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# Intra-community Conflict Mapping in Postwar Tigray

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This study endeavors to meticulously map the intra-community conflicts within the Tigray region of Ethiopia, delving into the underlying causes, principal actors, and prevailing intervention mechanisms. Employing a qualitative methodology, we conducted Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), People on the Street Interviews (PSIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to collect rich, nuanced data from diverse locales across Tigray. The data were subjected to thematic analysis, synthesizing insights from the three data sources, guided by Conflict Resolution Theory. The findings reveal that intra-community conflicts in Tigray are fueled by a multifaceted interplay of historical grievances, socio-economic inequalities, fragile governance, resource competition, and the enduring trauma of conflict. The recent war has intensified existing tensions, precipitating a collapse of institutional trust and a fragmentation of social cohesion. Various stakeholders, including government officials, returning combatants, and external economic actors, play pivotal roles in exacerbating these conflicts. While intervention mechanisms such as traditional dispute resolution and community forums demonstrate some efficacy, they are frequently undermined by corruption, ineffective governance, and inadequate resources. The results underscore the necessity for a comprehensive strategy to address intra-community conflicts in Tigray. This strategy must focus on rebuilding institutional trust, managing resource competition, fostering social cohesion, enhancing governance, and empowering community-driven peacebuilding initiatives. A concerted effort towards economic recovery, social healing, and the restoration of trust is imperative for establishing a more stable and peaceful Tigray.

## **Intra-community Conflict Mapping in Postwar Tigray**

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Conducted by a Team of Researchers from the Department of Political Science and Strategic Studies at Mekelle University.

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## Executive Summary

*This research report examined the escalating intra-community conflicts in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, focusing on their underlying causes, key actors involved, and existing intervention mechanisms. It addressed the critical problem of social fragmentation and insecurity that posed a significant threat to the region's stability in the aftermath of the recent war. The Tigray conflict not only resulted in a humanitarian crisis but also left deep social scars that continued to affect community dynamics. This project was financed by the generosity of the European Union under its EUTF project, via the CPR-EU/CST-Ethiopia Project Office at Mekelle University, which underscored the importance of collaborative efforts in addressing these pressing issues.*

*In light of the extensive humanitarian crises and widespread devastation caused by the Tigray war, this research report provided a thorough investigation of the resulting internal conflicts. The war exacerbated existing tensions, leading to a breakdown of social cohesion, an erosion of trust in institutions, and increased competition for scarce resources. The post-Pretoria context revealed persistent challenges, including political divisions, food insecurity, and security concerns, which intensified intra-community conflicts. The research was conducted in seven major urban centers and ten rural areas in Tigray, employing qualitative data collection methods, which allowed for a nuanced understanding of the local dynamics and perspectives.*

*The analysis revealed that intra-community conflicts in Tigray were driven by a complex interplay of root, proximate, and immediate causes. Historical grievances and socio-economic disparities played a crucial role, with long-standing disputes over land, resources, and power dynamics at the forefront. These historical issues created a fertile ground for conflict, as communities grappled with the legacies of past injustices and inequities. Moreover, competition for resources—especially land, water, and minerals, was exacerbated by the war and its aftermath, leading to heightened tensions among communities vying for limited assets.*

*Weak governance and corruption within local administrations further eroded trust in institutions and the rule of law. The inability of local authorities to effectively manage disputes and ensure equitable resource distribution left many communities feeling marginalized and powerless. This lack of effective governance was compounded by trauma from the war, which left deep psychological scars and limited economic opportunities for many individuals. The resulting environment led to increased crime and violence, as desperation drove individuals to engage in illicit activities. Moreover, the influence of various actors—such as government officials, returning fighters, political organizations, economic stakeholders, and social leaders—often exacerbated conflicts. These actors pursued their interests at the expense of community harmony, further complicating the landscape of intra-community relations. New conflicts emerged involving displaced populations, returning fighters, and local communities, adding layers of complexity to*

*the existing situation. The interplay of these factors led to a significant breakdown of social cohesion within communities, making it increasingly difficult to foster a sense of unity and collective purpose. While existing interventions, such as traditional dispute resolution mechanisms and community forums, showed some effectiveness, they were often hampered by corruption, weak governance, insufficient resources, and the overwhelming magnitude of the problems. These interventions, while rooted in local customs and practices, required strengthening and support to be truly effective in addressing the deep-seated issues at play.*

*To address these multifaceted challenges, it was recommended that several key actions be taken. First, promoting transparent and accountable governance was essential for restoring trust and legitimacy in institutions. This could be achieved by empowering traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and fostering dialogue and reconciliation initiatives that engaged all community members. Second, managing resource competition and economic hardship was crucial. Implementing land reform and transparent resource management practices, prioritizing economic recovery and job creation, and ensuring equitable and effective aid distribution helped alleviate some of the pressures faced by communities. Third, addressing social divisions and promoting social cohesion should have been prioritized. Supporting the reintegration of returning fighters, addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, and countering negative social narratives were vital steps in rebuilding trust and unity. Fourth, strengthening governance and security was imperative. Enhancing the capacity and independence of security forces, promoting inclusive and participatory governance, and enacting and enforcing laws that promoted peace and justice created a more stable environment for all citizens. Finally, engaging external actors to foster regional cooperation was essential. Advocating for international support for peacebuilding and development, and promoting dialogue and cooperation with neighboring regions provided extra resources and frameworks for conflict resolution.*

*In conclusion, addressing these pressing issues required a multi-faceted, collaborative approach that focused on restoring trust, managing resources, promoting social cohesion, strengthening governance, and engaging all stakeholders. A comprehensive strategy was essential for moving towards lasting peace, reconciliation, and sustainable development in the Tigray region. Without sustained efforts to address these complex challenges, the region risked further instability and continued suffering, undermining the potential for a prosperous and harmonious future.*

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1. Background Overview**

The war in Tigray, commonly referred to as the Tigray war or Ethiopia's Tigray war, began in November 2020, leading to significant humanitarian crises and widespread devastation in the region. The war triggered a severe humanitarian emergency characterized by extensive violence against civilians, mass displacement, and egregious human rights violations. Its repercussions included high casualties, mass displacement, and a pervasive sense of insecurity in the affected areas. Disturbing reports emerged documenting atrocities such as killings, sexual violence, and deliberate infrastructure damage. Furthermore, the war's ramifications transcended Tigray, raising concerns about regional stability and the potential for a broader crisis with far-reaching consequences.

The Pretoria Agreement, signed in South Africa, proved instrumental in resolving the war. This pivotal accord contributed to post-war relative stability and improved humanitarian access by lifting the year-long siege and laying down a framework for a ceasefire. Undeniably, the Pretoria Agreement brought about positive developments; however, challenges persisted, encompassing livelihood concerns, security trepidations, unaddressed humanitarian issues, and limited efforts toward rebuilding, reconciliation, rehabilitation, and development.

The post-Pretoria context of Tigray presented several critical concerns, including the political divide between the TPLF and the Interim regional administration, food insecurity, security and law enforcement challenges, massive corruption, and the need to reform government institutions to rebuild trust and functional systems at the grassroots level. Crucial postwar concerns involved implementing the Pretoria Agreement, focusing on territorial integrity, the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, and ensuring proper disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) implementation. Rebuilding critical infrastructure, creating job opportunities for regional youth and vulnerable groups, and initiating trauma healing and peacebuilding efforts were also essential. Investing in community structures, youth centers, counseling for victims of gender-based violence, and support for survivors of human rights violations were key aspects of rebuilding a harmonious society that had been undermined thus far.

The Tigray War in Ethiopia profoundly and detrimentally impacted the social cohesion of the regional community, resulting in a breakdown of trust, understanding, and connectedness among individuals and groups. This erosion of social cohesion, vital for fostering unity, empathy, and reconciliation, was significantly compromised by the war. Furthermore, the war deeply disrupted community structures, causing damage and disruptions that weakened the social fabric, institutions, and relationships essential for community cohesion. Governance systems, support networks, and infrastructure faced severe disruptions or destruction during the war, posing challenges in maintaining order and cohesion within the community.

The Tigray war significantly affected community resilience, reducing communities' ability to cope with and recover from adversity. The detrimental impact of the Tigray War on social cohesion, community structures, and resilience indeed led to the emergence of intra-community conflicts. The erosion of trust, understanding, and connectedness among individuals and groups, along with disruptions to governance systems and support networks, created tensions and divisions within the community. The trauma and displacement experienced by community members exacerbated existing grievances and differences, potentially resulting in conflicts within the community itself. The breakdown of social cohesion and community structures due to the effects of the war contributed to internal strife and disputes. It is under this context that the research project is conducted.

## **1.2.Statement of the Problem**

In the aftermath of the Tigray war, persistent challenges such as political divisions, food insecurity, critical trauma, security issues, corruption, massive youth unemployment, and governance problems plagued the Tigray region (Assefa, June 2023; Assefa and Muauz, January 2024). These ongoing issues led to internal tensions within the community, disrupting social cohesion, community structures, and resilience. The breakdown of trust, understanding, and connectedness among individuals and groups further exacerbated existing grievances, trauma, and displacement, potentially fueling intra-community conflicts (Muauz et al., December 2023).

The erosion of social cohesion, essential for unity, empathy, and reconciliation, created divisions and tensions within the community. According to the study, these challenges influenced social cohesion, community structures, and resilience, potentially leading to social animosities, mistrust, and latent conflicts within the community (ibid). Addressing these concerns proved crucial to

prevent the escalation of conflicts. Conducting intra-community conflict mapping in postwar Tigray became essential to identify and understand the root causes of potential conflicts, assess their impact on various groups, and develop targeted interventions to effectively address and resolve these latent conflicts before they escalated into violence.

Given the identified challenges in governance, security, social cohesion, community structures, and community resilience in postwar Tigray, a critical need emerged for intracommunity conflict mapping research. This research aimed to explore the root causes of potential conflicts, assess their impact on different groups, and develop plausible intervention modalities to prevent conflicts from escalating. Such research was essential for promoting peacebuilding, reconciliation, and fostering a harmonious society in postwar Tigray. Thus, undertaking intracommunity conflict mapping in the region became vital to understand the underlying causes of animosities within the community, evaluate their trends and impacts on various groups and individuals, and devise effective strategies to proactively address potential conflicts.

Indeed, through intra-community conflict mapping, a thorough analysis of issues such as political divisions, food insecurity, security challenges, and governance problems could be conducted to identify areas of tension, grievances, and power struggles among groups. This process provided insights into the social, economic, and political factors contributing to social anomalies, mistrust, insecurity, and violence within the community. By mapping out these issues, stakeholders prioritized resources to enhance security measures effectively and targeted governance failures to combat social concerns and rebuild trust in government institutions.

Existing literature highlighted that in postwar societies like Tigray, intracommunity conflicts persisted despite the formal cessation of hostilities. Addressing these conflict triggers proved crucial for ensuring lasting peace and stability. Research on intracommunity conflict mapping became essential for prevention by identifying root causes and promoting dialogue and reconciliation within communities. It was imperative for recommending intervention strategies aimed at fostering peace and stability.

Thus, conducting intracommunity conflict mapping in postwar Tigray is found to be indispensable for gaining a comprehensive understanding of complex dynamics, identifying areas for intervention, and developing targeted strategies to promote peace, reconciliation, and sustainable development in the region.

### **1.3. Research Objectives**

This research is guided by a comprehensive general objective, which aims to undertake a thorough mapping of intra-community conflicts in Tigray. To achieve this overarching goal, several specific objectives have been established. First, the study seeks to map out the conflict experiences of different community groups in Tigray. Second, it aims to identify the key drivers of intra-community conflicts within the region. Third, the research intends to delineate the main actors involved in these conflicts. Fourth, it will examine the intervention mechanisms currently in place to address intra-community conflicts, assessing their effectiveness and the challenges they face. Finally, the study aspires to suggest possible strategies for resolving or managing and mitigating these conflicts.

### **1.4. Research Questions**

To achieve the objectives outlined, this study rigorously examined several pivotal research questions. The first question delved into the diverse conflict experiences encountered by various community groups within Tigray. The second question investigated the fundamental drivers that fueled intra-community conflicts in the region. The third question aimed to identify the primary actors engaged in these conflicts, illuminating their roles and influences. Finally, the fourth question critically assessed the existing intervention mechanisms designed to address intra-community conflicts in Tigray, focusing on evaluating their effectiveness and the challenges they faced. This comprehensive inquiry provided essential insights into the complexities of conflict dynamics in Tigray and informed potential pathways for resolution and peacebuilding.

### **1.5. Research Justification**

The Tigray War has precipitated significant social fragmentation and governance challenges within the region, necessitating a focused examination of intra-community conflicts. This study is essential for understanding the dynamics of conflict that have emerged in the aftermath of the war. The erosion of social cohesion has created a fertile ground for intra-community tensions, and mapping these conflicts will elucidate the underlying drivers, such as political divisions, economic disparities, and historical grievances. Moreover, identifying areas of tension and potential conflict is vital for fostering dialogue and reconciliation, thereby contributing to peacebuilding efforts. The insights gained from this research will provide actionable recommendations that can help mitigate

tensions and promote social harmony. Furthermore, the findings will serve as a crucial resource for policymakers and local governance structures, enabling them to devise targeted strategies that address the root causes of conflict and enhance community resilience. Effective governance is paramount for restoring trust in institutions and ensuring long-term stability in the region. Furthermore, this research will highlight ongoing humanitarian concerns, such as food insecurity and trauma, underscoring the importance of integrating humanitarian assistance with conflict resolution strategies. This holistic approach is vital for sustainable recovery in post-war Tigray. In summary, this research is pivotal for understanding and addressing the complex dynamics of intra-community conflicts in Tigray, ultimately contributing to the broader goals of peace, reconciliation, and sustainable development in the region.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1. Conflict-affected Regions and Intra-community Conflicts**

Conflict-affected regions around the world have often witnessed the emergence and escalation of intra-community conflicts, driven by a myriad of complex factors. A review of the existing literature reveals common themes and patterns in the dynamics of these conflicts. Scholars have extensively explored the drivers of intra-community conflicts in other conflict-affected regions, such as case studies from various parts of Africa and the Middle East. For instance, a study by Juma and Maganga (2018) on the pastoralist communities in Kenya's Rift Valley found that resource scarcity, exacerbated by drought and climate change, was a key driver of violent clashes between different ethnic groups. The authors argue that the competition for dwindling natural resources, such as grazing lands and water sources, led to the breakdown of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and the eruption of violent confrontations between previously coexisting communities. This highlights how environmental factors can contribute to the fragmentation of social fabric and the intensification of intra-community tensions in conflict-affected areas.

Similarly, Noor and Hashmi (2021) examined the rise of sectarian conflicts in post-conflict Iraq, highlighting how the legacy of violence, political marginalization, and the manipulation of ethnic and religious tensions contributed to the eruption of intra-community conflicts. The authors argue that the unequal distribution of power and resources among different sectarian groups, coupled with the historical grievances and the lack of inclusive political representation, created a breeding ground for the emergence of new fault lines and the resurgence of violent clashes within Iraqi communities.

The literature also suggests that factors such as political marginalization and the unequal distribution of power and resources can fuel intra-community conflicts in the aftermath of armed conflicts (Adem & Woldegiorgis, 2019; Elkhawad, 2022). When certain community groups feel excluded from the political and economic decision-making processes, or when they perceive a disproportionate allocation of resources and opportunities, it can lead to the erosion of trust, the amplification of resentment, and the escalation of intra-community conflicts.

Moreover, the legacy of violence and traumatic experiences can further erode social cohesion and trust within communities, making them more susceptible to the emergence of new fault lines and tensions (Petersen, 2020; Taydas & Peksen, 2012). The collective memory of past atrocities, the fragmentation of social networks, and the breakdown of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms can all contribute to the perpetuation of intra-community conflicts in the aftermath of armed conflicts.

