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with women and girls

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Leading the way:

Civil Society Movements Reshaping
Peace and Security in Ethiopia

Acronyms

WPS: Women, Peace, and Security

WLO: Women-led organisation

WRO: Women's rights organisation

YLO: Youth-led organisation

FGD: Focus group discussion

KII: Key informant interview

IDP: Internally-displaced person/people

IOM: International organisation for Migration

SYHILA: Save Your Holy Land Association

PADet: Professional Alliance for Development

PSS: Psychosocial support

IPV: Intimate partner violence

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Introduction

This policy brief has pulled together evidence, stories, and experiences from women, young people, and their organisations involved in activities on peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and post-conflict support in Ethiopia. It has explored their lived experiences to better understand and document their work in conflict-affected regions, including the challenges they faced and alternative solutions they found.

The findings demonstrate that, against a backdrop of complex conflict dynamics, Ethiopia has experienced a range of violent internal conflicts that have devastated its communities. Conflict has deepened existing gender inequalities and power imbalances in communities, with women and girls particularly affected by increased gender-based violence (GBV), and limited access to resources and livelihood opportunities.

ActionAid Ethiopia has worked closely with local women's rights organisations (WROs), women-led (WLOs), and youth-led organisations (YLOs) to support community peacebuilding efforts. Through this research and programs, ActionAid found that women's movements and their organisations, and youth-led organisations, have found alternative ways to address the challenges caused by conflict and reshape what peace and security mean for them.

This study examines how women and youth-led organisations are engaging in peacebuilding activity at the local level, as well as how the international community is responding to conflict, with a call for donors to invest in local women-led interventions, and shift power and decision-making to national and local movements. It finds that women and youth-led

interventions, at both local and national levels, have the potential to play a unique role in the WPS space, which is often inaccessible to the international community.

1.1 Northern Ethiopia Regional Context

Ethiopia has a long history of ethnic and political friction, with complex political, ethnic and territorial disputes. The 2020-2022 Northern Conflict, between the Ethiopian Federal Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), is believed to have impacted the lives of many and destruction of civil structures.

...women's movements and their organisations, and youth-led organisations, have found alternative ways to address the challenges caused by conflict and reshape what peace and security mean for them.

The ongoing conflicts have led to a severe humanitarian crisis, with widespread reports of atrocities, including mass killings and sexual violence. The fighting has displaced millions of people within Ethiopia and forced many to flee to neighboring countries. A ceasefire agreement was signed in 2022, which brought stability in Tigray region. Yet, the protracted nature of the humanitarian crisis has left many in dire situations, including violence and violation of human rights. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the humanitarian crisis. At the same time, the region is experiencing severe food insecurity, with the international community struggling to deliver

humanitarian assistance due to funding shortages and other factors related to access to some parts of the region.

Ethiopia is now facing political, economic, and ethnic turmoil causing death, displacement, and other forms of pre- and post-conflict trauma. According to the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, by the end of 2023, Ethiopia had over 3 million internally displaced people¹, and this number has since increased because of the conflict in Northern Ethiopia and other violence between different groups. As a result, women, children, youth, and elderly people have become the most affected.

In response, civil society, specifically women's and youth organisations, have played a fundamental role in calling for peacebuilding in Ethiopia. Yet, deeply rooted patriarchal beliefs have hindered women's participation in peacebuilding initiatives, with very few women involved in formal peacebuilding processes.

1.2 Methodology

The brief explores how women's rights organisations and youth groups in Ethiopia have faced challenges and posed their alternative solutions in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and post-conflict activities.

ActionAid adopts a feminist research approach, seeing it as a tool to bring about power shifts, through ActionAid's Feminist Research Guidelines. Research findings and evidence are used to dismantle potential bias from decision-makers' views and actions and to challenge how and where power negatively manifests and reproduces oppression. The voices of women and girls from communities and women-led organisations and women's rights organisations are prioritised as evidence. Women-only and girl-only spaces are created for evidence generation.

