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INSTITUTIONALIZED EXCLUSION: AGONIES OF CONFLICT-DISPLACED HOUSEHOLDS IN ETHIOPIA

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Abstract

Using a mixed-methods approach, this study examined how formal and informal institutions facilitate or deter social exclusion from accessing livelihood resources in the Metekel Zone of the Benishangul Gumuz National Regional State (BGNRS). The findings show that institutional social exclusion leads to mistrust, conflict, and displacement, with multifaceted impacts on human lives, livelihoods, and assets. The Constitution of the FDRE and the BGNRS Constitution have contradictory and exclusionary provisions. Formal institutions facilitated social exclusion in determining access to and use of livelihood resources through laws, policies, guidelines, and unwritten interpretations. Hence, this study highlights the potential for change in how national and regional governments reassess identity and resource allocation are vital for fostering inclusive governance, social cohesion, and sustainable development, ensuring resilience and improved livelihoods for all communities within Ethiopia.

Keywords: Social Exclusion; Constitution; Institutions; Livelihoods; Conflict; Displacement

INTRODUCTION

Institutions are structures comprised of agreed-upon social rules that shape interactions in political, economic, social, and cultural relationships. Institutions can lead to violence by implementing unjust and unequal opportunities and benefits. Institutions facilitate inclusion and exclusion through norms, values, laws, politics, education, businesses, and customs. Therefore, institutions can either facilitate or hinder people from seizing political, social, and economic opportunities (Bauer and Farmer 2016; Hodgson 2006; North, 1991; Semones, 1990). Formal institutions are governed by rules, laws, and regulations in both governmental and non-governmental settings, and they function at the global, continental, national, and local levels. Compared to formal institutions, informal institutions operate based on behaviour and value systems at the community and individual levels (Casson, 2010; North, 2003). Cox and McCubbins (1997) understood institutions as interlinked ideas and material capabilities signifying political and economic power.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, institutionalization of an ethnic-based structure drives conflict and subsequent internal displacement, both during the colonial and post-colonial era (Oucho, 1997). In Ethiopia, institutionalized and structured exclusion stems from the intersectionality of establishment and functionality of institutions along ethnicity, religion, region, centre, periphery, disability, urban, rural, class, gender, and age, built on complex, multilayered political, social, and economic considerations. Institutions, legislative processes, and value systems influence inclusion and exclusion. The structural failure of social networks and relationships facilitates social inclusion in rural contexts, creates deprived groups, individuals, and communities (socially excluded) (Abiy, 2019; European Commission, 2004; Haan, 2012; Kabeer, 2000; Sen, 2000). Clapham (2009) observed that, in post-1991 Ethiopia, the federal ethnic-based political system has failed to create inclusive political institutions. Rather, it has become a means of political power accession, narrowing representation, and leading to resentment and conflict. The national ethnic federal administrative system has legitimized locals, leading to conflicts over investable land. Global, national, and local actors have excluded existing and potential users at the local level (Tagel and Fana, 2018).

According to Zeitlyn, social exclusion occurs when institutions that allocate resources and assign value operate in ways that systematically deny some groups the resources and recognition that would allow them to participate fully in social life (Zeitlyn 2004, cited in Stewart et al., 2006). Drawing from the literature, exclusion is defined as the process and practice of creating constraints for rural people to access and use livelihood resources and aspire to the future (Allman, 2013; Levitas, 2006; World Bank, 2013). Conflict arises when there is a disagreement or clash of interests between two or more groups. Conflicts escalate into issues when institutions and systems are unable to effectively regulate and manage them, potentially resulting in violence (United Nations and the European Union, 2012).

The current study argues that Ethiopia experienced grievance-induced turmoil post-2014 due to various factors, including unequal growth and systemic and institutional exclusion and inclusion practices. These conflicts intensified in 2016 and reached a peak in 2018 and 2021, resulting in 3.6 million displaced persons. These systematic, formal, and informal institutions sponsored issues facilitated widespread varying scope and magnitude of civil demonstrations, violence, property destruction, loss of life, and displacement. The study examines the merits and drawbacks of nation-building agendas at various levels, emphasizing their importance in achieving sustainable development and establishing credible institutions in different countries. It posits that institutions comprise a set of rules and values that influence social inclusion and exclusion, potentially leading to conflict and violence. The study explores how social exclusion can provoke conflict, resulting in forced displacement and its

impact on economic, social, and political dimensions. Additionally, the study addresses questions regarding the role of institutions in instigating conflict and the implications for violence, property destruction, and internal displacement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study highlights that formal and informal institutions shape community values and livelihoods. National and regional constitutions, laws, and policies establish governance structures for formal institutions. The FDRE Constitution underpins national and regional governance and development, with Article 39 detailing rights for self-determination, cultural preservation, and government representation.

The study suggests that the government structure and constitutional provisions in the BGNRS misinterpret the FDRE Constitution's intent on self-organization and administration. While the FDRE Constitution supports organizing by ethnicity, it does not explicitly promote 'ethnic federalism.' However, linguistic and cultural diversity is often restricted in various regions. The BGNRS Constitution lists Berta, Gumuz, Mao, Komo, and Shinasha, excluding other groups like the Amhara, Oromo, Agaw, and Sidama, which contradicts Article 46 (2) of the FDRE Constitution concerning state delimitation based on settlement patterns, language, identity, and consent of the people.

