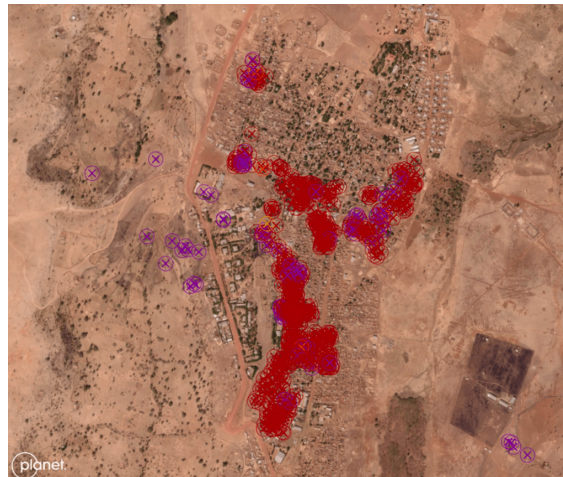
235 NRC Press Release via ReliefWeb, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/buildings-belonging-nrc-destroyed-ethiopia-tigray>

236 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,' OCHA, March 8, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3rQHiwo>.

Figure 29. Destroyed WFP Food Storage Facilities in Shimelba Camp, Western Tigray²³⁷



Figure 30. Destruction of 721 Buildings in Shimelba Refugee Camp (December 2020 - January 2021)²³⁸



*The purple markings indicate catastrophic damage and red indicates extensive damage. (Courtesy of PlanetLabs Inc)

5. Constraints on Humanitarian Access

People in distress are entitled to humanitarian assistance and blocking or stealing such assistance is prohibited under the Geneva Conventions.²³⁹ The issue of humanitarian access typically gets most attention in the media and among diplomats, obscuring other dimensions of the crisis. It deserves attention, but that attention should not distract us from the bigger issue of stopping the causes of food insecurity and starvation. This report deals with the issue in summary form only.

The key points are that we know very little about humanitarian needs and the extent to which they are being met, and that humanitarian access—while not as bad as in the first three months of the war—remains woefully insufficient.

²³⁷ Cara Anna, ‘Extreme urgent need.’

²³⁸ Zecharias Zelalem, ‘Refugee Camps in Ethiopia Appear to Have Been Systematically Destroyed.’

²³⁹ The strongest provisions are found in the Additional Protocols of 1977, especially Articles 14 and 18 of AP II.

Information Blackout and Censorship

Humanitarians continue to cite extreme limitations in coordinating their response to the situation in Tigray due to the inability to contact staff through phone or internet. OCHA estimates that some 4.5 million people in rural areas have been without electricity, communications, and other essential services for more than four months.²⁴⁰ Private conversations with agencies operating in Tigray have revealed strict embargoes on public communications, as humanitarian agencies fear repercussions by Ethiopian federal actors, such as indefinite expulsion from the country. Despite an increasing number of media reports emerging from the region as foreign journalists gain access to new areas, such information has been restricted to more urban areas along the main highways. Information on the situation faced by rural populations, likely among those of the highest level of need, remains scant. To date, few credible data on food security and nutritional statuses have been made public.

The media are an essential component of humanitarian information. A free press is closely associated with effective relief response and famine prevention, and censorship is likewise a corollary of vulnerability to famine.²⁴¹ The crisis in Tigray demonstrates this. Since the start of the conflict, threats on journalists and media companies have increased significantly, undoing much of the progress on press freedom made since the start of a national reform process begun in 2018 and accelerated by PM Abiy Ahmed in his first year in office.

There has been total and complete information blackout in Eritrea. The Government of Eritrea responded to the Covid-19 pandemic with one of the world's most comprehensive and sustained lockdown regimes. Given the lack of any independent media and tight surveillance of electronic communications, Eritreans have relied on personal contact to pass information. This has been far more difficult over the last 12 months. President Isaias Afewerki said almost nothing at all about his country's engagement in the war for four months after the outbreak of hostilities.

In Ethiopia, steps taken since mid-2020 have rolled back press freedoms nationwide and have inhibited the flow of information to both humanitarian actors and the public, and reduced international attention to the crisis. Since the beginning of November, Ethiopian forces have detained twelve journalists and/or persons working with the press (e.g. translators for foreign outlets and a cameraman from Reuters).²⁴² ²⁴³ Though hailing from a variety of press outlets and regions of Ethiopia, all journalists were detained on grounds somehow relating to their coverage of ongoing conflict in Tigray.^{244, 245} Ethiopian authorities claimed that the initial denial of press access to the region, especially in November and December, was based on security concerns. Several foreign journalists were allowed to re-enter Tigray in February.