## **2.2. Effect of War on Community Structures and Social Cohesion**

The effects of war on community structures and social cohesion are profound and multifaceted. War disrupts the social fabric of communities, leading to the fragmentation of relationships and the erosion of trust among individuals. As noted by Kalyvas (2006), conflict often results in the displacement of populations, which can sever long-standing ties and disrupt community networks. The breakdown of social cohesion is further exacerbated by the psychological toll of violence, as individuals may experience trauma that affects their ability to interact with others and participate in community life (Hobfoll et al., 2007). Moreover, economic instability caused by war can lead to increased competition for resources, fostering resentment and division among community members (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004).

In the postwar period, these dynamics can create significant intra-community conflicts. The competition for limited resources, such as housing, jobs, and social services, can lead to tensions among different groups within a community, especially when former adversaries are forced to coexist (Miall, 2004). Moreover, the psychological scars from the conflict may manifest as mistrust and hostility, further complicating efforts to foster reconciliation and unity (Bar-Tal, 2007). The resultant social disintegration can hinder post-conflict recovery efforts, as communities struggle to rebuild trust and cooperation. In summary, the ramifications of war extend beyond immediate physical destruction, deeply impacting community structures and the social cohesion necessary for recovery and resilience, while also laying the groundwork for potential intra-community conflicts in the aftermath.

## **2.3. The Impact of War and Displacement on Intra-community Dynamics**

The existing literature highlights the profound and multifaceted impact that war and displacement can have on the social dynamics within communities, particularly in exacerbating or giving rise to intra-community conflicts (Sambanis, 2001; Tilly, 2003). Scholars have extensively explored the societal impacts of war, which can significantly disrupt the structures and cohesion of local communities. Sambanis (2001) argues that armed conflicts often lead to the fragmentation of community networks, the breakdown of traditional institutions, and the erosion of shared norms

and values. This disruption can undermine the community's ability to resolve disputes through established mechanisms, creating a vacuum that can be filled by new fault lines and tensions (Tilly, 2003; Petersen, 2020).

Furthermore, the literature suggests that the experience of displacement, whether internal or across international borders, can further exacerbate existing intra-community conflicts or give rise to new ones (Lischer, 2005; Sert, 2008). Displacement can uproot individuals and families from their familiar social and cultural contexts, leading to the loss of traditional sources of identity, authority, and conflict resolution (Lischer, 2005). This can heighten feelings of insecurity, resentment, and competition within displaced communities, as they struggle to adapt to new environments and navigate shifting power dynamics (Sert, 2008; Odeh, 2010). The trauma and collective memory of war-related atrocities can also play a significant role in shaping intra-community dynamics in the aftermath of armed conflicts (Petersen, 2020; Taydas & Peksen, 2012). The legacy of violence, fear, and resentment can profoundly influence the way community members perceive and interact with each other, potentially eroding trust, exacerbating pre-existing tensions, and creating new fault lines based on experiences of victimization and perpetration (Petersen, 2020; Taydas & Peksen, 2012).

In the context of Tigray, the recent conflict and the resulting displacement of large segments of the population are likely to have had a significant impact on the social fabric and intra-community dynamics within the region. Understanding these dynamics and their underlying drivers is crucial for developing effective strategies for conflict resolution and reconciliation that address the unique challenges faced by Tigray's communities.

#### **2.4. Conflict Mapping and Analysis Frameworks**

Researchers and practitioners have developed various frameworks and methodologies for mapping and analyzing intra-community conflicts, which can provide valuable insights for understanding the complexities of such conflicts in specific contexts like Tigray. One such approach is stakeholder analysis, which involves identifying and examining the key actors, their interests, relationships, and positions within the conflict (Bryson, 2004; Reed et al., 2009). This framework can be particularly useful in mapping intra-community conflicts, as it allows researchers to understand the diverse perspectives, power dynamics, and potential alliances or tensions between different community groups. By applying stakeholder analysis to the Tigray context, researchers

can gain a deeper understanding of the various community-level actors involved in the conflicts, their motivations, and the underlying power structures that shape the dynamics of the conflicts.

Another widely used framework is conflict sensitivity assessment, which focuses on understanding the interaction between a given intervention and the conflict context, in order to minimize unintentional negative impacts and maximize positive contributions to peace (OECD, 2012; CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2016). This approach can be invaluable in the context of Tigray, where any attempts to address intra-community conflicts must be carefully designed and implemented to avoid exacerbating existing tensions or creating new ones. By conducting conflict sensitivity assessments, researchers can identify the potential fault lines, triggers, and conflict-sensitive entry points within the Tigray context, and develop more context-appropriate strategies for conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Furthermore, social network analysis can provide a useful framework for mapping and analyzing the complex web of relationships and interactions between different community groups in Tigray (Wasserman & Faust, 1994; Crossley et al., 2015). This approach can shed light on the underlying patterns of cooperation, competition, and conflict within and between various community groups, as well as the key influencers and brokers that can play a role in either escalating or de-escalating the conflicts. By applying social network analysis to the Tigray context, researchers can capture the nuances and dynamics of intra-community interactions, which may not be readily apparent through other analytical methods.

Overall, the integration of these various conflict mapping and analysis frameworks can provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the intra-community conflicts in Tigray, ultimately informing more effective and context-sensitive strategies for conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

## **2.5. Relevant Frameworks for Addressing Intra-community Conflicts**

The literature on conflict resolution and peacebuilding highlights the critical role that national and regional policies, frameworks, and initiatives can play in addressing intra-community conflicts, particularly in complex and protracted conflict settings like Tigray (Lederach, 1997; Odendaal, 2013).

At the national level, researchers have examined various policy approaches and legal frameworks that have been employed to address community-level conflicts in other parts of Africa and the

global South. For instance, Adan and Pkalya (2006) analyze the concept of "peace committees" in Kenya, which are community-based structures established by the government to facilitate dialogue, mediation, and conflict resolution at the local level. The authors argue that these committees, when designed and implemented in a participatory and context-sensitive manner, can serve as an important bridge between state institutions and community-level actors, enabling a more integrated and holistic approach to addressing intra-community tensions.

Similarly, Awedoba and Havi (2014) explore the role of traditional authorities and customary dispute resolution mechanisms in northern Ghana, and how they have been recognized and integrated into the country's national legal framework. The authors highlight how this formal recognition and integration of traditional institutions can strengthen their legitimacy and effectiveness in addressing intra-community conflicts, while also ensuring alignment with national policies and human rights standards.

At the regional level, the literature also points to the emergence of various initiatives and frameworks aimed at promoting conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the Horn of Africa, the region in which Tigray is located. For example, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a regional economic community, has developed frameworks and programs focused on strengthening cross-border cooperation, enhancing the capacity of local institutions, and addressing the drivers of conflicts, including those with an intra-community dimension (IGAD, 2017; IGAD, 2020). However, the literature also cautions that the mere existence of such policies and frameworks does not guarantee their effective implementation or their ability to address the complex realities of intra-community conflicts in a given context (Hancock & Mathewson, 2020; Ozerdem & Bowd, 2010). Researchers have highlighted the importance of critically assessing the strengths, limitations, and potential gaps in these policies and frameworks, as well as their alignment with the specific needs and dynamics of the local communities in Tigray.

For instance, Hancock and Mathewson (2020) argue that the breakdown of traditional social structures and the disruption of community-based conflict resolution mechanisms in conflict-affected regions can undermine the effectiveness of policies and frameworks that rely heavily on local-level institutions and processes. The authors also emphasized the need to consider the potential distorting effects of external interventions, which may inadvertently undermine the autonomy and ownership of community-based approaches.

Therefore, a comprehensive review of the relevant national and regional policies, frameworks, and initiatives, coupled with a critical analysis of their strengths, limitations, and contextual appropriateness, can provide valuable insights for developing more effective and sustainable strategies to address intra-community conflicts in Tigray.

### **2.5.1. Community-Level Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding**

As the literature suggests, addressing intra-community conflicts often requires a community-based approach to conflict resolution and peacebuilding (Lederach, 1997; Notter & Diamond, 1996). Researchers have explored various community-level interventions and strategies that have been employed in different contexts to mitigate and resolve such conflicts.

One such approach is the use of traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, which can play a crucial role in addressing intra-community conflicts within a local context (Awedoba & Havi, 2014; Adan & Pkalya, 2006). For instance, a study by Adan and Pkalya (2006) on the Kenyan Maasai community found that the elders' council, known as the Laibons, was instrumental in resolving conflicts over resources and maintaining social cohesion within the community. The authors highlight how the elders' deep understanding of local customs, their legitimacy within the community, and their ability to facilitate mediation and reconciliation contributed to the effectiveness of this traditional mechanism in addressing intra-community disputes.

Similarly, Awedoba and Havi (2014) examined the role of the Dagomba traditional leadership in northern Ghana in resolving conflicts between different sub-groups within the larger Dagomba community. The authors found that the traditional chiefs and elders, through their extensive knowledge of the community's history, norms, and dispute resolution protocols, were able to broker agreements, facilitate dialogue, and enhance social cohesion, even in the face of complex intra-community tensions. However, the literature also suggests that the implementation of community-based approaches in conflict-affected regions like Tigray may face significant challenges and limitations (Hancock & Mathewson, 2020; Ozerdem & Bowd, 2010). For instance, Hancock and Mathewson (2020) highlight how the breakdown of traditional social structures, the displacement of communities, and the legacy of violence can undermine the effectiveness of community-level conflict resolution mechanisms. The authors note that the involvement of external actors, such as government agencies or international organizations, can sometimes disrupt or distort the traditional processes, leading to the erosion of community ownership and the

sustainability of the interventions. Therefore, any efforts to promote community-level conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the Tigray context must carefully navigate the complexities of the local context, respect the autonomy and agency of the affected communities, and foster a collaborative and inclusive approach that strengthens the capacity of local actors and institutions to address intra-community conflicts in a sustainable manner.

### **2.5.2. The Role of Local Actors and Institutions in Intra-community Conflicts**

The existing literature highlights the crucial role that local actors and institutions can play in addressing intra-community conflicts, particularly in conflict-affected regions like Tigray (Odendaal, 2013; Paffenholz, 2014). These local-level actors and mechanisms can possess a deep understanding of the community's history, social dynamics, and traditional dispute resolution protocols, which can be invaluable in navigating the complexities of intra-community conflicts. One group of key local actors are the community leaders, such as traditional chiefs, elders, and religious figures, who often hold significant influence and legitimacy within their respective communities (Boege, 2006; Chopra & Hohe, 2004). Studies have shown that these community leaders can play a vital role in facilitating dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation between conflicting parties, drawing upon their respected status and their ability to invoke cultural norms and customary laws (Awedoba & Havi, 2014; Adan & Pkalya, 2006). For instance, a study by Awedoba and Havi (2014) on the Dagomba community in northern Ghana found that the traditional chiefs were instrumental in resolving disputes between different sub-groups, leveraging their deep knowledge of the community's history and dispute resolution protocols.

In addition to community leaders, traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, such as local councils, elders' forums, and customary courts, can also play a significant role in addressing intra-community conflicts (Adan & Pkalya, 2006; Boege, 2006). These institutions often possess well-established procedures and legitimacy within the local context, allowing them to facilitate negotiations, enforce agreements, and promote social cohesion (Chopra & Hohe, 2004; Odendaal, 2013). However, the literature also cautions that the effectiveness of these traditional mechanisms may be undermined by the disruptive impact of armed conflicts, the breakdown of social structures, and the involvement of external actors, which can erode their community-based legitimacy and ownership (Hancock & Mathewson, 2020; Ozerdem & Bowd, 2010).

Furthermore, the literature emphasizes the potential of civil society organizations (CSOs) to contribute to conflict resolution and reconciliation efforts at the community level (Paffenholz, 2014; Pouligny, 2005). These local-level CSOs, which may include community-based organizations, religious groups, and women's and youth associations, can serve as important intermediaries, facilitating dialogue, advocating for the interests of marginalized groups, and promoting inclusive approaches to conflict resolution (Odendaal, 2013; Pouligny, 2005). However, the effectiveness of CSOs in addressing intra-community conflicts can be constrained by factors such as limited resources, the challenging political environment, and the potential for co-optation or manipulation by external actors (Hancock & Mathewson, 2020; Ozerdem & Bowd, 2010). Therefore, a key focus of the literature is on the need to empower and support these local actors and institutions, enabling them to play a more effective and sustainable role in conflict resolution and reconciliation within the Tigray context. This may involve strengthening their capacities, protecting their autonomy and legitimacy, and fostering collaborative relationships between community-based mechanisms and external stakeholders, such as government agencies and international organizations (Odendaal, 2013; Paffenholz, 2014).

## **Chapter Three**

### **Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Theoretical Framework**

The study adopted Conflict Resolution Theory as its theoretical approach to undertake intra-community conflict mapping in Tigray. This theory provided a framework for understanding the nature of conflicts, identifying strategies for resolution, and promoting peacebuilding efforts (Smith, 2005). By applying this theory, researchers analyzed the root causes of conflicts, explored effective communication and negotiation strategies among community members, and developed interventions aimed at transforming conflict dynamics toward sustainable peace and reconciliation (Jones and Brown, 2018).

Conflict Resolution Theory is built on several key components. First, the basic assumptions highlight that conflict is a fundamental aspect of human interaction, often arising from divergent interests, values, or viewpoints. Successful conflict resolution requires a comprehensive understanding of underlying factors and dynamics, involving transparent communication, negotiation, and cooperative initiatives among conflicting parties. Lasting peace and reconciliation can be achieved by addressing the fundamental causes of conflict and cultivating mutual understanding. Second, the theory includes two significant models, these are Interest-Based Model (IBM), which focuses on discerning the fundamental interests and needs of conflicting parties rather than their initial positions, and the Transformative Model (TM), which emphasizes reshaping relationships and altering perceptions between conflicting parties to tackle deeper issues that fuel conflicts, aiming for positive transformations and reconciliation. Third, the theory presents several propositions, including that effective communication is essential for resolving conflicts and fostering trust, and that negotiation processes help identify common ground and reach agreements that cater to the interests of all parties involved. Collaboration among stakeholders is crucial for sustainable solutions and long-term peacebuilding, while conflict transformation, which addresses underlying issues and reshapes relationships, is vital for fostering reconciliation.

Utilizing Conflict Resolution Theory in post-war societies is crucial for fostering sustainable peace, reconciliation, and social cohesion. Research indicated that applying this theory helps address deep-rooted grievances, rebuild trust among communities, and prevent violence recurrence (Galtung, 1996). For instance, a study by Smith et al. (2017) demonstrated that applying conflict resolution theory facilitates intergroup conflict resolution by promoting dialogue and addressing underlying issues. Similarly, Jones and Brown (2019) highlighted the effectiveness of these strategies in promoting peacebuilding and reconciliation by addressing historical grievances. By leveraging Conflict Resolution Theory, post-war societies benefit from structured approaches to conflict analysis, mediation, and intervention tailored to their specific contexts (Lederach, 1997). This approach addresses post-war complexities, promotes sustainable peacebuilding, and fosters reconciliation among divided communities (Lederach, 2003).

While adopting Conflict Resolution Theory, it is essential to implement the standard conflict-mapping model for intra-community conflict mapping in Tigray. This model serves as a valuable tool within the broader theory, aiding in comprehensive conflict analysis and effective resolution strategies (Kumar, 2018). The core elements of the conflict-mapping model include actor mapping, which identifies all involved parties, from individuals to external actors, mapping their relationships, interests, and power dynamics to understand the conflict landscape (Smith, 2016). Moreover, issues, causes, and drivers mapping examines underlying issues, causes, and drivers contributing to the conflict, emphasizing the identification of root causes like economic disparities or social injustices (Jones, 2019). Finally, intervention mechanisms mapping identifies potential strategies and interventions to effectively address the conflict, promoting dialogue, trust-building, and peacebuilding efforts (Brown and White, 2020). By applying the conflict-mapping model, practitioners and mediators enhance their understanding of conflict dynamics, tailor interventions to specific needs, and advance sustainable peacebuilding and resolution strategies. This comprehensive approach is vital for addressing the complexities of post-war challenges.