Diversity does not always lead to conflict (Dagne, 2009). Ethno-linguistic federalism is often suggested for countries with diverse populations, like Ethiopia, to address interethnic tensions. Articles 46 and 47 of Ethiopia's FDRE Constitution detail the government structures of the nine states, ensuring equal rights and power for each state.

Zeitlyn (2004) defines social exclusion as the systematic denial of resources and recognition to certain groups, preventing them from fully participating in society. Social inclusion policies aim to improve the conditions for disadvantaged individuals to participate in society by enhancing their ability, opportunity, and dignity (World Bank and UNHCR, 2015). In Ethiopia, historical social exclusion in land ownership fuelled student movements in the 1960s-1980s, leading to the overthrow of the imperial regime in 1974 and subsequent land reforms (Bahiru, 2014).

This study defines social exclusion as limiting rural people's access to resources and development opportunities in Ethiopia. It explores how administrative and legal frameworks contribute to this exclusion, impacting social, economic, and political lives. Ethnic federalism marginalizes certain groups, leading to conflicts and displacements.

This study investigated social exclusion-induced conflict among IDPs in the BGNRS and its effects on livelihoods. It examined how institutions affected interactions and resource access within the context of the BGNRS Constitution and analyzed the roles of government and community institutions. The study highlighted literature gaps and developed a framework to meet the objectives.

Data on social inclusion and exclusion, rural livelihoods, and forced displacement were collected using qualitative and quantitative methods. The data were analyzed using concepts from the social framework, social inclusion framework, and structural violence theory. The study’s theoretical framework (Figure 3) was developed based on empirical and conceptual literature reviews and selected relevant variables.

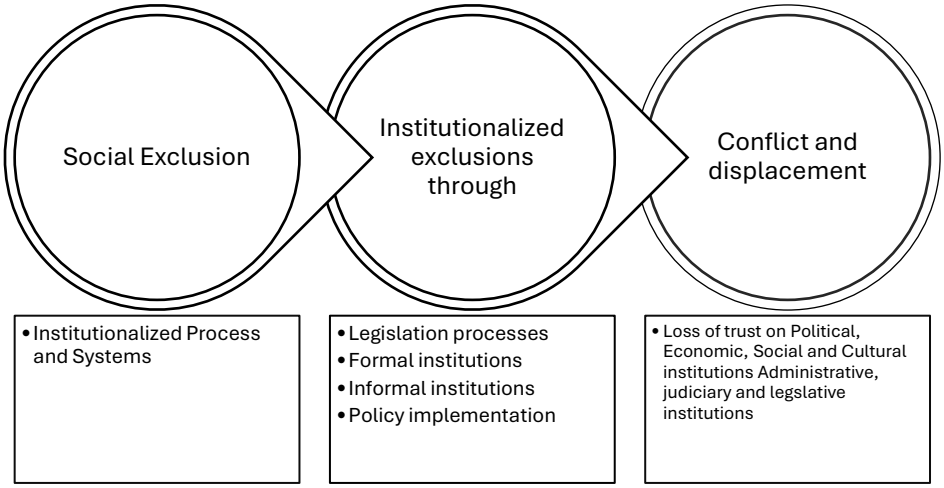
The Social Framework (SF) was developed in 2017 by Smith and Vanclay as a comprehensive blend of the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) and well-being approach to analyze the impact of displacement caused by development projects on livelihood outcomes and people's well-being (Department for International Development, 2001; Ellis and Biggs, 2001). The SF addresses critiques of the SLF and explores the merits of the well-being approach in fulfilling needs and ensuring well-being (White, 2010). This study uses variables from the SLF to assess the impact of conflict-induced displacement. The SF comprises pillars related to community, land, and livelihoods, making it suitable for examining displacement impacts at both the individual and group levels, with a focus on well-being.

Structural violence can take different forms, including intended and unintended physical and psychological harm. Preventable forms of violence (e.g., physiological, psychological, and somatic violence) contribute to the discourse on structural violence. This study applied the concept of structural violence to analyze the impact of social exclusion-induced conflict on the well-being of rural people affected by internal displacement in the BGNRS, Metekel Zone (Galtung, 1969; Galtung and Fischer, 2013; Katie, 2019; Mitchell, 2019). Additionally, this study used a multifaceted approach, including a series of questions, to assess the perceptions and experiences of structural violence in the context of internally displaced households in the Metekel Zone.

Since 2013, the World Bank's Social Inclusion Framework (SIF) has focused on markets (finance, land, housing), services (health, education, transport, water, information), and spaces (physical, political, cultural, social). It examines social inclusion and exclusion in legislation, institutions, and policy implementation across countries. The study analyzes how these factors affect household access to spaces, markets, services, social networks, and rural livelihoods, and highlights inequalities caused by exclusion and displacement.