Aligned with this, the policy brief adopted a feminist research approach, by centering the



Dignity kit distribution in Tigray. Women are leading ActionAid's emergency response in Ethiopia's Tigray region where communities are facing severe food shortages, conflict and widespread violence against women and girls:

experiences and rights of those who are most at risk of being marginalised within conflict-affected regions, and interrogating the causes of inequalities. To do so, the research questions were tested and co-developed with a range of women leaders to ensure they were aligned with the current context, and to mitigate against any risk or ethical concerns. A thorough ethics document was also developed for this study.

During the data collection, women and youth-led spaces were created for evidence generation in the format of focus group discussions (FGD), key informant interviews (KII), and a survey. Secondary data was reviewed through literature, drawing from research, journals, and other diverse sources.

Fifty-eight (58) women and youth leaders from two woredas (regions) in Northern Ethiopia (Raya Kobo and Guna Begemider) participated in the study. These woredas have seen continuous conflict for the past five years, due to political and ethnic-related violence and Raya Kobo has suffered from political conflict that has disrupted people's lives, livelihoods, and resources. In addition to the qualitative analysis, a structured survey was used to collect quantitative data from the 58 project participants.

Findings: Gendered impact of conflict in Ethiopia

The conflicts affecting Raya Kobo and Guna Begemider are profoundly, and disproportionately, impacting women and girls. Economic crises, mental health challenges, displacement, inadequate healthcare, housing shortages, food insecurity, unwanted pregnancies, and increased incidence of sexually transmitted diseases are among the exacerbated issues.

2.1 Gender-based violence and safety concerns due to the Northern Ethiopia conflict



The presence of the frequent conflict has led to a level of insecurity for women which has depleted our human rights.”

Women Leader, Ethiopia

Our findings indicated that women and girls in Ethiopia face a range of safety concerns due to the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis. The threat of violence and ongoing instability has severely restricted freedom of movement, making it dangerous for women to travel for work or access essential services. Participants flagged that this lack of mobility not only hinders economic opportunities but also isolates them from community support networks, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.

The reality of this crisis was brought to life by the participants, who reported disturbing increases in early and forced marriages, female genital mutilation (FGM), physical abuse, social isolation, economic exploitation, and sexual violence, contributing to health complications such as HIV and fistulas. The lack of access

to essential healthcare services, including sexual and reproductive health care, further exacerbates these risks – with a women leader stating: “*One of the biggest threats to women right now, is their safety, their protection, and the abuse they face in many areas with active conflict. It is getting worse and worse as there is limited support*”. Pregnant women face life-threatening complications due to the absence of antenatal and postnatal care, with many unable to access even the most basic medical services. Women and girls with disabilities have faced further marginalisation, often neglected in the distribution of resources and unable to reach healthcare services tailored to their specific needs. Participants also spoke to us about “*sexual exploitation*”, including reports of “*transactional sex for food*”. As a result, rates of gender-based violence (GBV) have soared, with 7.2 million women and girls in need of support.²

In addition, the ongoing violence in various parts of Ethiopia has led to large-scale destruction of property, leading to displacement, with women and children making up a significant proportion of internally displaced persons (IDPs).³ Displaced women often live in overcrowded camps with inadequate protection, making them vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and trafficking. The lack of sexual and reproductive health services in the camps leaves women and girls vulnerable to unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and complications related to childbirth, all of which are compounded by the overall scarcity of medical care. These conditions create a cycle of vulnerability, where the lack of basic necessities directly undermines the safety, health, and well-being of those most at risk.⁴

The urgent need for protection and psychosocial support was expressed by participants, with one

Photo of a local partner leading a women refugee group meeting in Amhara region, part of an ActionAid business skill training and seed grants:



saying they “*have lost hope in [their] protection; Nothing has changed for women after the conflict. Just like before, women are raped, experience social isolation, they are discriminated against. This has affected day to day mental wellbeing.*” In terms of psychological impact, depression, stress, and mental health disorders are prevalent, often leading to instances of self-harm and attempted suicide. Abductions and sexual violence perpetrated by armed groups have exacerbated mental health issues and fostered a climate of isolation and stigma.

