



Africa Amani Journal

ISSN 2709-2216



ISBN: 978-9966-025-51-7

Vol. 9 | Africa Amani Journal (c)

Chief Editor: Dr. Michael Sitawa

Vol. 9 Issue 1 | September 2022

Email: aaeditor@ipstc.org

Copyright © 2022 Africa Amani Journal
(AAJ)

Editing Oversight: International Peace
Support Training Centre

The Tigray Conflict: Stitching pieces for Conflict Transformation in Ethiopia

Authors:

Rodgers Mwansa and

Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and

International Relations

Nairobi Kenya,

Joachim Simbila

Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and

International Relations

Nairobi

Abstract

Despite the many efforts by the Ethiopian government to end escalation of conflict in Tigray, the situation seems to have reached a stalemate. Thousands of people have been killed, displaced, a lot of property destroyed and looted, while women and children have been sexually abused. The relationship between the Central government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) has been compromised. Drawing from preceding incidents of the conflict and as well as the historical and political struggle of Ethiopia, this article argues that the critical issue heightening the conflict between the parties is the struggle for power. While recognising the cease-fire efforts and humanitarian responses, the article further argues that the Tigray conflict is a work-up call to implore a more robust and multidimensional conflict transformation process that addresses the power struggle and other related social structural issues hindering sustainable peace in Ethiopia. Throughout the analysis, the article relies on relevant press, articles, and reports to support the arguments.

Key Words: Conflict, conflict transformation, power struggle, peace, civilians

Introduction

Ethiopia, one of the most famous countries on the continent of Africa and a host of the African Union (AU) has a long history of conflict. Other than the Tigray conflict that erupted on the 4th of November 2020, the country has gone through a number of conflicts including, but not limited to the 1974 dethronement of Emperor Haile Selassie in a military coup by the Marxist-Leninist Derg, 1977 Ethiopia's conflict with Somalia over Ogaden region, the overthrowing of Derg by Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1991, the 1998 war with Eritrea over delineation of the border, the 2016 anti-government protests, the 2018 ethnic violence in Guju-Gedeo and the 2019 Sidama zone civil unrest, among others (Institute for Security Studies, 2020). These and many others, have painted Ethiopia as a territory ruined by the forces of war and conflict, threatening political and economic development in the country.

Drawing from preceding incidents of the conflict and indeed the historical and political struggle in Ethiopia, this article argues that the critical issue heightening the conflict between the central government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in Tigray is the struggle for power. Hence, the existing Tigray conflict is a work-up call for the application of a robust conflict transformation process in Ethiopia's conflict.

Basing arguments on the conflict transformation theory as proposed by John Paul Lederach, the article presents the conflict situation in Tigray. Furthermore, it analyses the power struggle and political violence dilemma in Africa and Ethiopia in particular. In addition, it provides recommendation for a transformative process and peaceful co-existence. By so doing, the article contributes to the micro-level explanations of the dynamics of the conflict in Tigray while promoting the need for a more inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding process in Ethiopia. The article relies on literature research that include press articles, academic articles, reports of relevant organisations and institutions to substantiate arguments and drawing relevant conclusions.

Conflict Transformation Theory

Human beings are relational in their very nature and consequently, always exposed to social conflicts. When a conflict occurs, it affects and transforms the perceptions, attitudes, orientations, people, and relationships and that's the basis for the term conflict transformation. The transformation occurs naturally due to the cause-and-effect relationship.

This affects the way people think and relate to the conflict and with each other. Conflicts therefore play a major role in relationships as it changes it in predictable ways by altering communication, patterns of social organization, and altering images of self and others.

Considering that, this work has been inspired by the conflict transformation theory as the framework for analysis. John Paul Lederach, a pioneer among others to the term conflict transformation in his work, *Little book of Conflict Transformation* (2014), defines it as “the envision and response to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life giving opportunities for creating constructive change process that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real life problems in human relationships” (Lederach, 2014, p.3).

More to that, conflict transformation for him is “engaged in constructive change efforts that include and go beyond the resolution of specific problems. Elaborating further this point, Bloch and Schirch (2018) adds that, conflict transformation promotes a platform where nonviolent methods such as dialogue are used to address root causes of conflict and build a just and sustainable peace. Conflict transformation is scientifically sound language because it is based on two verifiable premises and realities: first, it acknowledges that conflict is normal in human relationships, and second, conflict is a motor of change” (Lederach, 2014, p.2). This methodology therefore provides a clear and important vision because it aims at fostering personal, relational, cultural and structural change in a conflict context. Below is a structure of transformational change process as proposed by Lederach.

Table 1: Process of transformational change

Kind of Change	Targeted Area played out
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Change 	Significant at the individual internal processes that requires; self-awareness of one's identity, inclination to and sources of power, skills development, attributes and knowledge, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relational Change 	Enhancing interaction and dialogue between people, parties, institutions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social & Cultural change. 	Need for societal and cultural shift in values – moving away from domination and violence, and strengthening partnership, justice, equity, and nonviolence approaches.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural Change 	Emphasising institutional shift – moving away from harmful structures, institutions, laws and regimes.