These processes occur in multiple layers and dimensions, affecting the livelihood outcomes of communities and households. We measured how these processes and practices at the household level enhanced opportunities or hindered access to resources for conflict-induced IDPs to achieve livelihood outcomes. The theoretical framework is based on the study's objective, with social exclusion at its core. It is also structured around both forward and backward effects on institutional processes and systems that inform legislative processes, the function of formal and informal institutions, and policy implementation. Feedback from legislation, policy, and institutional processes at various administrative levels shapes the scope and intensity of social inclusion and exclusion. These institutions interact with communities and households' access to and use of livelihood resources (such as land, employment, and agricultural production), affecting those included and excluded. This theoretical framework is used to measure the effects of conflict-induced displacement at the household level. Figure 1 provides a detailed illustration of the contextualized theoretical framework for this study.

Figure 1: Institutions and processes in social exclusion, conflict and displacement dynamics conceptual framework



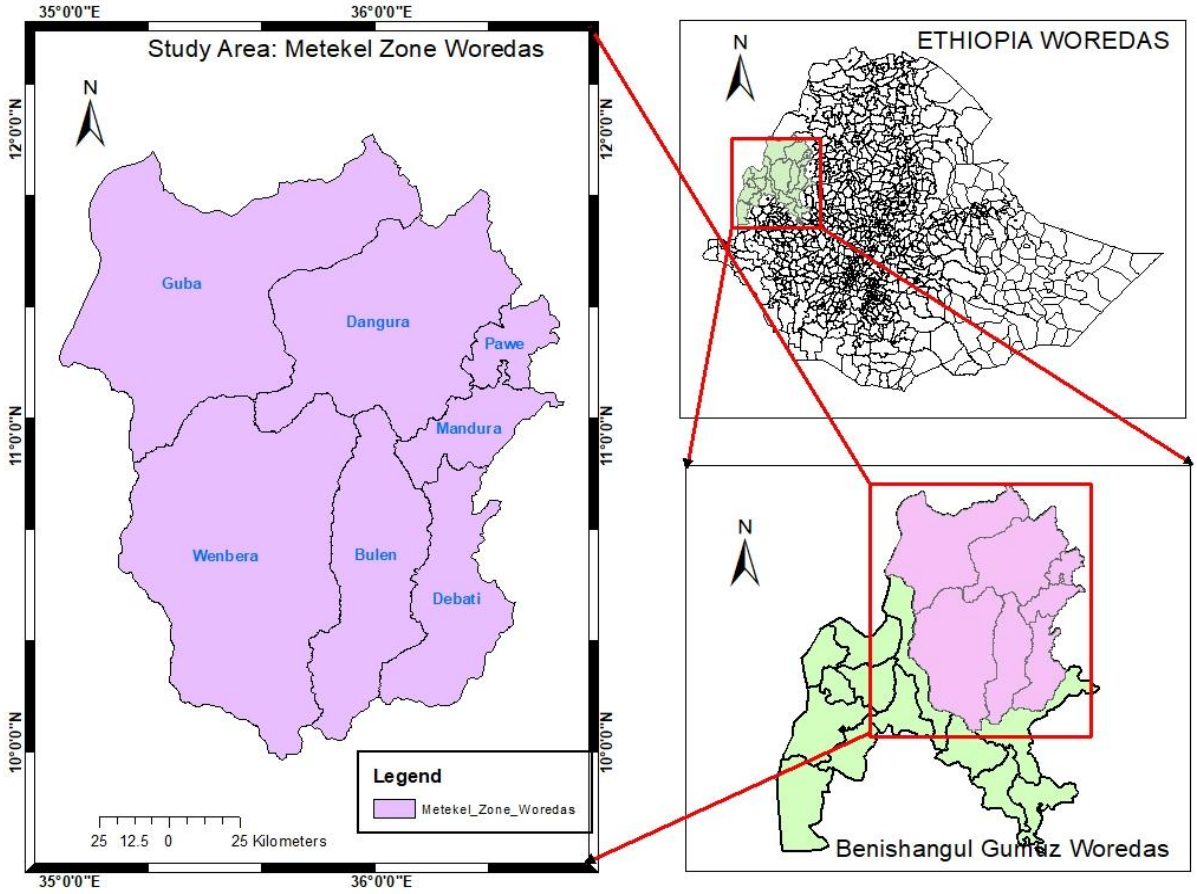
Source: SLF (DFID, 2001), Iain Scoons (1998), IRR Model (Cernea, 2000),

METHOD

Study area

Benishangul Gumuz is a national regional state in Ethiopia. In 2021, CSA (2021) estimated, the population of the region reached 1219,000 (618,000 male and 601,000 female). The region has a geographic span of 51,000 km^2. It shares borders with Amhara National Regional State (ANRS), Sudan, Oromia, and Gambella. Administratively, it comprises three zones and 20 woredas (Figure 2); Pawe and Mao Komo are special woredas. The Metekel Zone is the largest geographically (26,272 km^2), followed by Assosa (14,166 km^2) and Kamashi (8,850 km^2).

Figure 2: Map of the study, region, zone and woredas



Source: Central Statistics Agency and Ministry of Finance, updated in October 2020

The BGNRS is endowed with natural resources, including gold, marble, and coal reserves, and perennial rivers suitable for hydropower and irrigation agriculture. It hosts the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), the largest hydroelectric dam in Africa. It contains vast amounts of agricultural land, suitable for livestock and other ruminants. Cultivated land in Ethiopia has grown from 9.9% in 1994 to 14.33% in 2018. The size of arable land in the BGNRS was 6-7% of the national cultivated land (Agriculture Bureau, 2022). In the 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 Meher seasons, the region cultivated 253,409.72 and 253,681.56 ha, with estimated production of 5,818,801.22 and 6,272,383.51, respectively (CSA 2019; CSA 2020).