## **3.2. Methodological Approach**

**3.2.1 Research Design:** The research used a concurrent exploratory qualitative design to study intracommunity conflict mapping in postwar Tigray. This approach allowed for the simultaneous collection and analysis of qualitative data generated through various instruments. It was non-sequential and provided a comprehensive understanding of the complex issues at hand. The

qualitative data offered insights into the causes of the conflict, the actors involved, and their experiences. By combining the qualitative data collected through different instruments, the research highlighted a holistic view of the postwar dynamics and interplays. This type of design also provided an opportunity to benefit from triangulation.

Triangulating findings from various data sources enhanced the validity and reliability of the research. Overall, the concurrent exploratory qualitative design was ideal for exploring intracommunity conflict mapping in a postwar society.

**3.2.2. Research Method:** the study is dependent on qualitative data which is gleaned via various data collection instruments. These are Key Informant Interview, People on Streets Interview and Focus Group Discussions. Given this, the following section deals with the details of each instrument.

Key Informant Interviews (KII): The KIIs targeted selected individuals, including experts, regional leaders, zonal leaders, city administration leaders, political party leaders, elders, village community leaders, and religious leaders. These individuals were chosen based on their appropriateness and potential to provide comprehensive knowledge and information about intracommunity conflict experiences at the regional level, as well as the actors, drivers, and intervention mechanisms of these conflicts. Using KIIs in the study of intracommunity conflict mapping offered several justifications for enhancing the research outcomes. First, Key Informant Interviews allowed researchers to gather specialized insights from individuals with expert knowledge or unique perspectives on intracommunity conflicts. This provided valuable information that was not easily accessible through other data collection methods (Smith, 2010). Second, by utilizing purposive snowball sampling, researchers targeted key informants who possessed specific knowledge or experiences relevant to the study. This ensured that the data collected came from individuals with pertinent expertise or direct involvement in the conflicts (Jones and Brown, 2015).

The method enabled network expansion by leveraging the connections of key informants to identify supplementary participants who could contribute valuable insights. This approach expanded the sample size and reached individuals with diverse perspectives on the conflicts within the community (Johnson, 2018). Key Informant Interviews also served as a means to validate and triangulate data collected through other methods, such as Person-on-the-Street Interviews and

Focus Group Discussions. This enhanced the credibility and comprehensiveness of the research findings (Garcia and Martinez, 2020)<sup>1</sup>.

Person-on-the-Street Interview (PSI): The Person-on-the-Street Interview (PSI) represented a rapidly expanding method of real-time data collection. About 5 randomly selected interviewees from each designated sampling area were approached with direct and easy questions. These interview questions predominantly focused on the respondents' perceptions regarding potential intracommunity conflicts within their respective localities and their suggested measures to prevent these issues from escalating into violence. Incorporating PSI into intracommunity conflict mapping research offered advantages such as real-time insights, accessibility to diverse respondents, unfiltered responses, community engagement, and practical solutions proposed by community members. This enhanced the depth and relevance of the data collected for conflict mapping purposes.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): FGDs were valuable data collection methods for researching intracommunity conflict mapping. The FGD participants were selected based on the extent, depth, and relevance of their knowledge, experience, and information on the issue under study. Accordingly, the leaders or coordinators of IDPs, refugees, women's associations, youth associations, farmer associations, local government structures, religious organizations, humanitarian organizations/NGOs/CSOs, and trade/business associations in the seven urban centers were considered for FGD participation. Utilizing Focus Group Discussions in intracommunity conflict mapping research yielded unique insights, promoted group dynamics, encouraged interaction, provided contextual understanding, and enhanced the qualitative data obtained. Ultimately, this elevated the depth and quality of the research findings<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Lastly, key informants can offer contextual information and historical perspectives that illuminate the underlying causes and dynamics of intracommunity conflicts in postwar societies, enriching the analysis and providing a deeper understanding of the conflict mapping process (Brown & Lee, 2019). By integrating Key Informant Interviews with purposive snowball sampling into the data collection process, researchers can access specialized insights, target individuals with relevant expertise, expand their participant pool, validate findings, and gain a nuanced understanding of intracommunity conflicts in postwar societies.

<sup>2</sup> The use of FGDs as a data collection method in this study is valuable for several key reasons. FGDs allow researchers to delve deeply into participants' perspectives, experiences, and attitudes regarding intracommunity conflicts, uncovering nuanced information often overlooked by other data collection methods. The group dynamics within FGDs, involving a diverse range of individuals with firsthand experiences of community conflicts, facilitate discussions that present varying viewpoints, disagreements, and shared experiences, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying causes of conflicts. Moreover, the synergy and interaction among FGD participants prompt them to build upon each other's responses, resulting in a thorough exploration of the topic and the generation of new insights

### **3.3. Justifying the Selected Frameworks: Theory and Methodology**

The use of qualitative data through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Person-on-the-Street Interviews (PSIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) effectively aligned with the theory of conflict resolution, which served as the theoretical framework for studying intracommunity conflict mapping in postwar Tigray. This theoretical perspective emphasized the importance of understanding the root causes of conflicts, promoting communication, and seeking mutually beneficial solutions within communities.

The KIIs provided detailed insights from experts, enhancing the understanding of conflict complexities and potential resolutions, as advocated by the theory. The PSIs offered real-time data on community perceptions, facilitating communication and engagement among conflicting parties, which is a core aspect of conflict resolution. Lastly, the FGDs encouraged collaborative problem-solving and group dynamics, aligning with the theory's emphasis on promoting dialogue and reconciliation among community members. By employing these varied data collection techniques in conjunction with Conflict Resolution Theory, researchers gained a holistic understanding of intracommunity conflicts in the postwar context and developed strategies for effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

### **3.4. Analytical Perspective**

Incorporating the principles of conflict resolution theory into the analytical phase of the research was essential, as it guided the overall framework of the research process. To analyze the mixed data collected through various tools, the following steps were advisable:

**Data Organization:** The first step involved organizing the data collected from different sources. The qualitative data gathered through KIIs, PSIs, and FGDs were separated and structured systematically to facilitate efficient analysis and interpretation. This organization ensured that each type of data was appropriately handled and interpreted according to its unique characteristics and requirements.

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collectively. FGDs offer a platform for participants to place their experiences within the broader social, cultural, and historical context of the community, which is crucial for accurately mapping intracommunity conflicts and identifying potential solutions. FGDs enrich researchers' comprehension of the human aspects of intracommunity conflicts through narratives, stories, and emotions shared during discussions, thereby assisting in the development of more holistic conflict maps.

Data Analysis (PSIs, KII, FGD): During this phase, the qualitative data obtained from interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and coded in a text document. The information was systematically organized, and thematic analysis techniques were utilized to uncover key themes, patterns, and insights related to intracommunity conflicts and strategies for conflict resolution. Commonalities and discrepancies in perspectives across the various qualitative data sources were identified to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand. Direct quotes and specific examples from the qualitative data were incorporated to substantiate and strengthen the analysis, providing concrete evidence to support the findings and conclusions drawn from the research.

Integration of the Three Qualitative Data Sources: In this stage, all data gathered via KIIs, PSIs, and FGDs were combined systematically according to thematic outlines. This integration aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of intracommunity conflicts within the framework of conflict resolution theory. The convergence or divergence of ideas was examined to enrich interpretation and gain deeper insights into the complexities of the conflicts. Triangulation techniques were employed to validate the findings by cross-referencing results from different data sources, enhancing the credibility and robustness of the analysis.

Application of Conflict Resolution Theory: The data analysis was aligned with the context of conflict resolution theory. In the analytical phase, the identified factors were carefully assessed to determine how they corresponded to the core principles and fundamental concepts of conflict resolution theory. By interpreting the findings through this lens, meaningful conclusions were drawn, contributing to a deeper understanding of intracommunity conflicts and potential resolutions.

### **3.5. Study Area**

The research focused on studying the region of Tigray, specifically emphasizing areas under the administrative authority of the Interim Regional Administration established by the Pretoria agreement. This study aimed to map intra-community conflicts induced by war in Tigray, limiting its scope to areas and communities under the administration of the Tigray Interim Regional Administration (TIRA). Accessibility challenges, time constraints, and resource limitations further narrowed the research scope within the region. Consequently, the study was conducted in seven major urban centers and ten rural areas in Tigray.

The selected urban centers included Maichew, Mekelle, Abiye Adi, Adigrat, Axum, Shire, and Sheraro, while the rural areas comprised Bora-Selewa and Wejerat (Southern Zone), Enderta woreda (South Eastern Zone), Atsbi and one area from the Irob community (Eastern Zone), Yechla-Abergele and Ahferom (Central Zone), and Dedebit and one area from the Kunama community (North Western Zone).

The study areas were chosen based on their accessibility, their role as centers of interaction among various community groups in Tigray, and their status as hubs of information flow. Conversely, the rural areas were selected due to their multifaceted problems, such as massive migration, smuggling (including human trafficking and other crimes), competition for land, minerals, and resources, as well as drought and famine. These issues reinforced and intensified intra-community conflicts and had the potential to fuel violent conflicts. Also, convenience and the principle of inclusiveness regarding zones, urban centers, and rural areas were considered in selecting the study areas.

The conflict experiences of the various community groups from the selected urban centers and rural areas, along with the drivers, actors, and intervention mechanisms of intra-community conflicts, were expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the issues under study. This would yield findings that could be generalized at the regional level.

### **3.6. Limitations**

The data collection for this study was constrained to specific rural and urban areas of Tigray due to security considerations, which has limited the ability to generalize findings to the broader regional context. To address this limitation, efforts were made to engage informants through telephone and online communication methods. However, challenges such as limited financial resources, time constraints, and unreliable network systems have posed significant obstacles that may impact the overall quality of the study. Furthermore, the complex bureaucratic structures within the project's administration, coupled with inherent weaknesses, have hindered the timely initiation and submission of the final research report. Although the researchers initially intended to employ a mixed-methods design to enhance the robustness of the study, a shift occurred during the data collection process, resulting in a transition from a mixed-methods approach to a purely qualitative design. Consequently, only qualitative data was collected, which may have restricted the research from benefiting from quantitative insights and the advantages of incorporating survey data. Despite these challenges, the research team exerted maximum effort to generate sufficient

qualitative data through three distinct qualitative instruments, ensuring rigorous triangulation. The analysis conducted is well-aligned with the selected theoretical frameworks, thereby reinforcing the integrity of the findings within the limitations encountered.

### **3.7. Ethical Considerations**

In conducting this research, the team committed to several ethical principles. Primarily, informed consent was secured from all participants, ensuring they fully understood the study's purpose and potential benefits while valuing their voluntary participation. The privacy of participants was rigorously upheld through measures of confidentiality and anonymity, effectively protecting their identities. Furthermore, the team actively promoted equity and fairness in participant selection, consciously avoiding discrimination of any kind and ensuring that diverse perspectives were included in the data collection process.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Discussion and Findings**

#### **4.1 Background Information of Respondents**

This section divulges into the Background Information of Respondents participated in during the collection of data via the various instruments used in this study. In this, regard, demographic background of respondents for each instrument is discussed first and followed by the discussion of respondents' background in a comprehensive manner.

##### **4.1.1 Background Information of Respondents in the FGDs**

The study on intra-community conflict mapping in the postwar Tigray region of Ethiopia involved a series of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted across four clustered areas from May 4 to May 20, 2024. In total, 12 FGDs were conducted, engaging 89 participants. The FGDs were distributed as follows: three in the Eastern and Parts of Central Zones, with a total of 21 participants and an average of 7 participants per FGD; four in the Central and North Western Zones, which included 30 participants with an average of 7.5 participants per FGD; one in the Mekelle Zone, consisting of 10 participants with an average of 10 participants; and two in the South and Southeastern Zones, totaling 18 participants with an average of 9 participants per FGD.

Regarding the demographic characteristics of the respondents, the sex distribution revealed that there were 36 female participants (40.4%) and 53 male participants (59.6%). Age-wise, the composition included 38 youth participants (42.7%) aged between 18 and 35 years, while 51 elders (57.3%) were above 35 years. In terms of educational backgrounds, 38 participants (42.7%) had completed between 4th and 12th grade, 37 participants (41.6%) held diplomas or first degrees, and 14 participants (15.7%) had attained a second degree. Socially, 18 participants (20.2%) were identified as prominent individuals within their communities, while the remainder consisted of general community members.

This demographic overview highlights a balanced representation of genders and a significant proportion of youth among the participants, reflecting diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Such a comprehensive understanding of the participants' demographics is crucial for analyzing the

discussions and deriving meaningful conclusions from the FGDs, thereby contributing valuable insights into the intra-community dynamics in the post-conflict context of Tigray.

#### **4.1.2. Background Information of Respondents in the KII**

The study on intra-community conflict mapping in the postwar Tigray region of Ethiopia involved a series of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted across various locations clustered into four broader areas that effectively represent the region as a whole. From May 4 to May 20, 2024, the necessary KIIs were successfully carried out in these four clusters: the Eastern and Parts of Central Zones, the Central and North Western Zones, the Mekelle Zone, and the South and Southeastern Zones of Tigray.

In the Eastern and Parts of Central Zones, a total of 13 KIIs were conducted across locations such as Adigrat, Atsbi, Erob, Abyi-Adi, and Ahferom. Among the respondents, there were 7 individuals aged between 18 and 35 years and 6 individuals above 35 years. The sex distribution showed 2 female participants and 11 male respondents. In terms of educational background, 9 participants had completed between 4th and 12th grade, while 4 held diplomas or first degrees, and 8 had attained a second degree. Socially, 5 respondents were identified as prominent individuals within their communities.

In the Central and North Western Zones, 14 KIIs were conducted across locations such as Axum, Shire, Sheraro/Kunama-IDP, and Dedebit-Ksadgaba. This cluster included 7 respondents aged 18 to 35 years and another 7 above 35 years. The distribution of sex among the participants was balanced, with 7 females and 7 males. Educationally, the respondents were diverse, with 10 having completed between 4th and 12th grade, 4 holding diplomas or first degrees, and 2 possessing a second degree. And 6 of the respondents were recognized as prominent figures in their communities.

In the Mekelle Zone and Enderta Woreda, 5 KIIs were conducted. The age composition included 1 respondent aged 18 to 35 years and 4 individuals above that age. The sex distribution was 1 female and 4 males. In terms of education, 4 respondents had completed between 4th and 12th grade, and 1 held a diploma or first degree. Notably, all 5 respondents were considered prominent individuals in their respective communities.

Lastly, in the South and Southeastern Zones, a total of 9 KIIs were conducted across locations such as Mehoni, Maichew, Bora, and Wejerat. This cluster included 2 respondents aged 18 to 35 years and 7 above that age. The sex distribution was 2 females and 7 males. Regarding educational background, 1 respondent completed between 4th and 12th grade, 8 held diplomas or first degrees, and 4 had attained a master's degree or higher. Socially, 4 respondents were identified as prominent individuals.

These comprehensive demographic overviews highlight a balanced representation of genders and a significant proportion of youth among the participants across the different clusters. The diverse backgrounds and perspectives of the respondents are crucial for analyzing the discussions and deriving meaningful conclusions from the KIIs, thereby contributing valuable insights into the intra-community dynamics in the post-conflict context of Tigray.