On November 21, the Ethiopian government deported William Davison, senior Ethiopia analyst for International Crisis Group (ICG), citing violation of labor laws. ICG released a press statement alleging that Davison's expulsion from the country was directly related to ICG's coverage of fighting in Tigray. The statement also notes that, 'around the time Mr. Davison was expelled, authorities also warned the

240 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,' OCHA, March 22, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3rlJoDz>.

241 Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2000.

242 Data from Committee to Protect Journalists, <http://bit.ly/3ccqlaF>.

243 'Reuters cameraman detained in Ethiopia has seen no evidence against him, lawyer says,' Reuters, December 30, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-arrest-idUSKBN29422J>.

244 Data from Committee to Protect Journalists, <http://bit.ly/3ccqlaF>.

245 Alula Solomon, Twitter Post, February 27, 2021, https://twitter.com/Alula_Solomon/status/1365663477122088960.

news agency Reuters' Ethiopia correspondent and the BBC and Deutsche Welle stations.²⁴⁶ Later, in early January, freelance journalist and Tigrayan, Lucy Kassa, was attacked in her home in Addis Ababa and questioned on her connections to Tigray.²⁴⁷ On February 19, unidentified attackers shot and killed Dawit Kebede, a reporter with the state-owned broadcaster Tigray TV.²⁴⁸ When international media were belatedly allowed access to Mekelle, the authorities harassed and detained translators and fixers—people whose services are essential to the ability of foreign journalists to do their work.

The cut-off in communication also prevents people in the affected area from seeking help. In the first days of the war, mobile phone networks were shut down. The Federal Government and the Tigrayan authorities each blamed the other, but it is more credible to suspect that Addis Ababa was responsible as it has tried to restrict information from the war zone to zero.

This communication shut down has neutralized common means of coping in times of crisis for Tigrayan communities. We would expect affected families to seek refuge with, and assistance from, relatives and urban host communities. Indeed this has happened, though those hosts themselves have sorely limited resources.²⁴⁹ A lack of mobile network means that people are unable to call for help. It amounts to preventing the population from having access to OIS. In some locations they have been able to contact their families; this has happened on the southern borderlands of Tigray where cellphone networks have not been cut off, on the northern borderlands through Eritrean mobile networks and in Mekelle city after the partial restoration of network access.²⁵⁰

Humanitarian Access

In situation such as Tigray, humanitarian assistance is an object indispensable to survival. True humanitarian access involves an enabling environment for humanitarian actors *and* the affected population to enable the latter to obtain all OIS in a reliable and dignified manner. The mere physical presence of humanitarian assistance in an area is not considered humanitarian access.

Humanitarian actors must be able to freely and safely access a physical location, conduct their activities, and leave in the same manner. For humanitarian activities to have any meaningful positive impact, the civilian population in need must also be able to freely and safely access the same location, participate in humanitarian activities, and exit the area in the same manner, including with any commodities they have been given. Undergirding these interactions is an ongoing process of assessment and analysis of life-threatening needs over an entire affected area without bias. Comprehensive information about the population in need is a requirement for being able to claim that humanitarian access has been provided.

In a situation of severe food insecurity, any interference with a population's access to humanitarian assistance is an obstruction to accessing OIS and is a component of the use of starvation as a weapon of war. Interference can take many forms, including impeding the assessment of needs, restricting the

246 'Ethiopia Expels Crisis Group Senior Analyst,' International Crisis Group, Press Statement, November 22, 2020, full text available at <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2041802.html>.

247 Salem Solomon, 'Ethiopian Journalist Attacked in Her Home, Questioned on Tigray Connections,' Voice of America, February 12, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/press-freedom/ethiopian-journalist-attacked-her-home-questioned-tigray-connections>.

248 'Journalist shot dead in Ethiopia's Tigray - aid worker, residents,' Reuters, January 21, 2021, <http://reut.rs/3vJZH0m>.

249 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,' OCHA, March 13, 2021, <http://bit.ly/2OQnuuA>.