The BGNRS was selected for this study because: (i) conflict-induced displacement (CID) was 6% in 2018 and increased to 13% of the region's total population projected in 2022 (MoP 2019; BGNRS Emergency Coordination Center, 2021; CSA, 2013); (ii) CID in the region is understudied; (iii) BGNRS is home to a diverse set of people (hosts over eighty ethnic groups); and (iv) prior research experience of social exclusion and internal displacement.

Study Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach with a sequential exploratory and descriptive design centred on pragmatism. It started with qualitative data collection, augmented with quantitative data for triangulation and filling data gaps. The qualitative approach employed focus group discussions (FGD) and key informant interviews (KII). Observations were made at the Ranch camp. It was then followed by a survey and review of secondary sources in the relevant thematic areas, including journal articles, book volumes, statistical reports, published and unpublished academic works, and video documentaries.

Study population

The study participants were displaced from the BGNRS, Metekel Zone six Woredas. The IDPs are sheltered at Ranch IDP Camp, Chagni town, Guangua Zuria Woreda, Amhara region. The first segment of respondents comprised displaced households with diverse sociocultural backgrounds. The second constituted government representatives at different levels from the Amhara (Chagni) and BGNRS Emergency Coordination Center (Gilgel Beles and Assosa). The third comprised civil society organisations and local institutions working at the origin of displacement and the Ranch Camp.

Insecurity in reaching IDPs in their areas of origin and IDP camps' inaccessibility due to ongoing active conflict restricted the sample choice. Survey respondents were selected from non-overlapping 74 shelter tents clustered at the Ranch Camp, hosting 4,583 households (17.8% of the IDP population in the Metekel Zone), using probability sampling (Kothari 2004). They are organised by the ECC, from different woredas and villages. The tent organisation helped avoid biases in respondents' selection. A lottery method was used to select 26 tents (35%). Each tent's register was used to randomly select participants. We dispatched 400 questionnaires to selected participants, of which 359 were successfully collected.

The KII and FGD participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their knowledge of the study's objective (Bernard, 2006). Ten FGDs were conducted with 60 households (38 men and 22 women). Sixteen KIIs were conducted with 10 men and 6 women. Observations were made at temporary shelters, living conditions, transitional food, shelter, services, clothing support, security, and people's overall interaction. We accessed 10 documentary videos from national (Ethiopia Broadcast Corporation and Fana Broadcast Corporate) and international media outlets (Al Jazeera, France24), advocacy groups, and activists at different times during the study.

Field work

The fieldwork was conducted from February 15 to July 2, 2021. It was iterative between data collection and analysis, covering the same households to complement data gaps based on preliminary data analysis. We conducted one FGD and three KIIs with the Gumuz because of the ongoing active conflict and insecurity.

Data analysis methods

The interviews and FGD notes were transcribed, thematically organised, and systematically sorted. The quantitative data were entered using CSPro software and exported to STATA 14.1 for analysis. The views and perspectives of the video content were cautiously examined to ensure source integrity. The perspectives and claims presented in ten videos were corroborated through interviews, focus group discussions, and literature. The video documentaries have been accessed at various stages of this study to support the thematic findings considering their factual consistency with the interview and focus groups, balanced views, and timeliness. The survey and secondary data were analysed using descriptive statistics, mean, and frequency tables.

Research ethics, validity, and data reliability

We followed the ethical considerations highlighted by Sarantakos (2005), cited by Creswell (2009), for consent. The Addis Ababa University's Center for Rural Development approved our tools and objectives. The qualitative and quantitative tools included a paragraph explaining the study purpose, respondents' privacy, diversity (geographic origin, ethnic background, sex, and age), and the study findings' use. Therefore, we took care to manage expectations, explain the purpose, and avoid harm. The study secured clearance to interact with the displaced people and collect data for academic exercises from the ANRS and BGNRS ECCs, Ranch Camp coordinators, and tent focal persons.

Data validity and reliability tests authenticated the collected data's utility in analysing and answering the study questions and objectives. Among the dispatched 400 printed survey questionnaires, 14 were not returned, 12 were incomplete, and 15 were unengaged, yielding 359 samples for analysis. The data for this study were collected from the lived experiences of internally displaced persons (IDPs), which may inherently carry some bias. To verify the data, diverse sources were used, including surveys for quantitative data about IDP demographics and experiences, key informant interviews for in-depth insights, and focus groups for varied perspectives. Observation was used to provide an understanding of the living conditions and daily challenges, while an empirical literature review compared findings with existing research. This multi-method approach mitigated biases and ensured a comprehensive, reliable understanding of IDP experiences, capturing both quantitative and qualitative aspects to present a holistic view of their situation. The study employed multivariate analysis of the Likert scale questions using Cronbach's alpha test to assess data reliability, yielding a reliability coefficient value of 0.7856. This value is considered reliable, as values above 0.7 and close to 1 are generally accepted as reliable.