2.2 Livelihoods

Our findings revealed that, due to the unpredictability of the conflict, the gap in gender roles has widened, with women increasingly reliant on their husbands for economic support due to limited access to livelihood opportunities. As one woman leader explains: “*The severe economic crisis has meant food prices are too high. I am unable to feed my children, and my family. We have no economic independence.*” The shortage of basic necessities such as food,

water, and healthcare has reached a critical level, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations. The scarcity of food and clean water has also led to malnutrition, particularly among children, pregnant women, and individuals with disabilities.

Financial hardship has also driven many families to rely on traditional gender roles, with women and girls expected to shoulder the bulk of domestic responsibilities without extra support or resources.⁵ This has resulted in heightened instances of financial exploitation, where women are economically dependent on their husbands or male family members, leading to unequal power dynamics and decision-making within the household. Women and youth leaders within focal group discussions highlighted that this economic strain has also led to higher rates of child labour, with girls being forced to work in domestic or informal sectors to contribute to the family income, often at the expense of their education and personal wellbeing, as families are unable to afford school, leading to a prioritisation of boy’s education over that

The collapse of legal and administrative structures has also disrupted essential case management activities. Survivors of conflict-related violence, particularly GBV survivors, have limited access to legal recourse, psychological support, or medical care.

of girls. As a women participant explains it: “Every week I hear about more and more girls having to drop out of school, to help at home or work”. The situation is exacerbated by the risk of early marriage, with families marrying off their daughters at a young age in an attempt to solve financial difficulties, effectively ending their education. This trend not only limits the potential of girls but also perpetuates a cycle of inequality, as such stereotypes may likely lead to women and girls remaining economically dependent and vulnerable to further exploitation throughout their lives.

2.3 Access to justice

“**Sometimes we question what is the point of reconciliation and the rule of law when we are always worrying about what time the next conflict will happen?**”

Young woman participant in Focal Group Discussion

Information gathered through key informant interviews shows that access to essential services and the rule of law in Ethiopia have been gravely compromised during periods of active conflict, leaving many communities vulnerable

and unsupported. The disruption of social services and legal institutions has created a vacuum in which women, children, and orphans, are left without the protection and assistance they desperately need. The lack of adequate resources to address gender-based violence and other crimes has led to an alarming rise in incidents of violence, with perpetrators often going unpunished due to the collapse of the justice system.

Orphans and vulnerable children are particularly at risk in this environment. With the disintegration of family structures and the absence of state support, many of these children are left to fend for themselves, often falling prey to exploitation, trafficking, and abuse. The breakdown of social services means that there is little to no oversight or intervention to protect these children, further exacerbating their vulnerability. This was raised as a concern by focal group discussions in Raya Kobo, who stated:

“**Women and girls have been greatly affected. Many have faced violations and discrimination again. But there are no health and justice facilities to receive services of support.**”

The absence of functioning legal institutions during active conflict has significantly worsened these challenges.⁷ The judiciary, law enforcement, and other legal bodies have been either completely dismantled or are operating at severely reduced capacities, making it nearly impossible to pursue justice for crimes committed during the conflict. This breakdown in the rule of law has led to widespread impunity, where looting, violence, and other criminal activities are rampant, and perpetrators face little to no consequences for their actions.

The collapse of legal and administrative structures has also disrupted essential case management activities. Survivors of conflict-related violence, particularly GBV survivors, have limited access



Capacity building training participant in Guna, Amhara region: “By building my capacity, ActionAid protected my life and family”

to legal recourse, psychological support, or medical care. The lack of communication and coordination among what remains of the legal and social service sectors has led to significant delays in addressing cases of violence and exploitation, leaving survivors without the necessary protections and support.

In addition, the absence of functioning legal systems has impeded efforts to rebuild and restore communities in the aftermath of conflict. Without the rule of law, property disputes, inheritance issues, and other legal matters remain unresolved, perpetuating instability and hindering the recovery process. This ongoing legal vacuum not only undermines the safety and security of individuals but also erodes trust in institutions, making it even more challenging to restore order and provide essential services in post-conflict settings.