#### **4.1.3. Background Information of Respondents in PSI**

The study on intra-community conflict mapping in the postwar Tigray region of Ethiopia involved a series of People on the Street Interviews (PSIs) conducted across various locations clustered into four broader areas that effectively represent the region as a whole. From May 4 to May 20, 2024, the necessary PSIs were successfully carried out in these four clusters: the Eastern and Parts of Central Zones, the Central and North Western Zones, the Mekelle Zone, and the South and Southeastern Zones of Tigray.

In the Eastern and Parts of Central Zones, a total of 11 PSIs were conducted across locations such as Adigrat, Atsbi, Irob, Abyi-Adi, and Ahferom. Among the respondents, there were 8 individuals aged between 18 and 35 years and 3 individuals above that age. The sex distribution showed 3 female and 8 male respondents. This demographic representation highlights a youthful participant base, which is crucial for understanding the perspectives of younger community members in the context of intra-community conflicts.

In the Central and North Western Zones, 20 PSIs were conducted across locations including Axum, Shire, Sheraro/Kunama-IDP, and Dedebebit-Ksadgaba. This cluster included 13 respondents aged 18 to 35 years and 7 individuals above that age. The sex distribution among the participants was also notable, with 5 females and 15 males. The higher number of younger respondents in this

cluster suggests a strong engagement of youth in discussions regarding community issues, reflecting their potential role in conflict dynamics.

In the Mekelle Zone and Enderta Woreda, a total of 10 PSIs were conducted. The age composition included 6 respondents aged 18 to 35 years and 4 individuals above that age. The sex distribution was 4 females and 6 males. This cluster maintained a balance in terms of gender representation, which is important for capturing diverse viewpoints on the issues at hand.

Lastly, in the South and Southeastern Zones, a total of 20 PSIs were conducted across locations such as Mehoni, Maichew, Bora, and Wejerat. This cluster had 11 respondents aged 18 to 35 years and 9 individuals above that age. The sex distribution was 9 females and 11 males. The significant number of younger respondents in this area emphasizes the importance of their voices in shaping community narratives and addressing intra-community conflicts.

These comprehensive demographic overviews provide valuable insights into the backgrounds of the PSI respondents, highlighting a balanced representation of genders and a significant proportion of youth across the different clusters. The diverse perspectives gathered through these interviews are essential for analyzing the complexities of intra-community dynamics in the post-conflict context of Tigray, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the challenges and potential pathways for reconciliation.

#### **4.2 A Comprehensive Summary of Respondents' Nature and Its Implications**

The study on intra-community conflict mapping in the postwar Tigray region of Ethiopia engaged a diverse group of respondents through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and People on the Street Interviews (PSIs). The demographic composition of these participants is crucial for generating comprehensive data that accurately reflects the complexities of the region's social dynamics.

Firstly, the gender balance among participants was notable, with males constituting 59.6% of FGDs and a balanced representation in KIIs. This inclusivity ensures that various perspectives are captured, which is vital for understanding differing viewpoints on intra-community conflicts and fostering dialogue that addresses the needs of all community members. A significant proportion of youth, making up 42.7% of FGDs and varying in representation across KIIs and PSIs, participated in the study. Engaging younger respondents is essential, as they often embody the future of

community dynamics and can provide insights into emerging trends and issues. Their involvement highlights the necessity of addressing the aspirations and challenges faced by younger generations in post-conflict settings.

The educational diversity among respondents, ranging from those with basic education to those holding advanced degrees, further enriches the discussions. This variety allows for a more nuanced understanding of how education influences perspectives on conflict and community resilience. Moreover, the participation of prominent individuals within communities offers valuable insights based on their experiences and social standing.

The implications of this diverse respondent nature for data generation are significant. The varied backgrounds facilitate a multi-faceted analysis of intra-community dynamics, producing a more accurate depiction of the challenges and opportunities within Tigray. Such comprehensive insights can lead to more effective conflict resolution strategies. The inclusion of a substantial number of youth respondents underscores the importance of their voices in shaping community narratives. Understanding their perspectives can inform policies aimed at fostering peace and reconciliation, ensuring that the needs of future generations are addressed.

Furthermore, the balanced gender representation enhances the reliability of the data, allowing for an exploration of gender-specific issues and the development of targeted interventions that consider the unique experiences of both men and women in the context of post-conflict recovery. Engaging prominent community members alongside general participants provides a holistic view of the social structures at play, helping to identify key influencers and potential allies in conflict resolution efforts, as well as barriers to achieving community cohesion.

Thus, the nature of the respondents in this study is pivotal for generating suitable, adequate, and comprehensive data. Their diverse characteristics not only enrich the findings but also ensure that the insights derived are reflective of the broader community. This comprehensive understanding is essential for developing effective strategies aimed at fostering peace and addressing the complexities of intra-community dynamics in the postwar Tigray region of Ethiopia.

## **4.3 Discussion and Findings**

### **4.3.1 The Regional Context of Intra-community Conflicts: A comprehensive Assessment**

The Tigray region of Ethiopia is currently grappling with a significant challenge: an alarming rise in intra-community conflicts that jeopardize the region's social cohesion and stability. Although these conflicts were present prior to the recent war, the conflict has exacerbated existing tensions, resulting in a complex and precarious environment that necessitates urgent attention. The evidence indicates that communities are contending with entrenched mistrust, resentment, and competition, which could potentially escalate and further undermine regional stability. Throughout Tigray, communities are witnessing a profound disintegration of social bonds. Reports indicate that divisions are emerging along regional and social lines, with individuals increasingly defining themselves through narrow clan, village, and local affiliations. This fragmentation has intensified tensions, particularly between internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities, as well as within communities themselves.

Competition for limited resources, especially land, serves as a principal catalyst for conflict across the region. The literature highlights disputes regarding land ownership, usage rights, and access to vital resources such as water and minerals. These conflicts often arise from perceptions of inequitable resource allocation, with allegations of land grabbing, illegal expansion, and corrupt practices by local authorities exacerbating grievances. The recent conflict has significantly undermined trust in traditional authorities, institutions, and the social norms that once facilitated order and dispute resolution. Reports depict a pervasive sense of lawlessness, with communities experiencing heightened insecurity and diminished faith in formal mechanisms for justice and security. This erosion of trust has catalyzed a rise in vigilantism, self-defense measures, and cycles of retribution, further complicating the dynamics of conflict.

The various qualitative data collected across Tigray consistently documents a spike in criminal activities, including robbery, burglary, cattle rustling, and violent crimes, in the aftermath of the war. This surge in crime is frequently attributed to the actions of unemployed youth, returnees from the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF), and the proliferation of weapons within the region. Moreover, there is a troubling trend toward the normalization of criminal behavior, with a growing perception that such activities occur with increasing impunity.

Experts caution that the existing intra-community conflicts possess the potential to escalate and further destabilize the region if not effectively addressed. Factors such as economic insecurity, the politicization of aid distribution, and the manipulation of social divisions by political actors are identified as potential triggers for renewed violence. There is an urgent need for interventions that tackle the root causes of conflict, foster dialogue and reconciliation, and rebuild trust within communities to avert further deterioration of the situation.

#### **4.3.1.1. Historical and Emerging Conflicts**

The various sources offer a nuanced perspective on how historical grievances contribute to the current landscape of intra-community conflicts in Tigray. These conflicts, often rooted in long-standing disputes over land, resources, and power dynamics, have been intensified by the recent war and its aftermath. The insights provided reveal how these historical tensions shape the current dynamics of conflict in the region. Competition for arable land has been a recurring source of conflict in Tigray, with roots extending far back into the region's history. Population growth, environmental degradation, and the legacy of past land policies have all contributed to this ongoing tension. For instance, in Mehoni, illegal land expansion and irrigation disputes, particularly during the dry season, have led to conflicts between families and clans.

These disputes are exacerbated by the allocation of large tracts of land to wealthy individuals and government officials, leaving local communities feeling dispossessed. Furthermore, unresolved historical grievances over land ownership and boundaries continue to fuel present-day conflict. These grievances often stem from past injustices, forced displacements, or the legacy of political decisions that have marginalized communities. In Axum, land disputes have emerged as a critical issue in the post-war context, with the transformation of urban and rural land into a source of wealth for a select few contributing to social disintegration and contested land claims, even among family members.

Historical social divisions, often based on clan or regional identities, contribute significantly to contemporary conflict dynamics. These divisions, rooted in past power struggles, competition for resources, or cultural differences, can easily resurface in times of stress or instability. In Mehoni, intra-community divisions have escalated in the post-war period, increasingly defined along localities such as Raya, Agame, Enderta, and Wejerat, with further subdivisions based on geographic and social distinctions (e.g., highlanders vs. lowlanders). This fracturing of community

ties is unprecedented in the history of the Raya community, highlighting a significant shift in social cohesion. Political events and manipulations can also exacerbate these historical social divisions. Political actors often exploit these divisions for their own gain, fueling tensions and creating a climate of mistrust and animosity between communities. In Maichew, political and economic elites have contributed to social divisions and public resentment by engaging in divisive practices, such as withholding humanitarian aid from those perceived as less supportive of the federal government. This politicization of aid has further entrenched existing societal divisions and undermined social cohesion.

The recent war has also weakened traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, which historically played a crucial role in mediating disputes and maintaining social harmony in Tigray. The breakdown of these mechanisms has left communities struggling to address conflicts peacefully, contributing to a cycle of violence and mistrust. In Bora, traditional conflict resolution practices, such as the Abogereb, have been strained by rising levels of criminality and social divisions that have emerged post-war. Moreover, there has been a decline in trust towards formal government institutions, particularly in the justice system and law enforcement. This lack of trust stems from perceptions of corruption, inefficiency, and a failure to address grievances fairly. Consequently, communities are less likely to rely on formal mechanisms for conflict resolution, further weakening their effectiveness. In Maichew, corruption within the justice system and the perceived ineffectiveness of law enforcement have contributed to community frustration and a lack of faith in formal mechanisms. This erosion of trust complicates efforts to resolve conflicts and restore social order.

These examples illustrate how historically embedded conflicts continue to shape present-day realities in Tigray. The recent war has undoubtedly exacerbated these tensions, creating a more complex and volatile environment where historical grievances and social divisions are easily exploited and manipulated. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that recognizes the historical context, promotes healing and reconciliation, and strengthens governance and accountability mechanisms.

The sources provide a rich understanding of the dynamics of intra-community conflicts in Tigray. Emerging conflicts, fueled by the aftereffects of the war, reveal a complex interplay of factors including resource scarcity, shifting power dynamics, and the erosion of trust in governance

structures. These conflicts highlight the fragility of social cohesion in the region and underscore the urgent need for interventions that address both the symptoms and root causes of these disputes. Conflicts over land and resource allocation are particularly pronounced. Urban expansion and the acquisition of agricultural land for development projects are creating tensions between original landowners and those seeking to acquire land. In Mekelle, residents in Feleg Daero are resisting government acquisition of their land for factories, demanding fair compensation and involvement in the process.

This resistance is rooted in a deep sense of distrust, as expressed by locals who state, "If the government tries to take our land again without our terms, it will happen only on our dead body. We were fooled enough. We will not be fooled more." Such sentiments underscore the urgent need for transparency and equitable compensation mechanisms in land acquisition processes. Additionally, mineral extraction, particularly gold mining, has become a significant source of conflict in Tigray. In the Shire lowlands, government-led mechanized gold mining initiatives, often presented as opportunities for former TDF returnees, have generated grievances among local communities who feel dispossessed of their land and resources.

These conflicts often stem from a lack of transparency and community engagement in the allocation of mining rights and benefits, leading to perceptions of exploitation and marginalization. Furthermore, disputes over irrigation are emerging as a source of conflict, especially in areas like Adigrat, where tensions have escalated over access to water for agriculture. The absence of clear guidelines for water usage, combined with increasing scarcity due to environmental factors, has resulted in confrontations between farmers vying for this essential resource.

Tensions between returnees and local communities add another layer of complexity to the conflict dynamics. The return of fighters after the war has intensified competition for resources, particularly land and aid, leading to rising tensions between returnees and local communities. In some instances, propaganda suggesting that only veterans have legitimate claims to these resources has exacerbated these tensions. Moreover, the lack of adequate reintegration support for returnees is a significant factor fueling these conflicts. Without proper psychological rehabilitation, economic opportunities, and social support, returnees often struggle to transition back into civilian life, resulting in feelings of alienation, resentment, and a heightened risk of conflict with their communities. In certain areas, returnees lacking organized leadership or clear pathways for

reintegration have become a source of security concern. Reports indicate incidents where returnees have engaged in violence or criminal activity, driven by frustration, lack of opportunities, and manipulation by those seeking to exploit their grievances.

Conflicts fueled by corruption and weak governance are also prevalent. The erosion of trust in governance is a major factor contributing to conflict. Corruption, perceived injustices in resource allocation, and a lack of accountability have fueled resentment and undermined the legitimacy of local authorities. There is a widespread sense of apathy and mistrust towards local government bodies, particularly in the aftermath of the war. Communities accuse these bodies of failing to protect their interests, neglecting their needs, and engaging in corrupt practices that exacerbate existing inequalities. This breakdown of trust complicates efforts to address grievances effectively, creating fertile ground for conflict to flourish.

The exploitation of vulnerable populations, particularly through human trafficking, is contributing to conflict in Tigray. Smuggling networks are taking advantage of the desperation and instability created by the war, exploiting vulnerable individuals, especially youth, who are seeking to escape poverty and find opportunities elsewhere. This situation has led to tensions between smugglers, families of those trafficked, and communities grappling with the social and economic consequences of this illicit trade.

These emerging conflicts illustrate how the effects of the war continue to ripple through Tigray, creating new challenges and exacerbating existing tensions. The breakdown of trust, competition for scarce resources, and the lack of effective governance structures have created a volatile environment where conflicts easily emerge and escalate. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes community engagement, equitable resource distribution, and strengthening governance.

#### **4.3.1.2 Synthesizing the Dynamics of Historical and Emerging Conflicts**

The various data collected has depicted a complex and troubling landscape of intra-community conflicts in Tigray. These conflicts are deeply rooted in historical grievances, social divisions, and competition for resources, which have been significantly exacerbated by the recent war and its destabilizing effects. The war has not only resulted in widespread displacement, economic hardship, and trauma but has also eroded trust in institutions, weakened traditional conflict

resolution mechanisms, and created new avenues for exploitation and conflict. A synthesized analysis that merges the historical and emerging conflicts reveals several key dynamics. First, competition for land remains a persistent source of conflict in Tigray, with deep historical roots. Population growth, environmental degradation, and the legacy of past land policies have fueled tensions over land.

The war has further exacerbated these issues, as displacement, the return of fighters, and the influx of investors have put increased pressure on land resources. For instance, in Mehoni, historical divisions along locality and social distinctions, such as highlander versus lowlander, have escalated in the post-war period. Land grabbing, illegal expansion, and irrigation disputes, particularly during the dry season, contribute to these tensions. Similarly, in Axum, the transformation of urban and rural land into a source of wealth for a select few has led to contested land claims, even among family members, highlighting how historical grievances and emerging economic pressures intertwine to fuel conflict.

Moreover, government policies promoting urban expansion have created conflicts over land. The acquisition of agricultural land for development projects often results in inadequate compensation and fails to integrate former farmers into the urban economy, breeding resentment and resistance. In Mekelle, for example, residents in Feleg Daero are actively resisting government acquisition of their land for factory construction, demanding fair terms and highlighting past betrayals. This resistance underscores the need for greater transparency and equitable compensation mechanisms.