DISCUSSION

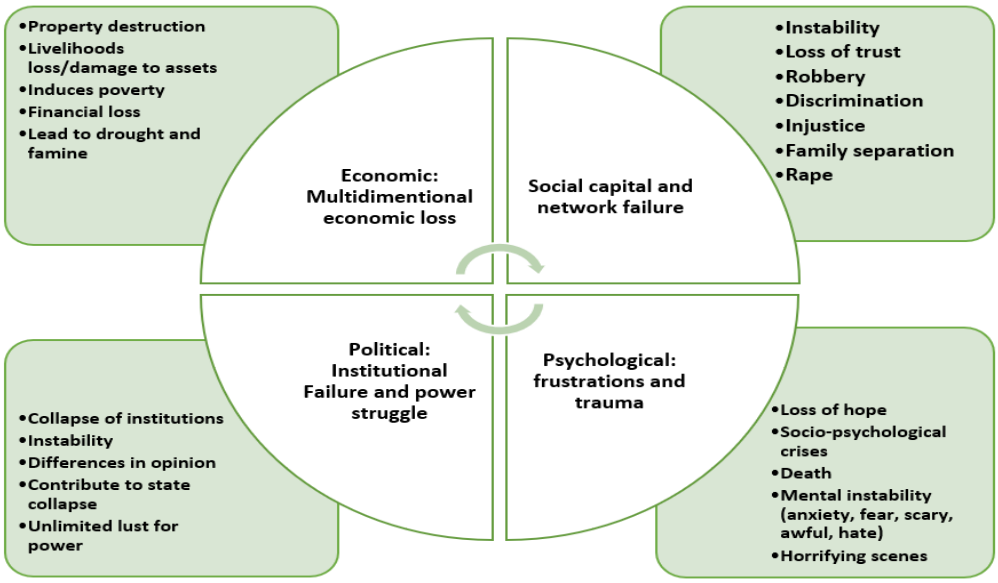
Study participants' socioeconomic and demographic profiles

Most of the respondents were between 29 and 39 years old (55.2%), indicating idle labor and production loss. Women and girls comprise 18.7% of the sample survey, 36.67% of the FGD, and 37.5% of the KII participants. Among the survey respondents, 263 categorised themselves into the Amhara ethnic group, 74 into the Agaw-Awi, and 22 into the Shinasha and Oromo. Most (84.4%) only knew how to read and write and were married (346; 96.4%). KII informants were recruited from Amhara (eight), Agew (three), Shinasha (two), and Gumuz (three) households.

Understanding conflict and conflict drivers

Households at Ranch camp were displaced from their original residences due to violent incidents and clashes with community members. It is important to ask and understand their perspective on what constitutes conflict. Survey respondents were asked to share their understanding of the conflict and its outcomes through open-ended questions. Figure 3 thematically organizes the responses, focusing on defining conflict and the manifestations of conflict in their context. The responses varied across participants covering political, social, cultural, and economic institutions' failure, contributing to the impacts on the lives and livelihoods of displaced people. The scope of violence, conflict, and displacement hardships impacted the well-being and psychological stability.

Figure 3: IDPs' definition of conflict thematic response



Source: Own survey, February-July 2021.

The survey respondents' understanding of conflict is aligned with existing literature on conflict and its effect. Their responses covered four main themes: political, economic, social, and psychological. These included institutional failure, economic loss, social capital and network failure, and psychological impacts.

The benefit of inclusive development mitigates social conflict due to access to resources and livelihoods. The situation of the excluded and disadvantaged would be exacerbated due to access to social services (education, health, infrastructure, finance, labor market), and political capital. There are different versions and understandings of inclusive development, where all scholars agree on the exclusionary dimension. The study further outlined that loss of livelihood and assets, due to redistribution or displacement and policy-based alienations, leads to inequality as the instruments of unevenly distributed livelihood assets, power imbalances, and civil unrest (Gupta, 2015). Hence, conflict analysis in this context refers to economic, political, and social aspects in determining social policy and change (Semones, 1990). Kottak (2002) also highlighted institutional discrimination and legislative exclusions in social interactions shaping conflict and conflict outcomes.

Administrative, security and economic institutions: woreda and kebele

We delve into the specific segments of displaced households' understanding of conflict, the issue that cuts across the four thematic areas. Although inter-group conflict on the Benishangul-Oromia border has a long history (Abbink 2011) notes that a conflict erupted in the mid-1990s between the various population groups in this region - indigenous Berta, Gumuz, and descendants of later immigrant groups like the Oromo, the Amhara, and other "highlanders". Issues included political representation, ethnic districts, and the regional presidency. An uneasy peace returned when a complicated compromise formula with ethnic quotas was created, and a new 'special woreda' was carved out for the Amhara resettler population, with new councils, and a structure of alternate power holding. The triggers for the current wave of conflict appear to have been land-titling projects being undertaken by a development organization (Labzae 2019). The primary trigger, however, was competition over land, in a context characterized by expropriation of land for investment without considering the local land use patterns of shifting cultivation by the Gumuz (Davison and Sew, 2018; Moreda, 2017). The KII 10-16 stated that their vulnerability increases when they purchase land by entering sharecropping and lease agreements. The FDRE Constitution, Article 40, Sub-article 1, 2, 3, indicate that land is a common property of the nations, nationalities, and peoples of Ethiopia. So, selling and buying land is not legally allowed.