Source: adapted from, Lederach, 1997; Bloch & Schirch, 2018, p. 7.

Conflict transformation theory therefore is a multidimensional constructive process of change efforts. On the one hand, there is an empirical impact of conflict at the personal, relational, cultural and structural dimension of society. On the other hand, the patterns and dynamics of the roots and impacts of conflict require deliberative interventions in a more transformative way (Lederach, 2014, p.17). it is therefore imperative to note that at the base of conflict transformation theory, creating adaptive and benevolent responses to human conflict by means of changing the process which build up justice and abate violence is fundamental. Having said that, it is notable that conflict transformation theory is relevant to analysing the conflict situation in Tigray and the various intervention mechanisms applied so far.

The Tigray Conflict Situation

On the 4th of November 2020, the office of the prime minister in Ethiopia declared “military confrontation” (Daba and Wrought, 2020) on Northern Tigray Region. This happened after Abiy Ahmed’s office had reached a conclusion that the last line had been crossed and that there was a necessary and just cause for military operation to be conducted in the region for the purpose of law enforcement (Office of the Prime Minister, 2020). To back up this argument, Abiy Ahmed’s office accused the TPLF of (1) attacking the Northern Command of

the Ethiopian National Defence Forces; (2) Planning, Training, Financing and Executing Ethnic and Sectarian conflict in Ethiopia; (3) Endangering the constitutional order – citing what it called the blatant violation of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's Constitution, adopting its own law, established its own electoral commission, and orchestrated a sham and illegal election in which it won all seats in the regional council; and (4), the three decades rule characterised by egregious violation of human rights, and self-enrichment at a grand scale (Office of the Prime Minister, 2020).

Supported by the above claims, the central government deployed its military operations and affirmed that the action was well backed up by the principle of last resort. By so doing, it hoped that the operation will be conducted in a manner that follows the principles of proportionality and discrimination – in the sense that, the force to be used would be proportionate to the goals of the law enforcement and whenever possible, civilians would be spared (Office of the Prime Minister, 2020). The goals and objectives of this operation included (1) disarming the TPLF junta, (3) restoring legitimate administration to Tigray, and (3) enforce law and order in Tigray and bring the fugitives to justice (Office of the Prime Minister, 2020).

While these looks to be purposeful goals, the challenge is that military interventions, in most cases have led to miscalculation, multidimensional magnitudes of destruction and large-scale violation of human rights. This is because once war or any other form of conflict erupts, rules are forgotten, and peaceful means are undermined. The conflict situation in Tigray that has led to compromised peace has diverse and multi-layered root cause. The kind of interventions applied by the Abiy government have also had large-scale impacts that call for short-, mid- and long-term redressing mechanisms.

Underlying Causes

Just like what seems to be a general situation in Africa and other parts of the world, conflict situations have got several underlying courses. They include historical, political, economic, cultural, and social factors, among others. The causes of the conflict in Tigray ought therefore to be viewed from this backdrop. However, in the context of this article, we argue that the political aspect, which has more to do with power struggle between the central government and the TPLF, is seen to be the main and contentious issue underpinning conflict. A view that is shared by Lauren Ploch Blanchard (2020) who also argues that the outbreak of hostilities in Ethiopia's Tigray region reflect a power struggle between the federal government and the TPLF even though the ethnic tension in the country is part of the patters of conflict in the

country. In a way, Blanchard seeks to emphasise the fact that what seems to be a mere confrontation for law enforcement, has got underlying issues rooted in the struggle for the country's administration and resources in some way.

From an historical perspective, Taya (2020) is also of a view that Ethiopia's politics is the struggle between regional and the central forces. Although there are connotations attached to the failure of the central government to manage and distribute resources, political leadership has been a major culprit in the perennial conflict and competition in Ethiopia (Taya, 2020). In the early 1975 for example, what was felt as political and economic exclusion, leading to limited development in some area such as Tigray region and others, gave birth to the TPLF that fought for political, cultural and economic independence (Taya, 2020). In fact, at the center of this argument is the struggle for political power and economic management.

To explain further the above assertion, it must be emphasised that the TPLF, as mentioned here, is one of the founders of the EPRDF that assumed power in 1991, after overthrowing Derg. The government of EPRDF, dominated by the TPLF, ruled Ethiopia for nearly three decades. Throughout its mandate, it has been accused of corruption, nepotism, exclusion, injustices, human rights violations and unequal distribution of resources, among others (Admassu, 2019).

However, after prime minister Abiy Ahmed assumed power in 2018, a lot of governance reforms have been done including the release of political prisoners, commitment to political and economic liberalisation, and most critical, the dissolution of EPRDF and formation of the Prosperity Party (PP) (Lemma, 2020 & Matlosa, 2020). This move has in a way contributed to dissatisfaction among the TPLF members who feel alienated from the central administration of the country. Hence, the current deteriorated relationship between the central government and the TPLF.