250 Zecharias Zelalem, "'They Started Burning the Homes': Ethiopians Say Their Towns Are Being Razed in Ethnic Cleansing Campaign,' Vice News, February 27, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3bObN0G>.

freedom of movement of humanitarian actors and the civilian population, and intervening in the conduct of humanitarian activities. While some interference is obvious, such as the looting of assistance, other actions may be less readily observed.

Table 4. Components of Humanitarian Access - Uninhibited, Safe, and Sustained²⁵¹

	Humanitarian Actors	Civilian Population
Entry	Able to access affected areas	Able to access the locations of humanitarian activities as well as their own coping strategies
Activities	Able to fully conduct activities as intended	Able to fully participate in activities
Exit	Able to exit the affected area	Able to return to intended destination, including with any and all commodities received

International and national humanitarian agencies have unilaterally reported severe restrictions in humanitarian access since late October. Through triangulation of INGO, OCHA, and other UN agencies' reports, it is clear that almost all access was cut off in the months of November and December.²⁵² The UN and Ethiopia's Ministry of Peace agreed to establish aid access via a humanitarian corridor in the beginning of December 2020.²⁵³ Authorities, however, continued to delay humanitarian supply and personnel clearances. At the new year, some UN agencies (including UNHCR and UNICEF) and some INGOs (including MSF, ACF, NRC, and Oxfam) regained access to Mekelle and areas along major highway routes.²⁵⁴ Nevertheless, humanitarian agencies were laden with bureaucratic impediments which were inconsistent and byzantine to authorize their movement at the federal and regional levels.²⁵⁵

Despite formal agreement in December, clearances for international staff travel to the region have been heavily delayed. On February 8, the first clearances were made for a meager 25 staff, all from UN agencies, to travel to Tigray.²⁵⁶ As of the end of February, Ethiopia announced increased access for humanitarians and journalists, yet most accessible areas lie along the ENDF-controlled main highway from Alamata to Adigrat.²⁵⁷ Recently, agencies reported increasing difficulty in leaving Mekelle for more rural areas, citing new security concerns and bureaucratic impediments.²⁵⁸ In mid-March, OCHA confirmed that much of humanitarian service delivery was constrained to Mekelle. In their situation update dated March 13, the UN agency urged partners to move out of Mekelle and off of main roads for more rural, high need areas, illustrating the reluctance of humanitarian actors to move around in an insecure context with little up to date information.²⁵⁹ A January report from OCHA confirmed that six aid workers have

251 Developed by the authors.

252 David Del Conte, Sarah Miller, and Hardin Lang, 'Time Is Running Out: Urgent Action Needed to Address Humanitarian Crisis in Tigray,' Refugees International (RI), February 25, 2021, <https://bit.ly/30G9qq3>.

253 Associated Press, 'U.N. and Ethiopia sign deal for 'unimpeded' aid access to embattled Tigray,' LA Times, December 2, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-12-02/un-ethiopia-sign-deal-aid-access-tigray>.

254 At this point several humanitarian agencies began releasing reports with limited information on needs and the situation of humanitarian access. See Jan Egeland, 'Statement by Secretary General Jan Egeland: Aid still not reaching Tigray,' NRC, February 1, 2021, <https://www.nrc.no/news/2021/february/statement-on-tigray/>.

255 'Ethiopia's government appears to be wielding hunger as a weapon,' The Economist, January 21, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2021/01/23/ethiopias-government-appears-to-be-wielding-hunger-as-a-weapon>.

256 'Ethiopia: Government approves 'first step' towards Tigray emergency assistance,' UN, Press Release, February 8, 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/02/1084192>.

257 Martin Plaut, 'Prime Minister Abiy Announces Access to Tigray for Seven International Media Organisations, Including BBC, Reuters, Al Jazeera,' Eritrea Hub, February 24, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3csBiUo>.

258 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,' OCHA, February 19, 2021, <http://bit.ly/3lfjyQ6>.

259 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,' OCHA, March 13, 2021, <http://bit.ly/2OQnuuA>.

been killed during the current conflict.²⁶⁰

By March 22, humanitarian agencies reported improved access. The transition to a notification system for international staff travel to Tigray has allowed increased numbers of aid workers to reach Mekelle and certain other locations. The UN estimates that there are currently around 240 UN staff in Tigray and hundreds more aid workers present. Access has fluctuated with the shifting locations of military engagements. Significant portions of Central, North, and Western Tigray remain unreachable by partners. Military presence along major roads continues to impede the safe and free movement of both humanitarian actors and those seeking assistance.²⁶¹