The humanitarian crisis and ongoing conflict in Ethiopia have made it difficult for international organisations to deliver consistent support, due to limited access to some conflict-affected regions as well as dwindling funding situation. This inconsistent support has only exacerbated the need for humanitarian aid, with 21.4 million people in the country requiring assistance⁸ and around 7.8 women and girls in need of gender-specific support.⁹ Civil society organisations, particularly women’s organisations, have played a significant and multifaceted role in addressing the complex and protracted conflicts.¹⁰

All the women-led, women’s rights and youth organisations we spoke to highlighted how their initiatives help to promote social cohesion and facilitate dialogue to promote peace. Respondents stressed how this involvement has developed peacebuilding conversations and processes – organisations are doing everything from providing humanitarian assistance, supporting the immediate needs of displaced communities and providing medical and psychological support to delivering peacebuilding activities. However, they have faced many challenges.

3.1 Challenges faced by youth groups and WROs

The major factors hindering women and young people’s participation include a lack of funding, harmful cultural norms, and working in volatile situations, all of which impacted the scope of their leadership and engagement.

Limited resources

The Ethiopian 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan estimates that US\$3.24 billion is needed to meet the needs of affected communities in the country.¹¹ The youth groups and WROs we spoke to flagged that they lack the needed resources to adequately support those in need, with a youth activist stating that:

“Compared with the high number of conflicts that [are] affecting individuals, there are limitations in what support we can provide due to limited funds and continuous expansion of conflict, and [its] fluctuating nature.”

Lack of resources was consistently raised as the biggest challenge faced by WROs and youth groups. This included a lack of facilities, insufficient budgets, and scarce long-term funding for core costs. Limited funding opportunities also created obstacles for WROs and youth groups in accessing national and international humanitarian and peacebuilding spaces where they can advocate for their needs. One of the main barriers to accessing funding opportunities is donor conditions which do not consider the organisational structures of smaller WROs and youth organisations and may lack the stringent policy mechanisms and systems to meet donors’ requirements.¹² These conditions are often inflexible and cannot be adapted to the constantly conflict context, and require time-consuming admin which makes them inaccessible to overstretched WROs and youth groups. In addition, some of the respondents shared that the majority of fundraising opportunities are not in the local language, and donors do not accept bid proposals in local language, which makes them inaccessible

to many groups. Inaccessible funding stops women’s rights and women-led organisations from developing their organisational structures and capacities so that they can access decision-making spaces, despite these organisations being best-placed to understand and respond to the community’s needs.

When organisations do get funding, this funding is often for short-term responses that don’t meet the needs of the community. The survey revealed that the majority (57%) of survey respondents confirmed they mostly get short-term funds, with nearly two out of three (59%) survey respondents saying that funds are for service delivery only.

Lack of safety to engage in activities

The ongoing conflict in Ethiopia presents additional obstacles for WROs. The lack of safety and security was noted as a major challenge for WROs in providing support to affected communities and continuing peacebuilding activities, with concerns that the “*volatile security situation hinders us to go and work at local level and meaningfully respond to the situation*”, due to restriction of movement enforced by military forces. In addition, due to the “*presence of conflict everywhere*,” organisations have had to cease working in the areas most affected by conflict.

The absence of safety and security has also impacted community participation in peacebuilding activities. Community members were reluctant to take part in local activities for many reasons, including fear of GBV, risk of robbery, conspiracy beliefs, and a lack of trust in others. “[People believe] peacebuilding working people are biased, either to the government side or other side” explains one participant. Participants also mentioned mental health as a major challenge: “*The biggest barrier our organisation has faced in peacebuilding is worrying about conflict at what time it may happen.*”

These security concerns and barriers create major obstacles for WROs in responding to and advocating for, the needs of affected communities. This has made it more difficult for WROs to take part in peacebuilding activities, deepening feelings of fear and hostility towards others: “*Because of community attitude towards women participation [we are] not able to move from place to place to work on attitude change, due to current problems like rape, robbery, etc*”. Women said the hostile behavior they encounter in some communities impacts their mental health and willingness to conduct peacebuilding activities, with one leader explaining: “*Attitude towards women is not right. In most case [it] undermines our role in peace building, makes us feel disappointed and demotivated*”. A respondent shared:

“Women activity in peace building is new for the community and take time to be convinced by our work. Most of our members are living in the local community and face some challenge in acceptance and there is resistance [...] Continuous conflict also hinders us to create awareness about our work and we cannot get [as many] members as we want due to security issue and absence of transport service.”