The tension between the two parties even became overt after the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) delayed elections citing COVID-19 pandemic measures (Lemma, 2020). Acting against this call, the federal regional government in Tigray went further to conduct elections in September 2020 and accused the central government of ignoring the constitution by delaying the national election beyond its mandate (Mark, 2020). Delaying elections, therefore, may have been interpreted by the TPLF as a political move by the central government to maintain and control power. Critical to this issue is the fact that elections play a central role in deciding power sharing in the country.

To this end, it could be argued that the decision by the TPLF to go ahead with elections in the context where the central government advised otherwise, was a political and tactical move by the TPLF to underscore that they oversaw the regional administration. This is a clear indication of a compromised power relationship between the central and the regional government.

Ironically, the broken relationship between the central government and the TPLF must be understood in a context. Firstly, Ethiopia is coming from a long history of political instabilities. It has experienced feudal rule until 1974, military rule (1974-1991) and dominant party system (1991-2018) under the hegemony of the ruling coalition of EPRDF dominated by the TPLF (Matlosa, 2020) and now, under the reformist Abiy Ahmed who continue experiencing resistance from some ruling elites including members of the TPLF. Secondly, the covid-19 pandemic has revealed critical issues of power struggle in Ethiopia that Abiy Ahmed will have to struggle with. For example, when on 8th April 2020, the Ethiopian government declared a five-month state of emergency in order to fight the pandemic (Embassy of Ethiopia, London, 2021), the opposition criticized the move as a ploy by the PP coalition to centralize power and entrench repression (Matlaso, 2020).

Following this move, on 10th of June 2020, the House of Federations (HoF) agreed to extend the tenure of office for Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, his federal government and regional government by a period of nine (9) months, after which, depending on the risks associated with covid-19, election would be considered (Abera, 2021 & Matlaso, 2021). This decision was in fact taken two days after the speaker of HoF, Ms. Keria Ibrahim, a top opposition leader resigned in protest at what she dubbed an attempt at the unconstitutional usurping of power by the ruling coalition PP (Matlaso, 2020). All these events had a bearing on the shaping of what is happening in Tigray today.

Postponement of elections in Africa, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic met diverse political challenges. Firstly, Africa's history is one associated with leaders whom we choose to call 'power capitalists' – those who traverse on delaying elections in order to keep power. Such moves have led to serious political tensions, conflicts and human rights violations. Ivory Coast, Somalia, Mali, South Sudan, Zimbabwe and Burundi, among others, can be cited as countries that have experienced political challenges due to delayed elections.

Another closest example can be the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In 2018 when the DRC's Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) declared the postponement of elections in Beni region and Butembo, there was a general outcry and protests that increased political unrest – opposition leaders condemned this move as anti-democracy (Mahaba, 2019, p. 216; & Salihu, 2019). Secondly, the history of election related violence in Africa presents election periods as one that is delicate for preservation of peace and averting violence. The continent has witnessed a lot of election related violence. The case of Kenya between 2007/2008 (Kagwanja & Southall, 2009, p. 259-260), Burkina Faso in 2014, Burundi in 2015 and Sierra Leon (Bjarnesen & Kovacs, 2018, p. 4) are some examples with overt election related violence to learn from.

As of recently, COVID-19 to a larger extent exposed the challenge of elections in Africa and several countries experienced election rescheduling that received resistance from civilians and political actors. As such, COVID-19 become a threat to peace in most African countries. The table below shows some of the countries that postponed elections due to COVID-19.

Table 2: Postponed elections in Africa due to COVID-19.

Country	Type of election	Originally shelled date	New date
Botswana	Local by-elections for Metsimothabe and Boseja South wards	May 2020	
Chad	Legislative elections	13 December 2020	24 th October
Ethiopia	Parliamentary elections	29 th August 2020	21st June 2021
Gabon	Partial legislative elections, Lékonilékori (Akiéni)	4 th & 18 th April 2020	31 st January 2021
Gambia	National Assembly by-elections, Niamina West constituency	16 th April 2020	7 th November 2020
Kenya	County Assembly and National Assembly by-elections	April, Jun and July 2020	15 th December 2020
Liberia	Midterm Senatorial elections and national referendum	13 th October 2020	8 th December 2020
Libya	Municipal elections	18 th April 2020	June 2020
Niger	Local elections	1 November 2021	13 th December 2021 (not necessarily related to COVID-19)
Nigeria	Senatorial by-election in Bayelsa, Imo and Plateau district	March 2020	5 th December 2020
Somalia	Parliamentary election & presidential elections	27 th November 2020	25 th – 10 th October 2021
South Africa	All municipal by-elections	March – May 2020	11 th November 2020
Tunisia	Municipal in elections	28 th – 29 th March 2020	5 th July 2020

	in Hassi El Ferid, and Jbaeniana		
Uganda	Special interest group elections	April – May 2020	11, 13, 17 August 2020
Zimbabwe	Rural district council by elections, ward 16 of Chiredzi, & legislative and council elections	4 th April 2020 5 th December 2020	2021
Sao Tome & Principe	Second round Presidential election	8 th August 2021	5 th September 2021 (not directly related to COVID-19)

Source: Adapted from IIDEA, 2021.