We understand the legal provision that land is not for sale but a common property of the Ethiopian people. However, contradicting this provision, the BGNRS constitution and land administration law designating land use rights to indigenous people of the region. After purchasing, the process and transaction costs of obtaining land-use rights certificates can be frustrating. Sometimes, the administrative staff who process land-use rights holdings demand bribes to facilitate registration. This is a simple example of the hierarchy of exclusion from livelihood resource access, involving different actors in the process: formal and informal institutions, individuals, and communities. These are consistent with the claims by Labzae (2015) about the woreda and kebele land administration committee support to the formalization of land use rights by non-indigenous people through bribes or providing past land tax documentation.

Mediations by local institutions to address competition over economic and natural resources (Labzae, 2015), institutional discrimination, and legal exclusion (Kottak, 2002) have been influenced by political and economic interests. Efforts of traditional mediation by informal institutions have encountered challenges on several occasions. A mediation event was held in Wombera, supported by local administration and elders. However, 'other people,' including the Shinasha, were violently attacked two days after the mediation and celebration event (Abera, 2021).

The lack of protection from displacement, security of life, property, equal treatment as per the law without discrimination based on any identity marker has led to conflict, violence, and displacement. It is fundamental to anchor these concepts on the FDRE and BGNRS constitutional provisions. The FDRE constitution article 18 ensures the right to protection against inhumane and degrading treatment. Article 25 guarantees non-discrimination. The BGNRS constitution includes provisions for human rights, safety, security (article 15), right to life (article 16), protection from physical harm (article 17), and dehumanizing treatment (article 19). However, KII 6-10 reports a decline in these protections and their effectiveness.

Both formal and informal institutions work together in reinforcing exclusion at the individual, community, and government levels. Non-indigenous individuals enter informal contracts with the indigenous Gumuz for share cropping and land rental

(lease) agreements to cultivate for a specified period. These agreements are formalized through the elders (informal community-level institutions) at an individual level. Among others, this includes the Kebele land administration committee. Subsequently, these informal agreements are recorded (Kebele land administration ledger) and legalized (stamped and issued with a unique reference number) by Kebele. A report will be sent from Kebele to the Woreda land administration office. The responsible committee and offices are aware that we cannot obtain formal land use rights and access natural resources (such as mining sites, irrigable land with water access, or non-timber forest resources). As a result, we constantly feel insecure and unable to make long-term investments in land due to the uncertainty surrounding the permanence of these agreements. Hence, our livelihoods are influenced by individual actions, formal and informal institutions, and the prevailing political environment.

Households who participated in the KII 9-16 stated that formal and informal institutions were crucial in determining access to land and livelihood resources:

> *In Dangur Woreda, the formal government system does not allow 'others' to access land use rights and other natural resources, unlike the Gumuz and Shinasha. We access land and natural resources by special arrangements, such as renting, sharecropping, or purchasing them. The rent agreement is for a defined period, usually from one to three years, in exchange for an agreed amount of crops or cash payments. Renting land use rights is permitted by the regional land proclamation. Sharecropping, as the name suggests, is an agreement to share a percentage of production, considering the costs incurred for seeds and fertilizers.*

Purchasing land use rights is facilitated by informal networks and community members because buying and selling land is not constitutionally allowed. Most agreements involve purchasing property developed on land, commercial trees, houses, and access to non-timber forest resources. The agreements are between the land-use rights holders, Gumuz and/or Shinasha, and the buyers, such as Amhara, Oromo, or Agew. These agreements are signed on paper in front of witnesses from both the buyer and the seller. Informal institutions mediate these agreements and are recognized by formal government institutions when presented by Gumuz and Shinasha. The survey results are consistent with the KII-9-11.

> *The BGNRS constitution assigns natural resource ownership, including land, to indigenous people. However, the regional land administration and use proclamation No. 85/2010, lacking detailed guidelines, has led to economic exclusion in our area. Selective recruitment of indigenous people to land administration committees at woreda, kebele, and village levels has exacerbated the situation. Employment opportunities consider political and ethnic affiliation and loyalty than technical qualifications. As a result, we face systematic isolation (access to and use of productive resources, land, and extractives), economic dependence (un/underemployed other people), and limited livelihood opportunities. This is a testament that non-indigenous individuals are rarely empowered economically.*

The focus group discussion participants 1-4 stated that security institutions, including the militia and police, have not adequately served the public. This has resulted in persecution, loss of life, damage to property, and displacement. These institutions are influenced by political interference and manipulation by elites. Key informants 6-10 also corroborated these institutional failures.

The loss of trust in the formal government administration, mainly the failure of the security and administrative institutions to protect displaced households and the alleged collaboration with the militant groups, demonstrates the failure of institutions legally mandated to provide protection has questioned the integrity of the system for continued reliance.

The inability of formal government administrative and security institutions to protect households at their origin, along with conflict, violence, and subsequent displacement, illustrates a decline in trust in these institutions as providers of security and protection. These failures are in contravention of the FDRE constitution Article 16, which guarantees protection of individuals from bodily harm.