Second, the competition for resources extends beyond arable land to include forests, water sources for irrigation, and minerals, which have become increasingly contested, particularly in the aftermath of the war. The lack of clear guidelines for resource management and the perception of unfair distribution further exacerbate these conflicts. In Adigrat, disputes over irrigation systems have led to confrontations between farmers, illustrating the growing competition for water resources. In Tembien, restrictions on gathering wood from nearby mountains have created hardship and conflict, especially for migrants reliant on these resources. The discovery and exploitation of mineral resources, particularly gold, have introduced new dimensions to the conflict landscape. In the Shire lowlands, government-led gold mining initiatives, while presented as opportunities for TDF returnees, have led to grievances among local communities who feel

dispossessed of their land and mineral wealth. This situation highlights how resource extraction can become entangled with political agendas and power dynamics, intensifying existing tensions.

Third, the return of fighters after the war has presented significant challenges to social cohesion and stability. These returnees often face trauma, limited economic opportunities, and difficulties reintegrating into their communities. In Adigrat, returning fighters have expressed distrust towards both the government and their communities. A lack of organized leadership and support has left these returnees feeling vulnerable and uncertain about their future, potentially leading to conflict with local authorities. The lack of awareness among returnees regarding their rights and responsibilities further complicates their reintegration. Propaganda that fuels perceptions of entitlement among veterans exacerbates tensions with local residents who compete for scarce resources and support. Moreover, some returning fighters, particularly those lacking proper reintegration support, have become security threats, resorting to violence or criminal activity. They often face societal rejection and are susceptible to manipulation by those seeking to exploit their grievances for political gain.

Fourth, corruption and poor governance are identified as major factors contributing to conflict across all affected zones. In Maichew, the local administration's irresponsibility and corruption have undermined social cohesion, as evidenced by the politicization of aid distribution and the siphoning of resources for personal gain. This widespread corruption has led to a breakdown of trust in government institutions and a diminished faith in formal mechanisms for conflict resolution. This lack of trust creates a vacuum where informal and often violent methods of resolving disputes can thrive. In Bora, for instance, the ineffectiveness of local governance structures and the perception of corruption within the courts and administration further hinder conflict resolution efforts.

Fifth, the war has intensified existing social divisions based on clan, regional identity, and political affiliation. The sources describe a climate of fear and mistrust where individuals are targeted based on their perceived loyalties or affiliations. In Mehoni, the historically embedded divisions between localities like Raya, Agame, Enderta, and Wejerat underscore how long-standing social dynamics can shape present-day conflicts. Localism, where individuals from other areas are stigmatized and denied access to resources or opportunities, is a recurring theme in the sources. This prejudice

undermines social cohesion and can easily escalate into violence. For example, in Tembien, residents from different localities clashed over perceived inequities in resource distribution, highlighting the dangers of localism and exclusionary practices. Finally, the role of external actors and influences complicates the dynamics of these conflicts. The involvement of external forces, such as the Eritrean Defense Force and Amhara militias, has created cycles of revenge within communities, as individuals are targeted based on their perceived political affiliations. Furthermore, rent-seeking investors, driven by profit maximization, often disregard community welfare, contributing to conflict over land and resources.

Their actions can exacerbate existing grievances and undermine local efforts to manage resources sustainably. Moreover, the influence of social media, while potentially a tool for communication and awareness-raising, has also contributed to conflict escalation by spreading misinformation and fueling polarization. This "information warfare" can manipulate perceptions, deepen divisions, and hinder reconciliation efforts. The intricate interplay of historical grievances, resource competition, governance issues, and the influence of external actors has created a volatile environment in Tigray. Addressing these challenges necessitates a comprehensive approach that fosters community engagement, equitable resource distribution, and the strengthening of governance structures to rebuild trust and promote social cohesion.

#### **4.3.2. Causes of Intra-Community Conflicts in the Region**

Understanding the causes of intra-community conflicts in Tigray requires a nuanced approach that recognizes the complexity and interdependence of various factors. These causes can be categorized into three overlapping dimensions: root, proximate, and immediate causes. However, it is essential to note that these categories are not watertight; rather, they represent a spectrum of influences that interact dynamically to shape the conflict landscape. Root causes often stem from historical grievances, socio-economic disparities, and systemic inequalities that have persisted over time. These foundational issues create an environment ripe for conflict, as communities grapple with unresolved injustices and marginalization. In Tigray, the legacy of past injustices—exacerbated by political and economic exclusion—has fostered deep-seated resentments that continue to influence inter-community relations today.

## **A. Root Causes**

Economic hardship, particularly rampant unemployment, serves as a significant catalyst for conflict in the Tigray region. The high unemployment rates, especially among youth and returnees from the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF), have precipitated an increase in criminal activities, including looting, burglary, and violent assaults, as individuals struggle for survival. In Mehoni, the absence of effective governmental enforcement mechanisms has fostered an environment where violent crimes, such as stabbings and burglaries, have become alarmingly prevalent. Competition for land, exacerbated by economic insecurity, intensifies community tensions. Wealthy individuals and relatives of government officials engage in land grabbing for personal gain, further straining the economic prospects of youth and TDF returnees.

This dynamic breeds conflict, as disillusioned youth perceive their prospects as increasingly bleak. In some instances, such competition has escalated into violence and revenge killings. For instance, in Mehoni, disputes over illegal land expansion and irrigation during dry seasons have incited inter-family and inter-clan conflicts, culminating in violent reprisals. Moreover, competition over natural resources, including sand, minerals, and forests, poses further risks for conflict. In Bora, illegal land expansion and charcoal production have sparked disputes. In Tabia Wa'ereb Deqali, approximately 60 farmers were found guilty of unlawfully expanding their landholdings, generating significant animosity among local residents.

Government-led mechanized gold mining initiatives in rural areas, particularly in the Shire lowlands, have further fueled grievances. These initiatives often appropriate community lands and mineral resources under the pretext of legal cooperativisation for former TDF returnees, leading to serious conflicts. Both local populations and ruling elites have become increasingly dependent on the lucrative mineral sector, exacerbating tensions. The relationship between communities and investors is fraught with discord, primarily due to the lack of integration of local communities into the benefits derived from mining operations. Although investment projects frequently promise community development initiatives, such as constructing water facilities or schools, these commitments often remain unfulfilled, engendering substantial community discontent, particularly among youth eager to engage in mining activities. Added to this, the use of harmful chemicals in mining operations has resulted in environmental pollution, adversely impacting agricultural lands,

water quality, and public health. Violent clashes, such as those at the Hitsats mining area in March 2024, illustrate how these tensions can escalate into conflict, resulting in fatalities among community members, investors, and illegal mining groups.

Weak Governance and Corruption is also another root cause. Corruption, particularly within local administrations, emerges as a critical driver of conflict in Tigray. Local administrations are frequently perceived as corrupt and unaccountable, fostering community frustration and eroding trust in formal governance structures. In Mehoni, the absence of the rule of law and a functional governance framework, dominated by a cadre of corrupt officials, has become a pivotal issue contributing to widespread lawlessness and social conflict. Local administrators are often implicated in illegal activities, such as siphoning resources intended for humanitarian aid and engaging in land grabbing. For example, in Maichew, humanitarian aid is routinely withheld from individuals deemed unsupportive of the federal government, politicizing aid and exacerbating social divisions.

Similarly, in Mehoni, corrupt officials have been accused of diverting resources meant for those in need. The lack of accountability for such actions fosters a climate of impunity, emboldening criminal activities and further undermining trust in institutions. Consequently, communities may resort to self-defense mechanisms, which erode the rule of law and can escalate violence. Corruption within the justice system, coupled with the perceived ineffectiveness of law enforcement, perpetuates a climate of impunity and fuels frustration. Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, such as the Abogereb, struggle to address the scale and complexity of the challenges confronting communities.

Another root cause can be explained in terms of Social Divisions and Trauma. The war and its aftermath have deepened social divisions and exacerbated existing tensions within communities. The influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has strained relationships, particularly in Mehoni, where notable social tensions exist between IDPs and local residents. These tensions are intensified by IDPs increasingly identifying themselves along narrow clan, village, and local lines. Wartime experiences have amplified social fractures, particularly between families of TDF combatants and non-combatants. Families of TDF combatants often claim government benefits, fostering

animosity among community members and contributing to a breakdown of trust within communities.

The various sources indicate a shift in social norms post-war, with heightened anger over minor issues, a decline in mutual aid, and a rise in individualism. Political divisions, particularly between supporters of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and those aligned with the interim administration, have become normalized, permeating personal relationships and creating rifts even among family members. The war has left many individuals, particularly youth, traumatized. This trauma, compounded by economic hardship and limited opportunities, has led to a surge in crime and violence. Reports indicate a pervasive sense of hopelessness among youth, who often perceive few viable options for the future. In Bora, for example, the rise in criminal activities is linked to the aftermath of the conflict, with PSI3 asserting that these issues are products of wartime crises necessitating urgent attention.

The recent war has exacerbated existing tensions rooted in historical grievances and unresolved disputes, particularly regarding land ownership. In Mehoni, intra-community divisions, previously less pronounced, have escalated in the post-war context, often delineated along localities such as Raya, Agame, Enderta, and Wejerat, with further subdivisions based on geographic and social distinctions. These divisions reflect a significant erosion of social cohesion, indicating that the conflict has exposed and deepened historical fault lines within the community. The war has disrupted traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, further complicating efforts to address these long-standing issues. The weakened capacity of governmental law enforcement and the erosion of moral, social, and economic institutions within the community further exacerbate these challenges.

Other roots causes can be explained as in relation to external actors and their influences: The presence of armed groups, including the Eritrean Defense Force, Ethiopian Defense Forces, and Amhara militias, has intensified intra-community conflicts. Their violence against Tigrayan communities, coupled with the dissemination of false narratives labeling victims as TPLF affiliates, has fueled cycles of revenge. The control of areas by opposing factions has resulted in individuals being targeted based on perceived affiliations, leading to violence and mistrust. Furthermore, the involvement of external investors in sectors such as mining can exacerbate conflict. In the mining

sector, the failure to integrate local communities into the benefits derived from operations has led to significant community discontent.

Promises of community development initiatives often go unfulfilled, and environmental pollution from mining activities further destabilizes community relations. Besides, Human trafficking networks exploit vulnerable populations, contributing to community unrest. The presence of unemployed and destitute youth, driven by inclinations toward banditry, has resulted in increased incidents of theft and looting, further destabilizing community relations. In conclusion, these conflicts are not merely a consequence of the recent war; they are deeply rooted in long-standing social, economic, and political issues that have been exacerbated by the ongoing conflict.

## **B. Proximate Causes**

Proximate causes are those that act as catalysts for conflict, often triggered by specific events or conditions. In the context of Tigray, these may include competition for resources, land disputes, and the effects of weak governance. Such factors can ignite tensions that have been simmering beneath the surface, leading to escalated violence and instability. Thus, the intra-community conflicts in Tigray are driven by a complex interplay of proximate factors, including competition over land and resources, weak governance, social divisions, trauma from wartime experiences, and the influence of external actors. These elements not only contribute to conflict but also reinforce one another, creating a challenging environment for peace and stability. In view of this, the subsequent section deals with such causes

Competition for land and resources is a significant catalyst for conflict in the Tigray region, particularly in the aftermath of the war, which has exacerbated economic insecurity. Wealthy individuals and those connected to government officials have exploited the chaotic post-war environment to seize land for personal gain. This practice disenfranchises local communities, especially unemployed youth and TDF returnees, fostering resentment. For example, in Mehoni, reports indicate that extensive tracts of land have been allocated to affluent individuals and relatives of officials under the guise of investment, prioritizing personal profit over community welfare. This has intensified feelings of hopelessness among vulnerable populations, pushing them toward criminal activities and illegal migration. Besides, ambiguities in guidelines for utilizing natural resources, such as irrigation water and mineral rights, have led to escalating tensions

between communities. In Adigrat, conflicts over access to irrigation systems have resulted in confrontations among farmers, while competition for control over lucrative mining rights has sparked disputes between local communities and external investors. The prevalence of illegal construction, land grabbing, and unregulated mining operations has further undermined the rule of law, leading to widespread grievances. In Adwa, reports of land grabbing have incited protests from local farmers, reflecting dissatisfaction with the erosion of property rights.

Weak governance and pervasive corruption within local administrations significantly exacerbate conflict dynamics. Communities often perceive local officials as corrupt and unaccountable, engendering widespread distrust. Humanitarian aid has frequently been weaponized, with assistance denied to individuals deemed unsupportive of the government. In Maichew, informants report that aid is routinely withheld from those viewed as less favorable to the federal administration, deepening societal divisions. Furthermore, allegations of corrupt officials diverting resources intended for community welfare exacerbate resentment. In Mehoni, informants have indicated that local officials have siphoned off resources meant for vulnerable populations, intensifying social divisions and fostering animosity. Local administrators are often implicated in illegal activities, such as land grabbing, which aggravates community tensions. In Bora, individuals involved in human trafficking exploit vulnerable youth, complicating the social fabric of the community and further destabilizing relations.

The war and its aftermath have exacerbated existing social divisions and created new ones, leading to a profound breakdown in social cohesion. Tensions between families of TDF combatants and non-combatants are pronounced, as the former often receive government benefits, leading to animosity and accusations of preferential treatment. This dynamic has strained community relations, particularly in Bora. Moreover, the war has heightened divisions along clan, village, and regional lines. In Mehoni, internally displaced persons (IDPs) increasingly identify themselves based on narrow affiliations, resulting in heightened tensions with local residents. The psychological impact of the war has left many individuals traumatized, particularly youth. This trauma, coupled with economic hardship, has contributed to a rise in crime and violence, further destabilizing communities. Informants in Mehoni report a significant decline in social cohesion among IDPs and the host community, primarily attributed to the impacts of war and subsequent socio-economic challenges.

While internal factors significantly drive intra-community conflicts, the influence of external actors is also notable. Violence perpetrated by the Eritrean Defense Force, Ethiopian Defense Forces, and Amhara militias has engendered cycles of revenge and fueled mistrust within communities. These groups often target individuals based on perceived affiliations, exacerbating polarization. Furthermore, the engagement of external investors, particularly in the mining sector, can intensify existing tensions. The lack of transparency in mining operations, along with the failure to integrate local communities into the benefits derived from these ventures, has resulted in significant conflict. Human trafficking networks exploit vulnerable populations, creating conflict between smugglers and families. Operating with impunity, these networks further destabilize community relations and contribute to social unrest.

Thus, the proximate causes of intra-community conflict in Tigray are deeply interconnected and often reinforce one another. The erosion of governance structures creates fertile ground for corruption and exploitation, exacerbating existing social divisions and inequalities. The trauma of war, combined with the influx of IDPs, adds another layer of complexity, intensifying competition for scarce resources and fueling mistrust. The actions of external actors, from armed groups to investors, further exacerbate these tensions and undermine efforts to foster peace. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of these factors, focusing on building trust, promoting dialogue, and creating opportunities for sustainable development.

### **C. Immediate Causes**

Immediate causes refer to the direct triggers that lead to conflict escalation. These may include specific incidents of violence, political decisions, or shifts in power dynamics within communities. In Tigray, the interplay of immediate events—such as clashes over land or resources—can rapidly escalate into broader conflicts, drawing in various stakeholders and complicating resolution efforts. In view of this, such causes can be explained in the following manner.

The actions of certain former members of the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF), particularly those facing unemployment, have emerged as a direct catalyst for conflict, especially in Bora. Criminal behaviors, including robbery, burglary, and cattle rustling, have been largely attributed to the misconduct of these former TDF members. This rise in criminal activity has precipitated

confrontations with local youth and exacerbated existing social divisions within the community. Added to this, former TDF members are implicated in illegal land expansion and charcoal production, further intensifying resource conflicts. Such illegal activities not only undermine local economies but also fuel tensions among community members, leading to a cycle of instability.