Improvements in access, however, are largely reported only in relation to various ministries and other bodies within the Ethiopian federal government that govern humanitarian action. Access challenges remain with the other parties to the conflict, including the EDF as well as Amhara Regional Special Forces and aligned militias. Access permission from the federal government in no way ensures access with forces other than those of the ENDF, and even then permission granted in Addis Ababa is not directly equivalent to permission on the ground in Tigray. Humanitarian reporting continues to note the *de facto* partition of Tigray, with access to Western Tigray possible only from the south via Amhara Region and not from eastern areas of Tigray.²⁶²

In one example of what the bureaucratized labels of ‘partially accessible’ or ‘intermittently accessible’ can practically mean within Tigray, MSF describes an incident of access denial on the Mekelle-Adigrat road on March 23. A marked MSF vehicle came upon a section of the road where a clash had recently occurred between the ENDF and an armed actor (assumed to be the TDF). The vehicle, and two public mini-buses traveling behind it, were stopped by ENDF soldiers, civilians were removed from the mini-buses and separated by sex, and then at least four men were summarily executed on the side of the road. The MSF driver was then taken from the MSF vehicle, beaten with an assault rifle, and then released. The MSF team was instructed to return to Mekelle.²⁶³

The aid delivery process has been impeded by the federal takeover of Tigrayan humanitarian agencies, especially REST, the traditional partners of major humanitarian UN agencies and various donors like USAID. Long-standing staff have either been removed or have fled. An increasing number of reports question whether food assistance has made it into the hands of beneficiaries even after being reported as successfully distributed. There are critical discrepancies between actual geography and the list of woredas released by the Ministry of Peace that have allegedly received food assistance distributions.²⁶⁴ Especially in northern areas, witnesses report the holding of relief supplies by armed groups. Eritrean soldiers have allegedly withheld food aid until families can produce their men and boys, presumably for detention or killing. In a phone call from TDF-controlled areas on March 21, Mulugeta Gebrehiwot described finding USAID rations intended for children in the supplies of EDF soldiers. Latest OCHA updates question how much aid is reaching intended beneficiaries and cites reports of looting and de-

260 ‘Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,’ OCHA, January 21, 2021.

261 ‘Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,’ OCHA, March 22, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3rlJoDz>.

262 ‘Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,’ OCHA, March 22, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3rlJoDz>.

263 Kleijer, Karline. ‘Ethiopia: MSF Staff Attacked after Witnessing Killings by Soldiers in Tigray.’ Doctors Without Borders - USA. Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières, March 24, 2021. <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/what-we-do/news-stories/news/ethiopia-msf-staff-attacked-after-witnessing-killings-soldiers-tigray>.

264 “Humanitarian needs and access”, in: Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Emnet Negash, De Sloover, L., Nyssen, J., 2021. Tigray: Atlas of the humanitarian situation. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181>

struction of humanitarian supply.²⁶⁵

OCHA reported partners' claims that displaced people were hiding the assistance they received for fear of looting. Protection actors have shared concerns that some beneficiaries have been forced to exchange sexual favors for assistance, and that displaced people in host communities were engaging in survival sex due to an inability to pay for their shelter.²⁶⁶

As of March 22, only approximately one million of the UN's estimated 4.5 million in need have been reached with assistance, mainly in and around urban areas.²⁶⁷

Humanitarian access to the very substantial populations in areas under the control of the TDF requires several preconditions that have not yet been put in place. Most important is a cessation of hostilities or humanitarian pause, either across the region or in specific locations, for aid material and staff to travel safely. For humanitarian operations to proceed there needs to be reliable communications between the TDF and its local administrative authorities and humanitarian agencies. Currently it is not possible to place a phone call (even using satellite phone) to the TDF leadership. There are no points (authorized individuals) within the TDF structures who can negotiate access and be accountable for assistance delivered. In rural areas, local governance structures have been reconstituted over the last few months by residents themselves, who have been selecting individuals to carry out essential functions at local level. It is possible to obtain critical information from these local public authorities but only on an ad hoc basis using personal contacts. There is no systematic information about humanitarian needs in the TDF-controlled areas, such as numbers, locations, condition of the population and there is no platform for coordinating information, access, or the security of humanitarian operations and personnel.

6. Responses and Remedies

The purpose of this report is to provide a framework for understanding the humanitarian crisis in Tigray and compiling evidence to indicate the likely causes, scale and trajectory of the crisis. This final section briefly touches upon actions needed. The World Peace Foundation will address legal issues more comprehensively in a future report.