> *The circumstances in our area clearly infringe upon constitutional rights to life and property, leading to fear, trauma, and mental instability. The apparent indifference of the Woreda and Kebele security forces (police, militia and regional special forces) raises concerns about their possible alliance with militant groups, casting doubt on their independence and exposing institutional shortcomings.*

This situation has raised serious concerns about the integrity of the system and its continued reliability for providing indiscriminate protection to life, property, and choice of residence.

This systematic and institutionalized economic exclusion of the 'other' people in the Metekel Zone has exacerbated their vulnerability to economic shocks and insecurity to acquiring and investing in long-term economic assets. According to the participants, the third layer of economic exclusion includes the challenges they face and the feelings of intimidation and fear when going to marketplaces, gathering produce, and participating in agricultural activities. The IDPs could not gather and cultivate the produce left on their farms due to conflict, violence, and forced displacement. Overall, 99 and 260 household survey respondents rated their perceptions as agreeing and strongly agreeing, respectively, with an average of 4.72. In summary, the characteristics and perception measurement of economic exclusion weighed an average of more than 4.72-4.90 on a 5-point scale, which is a strong indicator of various practices of social exclusion through institutionalized economic exclusion.

Role of informal and formal institutions: at individual and community level

The key informants 1-8 and focus group discussion 1-4 supported the survey findings, indicating that the systematic political exclusion of households from various aspects of life. Participants identified formal and informal institutions at the woreda level as effective tools for institutionalizing the prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion that may lead to conflicts impacting people's lives and livelihoods.

Likert scale questions were used to understand exclusion at individual, community, and institutional levels. A multivariate analysis of the Likert scale questions using Cronbach's alpha test to assess data reliability, yielding a reliability coefficient value of 0.7856. This value is considered reliable, as values above 0.7 and close to 1 are generally accepted as reliable.

Specifically, 217 of the respondents indicated that institutions (both formal and informal, including office holders at Woreda and Kebele levels) contributed to economic and political exclusion. Community-level exclusion has been experienced by 190 households, and 196 respondents identified their exclusion experience at the individual level. A considerable number of households experienced exclusion with varying degrees, often, sometimes, and rarely combined, constituted 160 at the individual level, 165 at the community level, and 137 at the institutional level. Respondents who never experienced social

exclusion were three at the individual level, four at the community level, and five at the formal and informal institution levels, constituting no more than 1% at different levels.

Households often face various types of exclusion in their interactions at institutional, community, and individual levels. These different forms and levels of exclusion gradually created divisions and a sense of insecurity. One of the key informants stated:

> *Political power governs the relationships among different community members. Other people are aware that they can face targeted violence and damage to their property, livestock, and crops. This historical experience has been passed down through the generations. Those with firearms have an advantage. Traditionally, individual incidents have been resolved using customary methods. Other people were systematically disarmed, whereas Gumuz and Shinasha received political, social, and psychological support, including arms from government sources. This shifted the balance of power. Without political manipulation, the situation might have unfolded differently, as past animosities and disputes between the people were successfully managed through mediation led by elders from both sides.*

The FDRE and BGNRS constitutions guarantee citizens' protection, security and safety. However, contrary to these provisions, people's trust has eroded owing to formal institutions' impartiality, including the systematic denial of recruitment for the judicial and police forces.

In the security of life and property surveys, respondents were asked to rate how they felt before, during, and after conflicts. Among the 359 respondents, 253 (65.5%) considered themselves safe and very secure before the conflict, 16 felt unsafe, and 42 were unable to assess themselves as they considered they lived a normal life. This deteriorated during the conflict, where 102 households felt unsafe and 108 felt less secure, totalling 220 households (57%). Given the uncertainties about their futures, trauma, and camp residence, responses to their current sense of security yielded mixed results. The summary of the excerpt from the FGD participants suggests that trust in formal security systems for protecting citizens has declined significantly. The recruitment process for security and administrative roles has been biased towards indigenous peoples, as per the regional constitution. This has led to a lack of cooperation between the military and other groups, resulting in security challenges in Metekel zone. The military has not established working relationships with other ethnic groups to gather intelligence and ensure safety, thus contributing to conflict and displacement in the area.

This narrative from the FGD participants is consistent with the survey findings, in which 259 households identified a lack of access to gainful employment as an indicator of exclusion. Households were requested to rank their level of gainful employment exclusion; 97, 103, and 59 ranked 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Moreover, safety and protection are lacking. A summary of the key informant participants explained that:

> *I witnessed houses and agricultural produce being burned and people killed and mutilated with spears and bullets and then inhumanely buried in mass graves. The livestock were either slaughtered for food or taken. Other internally displaced people spoke about various forms of brutality, and the extent of the violence and killing was enraging. This scale of violence and indiscriminate attacks was unprecedented for my generation. It has become too difficult for the elderly to resolve problems through traditional informal institutions and bring peace to their communities.*

Systematic denial of access to employment and natural resources

The FDRE Constitution, Article 43 on the Right to Development, provides the right for better living standards and sustainable development opportunities to enable citizens to meet their 'basic needs'. Article 43 on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights requires member states of the federal government to offer productive employment opportunities to their citizens. These provisions also hold true for the BGNRS Constitution Article 41, sub-articles 7 and 8.