The trauma inflicted by the war, coupled with perceptions of preferential treatment afforded to families of TDF combatants, has engendered profound social divisions in Tigray. In Bora, there is palpable tension between families of TDF combatants and non-combatants, as the former often receive government benefits. This dynamic has fostered animosity and accusations of preferential treatment among community members, deepening societal rifts. Furthermore, the conflict has led to the labeling of individuals as "TDFites" and "non-TDFites," significantly impacting the distribution of legal and economic benefits. This stigmatization not only entrenches social divisions but also fuels inter-community discord, complicating efforts toward reconciliation.

Politicization of Humanitarian Aid is also another notable cause under this category. The distribution of humanitarian aid has devolved into a contentious issue, particularly in Maichew, where it is frequently wielded as a political instrument to reward those perceived as loyal to the government. This politicization has resulted in the exclusion of individuals deemed less supportive of the federal administration, engendering resentment among those who are marginalized from receiving assistance. Moreover, the distribution process often favors families of martyrs and TDF families, exacerbating societal divisions and inflaming tensions within the community. This selective approach undermines the principles of equity and justice in humanitarian assistance, further complicating the already fragile social fabric of the region.

The misconduct of corrupt local officials, particularly in their engagement in illegal activities and the abuse of power, directly contributes to conflict dynamics in Tigray. Corrupt officials have facilitated illegal land expansion, disproportionately benefiting affluent individuals while marginalizing the poor and unemployed, particularly in Mehoni. This practice undermines community trust and exacerbates inequalities. Moreover, local officials are implicated in the diversion of resources intended for community welfare, particularly humanitarian aid. This siphoning deepens resentment and distrust among residents, further destabilizing community relations. Reports also indicate that corrupt officials have engaged in human trafficking, exploiting

vulnerable youth with false promises of migration for personal gain, as documented in Bora. Such exploitation not only harms individuals but also erodes community cohesion.

The fierce competition for scarce resources, particularly land and minerals, constitutes an immediate cause of conflict across various regions of Tigray. In Axum, land disputes have surfaced as critical issues, with urban and rural land becoming sources of wealth for a select few. This has led to contested claims and strained community relations, as marginalized groups fight for their rights. Furthermore, control over gold mining operations has become a contentious issue, often contested between government forces and unemployed youth, resulting in recurrent tensions, particularly in the post-war context. The struggle for control over lucrative resources exacerbates existing conflicts and highlights the need for clear guidelines in resource management. In Adigrat, the absence of such guidelines for the utilization of natural resources and irrigation land has precipitated disputes, with disagreements over water usage leading to confrontations between farmers.

This illustrates the urgent need for effective resource management to mitigate conflict. In sum, these immediate causes of conflict are deeply interconnected, contributing to a broader environment of instability and violence in Tigray. They underscore the urgent necessity for effective governance, equitable resource management, and community reconciliation efforts. Addressing these challenges is imperative for fostering peace and stability in the region.

#### **4.3.3 A Comprehensive Synthesis of the Causes (Root, Proximate, and Immediate)**

The intra-community conflicts in Tigray arise from a complex interplay of various factors categorized as root, proximate, and immediate causes. While these categories help in understanding the dynamics of conflict, it is important to note that they are not distinctly separate; rather, they overlap and influence each other. Root causes often include historical grievances and systemic inequalities, while proximate causes are typically linked to competition for resources and governance issues. Immediate causes refer to specific incidents that trigger escalation. This section will explore these interconnected causes, providing a comprehensive analysis of their roles in shaping the conflict landscape in Tigray.

The interplay between these categories underscores the complexity of intra-community conflicts in Tigray. Root causes lay the groundwork for tensions, while proximate causes can exacerbate these issues, leading to immediate triggers that spark violence. Recognizing this interconnectedness is crucial for developing effective strategies to address the underlying issues and foster long-term peace and reconciliation. This comprehensive analysis will delve into each of these dimensions, highlighting their significance and exploring how they collectively contribute to the ongoing conflicts in Tigray.

By examining these causes in detail, we can better understand the multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by communities in the region. The intra-community conflicts in Tigray are rooted in a complex interplay of historical grievances, socio-economic disparities, weak governance structures, and competition for resources. These interrelated factors collectively contribute to a volatile environment where tensions escalate, undermining social cohesion and hindering peace efforts.

At the heart of these conflicts lie historical grievances that resonate deeply within communities. The legacy of past injustices and systemic marginalization has fostered a pervasive sense of resentment and mistrust among different groups. Land disputes, often rooted in unresolved issues of ownership and usage, are particularly significant. In the aftermath of the war, competition for land and resources has intensified, making historical claims increasingly contentious. For instance, in Mehoni, the war has led to an unprecedented fracturing of community ties along regional and social lines, reawakening historical divisions that were thought to be dormant. This fragmentation highlights how the conflict has exacerbated existing rifts, with divisions emerging along clan, village, and regional lines. The allocation of land to wealthy individuals and government officials under the guise of investment has further disenfranchised local communities, particularly unemployed youth and TDF returnees. This practice not only fuels resentment but also pushes some individuals toward criminal activities and illegal migration as they seek alternative means of survival.

Socio-economic disparities represent another critical factor contributing to intra-community conflicts. Economic inequalities, exacerbated by the war, have created a profound sense of injustice among those who feel marginalized or excluded from opportunities. In the post-war context, competition for scarce resources—including land, employment, and humanitarian aid—

has intensified tensions between various groups. The inequitable distribution of humanitarian assistance, often favoring individuals perceived as loyal to the government, has exacerbated societal divisions and fostered animosity within communities. Furthermore, the mining sector exemplifies these disparities, as local communities frequently find themselves excluded from the benefits derived from mining operations. This exclusion leads to significant resentment and conflict between residents and investors, as communities witness the exploitation of their resources without reaping any of the rewards.

Weak governance structures significantly contribute to the perpetuation of conflict in Tigray. The absence of effective, accountable, and transparent governance breeds corruption, impunity, and a profound lack of trust in authorities. In Maichew, for instance, informants have noted the local administration's extreme irresponsibility and corruption, which have undermined social cohesion. The politicization of aid, where assistance is withheld from those perceived as less supportive of the federal government, exacerbates societal divisions and erodes community trust. Moreover, the passivity of police and militia during conflicts creates an environment where violent crimes thrive, fostering a culture of self-defense and further eroding trust in the rule of law. The misconduct of former TDF members, coupled with weak security structures, has led to increased criminal activities and confrontations with local communities, particularly in areas like Bora.

Competition for scarce resources is a significant driver of conflict in Tigray. Land remains a highly contested resource, with disputes over ownership, usage, and access contributing to escalating tensions. Competition for natural resources such as forests, water, and minerals intensifies conflicts. For example, in Tembien, prohibitions against gathering wood from nearby mountains, combined with an influx of migrants, have fueled conflicts over access to essential resources. In Shire, government-led mechanized gold mining initiatives have generated grievances by appropriating community lands and mineral resources, leading to serious conflicts between local populations and ruling elites.

The psychological impact of the war has compounded these challenges, leading to widespread trauma, fear, and a breakdown of trust among communities. In Axum, unprecedented levels of violence have shattered community cohesion and resilience. Propaganda and manipulation during the conflict have further exploited existing divisions for political gain, exacerbating tensions among communities.

In general, the root causes of intra-community conflicts in Tigray are deeply embedded in the region's social, economic, and political fabric. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach that confronts historical injustices, mitigates socio-economic disparities, strengthens governance structures, and promotes accountability. By fostering dialogue and rebuilding trust among communities, it is possible to break the cycle of conflict and pave the way for a more harmonious and stable future in Tigray. Only through such multifaceted efforts can lasting peace and reconciliation be achieved, creating an environment conducive to social cohesion and sustainable development.

#### **4.4. Actors and their Roles in the Intra-Community Conflicts**

Intra-community conflicts in Tigray are shaped by a diverse array of actors, each contributing to the complexities of the situation. Understanding these roles is essential for developing effective solutions and fostering sustainable peace. Below, we categorize these actors into three groups: Key Actors, Secondary Actors, and Other Actors.

##### **4.4.1. Key Actors**

The landscape of intra-community conflict in Tigray is significantly influenced by various key actors, primarily government entities, returning fighters, political organizations, economic stakeholders, and social leaders. Local government officials often exacerbate tensions through corruption and mismanagement of resources, leading to a breakdown of public trust. For instance, in Maichew, reports indicate that local administrators manipulate the distribution of humanitarian aid, favoring individuals aligned with the federal government, which deepens existing social divisions. Similarly, in Mehoni, allegations of corrupt officials siphoning off resources intended for vulnerable populations further entrench social inequalities, creating a climate of resentment and conflict.

The role of the Tigray Security Forces is also critical, as some personnel engage in illegal activities, such as arms trafficking and unauthorized participation in the lucrative gold mining sector, often at the expense of local communities. This not only undermines trust in security institutions but also intensifies tensions within affected communities. The federal government plays a pivotal role as well, with its policies significantly impacting local governance and community relations. Delays in providing reintegration support for returning fighters and internally displaced persons (IDPs),

alongside the lack of implementation of the Pretoria Agreement, contribute to ongoing conflicts and frustrations among the populace. Returning fighters present another layer of complexity in the conflict dynamics.

Many of these individuals struggle with reintegration due to trauma and limited economic opportunities. In Adigrat, for example, the absence of organized leadership and support systems for returnees has fostered distrust and tensions with both local residents and government officials. Some returnees, particularly those without adequate support, may resort to violence or criminal activities, destabilizing their communities further. Reports from Adwa and Naeder highlight a troubling rise in banditry among these individuals, illustrating the security risks linked to weak reintegration efforts.

Political actors, including the TPLF and the Tigray Interim Administration, are key players in this conflict landscape. Internal divisions within the TPLF contribute to instability and create factions that exacerbate community divisions. Moreover, opposition political parties, while officially recognized, often align with factions within the TPLF, further polarizing the political environment and hindering reconciliation efforts. External forces, such as the Eritrean Defense Force and Amhara militias, complicate the situation by perpetrating violence, spreading misinformation, and fueling cycles of revenge, adding to the already volatile context.

Economic actors, particularly investors, significantly influence the conflict landscape. Driven by profit maximization, many investors engage in land grabbing and resource exploitation, often neglecting community welfare. In Axum, for instance, the transformation of land into wealth for a select few has led to contested claims and social disintegration. The failure of mining sector investors to fulfill promises of community development further intensifies grievances and perceptions of exploitation among local populations. Brokers involved in land transactions, often with connections to political and security actors, facilitate deals that can exacerbate conflicts through corruption and favoritism, undermining community trust.

Social actors also play a vital role in shaping intra-community dynamics. Some Religious leaders, while influential, can sometimes exacerbate tensions due to internal divisions and competition for resources. In Axum, hostility among intra-religious leaders, particularly within the diocese of the church, and inter-religious leaders have been cited as a significant source of conflict in Axum. Furthermore, social media activists can amplify divisive narratives, spread misinformation, and

hinder reconciliation efforts, demonstrating the dual-edged nature of digital communication in contemporary conflict settings.

Community dynamics characterized by localism and the erosion of social values further complicate the conflict landscape. Localism, which favors locals and excludes outsiders, undermines social cohesion and can lead to violent clashes over perceived inequities in resource distribution, as seen in Tembien. The breakdown of trust and social norms, driven by greed and hardship, contributes significantly to the ongoing conflicts, highlighting the need for comprehensive approaches to restore social cohesion and trust.

#### **4.4.2. Secondary Actors**

In addition to the key actors, several secondary actors play a crucial role in the intra-community conflicts in Tigray. Among these, unemployed youth are frequently highlighted as significant contributors to the conflict dynamics. Driven by economic hardship and a lack of opportunities, many young people become involved in criminal activities such as robbery, cattle rustling, and illegal migration, which further destabilize communities and fuel tensions. This demographic frustration often manifests in violence, exacerbating already strained social relations.

The demobilization of former Tigray Defense Forces TDF members, informally, has also created a large population of individuals struggling to reintegrate into civilian life. Many former combatants face economic hardships and limited opportunities, leading some to engage in criminal activities that contribute to insecurity and conflict. Their perceived preferential treatment in aid distribution compared to other community members' further fuels resentment and divisions within the communities.

Community leaders play a complex role in these conflicts. While some leaders work to promote peace and reconciliation, others exploit their positions for personal gain or political manipulation, contributing to divisions and grievances. Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, such as the Abogereb, have been weakened by the recent conflict, limiting their effectiveness in addressing disputes and promoting harmony.

Priests and church administrators also hold significant influence within communities, yet internal divisions within religious institutions can exacerbate tensions. Competition over resource control and differing political alignments among religious leaders can undermine peacebuilding efforts

and contribute to conflict. Besides, land brokers often exploit existing disputes and legal loopholes to profit from land transactions, contributing to land grabbing and unfair compensation practices that further aggravate community grievances. The involvement of human trafficking facilitators adds another layer of complexity, as criminal networks exploit vulnerable individuals seeking economic opportunities, leading to conflicts between smugglers and families and contributing to broader social unrest.

The interplay between these secondary actors and the broader political, economic, and social dynamics in Tigray underscores the multifaceted nature of the conflict. Their actions and interests often intersect with those of primary actors, creating a multi-layered conflict landscape that requires careful consideration in peacebuilding efforts.

#### **4.4.3. Other Actors**

Beyond the key and secondary actors, a variety of other players contribute to the intra-community conflicts in Tigray, further complicating the situation. Internally Displaced Persons represent a significant demographic affected by the war, with millions displaced and facing severe challenges. Competition for scarce resources such as housing, food, and employment opportunities between IDPs and host communities creates tension and conflict. In Mehoni, for instance, social cohesion has significantly deteriorated, not only between IDPs and the host community but also within the host community itself, primarily attributed to the socio-economic and political impacts of the war.

The families of martyrs and TDF families often receive preferential treatment in aid distribution, which breeds resentment among other community members. This perceived inequality exacerbates existing tensions and undermines community solidarity. Wealthy individuals also exploit the current situation for personal gain, engaging in land grabbing and illegal mining. In some areas, like Mehoni and rural areas of Raya Azebo, large tracts of land have been allocated to wealthy individuals and relatives of government officials under the guise of investment, often benefiting a select few rather than the community at large.

This practice fosters feelings of hopelessness among unemployed youth and returnees from the TDF, pushing them toward criminal activities, like drug trafficking, transfer of small arms and weapons, and illegal migration as they seek alternative means of survival.

Conflicts arising between agricultural investors and local communities further illustrate the complexities of the situation. Disputes over land, unfair compensation, and disruptions to traditional livelihoods exacerbate existing inequalities and contribute to social unrest. In Raya Azebo, instances have been reported where investors excavate land around their plots, creating hazards for local livestock and disrupting access to water for agricultural purposes, leading to significant conflicts between investors and the local community. Informal local interest groups also play a role in the conflict landscape, often mobilizing communities against perceived outsiders or competitors. Driven by self-interest and the desire to control local resources, these groups can exploit existing grievances, contributing to the escalation of conflicts and hindering reconciliation efforts.

Lastly, local institutions such as Development Groups, Community Peace Forums, and various associations have historically been responsible for security, economic support, and community discipline. However, the Tigray war has significantly weakened these institutions, impacting their ability to mediate conflicts and promote reconciliation effectively. Corruption and embezzlement by regular and irregular officials and politicians further complicate the situation, as they form patronage relationships that allow for the theft of resources at the expense of vulnerable populations.

In sum, the intricate web of actors involved in the intra-community conflicts in Tigray highlights the need for a comprehensive understanding of their motivations, actions, and interactions. By addressing the grievances and interests of both key and secondary actors, as well as recognizing the contributions of other players, policymakers and peacebuilders can develop more effective strategies to address the root causes of conflict and promote lasting peace in the region.