The current situation in Tigray is correctly described as a large-scale war involving conventional and guerrilla forces in sustained and intensive combat.

There are major and ongoing violations of the laws of war and of human rights. Because systematic independent reporting and investigation has not been possible, the true nature and scale of the violations is not yet possible to determine. What is publicly reported is a small fraction of the abuses perpetrated. This includes killing, rape, torture and starvation crimes. There is good reason to suspect that these crimes are widespread and systematic.

It is virtually certain that there is a humanitarian crisis threatening to descend into famine.

- The pre-conflict data for food security across Tigray indicate the vulnerabilities.

265 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,' OCHA, March 8, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3rQHiwo>.

266 Ibid.

267 'Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update,' OCHA, March 22, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3rIJoDz>.

- Analysis of food (in)security in the 1980s points to the crucial role mobility and non-farm labor in livelihoods, and our analysis of economic development over recent years suggests that the disruption of financial services, migration and mobility, and off-farm employment has contributed heavily to the rapid deterioration in food security and raised the risk of famine across Tigray.
- We have extensive and growing evidence of mass atrocities including a range of starvation crimes.
- We have a continuing stream of humanitarian reporting, including periodic FEWS NET updates, augmented by a flood of individual stories, anecdotes and snapshots of starvation, which point to the scale of the crisis.

The level and quality of data that are currently available are insufficient to determine whether famine is occurring or not occurring.

Cessation of Hostilities

The most important actions to end the humanitarian emergency and its immediate causes are to end active hostilities and end the targeting of objects and activities indispensable for the survival of the civilian population.

There needs to be a cessation of hostilities leading to a ceasefire, along with respect for the laws of war by all belligerents. This includes Eritrea.

Currently, all the belligerents are making their political and military calculations primary and humanitarian considerations secondary. The Government of Ethiopia is even reluctant to acknowledge that it is fighting a war. In these circumstances, international action at the highest level is required.

The situation in Tigray is a threat to international peace and security. Eritrean forces are fighting inside Ethiopia at the invitation of the Ethiopian Government and are committing international crimes.

United Nations Security Council resolution 2417 (armed conflict and hunger) also provides a mechanism for responding to the situation in Tigray. The resolution was passed unanimously in May 2018.²⁶⁸ Ireland brought the humanitarian crisis in Tigray to the Security Council agenda in March but no resolution was agreed. Essential to progress on this is the active support of the three African members of the UNSC, but they have not stepped forward.

The situation in Tigray qualifies as ‘grave circumstances’ as defined by the Constitutive Act of the African Union to include, inter alia, war crimes and crimes against humanity. To repeat, starvation crimes qualify as those crimes. The AU Peace and Security Council has not, to date, held a session on armed conflict and hunger and has not regionalized UNSC resolution 2417 nor issued its own communiqué on the issue. That does not allow it to escape its responsibilities. Under Article 4(d) of the Constitutive Act of the AU, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government is obliged to consider grave circumstances and to intervene (though there is no stipulation as to what such an intervention would entail).

²⁶⁸ Ethiopia was a member of the Security Council at that time.

Humanitarian Access and Freedom of Movement

The obstruction of humanitarian assistance can be a violation of IHL and hence a starvation crime. Even where it does not qualify as such a violation, the Government of Ethiopia and the Government of Eritrea are under an obligation to provide humanitarian assistance themselves.

Ethiopia is perfectly capable of mounting major humanitarian operations so as indicated by recent large-scale assistance programs, such as in response to the 2015 drought. That assistance program was launched within one month of the scale of the harvest failure becoming evident, the government of Ethiopia allocated \$500 million of its own reserves and scaled up a program using the PNSP and additional food distributions that reached more than 10 million recipients. The government led the way and donors and international agencies such as the WFP followed. The drought and food crisis passed with very minimum human cost.²⁶⁹

Ethiopia and Eritrea are also required to facilitate international humanitarian assistance. This includes facilitating access to areas controlled by the TDF.

The TDF and its associated militia control significant territory in Tigray. At the time of writing it is a military organization and it has not developed an administrative or humanitarian relief capability. It needs a humanitarian focal point and means of consistent and reliable communication with external parties. The TDF needs to respect IHL and permit and encourage humanitarian access.

This is a war without clear frontlines. The effective public authorities in most rural areas are local village and woreda committees chosen by the residents themselves. These villages, woredas and zones may also control militia. These are the authority structures with which humanitarian agencies should be negotiating for access and security.