Tension and violence in the country directly undermines peacebuilding work done by WROs, with fear of “*kidnapping, rape, and other sexual violence happening on women which [can] undermine peacebuilding.*” This is echoed by a young women’s platform, who stated that “*the main resistance for young women’s engagement is sexual violence.*”

Harmful cultural norms

Despite significant progress in the implementation of gender-progressive policies within the country,¹³ cultural norms are still harming women and girls in Ethiopia. Deeply rooted patriarchy limits women’s participation in

leadership spaces including in the government, private sector, and education. Women representation on leadership in the higher political power in Ethiopia is improving. For instance, in 2023, 195 (41%) of the 470 members of the Ethiopian Parliament were women.¹⁴ However the situation is different when we go down to the local level structure in which women representation in peacebuilding and political participation is insignificant due to patriarchal norms and structures limit women's access to peacebuilding initiatives, resources, and opportunities.¹⁵

From our survey, 79% of respondents felt that their organisation was unable to access the same peacebuilding spaces as central actors. This is reflected in the fact that, of the 42 members of the 2019 Reconciliation Commission, only 5 were women (12%). Women's leadership in peacebuilding activities at the local level is nearly nonexistent. This lack of representation further exacerbates harmful gender norms and socio-cultural barriers for women, increasing their vulnerabilities and reinforcing harmful stereotypes about women in peacebuilding spaces.¹⁶



Youth peacebuilders at Guna district conducting focus group discussion for WPS research project:

4

Findings: Alternative solutions for peace and security

There are several women-and-youth-led peacebuilding initiatives in Ethiopia that are striving to restore peace and support people post-conflict. Despite all the challenges these organisations have faced, their activities support the affected communities and build awareness around conflict and conflict resolution. The organisations we spoke to found the following alternative solutions to help them continue their work.

4.1 Unpacking definitions of 'peace' and 'security'

In Ethiopia, youth groups and women's rights organisations working in peacebuilding have had to redefine what they mean by "peace" and "security". Traditional, top-down approaches to peace and security, such as formal peacebuilding coalitions, and ceasefire agreements, have not been effective in Ethiopia's complex social fabric. They failed to take into consideration some of the challenges of working in ongoing conflict, with one leader stating: *"often peace is assumed as a step only once violence has stopped. We should be able to speak to what we want peace to be now."*

As a result, WROs have started initiatives encouraging communities to discuss what peace and peacebuilding means for them. They have done this with the involvement of well-known community leaders, including religious figures and local authority structures, to ensure that their initiatives are rooted in the cultural and social realities of the communities they serve. This approach acknowledges the importance of inclusive dialogue, even with those who might

be viewed as adversaries. By bringing dissenting groups into the conversation, women leaders told us they were able to *"heal and address some underlying grievances that have been fueling conflict"* and promote a more comprehensive understanding of security, one that goes beyond just military or police presence.

While these activities are perceived as informal in official peacebuilding processes, WROs in Ethiopia have impacted the trajectory to peace, and supported conflict resolution by forming these informal peace committees and supporting survivors of conflict. One respondent shared that *"It creates awareness for women to promote peace for the community. It makes women an ambassador of peace."* Another participant explained that: *"Awareness creation among the youth, motivates youth and women to serve as peace ambassadors for their community and trains them to understand their rights and role in the community."* This inclusive strategy helps build trust and reduces tension, laying the groundwork for sustainable peace. This redefinition of "peace" has been crucial for communities, as the diverse cultural, religious, and ethnic contexts shape local perceptions of these concepts.

4.2 Long-term sustainability and livelihood building

Youth leaders and women's rights organisations believe that sustainable peace requires more than just immediate conflict resolution; it necessitates empowering women and girls with the knowledge and skills to participate meaningfully in formal peacebuilding processes. To do that, it's crucial to invest in long-term livelihood and resilience building.



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To reach areas made inaccessible by conflict or logistical challenges, organisations have formed alliances with women's groups and youth groups.