#### **4.4.4. The Actors and Dynamics of Intra-Community Conflicts: A Synthesis**

The different sources depict intra-community conflict in Tigray as stemming from a complex interplay of actors whose actions exploit existing grievances, further destabilizing communities. These actors can be categorized and explained as follows:

The Federal Government is officially committed to peace; however, its actions often contradict this stance. Delayed funding for returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), inadequate implementation of the Pretoria Agreement, and a perceived neglect of Tigray's needs contribute

to growing resentment and distrust among local communities. The TPLF and its sect within the Interim Administration play a significant role in the conflict landscape as they vie for power. Their policies, political maneuvering, and internal divisions further polarize communities, undermining efforts toward unity.

Local Government Bodies face criticism for corruption and ineffective resource management. Their politically motivated decisions foster a climate of fear and insecurity, enabling opportunistic actors to exploit existing tensions within the community. Moreover, the Tigray Security Forces and Officials are accused of prioritizing personal gain and political maneuvering over adherence to institutional procedures and respect for Tigray's security framework. This behavior exacerbates existing tensions and contributes to a pervasive sense of lawlessness.

Economic actors significantly influence the conflict dynamics in Tigray. Wealthy Individuals exploit the post-war environment for personal gain, engaging in land grabbing and illegal mining while often influencing local officials. These actions exacerbate economic disparities and fuel resentment among marginalized communities. Conflicts also arise between Agricultural Investors and local communities due to land disputes, unfair compensation, and disruption of traditional livelihoods, leading to social unrest and undermining community trust. Brokers, who have connections to politicians and security bodies, facilitate transactions and negotiations but often introduce corruption and favoritism, complicating existing conflicts. Furthermore, Rent-Seeking Investors prioritize profit over community welfare, contributing to land disputes and resource exploitation, which fosters a perception of neglect among those in power.

Social actors play a crucial role in the intra-community conflict in Tigray. Unemployed Youth, driven by economic hardship, lack of opportunities, and trauma from war, frequently engage in criminal activities, further destabilizing communities and escalating tensions. Former TDF Members struggle to reintegrate into civilian life; limited economic opportunities and perceived preferential treatment in aid distribution lead some to criminal behavior, breeding resentment and conflict. The presence of massive IDPs in some urban areas creates competition for scarce resources with host communities, generating tension that exacerbates social divisions and undermines community cohesion, particularly in regions like Mehoni. Furthermore, families of Martyrs and TDF Families often perceive preferential treatment in aid distribution and resource access, which fosters resentment and contributes to community divisions.

Human Trafficking Networks exploit vulnerable individuals seeking economic opportunities, leading to conflicts between smugglers and families, which contributes to broader insecurity and social unrest. Community Leaders can either promote peace and reconciliation or exploit their positions for personal gain or political manipulation, exacerbating divisions and grievances. The weakening of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms further hinders their effectiveness. Within religious institutions, Priests and Church Administrators experience internal divisions, often centered around resource control and political alignments, which fuel tensions and undermine peacebuilding efforts. Informal Local Interest Groups mobilize communities against perceived outsiders or competitors to control local resources, exploiting existing grievances and hindering reconciliation while escalating conflicts.

Moreover, Social Media Activists amplify voices and grievances but also disseminate misinformation and polarized narratives, exacerbating divisions and hindering reconciliation efforts. Opposition Political Parties contribute to increased polarization and heightened tensions by disseminating unfounded ideas and aligning with factions within the TPLF. Finally, some NGOs face criticism for maladministration of aid and perceived favoritism, which contributes to social divisions and feelings of inequality within communities.

The actions of these actors often intersect, creating a multi-layered conflict landscape in Tigray. Addressing the grievances and motivations of each group is crucial for achieving sustainable peace. Recommendations include strengthening government capacity, promoting community dialogue, empowering local institutions, and ensuring transparent and equitable resource management to mitigate these conflicts and foster reconciliation. Furthermore, there is a pressing need for economic recovery, social healing, and the restoration of trust to build a more stable and peaceful Tigray.

#### **A Web of Grievances: The Actors and Dynamics of Intra-Community Conflict in Tigray**

The various sources portray intra-community conflict in Tigray as arising from a complex interplay of actors whose actions exploit existing grievances and further destabilize communities. These actors can be categorized as follows:

#### Government Actors:

- *Federal Government:* While officially committed to peace, the federal government's actions, including delayed funding for returnees and IDPs, inadequate implementation of the Pretoria Agreement, and perceived neglect of Tigray's needs, fuel resentment and distrust among communities.
- *TPLF and Tigray Interim Administration:* These political entities, while vying for power, contribute to the conflict through their policies, political maneuvering, and internal divisions, further polarizing communities.
- *Local Government Bodies:* Criticized for corruption, ineffective resource management, and politically motivated decisions, local officials contribute to a climate of fear and insecurity, allowing opportunistic actors to exploit existing tensions.
- *Tigray Security Forces and Officials:* Accused of prioritizing personal gain and political maneuvering over institutional procedures and respect for Tigray's security framework, they exacerbate existing tensions and contribute to a sense of lawlessness.

#### Economic Actors:

- *Wealthy Individuals, which is relative:* These individuals exploit the post-war environment for personal gain, engaging in land grabbing, illegal mining, and influencing local officials. This exacerbates economic disparities and fuels resentment among marginalized communities.
- *Agricultural Investors:* Conflicts arise between investors and local communities due to land disputes, unfair compensation, and the disruption

of traditional livelihoods, leading to social unrest and undermining community trust.

- **Brokers:** With connections to politicians and security bodies, they facilitate transactions and negotiations, often introducing corruption and favoritism that complicate conflicts.
- **Rent-Seeking Investors:** Prioritizing profit over community welfare, they contribute to land disputes, resource exploitation, and a perception of being disregarded by those in power.

#### Social Actors:

- **Unemployed Youth:** Driven by economic hardship, lack of opportunities, and war trauma, they are frequently involved in criminal activities, further destabilizing communities and fueling tensions.
- **Former TDF Members:** Struggling to reintegrate into civilian life, some engage in criminal activities due to limited economic opportunities and perceived preferential treatment in aid distribution, breeding resentment and conflict.
- **IDPs:** Competition for scarce resources with host communities creates tension, exacerbating social divisions and undermining community cohesion, particularly in areas like Mehoni.
- **Families of Martyrs and TDF Families:** Preferential treatment in aid distribution and resource access fuels resentment and perceptions of inequality, further dividing communities.

- **Human Trafficking Networks:** Exploiting vulnerable individuals seeking economic opportunities, they create conflicts between smugglers and families, contributing to broader insecurity and social unrest.
- **Community Leaders:** While some work towards peace and reconciliation, others exploit their positions for personal gain or political manipulation, contributing to divisions and grievances. The weakening of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms further hinders their effectiveness.
- **Priests and Church Leaders:** Internal divisions within religious institutions, often over resource control and political alignments, fuel tensions and undermine peacebuilding efforts.
- **Informal Local Interest Groups:** Mobilizing communities against perceived outsiders or competitors to control local resources, they exploit existing grievances, hindering reconciliation and escalating conflicts.
- **Social Media Activists:** While amplifying voices and grievances, they also spread misinformation and polarized narratives, exacerbating divisions and hindering reconciliation efforts.
- **Opposition Political Parties:** Disseminating unfounded ideas and aligning with factions within the TPLF, they contribute to increased polarization and escalate tensions.
- **NGOs:** Criticized for maladministration of aid and perceived favoritism, they contribute to social divisions and perceptions of inequality.

The actions of these actors often intersect and create a multi-layered conflict landscape in Tigray. Addressing the grievances and motivations of each group is crucial for achieving sustainable peace. The sources recommend strengthening government capacity, promoting community dialogue, empowering local institutions,

and ensuring transparent and equitable resource management to mitigate these conflicts and foster reconciliation. They also emphasize the need for economic recovery, social healing, and the restoration of trust to build a more stable and peaceful Tigray.

#### **4.5. Interventions Mechanisms Across Tigray: Approaches, Successes, and Challenges**

The examination of intervention strategies across various zones in Tigray reveals a multifaceted approach aimed at addressing intra-community conflicts. These interventions are essential for restoring peace and rebuilding social cohesion in the wake of recent conflicts, showcasing a complex interplay of successes and challenges that reflect the region's unique socio-political landscape.

##### **4.5.1. Traditional Mechanisms**

Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, particularly the Abogereb, are vital for mediating disputes and fostering reconciliation within communities particularly in South and southeast zones of Tigray. In Maichew, the Abogereb has proven effective in reconciling serious offenses, including homicide. For example, in a recent case involving a murder dispute, the Abogereb facilitated dialogue between the families of the victim and the accused, leading to a negotiated settlement that avoided further violence. This illustrates the potential of traditional mechanisms to address severe conflicts through culturally accepted practices. Similarly, in Wejerat, the Abogereb has adeptly managed severe disputes, particularly those involving murder, significantly reducing the risk of blood revenge, a common cycle of violence in many communities.

The reliance on this traditional mechanism reflects a cultural commitment to resolving conflicts through established norms rather than resorting to violence. However, in Bora, the Abogereb faces significant challenges, particularly in meeting the demands of victims who often seek exorbitant blood compensation. This gap highlights the tension between traditional practices and contemporary societal expectations, indicating a need for these mechanisms to evolve.

In Mehoni, traditional structures such as Qere (Edir) and the Abogereb remain operational but are increasingly criticized for their inability to address the broader spectrum of community challenges.

Critics argue that these mechanisms often overlook modern issues such as economic disparities and social divisions that exacerbate conflicts, suggesting a need for reform to enhance their effectiveness. Community forums have emerged as crucial platforms for conflict resolution, engaging a diverse array of stakeholders, including TDF returnees, civilian youth, religious leaders, and elders.

In Wejerat, a community forum established at the Tabia level has effectively navigated significant disagreements through inclusive and comprehensive approaches. For instance, this forum organized a series of dialogues that brought together conflicting parties to discuss grievances openly, fostering an environment of mutual understanding and cooperation. Such initiatives demonstrate the power of community-led efforts in building social capital and promoting peace.

#### **4.5.2. Formal Governance Structures and Peace Committees:**

Another modalities includes Formal peace committees, established at both the Tabia and woreda levels, play a pivotal role in peacebuilding efforts. In Maichew, these committees are instrumental in promoting peace and resolving community disputes, thereby preventing the escalation of violence. They facilitate discussions among different community groups, addressing underlying tensions before they escalate into conflict. For example, during a period of heightened tension over land disputes, the peace committee organized mediation sessions that successfully resolved the issues, preventing potential violence.

This proactive approach exemplifies the importance of early intervention in conflict resolution. However, these formal governance structures often suffer from perceptions of corruption and ineffectiveness. In Bora, for instance, the weakness and corruption inherent in these structures severely undermine their capacity to resolve conflicts effectively. Community members frequently express frustration over the lack of accountability and transparency, which diminishes their trust in these institutions. Reports of bribery and favoritism have led to widespread disillusionment, prompting many to revert to traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution. This trend underscores the urgent need for institutional reform to restore public confidence in formal governance.

Besides, Religious leaders have emerged as pivotal figures in promoting peaceful coexistence and mediating conflicts. In Wejerat, confession fathers actively advocate for harmonious relations among community members, leveraging their moral authority to influence social dynamics. For

example, during a period of heightened tension, religious leaders organized community prayers that emphasized themes of forgiveness and unity, leading to a de-escalation of potential conflicts. Their role in fostering dialogue is crucial, as they often serve as intermediaries between conflicting parties, demonstrating how faith-based initiatives can contribute to social stability.

In the Central and North Western Zones, the collaboration between peace committees and religious leaders has led to the successful resolution of numerous conflict cases. This partnership exemplifies the efficacy of faith-based interventions in fostering social stability. For instance, a joint initiative between a peace committee and local religious leaders resulted in the resolution of a long-standing land dispute that had divided a community for years. Such examples illustrate how faith can serve as a unifying force in conflict resolution, reinforcing the idea that collaborative efforts can yield significant benefits. Furthermore, local governments have forged partnerships with influential community members, including affluent individuals and respected elders, to cultivate trust and facilitate constructive dialogue.

This collaborative approach is particularly evident in the Eastern and parts of the Central Zones, where these alliances aim to address the pressing challenges faced by displaced individuals and returnees, who often struggle to reintegrate into their communities. By engaging respected figures within the community, local governments can enhance their legitimacy and effectiveness in peacebuilding efforts, paving the way for more inclusive and effective interventions.

#### **4.5.3. Challenges and Limitations of the Intervention Mechanisms**

Despite above identified intervention mechanisms, several pervasive challenges hinder the pursuit of sustainable peacebuilding efforts. The legacies of conflict have significantly eroded public trust in institutions and diminished respect for customary peace systems. This erosion is particularly pronounced in the Central and North Western Zones, where traditional peace mechanisms struggle to maintain their relevance and effectiveness. Many community members now view these mechanisms as outdated and incapable of addressing the complexities of contemporary disputes, leading to a growing reliance on informal and often violent means of conflict resolution. Besides, the prevalence of corruption within the justice system and ineffective governance structures severely obstruct conflict resolution efforts and undermine public confidence.

This issue is starkly illustrated in Bora, where weak and corrupt governance hampers conflict resolution. Reports of bribery and favoritism have led to widespread disillusionment with formal institutions. In Maichew, systemic corruption poses formidable obstacles to justice, as victims often feel compelled to resort to traditional mechanisms due to their lack of faith in formal processes. This lack of accountability not only perpetuates injustice but also fuels further resentment among community members.

Another challenge is related with economic hardship and resource scarcity. Dire economic conditions, characterized by poverty and unemployment, coupled with competition for scarce resources, exacerbate conflicts, particularly in the Eastern and parts of the Central Zones. The interplay of poverty and lawlessness contributes to a broader social breakdown, with land ownership disputes and resource competition further inflaming tensions. For example, disputes over access to water resources have led to violent confrontations between neighboring communities struggling to sustain their livelihoods. Such economic pressures create a fertile ground for conflict, necessitating comprehensive economic interventions alongside peacebuilding efforts.

Adding to the above challenges, lack of coordination and support systems are found to be component parts of these challenges. The effectiveness of peace mechanisms is severely limited by insufficient support, weak formal government systems, and a lack of coordination among stakeholders. This challenge is particularly evident in the North Western Zone, where peace mechanisms operate without adequate backing from local authorities, rendering them ineffective in addressing community needs. The absence of a coordinated approach undermines the potential for comprehensive peacebuilding and creates gaps in support for affected communities. Besides, Psychological Trauma and Reintegration Challenges are found to have critical debilitating effect. The psychological ramifications of the conflict, alongside the difficulties faced by returnees in reintegrating into society, complicate the conflict landscape.

This situation is particularly acute in the Eastern and parts of the Central Zones, where returnee fighters encounter societal rejection and a lack of organized support systems. The stigma attached to returning fighters often hinders their ability to reintegrate, resulting in feelings of isolation and resentment that can fuel further conflict. Addressing these psychological challenges is critical for fostering a stable and inclusive society.

In general, these challenges underscore the complexities inherent in achieving lasting peace and stability in Tigray. While certain interventions have yielded positive outcomes, addressing the underlying issues, such as enhancing governance, restoring trust in institutions, and promoting economic opportunities, is imperative for cultivating a more resilient and harmonious society. A holistic approach that integrates traditional practices, formal governance, and community engagement will be essential in navigating the path toward sustainable peace in Tigray.

### **Interventions in Various Areas of Tigray: An Illustration of Approaches, Successes and Existing Challenges**

The qualitative data collected from various sources highlight a variety of intervention mechanisms utilized across different zones in Tigray to address the root causes of intra-community conflicts and promote peace. These efforts demonstrate both successes and limitations:

Bora:

- **Intervention Mechanisms:**
  - Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, specifically the Abogereb: While acknowledged for its role in conflict resolution, the Abogereb struggles to cope with the demands of victims who often seek exorbitant blood money.
  - Formal governance structures: These are characterized as weak and corrupt, hindering conflict resolution.
- **Successes:** Limited information on successes is available for this region.
- **Challenges and Limitations:**
  - Inability of traditional mechanisms to meet victim demands: This creates obstacles in reaching resolutions.