Humanitarian access requires that the affected people are able to move freely to obtain assistance from national and international agencies and from their families. They should also be able to move to go to market, seek work, or leave the area.

Protecting the 2021 Agricultural Season in Tigray

There is a short window of a few weeks before farmers need to begin preparing their lands for cultivation – their only opportunity to do so in 2021. If this agricultural season is missed, the next harvest opportunity will not come for an additional 18 months. Until now, farming communities have strived to remain on or in proximity to their land and avoid distress migration to towns. If they do not succeed, the humanitarian crisis will continue to deepen.

Planting season – and the associated seasonal labor migration – is an imminent opportunity for all parties to the conflict to cease fighting and allow for civilian, commercial, and humanitarian movement. Alongside humanitarian access, this can alleviate the severe food insecurity now seen across Tigray and prevent much greater loss of life due to starvation, disease, and acute malnutrition.

²⁶⁹ Alex de Waal, *Mass Starvation: The history and future of famine*. Cambridge, Polity, 2017, pp. 151-3.

It is urgent for assistance to reach farming communities for them to remain viable. The priorities include:

- Health services;
- Fertilizers;
- Oxen, plows and other farm implements;
- Food assistance;
- Freedom of movement;
- Access to financial services (banks and micro-finance institutions);
- The rapid re-establishment of the Productive Safety Net Program.

Freedom of Communication

The information blackout, restriction of humanitarian access and data, and concealment and misrepresentation of the disaster are all components of the crisis and are inhibiting the necessary humanitarian and political responses.

Freedom of communication is essential for a clear assessment of the scale and nature of the humanitarian emergency. It is also crucial for minimizing abuse of relief commodities and ensuring that aid is targeted most effectively.

Freedom of information and communication is essential for affected people to be able to utilize their limited options for survival—knowing where to go and how to access the assistance that is available.

The Federal Government should turn on all cellular networks and internet services.

Implications for National Food Security in Ethiopia

During the last 25-30 years, Ethiopia has been a poster child for development and food security promotion. Its simultaneous achievement of rapid growth, sustained poverty reduction, and low inequality has been heralded as a success story. While an older generation of Ethiopians had grown up with the humiliating stereotype of their country as peopled by the starving needing handouts, a younger generation looked forward to their country achieving middle income status.

Ethiopia achieved the following:

- Child mortality fell from 195 per 1000 to 50 per thousand between 1991 and 2019.²⁷⁰
- Life expectancy at birth rose from 47 years to 66 years between 1991-2018.²⁷¹
- Poverty headcount fell from 44.2% to 23.5% between 1999 and 2015.²⁷²
- Gross national income per capita rose from \$250 to \$850 (in current US\$) between 1991-2019.²⁷³

270 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.DYN.MORT?locations=ET>

271 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN?locations=ET>

272 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC?locations=ET>

273 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD?locations=ET>

As recently as 2017 it was possible to argue that Ethiopia was ‘no longer the land of famine.’²⁷⁴ The emergency response to the drought and food crisis in 2015-16 was a model of its kind, positioning Ethiopia as a world leader in refining existing food security policies (such as the PSNP) and developing new ones (such as innovative financial instruments including insurance against natural hazards).²⁷⁵ For a poor country, with a growing population, exposed to a range of adverse impacts of climate change, these food security mechanisms were essential not just to keep people alive but also for social stability and national security.

Urban poverty is substantially less than rural poverty (14.8% versus 25.6% in 2015). However, regional inequalities are not only low, but have been narrowing over recent decades.

Table 5: Regional Poverty Indicators²⁷⁶

	Poverty rate 2011	Poverty rate 2016	Change	Primary school completion 2016	Immunized children 2016
Tigray	31.8	27.0	-4.8	44.2	67.3
Afar	36.1	25.6	-10.5	24.2	15.2
Amhara	30.5	26.1	-4.4	29.5	45.8
Oromia	28.7	23.9	-4.8	30.1	24.7
Somali	32.8	16.8	-16.0	18.6	21.8
Beni-S. Gumuz	28.9	26.5	-2.4	39.2	57.4
SNNP	29.6	20.7	-8.9	32.4	46.9
Gambella	32.0	23.0	-9.0	45.4	41.1
Harari	11.1	7.1	-4.0	47.4	42.2
Addis Ababa	28.1	16.6	-11.3	66.1	89.2
Dire Dawa	28.3	15.4	-12.9	50.0	75.9
National	29.6	23.5	-6.1	32.7	38.5

Pre-conflict Tigray lay in the middle range of the monetary indicators and was above the median for schooling and immunization. That of course will change for the worse and will bring down the national average.