The outbreak of the pandemic was a critical challenge to many countries in Africa and the world beyond. Countries had to manoeuvre between protecting the lives of the citizens and ensuring that the running of the affairs of the countries, including holding elections were under control. Matlosa (2021) even observed that covid-19 posed an immense risk to the health of African citizens. This is because Africa is generally seen as a continent whose critical institutions such as health do not meet the demands required. Also, and most importantly in this case, government responses to the pandemic in Africa presented a major hazard to the health of democracy and integrity of elections (Matlosa, 2020). In fact, amidst the pandemic, governments had to struggle in creating balance between democracy and human security. According to 2020 democracy index, most countries in the world, and Africa in particular experienced deterioration of democracy as a result of the pandemic.

The table below shows democracy index of world regions. Special focus is placed on Africa as impacted by COVID-19 in relation to other years.

Democracy Index 2006-20 by region

	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Asia & Australasia	5.62	5.67	5.67	5.63	5.74	5.74	5.70	5.61	5.56	5.51	5.53	5.58	5.44
Eastern Europe	5.36	5.42	5.42	5.40	5.43	5.55	5.58	5.53	5.51	5.50	5.55	5.67	5.76
Latin America	6.09	6.13	6.24	6.26	6.33	6.37	6.36	6.38	6.36	6.35	6.37	6.43	6.37
Middle East & North Africa	3.44	3.53	3.54	3.54	3.56	3.58	3.65	3.68	3.73	3.62	3.43	3.54	3.53
North America	8.58	8.59	8.56	8.56	8.56	8.56	8.59	8.59	8.59	8.59	8.63	8.64	8.64
Western Europe	8.29	8.35	8.35	8.38	8.40	8.42	8.41	8.41	8.44	8.40	8.45	8.61	8.60
Sub-Saharan Africa	4.16	4.26	4.36	4.35	4.37	4.38	4.34	4.36	4.32	4.32	4.23	4.28	4.24
World average	5.37	5.44	5.48	5.48	5.52	5.55	5.55	5.53	5.52	5.49	5.46	5.55	5.52

Source: *The Economist Intelligence*, 2020, p. 42.

As on the table above, since 2015 there has been a steady reduction of democracy. As of 2020 Africa scored 4.16 as the level of democracy compared to 2015 that indicated 4.38. Several factors necessitated this outcome. First, is the fact that many countries on the African continent induced restrictions and impositions such as lockdowns and personal freedoms in order control the pandemic (The Economist Intelligent Unity, 2020, p. 40).

Second, some authoritarian regimes took advantage of the pandemic situation and maximized the control of power (p.40). All these contribute to understanding micro-factors of explaining the conflict dynamic in Africa and Ethiopia in particular.

Perhaps the critical questions to ask could be: was the central government in Ethiopia acting to protect its power by delaying elections or was it in their interest to maintain power? Was there enough dialogue between the central government and the TPLF regarding the conduct of elections in the context of the pandemic? Was the TPLF's decision to go ahead with elections in their region an act oriented towards the protection of constitutional mandate? Part of the problem to these questions is that most African regimes have given less voice to the opposition parties in decision making. As a result, they feel excluded and any decision that threaten their power struggle in the country can amount to political tensions. Abiy's regime for the past three years has been on a trajectory of institutional and governance reforms. One major reform is the formation of PP, a merger constituency of the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP), Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), Southern Ethiopia Democratic Movement (SEDM) – of the ruling, now defunct EPDF (Maru, 2021, p. 289).

However, the TPLF feel alienated from this coalition, and political and economic administration of a country. As a result, they have continued resisting and adopting various mechanisms that have been perceived as efforts to frustrate the central government. Some of these mechanisms have been in a form of physical violence, as it was a case of the attack on Northern Command of the Ethiopian Defence Force (Office of the Prime Minister, 2020). This move has prompted Abiy's regime to respond with a military operation in Tigray.

a) Military Interventions in restoring law order

Restoring order in most Africa countries has been a challenge. It is a common perception, at least to a better extent, that in a situation where peaceful means to avert conflict have been applied, restoration of peace among conflicting parties has been successful.

In a case where violent means have been applied, deterioration of peace and human rights abuses have been massive.

Military intervention is associated with use of force to restore order in a country. For example, the armed military operation against pro-democracy protests in Libya had widespread deaths and violation of human rights.

Even after the United Nation Security Council (UNSC) had passed resolution 1973 authorising military intervention, the action magnified the conflict's duration, increased death toll, exacerbated human rights abuse, increased humanitarian suffering and weapons proliferation in Libya and neighbouring countries (Kuperman, 2015, 66-67; & Kuperman, 2013). This has led to some scholars such as Kuperman (2015), Hoffman. M. (2014) and Ahmed. T (2019) to term the military intervention in Libya by NATO as object failure.

Similarly, the military confrontation in Anglophone Cameroon between the central government and the separatist groups have not led to a peaceful end. After several failed negotiations, the decision to adopt violent actions as means for last resort have led to unprecedented displacements, deaths and destruction of properties (International Crisis Group, 2017, p. 13-24). The question arises from this: is military intervention the right way to go when negotiation collapse?