The gap left by short-term responses from INGOs during conflicts in Ethiopia has been a significant challenge for local communities. While international actors sometimes engage in areas with less conflict, youth groups flag that support is often missing where there is active conflict.

To address these gaps, local WROs have had to mobilise their own resources to deliver humanitarian support, often operating with limited funding. These local organisations work tirelessly to ensure that the needs of their communities are met, from providing immediate relief during conflicts to supporting long-term recovery and resilience building. By doing so, they also lay the foundation for lasting peace and stability, highlighting the critical role that local actors play in effective peacebuilding. To reach areas made inaccessible by conflict or logistical challenges, organisations have formed alliances with women's groups and youth groups. These networks play a pivotal role in mobilising communities, sharing crucial information, and spreading news about changes in the security situation.

Alongside its WROs partners, ActionAid Ethiopia led a needs assessment during the active conflict, including gathering information from hard-to-reach areas. The assessment was carried out by a women's watch group and local teams, addressing the needs of 4,500 women by providing them with cash for food support. By leveraging these networks, organisations can

Through awareness-raising campaigns about women's and girls' rights and targeted training programs, these initiatives aim to equip communities with the tools they need to advocate for their rights and engage constructively in peace efforts. By fostering a deeper understanding, organisations help ensure that women and girls are active contributors to peace and stability.

Moreover, these efforts include addressing the broader social challenges that impede peace, such as ethnic tension and the stigmatisation of certain communities. By tackling these issues head-on, WROs and YLOs work to dismantle the prejudices that fuel conflict and hinder reconciliation. Through a combination of education, advocacy, and community engagement, these initiatives aim to create a more inclusive and resilient society where all

members, regardless of their background, can participate in and benefit from the peace-building process, with an emphasis on empowering the next generation of leaders.

In addition, youth groups we spoke to have taken crucial steps *"to support [their] own future, when others are not"* with young women participating in research initiatives and fostering peace and security for young people. These young leaders recognise the importance of actively shaping their future and their initiatives bridge the gap between older generations and young people by raising awareness in innovative ways. Instead of relying solely on traditional methods like pamphlets and workshops, they use drama and creative expression to convey their messages and foster understanding across different age groups.

4.3 Filling the gap left by short-term INGO response

It was clear from our findings that there is a disconnect between the conflict, the needs of the community, and the response provided by the international community:

“**In most cases, INGOs provide short term, one-off support which didn't address main needs of women and girls or address the problems leaving more and more gaps. But WLOs are longer lasting as we know the context.**”

In fact, 78% of survey respondents stated that the international community is not sufficiently responding to the conflict, with 83% feeling a clear disconnect between the scale of the need in country, and how international actors respond to it.

extend their reach into remote or conflict-affected areas, ensuring that even the most marginalised communities are informed and can engage in the peacebuilding process. This collaborative approach enhances the effectiveness of the WROs individual initiatives and empowers local actors to take an active role in shaping their regions' path to peace.

Stories of change: Immediate humanitarian assistance and long-term support

WROs support communities across Ethiopia, even in areas that are inaccessible to international organisations. Humanitarian aid is provided through cash assistance and income-generating activities, with women leaders describing how they provided *“food [and] clothing to women and girls who had been injured due to the conflict”*.

From 2018 to 2024, ActionAid and its partners have supported more than 809,278 people in urgent need. Areas of support have been on Protection, WASH, livelihood, and cash for food approach. Through which 456660 (56.4%) women and the remaining 3526618 (43.6%) men rights holders have been supported.

In addition to providing humanitarian support, WROs, WLOs, and youth organisations have been working closely with the affected communities by providing them with training and awareness-raising activities to increase communities' understanding of conflict mitigation and provide medical and psychosocial support.

The lack of adequate support for local peacebuilding efforts by WROs and YLOs has long-term consequences, including missed opportunities to leverage local knowledge and leadership in creating sustainable peace, as well as a lack of support for communities once the immediate crisis has subsided.