These accomplishments were premised on a combination of internal peace, well-designed and well-financed poverty reduction and safety net programs, and a capacity for rapid and effective relief response. All is now in doubt. Ethiopia has had macro-economic difficulties for several years, made worse by the impacts of Covid-19. The war in Tigray has been disruptive and expensive, and if is not ended as soon as possible, will likely have calamitous repercussions for national food security and poverty reduction.

National budgets are going to be squeezed, especially if there is massive spending on the military effort. Investors are unlikely to find Ethiopia an attractive destination, both because of political and economic instability, and because of the question of the security of their investments in the light of the destruction and pillage of private property in Tigray. Donors, already facing major budget constraints, are going to

274 De Waal, *Mass Starvation*, Chapter 8.

275 Daniel Clarke and Stefan Dercon, *Dull Disasters? How planning ahead will make a difference*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 88-89.

276 Source: World Bank, *Ethiopia Regional Poverty Report: Promoting Equitable Growth for All Regions*, Washington DC, 2020, p. 8.

divert funds to emergency programming and (perhaps) reconstruction and will have less appetite for the major bailout that the country requires. And lastly, if the Federal Government and Amhara regional government are not called to account for starvation crimes in Tigray it is a signal that hunger can be used as a weapon elsewhere in Ethiopia with impunity.

Acknowledging Starvation Crimes

The experience of starvation and destitution is lethal for many and humiliating for those who survive. Victims and survivors feel a deep sense of shame and degradation that they cannot support themselves and their families and act in a dignified way. The first and simplest act in support and solidarity for these people is a public acknowledgement that the famine is man-made, perpetrated upon them, and a crime. Their sufferings and indignities are not their fault.

The Ethiopian Government should acknowledge the starvation crimes. Failing this, the most appropriate international venue for such a declaration of starvation crimes would be the UN Security Council, making use of resolution 2417 on armed conflict and hunger. Should the UNSC be unable to act, governments and international organizations can make their verdict explicit. This should also lead to a demand that those parties that have created famine and perpetrated starvation crimes make a formal official apology.

Investigating and Punishing Starvation Crimes

‘Starvation crime’ is an umbrella term for acts prohibited under a diverse body of laws including international criminal law, international humanitarian law, the Genocide Convention, and other relevant instruments.

There is an urgent need for a comprehensive, independent and high-level investigation of international crimes committed by all belligerents in Tigray. Such an investigation should include starvation crimes.

There are options for prosecuting starvation crimes in domestic and international courts. The Special Prosecutor’s Office set up after the defeat of the military government in 1991 considered bringing charges against senior officials of the defeated regime for violations of IHL that contributed to starvation. In the event, the SPO focused almost entirely on atrocities during the Red Terror of 1976-78 and neglected crimes committed during the war in Tigray including starvation crimes. (The SPO closed in 2007.) The Ethiopian Penal Code of 2004 contains sufficient provisions for prosecuting those alleged to be responsible for starvation crimes and punishing those found guilty. The key obstacle to domestic prosecution is not the law, but the political will to utilize it.

Prosecutions could be brought at the International Criminal Court (in the unlikely event of a UN Security Council referral), under universal jurisdiction in some countries, or in a special court set up for the specific purposes of accountability for international crimes in Tigray.

Restitution, Compensation and Reparations

The suite of tools for transitional justice includes measures such as restitution, compensation and reparations. These are particularly appropriate measures for some forms of starvation crime, such as the looting or destruction of physical assets, for which reconstruction is an option. Clearly, there is a moral obligation on those who destroyed or stole the asset to reconstitute it. This is an area of law that remains to be explored.

In the case of a country heavily reliant on external aid, such as Ethiopia, there is an additional twist to this. Among the assets destroyed or stolen in Tigray are donor-funded projects ranging from horticulture to clinics to university research facilities. Those donors may legitimately ask whether it is appropriate for them to pay for the rehabilitation of their projects that had been deliberately destroyed by a government which they are funding. Taxpayers will ask whether they should be paying for the same asset twice over. The standing of donor contractual arrangements with the host government may also be called into question.