While circumstances differ according to place and conflict dynamics, the case of Libya and Cameroon could serve as best examples to learn from, especially when trying to understand the current conflict between the Abiy's government and the TPLF. The declaration of military operation by Abiy in order to restore order seems to have been miscalculated and today has led to multiple and deep consequences. While the goals and objectives of the operation may have the potential to contribute to peace, opting to adopt violent means as the last resort may not necessarily lead to achieving them. Instead, as the current experience in Ethiopia presents, the conflict situation has intensified, and its longevity is unpredictable. Its consequences have gone far beyond its citizens, territory and region.

b) Consequences and challenges on civilians, state and region

Civilians: the Tigray conflict, like many other conflicts in Africa will leave behind immediate and long-term impacts on civilians. The immediate impacts are that thousands of innocent people have been killed in the fight, children and women left homeless, others sexually abused, their properties looted, while others displaced within the country and into neighbouring countries (Amnesty International, 2021 & Mackintosh, 2021). Ethiopia has opted for military intervention (Gavin, 2021) and defined its action as law enforcement operation.

From a peace practitioner perspective, the challenge of military operation comes with the protection of civilians and indeed, property.

The government estimated that the force to be used would be proportionate and that the principle of discrimination of civilians will be observed. As things stand, not only has the conflict killed and displaced many people, the supply of food, fuel and electricity are also rapidly dwindling – communities and commercial activities have been shut down (Bader & Braun Schweiger, 2021) because of military presence and blockage of supplies to the area. This has induced a serious humanitarian crisis.

State: the state will face long-term impacts of the conflict. It will have to respond to the challenges of rebuilding the economy, addressing the political crisis and ethnic tensions that has now heightened between the central government and the TPLF. The issue of justice, particularly for civilians, whose rights have been violated will be a long-term struggle that the country will have to deal with. Already, the international community and human rights organisations are calling for investigations related to violation of human rights and international law, caused by the conflict (Amnesty International, 2021 & Maas, 2021).

Ethiopia is also entangled between the need for peace and maintenance of security within and around its borders. Most importantly, some critical challenges may be the infiltration of criminal actors who may take advantage of the conflict through arms and human trafficking (Castanedo, 2020).

Again, the country will have to respond to the challenge of proliferation of ethnic-driven military (Castanedo, 2020), who may regroup to defend themselves from the violence of the TPLF and that of the central government forces (International Crisis Group, 2021). This is because civilian protection seems to have been largely compromised through grievous atrocities committed on civilian communities. While power struggle among conflict actors seems to be the central issues in the conflict, the quest for lasting peace will have also to address these impacts and challenges.

Region: the Tigray conflict is not an isolated one. It has spill over effects on neighbouring countries in many dimensions. Two effects, among others can be pointed out in this article: First is the security destabilisation that comes with arms proliferation. Within the security dilemma, it is widely taken that conflict attracts circulation of weapons among civilians and, among agents of arms business.

While there has been calls for ceases fire and emphasis on the adoption of peaceful means, such calls are being frustrated by actions being undertaken by the parties to conflict. For example, on the one hand, the TPLF continues to advance with their act of armed violence, gaining territories and considering marching towards the capital Addis Ababa (Africa News, 2021 & Wintour, 2021).

On the other hand, Abiy's government has called upon civilians to register their arms and prepare to defend their communities (Africa News, 2021). This followed the declaration of the national wide state of emergency (Wintour, 2021). Citizens, therefore, will be induced for possible sources of arms and weapons within the country and around the neighbouring countries such as Kenya, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, among others. There is probably a likelihood for increased cross-border trade of arms and weapons. Thus, compromising security of the region. In so doing, the African Union's silencing the guns efforts will be undermined.

Another challenge possibly to affect the region due to the conflict in Ethiopia will be the influx of refugees. Already, Ethiopia is one of the countries that is both a host and origin of refugees. By December 2020, since the conflict erupted, nearly 2.2 million people were displaced and about 50,000 of them fled into neighbouring countries (Reuters, 2020). Fleeing of refugees into neighbouring countries such as Sudan (Dahir, 2021) has continued, and the numbers continue to increase. The increase in the refugee influx from Ethiopia into neighbouring countries will add pressure on the already existing refugee crisis in the East African region that already hosts millions of them. Amidst these diverse challenges therefore, Abiy's regime and other parties to the conflict, will have to embark on a long processes of conflict transformation in order to restore peace and avert violence.