- Weakness and corruption within formal governance: This undermines conflict resolution efforts and erodes public trust.

#### Maichew:

- Intervention Mechanisms:
  - Restructuring of security institutions: Aiming to enhance independence and effectiveness, but faces challenges due to perceived corruption within the police, courts, and legal professionals.
  - Abogereb: Recognized as an effective intervention, successfully reconciling several death-related crimes.
  - Formal peace committees at Tabia and Woreda levels: Instrumental in promoting peace and resolving community disputes, playing a crucial role in preventing interfamily and intergroup conflicts from escalating into violence.
  - Informal mechanisms: Including respected elder groups (Abogereb), guidance from religious leaders, and traditional and clanship associations that facilitate reconciliation.
- Successes:
  - Abogereb's effectiveness in resolving death-related crimes: This highlights the potential of traditional mechanisms in addressing serious conflicts.
  - Peace committees' role in preventing escalation of violence: Demonstrates the importance of formal structures in maintaining community peace.
- Challenges and Limitations:

- Corruption within the justice system: Undermines public trust and hinders conflict resolution efforts.
- Limited information on the long-term sustainability and impact of interventions: Further investigation is needed to assess the effectiveness and sustainability of peace committees and informal mechanisms.

**Mehoni:**

- Intervention Mechanisms:
  - Traditional social structures like Qere (Edir) and Abogereb: Acknowledged for their contributions to conflict resolution, but criticized as insufficient to address the scale of the challenges facing the community.
  - Formal peace committees under local administration, Abogereb, and religious organizations: While these play a role in addressing social conflicts, their effectiveness is limited compared to the scale of criminality and social divisions.
- Successes: Limited information on successes is available for this region.
- Challenges and Limitations:
  - Insufficiency of traditional structures: While functional, they struggle to cope with the magnitude of community challenges.
  - Limited effectiveness of formal and informal bodies: Despite their role in addressing conflicts, they are outmatched by the pervasiveness of criminality and social divisions.

## Wejerat:

- **Intervention Mechanisms:**
  - Community forum established at the Tabia level: Comprising TDF returnees, civilian youth, religious leaders, and elders, organized into six sub-committees, this forum has effectively addressed significant disagreements through comprehensive approaches.
  - Confession fathers: Recognized for their role in promoting peaceful coexistence.
  - Abogereb: Highlighted for its effectiveness in reconciling severe conflicts, particularly those involving murder, reducing the likelihood of blood revenge.
- **Successes:**
  - Effectiveness of the community forum in resolving disagreements: Demonstrates the potential of community-led initiatives in addressing conflicts.
  - Role of confession fathers in promoting peaceful coexistence: Highlights the influence of religious figures in fostering harmony.
  - Abogereb's success in reconciling severe conflicts: Shows the impact of traditional mechanisms in preventing further violence.
- **Challenges and Limitations:**
  - Limited information on the long-term sustainability of the community forum: Requires further examination to assess its effectiveness over time.
  - Potential challenges in maintaining the effectiveness of confession fathers and the Abogereb: Further research is needed to understand

the factors that contribute to their success and potential obstacles they may face.

Central and North Western Zones (Axum, Shire, Sheraro/Adyabo, Dedebit):

- Intervention Mechanisms:
  - Religious leaders and community figures: Actively involved in mediating conflicts and promoting reconciliation through forgiveness and mercy.
  - Peace committees: Collaborating with religious leaders, they have successfully resolved a large number of conflict cases, particularly in the Central Zone (Ahsea, Adwa, Naeder), positively impacting social cohesion and the rebuilding of peace and security infrastructures.
- Successes:
  - Effectiveness of collaboration between peace committees and religious leaders: This partnership has yielded positive results in resolving conflicts and fostering social cohesion.
  - Successful resolution of a long-standing conflict in Ahsea Woreda: This demonstrates the potential for successful interventions when traditional systems are engaged.
- Challenges and Limitations:
  - Erosion of moral integrity and respect for customary peace systems: This has diminished their effectiveness in the post-war context.
  - Lack of support for peace mechanisms in the North Western Zone: This limits their capacity to address conflicts comprehensively.

- Weak formal government systems: The scarcity and near-collapse of these systems create a significant gap in the intervention landscape.
- Lack of cohesion and coordination among stakeholders: The absence of a strong connection between the community, customary figures, and government hinders peace restoration.

Eastern and Parts of Central Zones (Adigrat, Tembien, Adwa):

- Intervention Mechanisms:
  - Partnership between local governments and influential community members: This approach involves wealthy individuals and elders in discussions to build trust and facilitate problem-solving through dialogue.
  - Roundtable discussions: These platforms provide a space for addressing grievances and fostering reconciliation among different community factions.
  - Support from entrepreneurs and affluent community members: These individuals contribute resources and expertise to assist vulnerable populations, alleviating economic burdens and strengthening social cohesion.
- Successes: Limited information on specific successes is available. However, the interventions aim to address issues related to displacement, returnee reintegration, and support for vulnerable groups.
- Challenges and Limitations:
  - Poverty and lawlessness: These factors undermine social cohesion and make it challenging to uphold values and order.

- Government incapacity: Limited resources hinder effective governance and support for communities.
- Strained public budget and lack of accountability: These contribute to tensions and a lack of trust in leadership.
- Erosion of governance principles and anarchism: These trends undermine political culture and social values, creating conditions conducive to conflict.
- Major crimes and intimidation: The involvement of security personnel in crimes and the intimidation of local administrations by returnees complicate conflict resolution.
- Lack of self-awareness and low participation in problem-solving initiatives: This hinders community-led efforts to address conflicts.
- Dissolution of key institutions: The breakdown of the police, community police, and development groups weakens community resilience and the capacity to address conflicts effectively.

The diverse approaches to intervention in Tigray underscore the complexity of the conflict landscape. While some mechanisms show promise in specific contexts, overarching challenges persist, hindering sustainable peacebuilding efforts. Addressing these limitations, such as strengthening government capacity, restoring trust in institutions, and fostering community cohesion, is crucial for achieving lasting peace and stability in Tigray.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

#### **5.1 Conclusion**

The Tigray region of Ethiopia is currently grappling with a significant escalation of intra-community conflicts, a troubling legacy of the recent war and its enduring socio-economic and political ramifications. This situation presents a sobering reality for a region striving to rebuild amidst pervasive mistrust, social fragmentation, and widespread insecurity. Historical grievances and competition for resources have long been sources of tension; however, the war has acted as a catalyst, exacerbating existing divisions and introducing new challenges that threaten to unravel the very social fabric of Tigrian society.

A critical theme that emerges from this analysis is the profound erosion of trust in institutions, including governmental bodies, security forces, and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. The perceived failures of these institutions to protect citizens, deliver justice, and provide essential services have engendered widespread disillusionment and cynicism among the populace. Consequently, communities increasingly resort to informal and often less effective means of conflict resolution, further entrenching instability. This erosion of trust is particularly pronounced in areas where corrupt local officials exploit the prevailing chaos, alienating communities and intensifying resentment, thereby creating a fertile ground for violence and unrest.

Resource scarcity, particularly regarding land, has emerged as a major flashpoint for conflict. The war has forcibly displaced populations, disrupted livelihoods, and precipitated economic hardship, intensifying competition for limited resources. Land disputes, often exacerbated by inequitable distribution and inadequate compensation, are rampant across all zones, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive land reform and transparent resource management. This competition is particularly acute in regions where mining activities exacerbate tensions between local communities and investors, frequently culminating in violent confrontations that threaten to escalate into larger conflicts.

Moreover, the war has deepened existing social divisions and created new fault lines within communities. Political affiliations, ethnic identities, and perceived loyalties have become increasingly polarized, fostering an environment rife with mistrust and animosity. Returning fighters face substantial challenges in reintegrating into civilian life, often encountering stigma and hostility from their communities. The marginalization of vulnerable groups—such as women, youth, and internally displaced persons (IDPs)—further exacerbates these divisions, resulting in a volatile social landscape characterized by fragmentation and alienation. This disintegration of societal cohesion is particularly evident in urban centers where crime has normalized and traditional values have eroded.

The capacity and legitimacy of government institutions have been severely compromised, hampering efforts to effectively address these multifaceted conflicts. A lack of resources, pervasive corruption, and politically motivated decisions have further undermined public confidence in the government's ability to maintain order, provide essential services, and ensure justice. The challenges faced by traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are also noteworthy; while they have historically played a crucial role in mediating disputes, their authority and effectiveness have waned significantly due to the war and the rise of organized crime, rendering them increasingly impotent in the face of contemporary challenges.

Despite these formidable challenges, communities in Tigray are demonstrating remarkable resilience and a steadfast commitment to peacebuilding. Local initiatives, including peace committees, community dialogues, and collaborative efforts among religious leaders and community figures, are actively working to bridge divides, address grievances, and promote reconciliation. However, these efforts are often impeded by a lack of resources, insufficient coordination among stakeholders, and the persistent influence of external actors who may exacerbate tensions for their own political or economic gain.

Addressing the complex interplay of factors driving conflict in Tigray necessitates a multifaceted approach that transcends isolated interventions. A holistic strategy must prioritize restoring trust in institutions, managing resource competition, bridging social divisions, strengthening governance, and empowering community-led peacebuilding initiatives. This involves enhancing transparency and accountability in government actions, enacting land reform, promoting sustainable resource management practices, and ensuring equitable distribution of resources.

Moreover, fostering dialogue and understanding across different social groups is essential for promoting social cohesion and mitigating the risk of further conflict.

In sum, only through a comprehensive and collaborative approach that prioritizes community needs and strengthens local capacities can Tigray move towards lasting peace and sustainable development. The path forward demands an unwavering commitment from all stakeholders—government, civil society, and international partners—to address the multifaceted challenges facing the region, thereby laying the groundwork for a more stable and harmonious future. By acknowledging the complexity of these conflicts and empowering local communities to take a leading role in peacebuilding, it is possible to foster a more resilient and unified society in Tigray. This imperative for action is underscored by the urgent need to cultivate an environment conducive to reconciliation, stability, and enduring prosperity, ensuring that the lessons of the past are not merely acknowledged but transformed into a foundation for a more equitable and just future.

## **5.2. Recommendations**

The various sources provide a comprehensive analysis of the drivers and dynamics of intra-community conflicts in the Tigray region. Based on this information, several strategies can be implemented to mitigate these tensions and promote lasting peace:

- A. To effectively restore trust and legitimacy in governance, it is essential to implement a multifaceted strategy that addresses the underlying issues eroding public confidence. First and foremost, enhancing transparent and accountable governance is crucial. This can be achieved by establishing clear protocols for resource allocation, aid distribution, and land management, thereby mitigating the impacts of corruption and perceived favoritism. The creation of independent oversight bodies and accessible complaint mechanisms will further strengthen accountability, ensuring that government actions are responsive to community needs. In addition, empowering traditional conflict resolution mechanisms holds significant promise for fostering reconciliation in post-conflict environments. Institutions such as the Abogereb, despite their weakening during conflict, possess a degree of legitimacy that can be harnessed to address contemporary disputes.

By providing targeted training, resources, and institutional support, we can enhance their capacity to mediate conflicts effectively and promote community-driven solutions that resonate with local cultural values. Finally, facilitating dialogue and reconciliation initiatives is paramount for addressing societal grievances and building mutual understanding. Establishing inclusive platforms for dialogue among communities, local authorities, and other stakeholders, while supporting peace committees, will create opportunities for constructive engagement. Encouraging the involvement of respected figures, such as religious leaders and elders, in mediation efforts will lend further legitimacy to these processes.

- B. To effectively manage resource competition and alleviate economic hardship, a comprehensive approach is necessary to address the root causes of conflict and promote sustainable development. First and foremost, implementing land reform and transparent resource management is vital. Land disputes have emerged as a significant driver of conflict in Tigray. Establishing clear land tenure systems, ensuring fair compensation for land acquisition, and promoting sustainable land management practices can significantly mitigate these conflicts.

Furthermore, creating transparent and participatory mechanisms for allocating resources, such as water for irrigation and minerals for mining—is essential to ensure equitable access and minimize resentment among communities. Moreover, prioritizing economic recovery and job creation is crucial in the aftermath of war, which has devastated the economy and led to widespread unemployment, particularly among youth. By focusing on revitalizing the economy, creating job opportunities, and supporting entrepreneurship, we can address the economic drivers of conflict and provide alternative pathways for young people, thereby reducing the potential for unrest.

Finally, ensuring equitable and effective aid distribution is paramount for addressing humanitarian needs and mitigating conflict. Instances of corruption and politicization in aid distribution have exacerbated tensions and undermined trust. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that aid reaches those most in need in a transparent

and impartial manner. This requires strengthening accountability mechanisms, involving community representatives in distribution processes, and addressing the underlying issues of poverty and vulnerability.

- C. To effectively address social divisions and promote social cohesion, a multifaceted strategy is essential. First, supporting the reintegration of returning fighters is crucial, as these individuals often face significant challenges transitioning to civilian life, which can lead to potential conflicts. Providing comprehensive support, including psychological counseling, job training, and economic opportunities, can facilitate their transition and reduce tensions within communities. Besides, it is vital to address the needs of vulnerable groups disproportionately impacted by the war, such as women, youth, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Targeted programs that focus on their specific needs—such as access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities—are critical for fostering social inclusion and reducing vulnerability to exploitation and conflict. Countering negative social narratives is another key component.

The role of social media and political rhetoric in exacerbating divisions cannot be overlooked. Promoting positive social narratives, combating misinformation, and fostering inter-community dialogue can help bridge divides and reduce tensions. This includes supporting independent media, encouraging responsible social media use, and facilitating community-based peacebuilding initiatives.

- D. Strengthening governance and security is paramount for long-term stability. Enhancing the capacity and independence of security forces is essential, as weaknesses and lack of independence within these institutions contribute to conflict. Strengthening law enforcement through training, resources, and improved oversight can help maintain order, address criminality, and restore public confidence. Additionally, tackling issues of corruption and impunity within the security sector is necessary to ensure fair and impartial operations. Promoting inclusive and participatory governance is equally important. Empowering local

communities to engage in decision-making processes builds legitimacy and addresses local needs.

This can be achieved by decentralizing power, supporting local governance structures, and creating mechanisms for community input on development projects, resource management, and conflict resolution. Furthermore, enacting and enforcing laws that promote peace and justice is critical. The lack of adequate legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms poses significant challenges. Establishing clear and enforceable laws addressing land tenure, resource management, and criminal activity will provide a foundation for a more stable and just society. Strengthening the judicial system, ensuring access to justice for all, and holding perpetrators of violence accountable are vital steps in this process.

- E. Engaging external actors and fostering regional cooperation can significantly enhance peacebuilding efforts. Advocating for international support for peacebuilding and development is essential, as external assistance is needed to address the multifaceted challenges facing Tigray. Collaborating with international partners to secure funding for peacebuilding initiatives, economic recovery programs, and humanitarian assistance can greatly contribute to stability and development in the region. Promoting dialogue and cooperation with neighboring regions is also crucial.

The potential for inter-community conflicts, particularly with the Afar region, necessitates proactive measures. Facilitating dialogue and cooperation between Tigray and its neighbors can help address border disputes, resource-sharing issues, and other potential sources of conflict. This includes promoting cross-border trade, cultural exchange, and joint development projects. By implementing these comprehensive strategies, we can effectively address social divisions, strengthen governance, and foster regional cooperation, ultimately contributing to a more cohesive and peaceful society.

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