4.4 Women's protection

Women and youth organisations have been providing affected women and girls with mental health support, including supporting survivors of GBV with referrals and counseling. To do this effectively, WROs and youth organisations provided training to communities. *“In addition to war and instability, when women face other attacks and injury, we understand the problem and act as representatives to reduce the impact and being part of the solution.”* This work was particularly important following the collapse of legal institutions and official referral systems as a result of the conflict.

Participants reported that in addition to supporting survivors, they were helping to restore the functions of government institutions as part of their post-conflict and recovery work. Using the restored systems, survivors were also able to access psychological and other mental health support from government institutions and other local and international organisations.

5

Conclusion and recommendations

Our findings reveal that the long-lasting conflict and emergency and its aftermath in Ethiopia disproportionately affected women and girls posing risks to their safety and security such as mass killings, food insecurity, and other sexual violence. During our group discussions, local women's rights, women-led, and youth organisations flagged that ongoing hostilities in Ethiopia created a significant obstacle for international agencies to deliver consistent humanitarian assistance and meet the long-term needs of communities.

Despite the challenges and obstacles such as lack of funding, harmful cultural norms, and violence, local women's rights, women-led, and youth organisations have found alternative ways to fill the gaps left by international actors, by providing humanitarian assistance, supporting the immediate needs of displacement communities, providing medical and psychological support and delivering peacebuilding activities. Work done by WROs, WLOs, and youth organisations additionally increased involvement in peacebuilding conversations and processes.

The civil societies were working to restore peace via alternative solutions including forming informal peace committees, supporting survivors of conflict, and creating awareness. Our findings shows that an increase in engagement between international communities and local women's rights, women-led and youth organisations, and local communities through long-term resilience building is essential to foster sustainable peace. To establish this empowerment of women and

girls with knowledge and skills is necessary to enable them to meaningfully participate in formal peacebuilding processes. Additionally, providing adequate flexible funding will support local organisations' development of the organisational structure and capacities so that they can access decision-making spaces and advocate for gender-responsive peacebuilding.

The organisations we spoke to collaborated to write the recommendations outlined below, which aim to enhance the participation of Ethiopian women and youth in peacebuilding and humanitarian responses, both locally and internationally.

Recommendations for international organisations:

1. Women’s participation: International actors in Ethiopia should actively engage with local women and youth-led organisations. This involves not only acknowledging their efforts but also providing substantial support to help them undertake peacebuilding work effectively within their localities, including with:

a. Better information sharing during humanitarian response and peacebuilding activities.

b. Strengthening the capacity of local women and youth by providing them with the necessary resources and skills to engage more effectively with conflict resolution and peacebuilding activities.

c. Support the safety of smaller organisations, with greater flexibility on partnership approaches, through

2. Take on a survivor-centered approach in conflict sensitivity. This includes considerations around gender-based violence and women’s protection throughout all program cycles, including partner violence, and early or forced marriage are considered with. These efforts must be accompanied by frequent gender transformative conflict sensitivity.

Recommendations for local governments:

1. Local and national governments should provide sufficient opportunities for local peacebuilding initiatives to utilise their skills and influence in peacebuilding and conflict resolution activities. This involves recognising and integrating their efforts into formal, national peacebuilding strategies.

2. Conflict prevention must be given significant attention by actors at all levels.

This proactive approach aims to mitigate conflicts before they escalate, reducing the need for extensive post-conflict recovery measures.

3. Peacebuilding structures should be reformed to make them more inclusive of women, youth, elderly and religious leaders, especially as mediation and peacebuilding mechanisms progress.

4. Long-term investment is needed in repairing the legal and judicial system, to challenge the entrenched culture of silence and impunity in Ethiopia.

Recommendations for international governments and donors:

1. Donors should provide long-term, multi-year and flexible funding which can be adapted to the needs of the most affected communities, and allow for different mechanisms for funding streams, e.g. providing cash rather than bank transfers. This type of funding supports the development of comprehensive peacebuilding programs that can have a lasting impact on the community.

2. Donors should support the creation of accessible peacebuilding resources to be used by women and youth. This can be done via translated material, infographics, and pamphlets.

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Cover image: Livelihood training participant, who started an injera (traditional flatbread) selling business after receiving livelihood training

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