Towards a lasting conflict transformation process

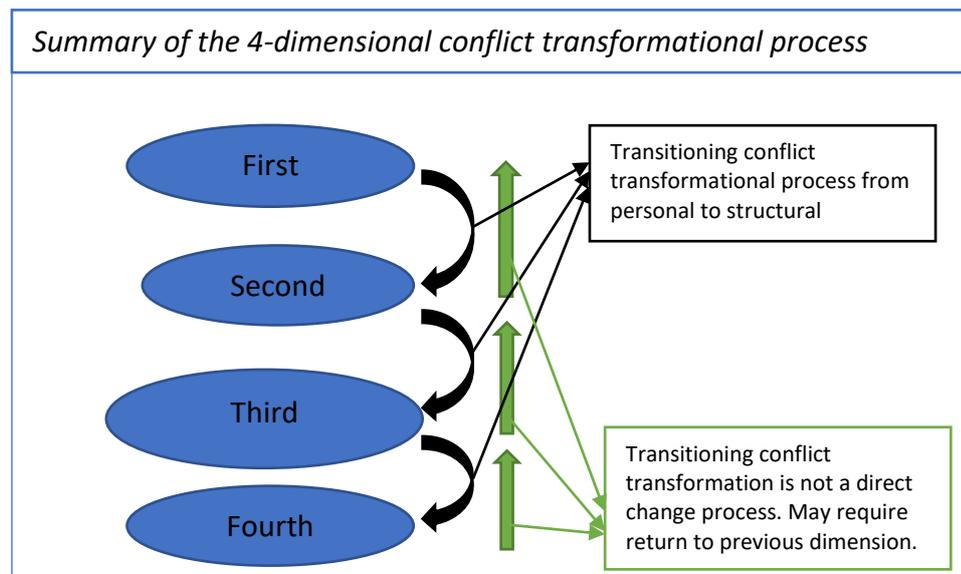
The Tigray conflict is complex. As argued in this analysis, struggle for power is at the center of the conflict. However, its dynamics, impacts and challenges are multifaceted. While it is important to respond to the immediate impacts as outlined above, addressing the main problem, by stitching together the dynamics and complexities that underpins power struggle will require a more robust conflict transformational process.

In this article, we argue that a conflict transformation approach, proposed by John Paul Lederach as earlier presented, may contribute to rebuilding the relationship between conflict actors and in turn, lead to the promotion of sustainable peace. Four-dimensional aspects are recommended for long term conflict transformation process in Ethiopia. They

include stitching together the personal, relational, socio-cultural and the structural dimensions.

The transitioning from one dimension to the other may not be a direct process of change. At times, it may require going back to the previous dimension in order to address unaddressed issues.

Consider the summary below.



Source: adapted from Lederach, 2014; 1997.

Following the 4-dimensional conflict transformation process as illustrated above, stitching pieces together for conflict transformation in Ethiopia will require the following:

First: Key actor's personal transformation

Among key actors both from the central government, the TPLF and any other allied actors within the Tigray conflict, there is need for individual internal process of change. Key actors therefore need to take up deliberative steps at the individual level to identify one's identity and inclinations to power that can escalate the conflict. In other words, conflicting parties will have to minimize destructive effects of social conflict and maximize the potential for growth and well-being in their personal pursuit for political leadership (Lederach, 2014 & Lederach, 1997). In their quest for peace, actors will therefore have to be genuinely innovative at the personal level.

Actors will require personal probing, accepting and addressing subjective generationally accumulated perceptions and deep-rooted hatred and fears among conflict actors in the history of Ethiopia. Openness to this form of transformation has the potential to invite one into relational change.

Second: Comprehensive relational transformation

Relationship is the basis of both the change and long-term solution to any form of conflict. As earlier alluded to, the COVID-19 context and the election dilemma that was faced by Ethiopia revealed the power struggle relationship in the country. In other words, between the central government and the TPLF, there is need for enhanced interaction and dialogue that address the power struggle relationship that may have been necessitated by many factors including but not limited to economic, social, cultural and political history in the country. This may be possible by imploring non-violence diplomatic means of resolving conflict such as dialogue. Most importantly, the parties to the conflict need to Maximize understanding of one another, believe in the power of interdependence and strong relationship. As a protracted conflict nation, this ought to draw also parties to addressing comprehensively socio-cultural dimensions of the conflict.

Third: Socio-cultural transformation

Socio-cultural dimensions play a significant role to addressing conflict. Pertaining the conflict situation in Ethiopia, one important factor to avert conflict will be, among different sectors of societies, cultures and in particular key actors, to identify and understand socio-cultural patterns that contribute to the vice of violent expressions of conflict (Lederach, 1997). At the social level for example, expressions of dominions and desire to rule others at the expense of strengthening partnership, justice, equity and non-violent approaches may not contribute to building a sustainable peaceful Ethiopia. At the cultural level, it will be important for parties in Ethiopia to identify and build upon resources and mechanism within the Ethiopian cultural setting for constructive response and healing of conflict (Lederach, 1997). This is because the African cultural way of life and civilisations have relevant mechanisms that can help to resolve conflict. By so doing, military intervention and use of violence will not necessary be a last resort since there will be a diverse pool of options to address conflict.

Fourth: Structural transformation

Structural transformation as Lederach recommends, presupposes moving from harmful structures, institutions, laws and regimes to those that are more peaceful, inclusive and democratic. In so doing, a comprehensive redress to root causes of conflict and social conditions that give rise to violent and other harmful expressions of conflict is important. Structural transformation to a larger extent promotes non-violent mechanisms that reduce adversarial confrontation, minimizes or eliminate violence (Lederach, 1997).

The Ethiopian government will therefore need to continue a trajectory of developing structures that meet basic needs, substantive justice and maximizing participation of people and different groups of people in the country in decision making that affect their lives.

Conclusion

The article has substantially argued for a robust and multidimensional constructive conflict transformation approach in Ethiopia. Taking the Tigray conflict as a work-up call to a long-term process for lasting peace, the analysis has revealed the causes of the conflict while highlighting the gravity of impacts and challenges on the citizens, the state and region. The article has argued that power struggle between the central government and the TPLF is the central issue escalating the conflict. off course, this does not mean that other factors are discard. The conflict is complex and carries many issues that also need to be ironed. Indeed, critical to these issues is a comprehensive restoration of the relationship between the central government and the TPLF. Bearing in mind that conflict affects many areas in Ethiopia, it will be important that a long-term conflict transformational process, aimed at restoring power relationships in the country is carried out using non-violent means to forester sustainable peace. In the meantime, scaling up efforts to strike cease-fire, increase humanitarian response and protect the vulnerable civilians in Tigray and other affected area will help to reduce the burden of the conflict.

References

- Abera, E (2021, June 10th). HoF approves CCI's recommendation to extend both houses, state councils term limit: Constitutional experts raises concern. *Addis Standard, News Alert*. Retrieved from <https://addisstandard.com/news-alert-hof-approves-ccis-recommendation-to-extend-both-houses-state-councils-term-limit-constitutional-expert-raises-concern/>, accessed on 8th August 2021.
- Admassu, D. M. (2019). Causes of ethnic conflict in Ethiopia and its effect on development: the case of 'Amhara' and 'Gumuz' communities. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 21(3), pp. 64-79.
- African News. 3rd November 2021. Ethiopia: Fear in Addis Ababa as government declares emergency over TPLF rebels advances. Retrieved from <https://www.africanews.com/2021/11/03/ethiopia-fear-in-addis-ababa-as-govt-declares-emergency-over-tplf-rebel-advance/>, accessed on 14th November 2021.
- Ahmed. T. (2019). NATO intervention in Libya: was it justified? Was it successful? *Accademia*, retrieved from https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/51240301/IS_Assignment_2-with-cover-page, accessed on 13th November 2021.
- Amnesty International (2021, May 4th). Ethiopia: Tepid International response to Tigray conflict fuel horrific violations over past six months. News. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/05/ethiopia-tepid-international-response-to-tigray-conflict-fuels-horrific-violations-over-past-six-months/>, accessed on 5th August 2021).
- Amnesty international (2021). Massacre in Axum. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR2537302021ENGLISH.PDF>, accessed on 5th August 2021.
- Bader, L., & Braun Schweiger, A (2021, July 30th). The latest on the crisis in Ethiopia's Tigray Region. Human Rights Watch. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/07/30/latest-crisis-ethiopia-tigray-region>, accessed on 5th July 2021.
- Besheer, M. (2021, July 2nd). UN calls on Tigray forces to endorse cease-fire. *Voice of America*. Retrieved from <https://www.voanews.com/europe/un-calls-tigray-forces-endorse-cess-fire>, accessed on 7th August 2021.
- Bjarnesen J, and Covacs, S. M. (2018). Violence in African elections. Policy Note No. 7. Nordic African Institute. Retrieved from

- https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Violence%20in%20African%20Elections_Policy%20Note_Final%20version.pdf, accessed on 7th September 2021.
- Blanchard, P. L. (2020). The unfolding conflict in Ethiopia. Congressional Research Service. Retrieved from https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2020-12-01_TE10058_50fc804a95a8a66846e331691cd40549c5ff6f91.pdf, accessed on 4th August 2021.
- Castanedo, C. I. (2021, April 15th). Predictive analysis of conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia. *Gray Dynamics*. Retrieved from <https://www.greodynamics.com/predictive-analysis-of-conflict-in-tigray-ethiopia/>, accessed on 5th August 2021.
- Daba, E. T., & Wroughton, L. (2020, November 4th). Ethiopia sends troops into renegade northern province as long-simmering tension explode. *The Washington Post, Africa*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-military-tplf/2020/11/04/3cd0f4a8-1e90-11eb-ad53-4c1fda49907d_story.html, accessed on 4th August 2021.
- Dahir. L. A. 21st September 2021. In Sudan Border town, desperate Ethiopians find ‘second mother country’. *The New York Times*, retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/13/world/africa/ethiopia-conflict-sudan-refugees.html>, accessed on 14th November 2021.
- Embassy of Ethiopia, London (2020, April 14th). Ethiopia declares state of emergency to curb transmission of the corona virus. *Press Release*. Retrieved from <https://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/ethiopia-declares-state-of-emergency-to-curb-transmission-of-coronavirus/>, accessed on 8th August 2021.
- Gavan, M. (2021, February 10th). The conflict in Ethiopia’s Tigray region: What to know. *Council on Foreign Relations*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/conflict-ethiopias-tigray-region-what-know>, accessed on 5th August 2021.
- Hoffman. M. 2014. Global NATO and the catastrophic failure in Libya: Lessons for African Unity. *New Political Science*, 36(3), 419-422.
- Institute for Security Studies (2020). Ethiopia conflict insight, vol. 1. Retrieved from <https://media.africaportal.org/documents/Ethiopia-Conflict-Insights-Vol-1-3042020.pdf>, accessed on 4th August 2021.
- International Crisis Group. (2017). Cameroon’s Anglophone crisis at the crossroad. *Africa Report no. 250*. Retrieved from https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/250-camerouns-anglophone-crisis-at-the-crossroads_0.pdf, accessed on 13th November 2021.

- Kagwanja P and Southall R. (2009). Introduction: Kenya – a democracy in retreat? *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 27(3), 259-277.
- Kuperman, J. A. (2013). Lessons from Libya: How not to intervene. Policy Brief, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kenney Schoo. Retrieved from <https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/Kuperman%20policy%20brief%20published%20version%202.pdf>, accessed on 13th November 2021.
- Kuperman, J. A. (2015). Obama’s Libya decade: How a well-meaning intervention ended in failure. *Council on Foreign Policy*, 94(2), pp. 66-77.
- Lederach, J. L. (2014). *The little Book of Conflict Transformation: Clear Articulation of the Guiding Principle by a Pioneer in the Field*. New York: Good Books.
- Lemma, T. (2020). The unfolding conflict in Ethiopia: Testimonies before the house of subcommittee on Africa, global health, global human rights and international organisations. Retrieved on <https://www.congress.gov/116/meeting/house/111103/witnesses/HHRG-116-FA16-Wstate-LemmaT-20201203.pdf>, accessed on 4th August 2021).
- Maas, C (2021, April 5th). G7 countries call for independent investigation of rights violations in Ethiopia’s Tigray region. *Jurist: Legal News and Commentary*. Retrieved from <https://www.jurist.org/news/2021/04/g7-countries-call-for-independent-investigation-of-rights-abuses-in-ethiopias-tigray-region/>, accessed on 5th of August 2021.
- Mackintoshi, E. (2021, July 1st). Ethiopia is at war with itself: Here is what you need to know about the conflict. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/30/africa/ethiopia-tigray-conflict-explained-intl/index.html>, accessed on 5th July 2021.
- Mahaba, F. (2019). Frontline. Ebola response in the lead up to DR Congo’s presidential elections. *World Report*, Vol. 393, issue 10167, p. 216.
- Mark, S., & Tadesse, F. 2021, August 5th. U.S official calls for cease fire as Ethiopia conflict deepens. *Bloomberg News*. Retrieved from <https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/u-s-official-calls-for-cess-fire-as-ethiopia-conflict-deepens-1.1636898>, Accessed on 7th August 2021.
- Mark, S. 2020, November 18th.. Ethiopia’s Internal conflict explained. *Politico*. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.eu/article/ethiopia-internal-conflict-explained/>, accessed on 4th August 2021.
- Matlosa, K. (2021). Elections in Africa during the covid-19: The tenuous balance between democracy and human security. *South African Journal of Political Studies, Politikon*, 48(2), pp. 159-173.

- Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2021, August 5th). Ethiopia – Tigray regional humanitarian update. *Situation Report*. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Tigray%20Region%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%205%20Aug%202021.pdf>, accessed on 7th August 2021.
- Office of the Prime Minister. 2020, November 14th. The ongoing law enforcement operation in Tigray: Causes and objectives. Embassy of Ethiopia, Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <https://ethiopianembassy.org/the-ongoing-law-enforcement-operations-in-tigray-causes-and-objectives-november-14-2020/>, accessed on 4th August 2021.
- Reuters. 12th December 2020. Over 2 million people displaced by conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray conflict. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-ethiopia-conflict-idUKKBN28M0DT>, accessed on 14th November 2021.
- Salihu, N. (2019). Elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo. *Conflict Trends 2019/2, ACCORD*. Retrieved from <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/elections-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>, accessed 12th November 2021.
- Taye, A. K. (2020). Ethnic federalism and conflict in Ethiopia. *ACCORD's Conflict Trend AJCR 2017/2*. Retrieved from <https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/ethnic-federalism-conflict-ethiopia/>, Accessed 4th August 2021.
- Wintour. P. 2nd November 2021. Ethiopia declares state of emergency as Tigray's rebels gain ground. *The Guardian Lab*, retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/02/ethiopia-declares-state-of-emergency-as-tigray-rebels-gain-ground>, accessed on 14th November 2021.

About the Authors

Mwansa Rodgers Holds a Master of Arts degree in peace studies and international relations from HIPSIR, a Constituency of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. His research interest evolves around conflict analysis and peacebuilding, international relations, African politics and governance, cultures and civilisations, climate change, peace and security.

Joachim Simbila holds a Master of Arts degree in peace studies and international relations – from Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations (HIPSIR), a Constituency of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. His research interest evolves philosophy, conflict resolution, preventing and countering violent extremism, extractive industry, mediation of pastoralist and boarder conflict.