The denial of employment opportunities in the region at the Woreda and Kebele levels to the various sectors of the administrative office positions in government has deprived the non-indigenous peoples the income and livelihood earnings. Key informant 4 stated that,

> *This exclusion in employment is even for those who are merit-based, giving priority to the indigenous people of the region. As a resident, we face discrimination in accessing equitable services and impartial justice from the technical staff because of their ethnic and political affiliations.*

This indicates the partiality inherent in the legislative and policy frameworks in the region concerning the distribution of economic and natural resources. These legal instruments are implemented by formal government institutions as the executive branch of government at regional, Woreda, Kebele, and village levels and informal institutions at community levels. However, this contradicts the provisions of the Federal Constitution, particularly the economic, social, and cultural rights outlined in Articles 41 (1) and 40 (4), (5), which state that citizens have the freedom to choose their means of livelihood and peasants and pastoralists have the property right, respectively.

The Likert scale questions used a five-point rating system from strong agreement to strong disagreement. Respondents frequently reported discrimination and denial of equal employment opportunities for individuals identified as 'others', with an average rating of 4.80. These institution-based deprivation of livelihood resources such as land, water, and employment opportunities, have over the years led to animosity, violence, conflict, displacement and loss of lives, and livelihoods in the study area.

Survey respondents were asked to elaborate on economic exclusion characteristics they faced before displacement. The survey results showed that privileged access to livelihood resources (land and finance) placed first (166 households, 46%), followed by lack of access to gainful employment (97 households, 27%) and lack of access to financial services (80 households, 22 %). Table 4 elaborates both the response and ranking of the respective livelihood resources and the prevailing level of exclusion prior to the conflict and displacement of people.

Table 1: Households' response and ranking of livelihoods and exclusion

Items	T3. 302a. Importance of economic exclusion ranking [1st Rank]	T3. 302b. Importance of economic exclusion ranking [2nd Rank]	T3. 302c. Importance of economic exclusion ranking [3rd Rank]	Rank
	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency	
No Ranking.	24	80	108	3
Privileged access to livelihood resources (land, finance, water).	166	53	36	2
Lack of access to gainful employment.	97	103	59	1
Lack of access to other economic resources (commercial land, minerals).	34	82	70	4
Lack of access to financial services	38	41	80	5
Other			6	6
Total	359	359	359	

Source: own survey, February-July 2021.

The voices of the KII 9-11 are consistent with the provision of the BGNRS Land Administration Proclamation 85, section 6, Article 4 (c) and (f) which assigns the authority of land allocation for natural resources extraction (gold, sand, lime) and agricultural land to Woreda, Kebele, and village-level land administration committees. These committees are responsible for designating land for individual and communal use. Local authorities have the mandate to grant or deny access to productive resources such as land and natural resources.

Access to resources historically has been tied to ethnicity and power balance, where those who have the upper hand control or dominate the landscape. There is also a differing world view about the environment and natural resources between the indigenous Gumuz (Woldesillasie 2009). In BGNRS, the sources of conflict stem from competition over natural resources, including land between indigenous and 'others'. In the survey, respondents were asked to elaborate on the forms of indignity and claims that led to conflicts in their areas of origin before displacement. A total of 160 respondents identified the claim of indignity to the land, while 198 respondents attributed the conflict to coming from another region, leading to eventual displacement. Those who reported that the conflict originated from another region explicitly stated in the BGNRS land proclamation article section 2, article 5, sub-article 3 as 'illegal occupants,' which does not entitle them to land use rights. This summarizes the views and claims of indignity as a source of conflict practiced through formal government administrative institutions supported by the FDRE and the BGNRS Constitution.

Lack of political representation

Survey respondents were asked specific questions to identify how they experienced political exclusion from their places of origin and its effect on their lives and livelihoods. The study revealed several sources of political exclusion in the area, such as a lack of political space and representation, limited access to the justice system, and unfavourable administrative arrangements, as reported by 90, 95, and 49 respondents, respectively. The KII 4-10 supported the survey participants' findings.

The conflict we encountered was driven by political interests at various levels of government and those who raised arms against the government. Political elites have mobilised the Gumuz community against other groups, specifically targeting individuals with lighter skin. Although this sentiment may not be commonly supported by all the Gumuz households or community members, it remains challenging to identify individual allegiances within the Gumuz.

The history of tension and violent engagements between the Gumuz and other communities in the BGNRS and Metekel Zone should not be overlooked. These interactions have been influenced by political power and the capability to manage economic and social issues at the community level. The empirical literature, including Woldesillasie's (2009) work on 'resettlement', has examined population control policies implemented by 'highlanders' in peripheral areas inhabited by the Gumuz to meet economic interests. Desalegn (2019) acknowledged sporadic conflict and violence between the Gumuz and other groups but highlighted their culture of tolerance and coexistence.

We have grown accustomed to and have tolerated certain levels of violence committed by some segments (clans) of the Gumuz community for generations. Killing other ethnic groups is a cultural ritual celebrated by community members as a symbol of beauty and courage. The act is celebrated by men who are married and preparing to marry. This was a ritual among some clans of the Gumuz and was typically observed during the third week of September. However, the scale of killing and brutality significantly increased beyond the ritual that we were used to tolerate and resolved through elder mediation.

The following summary from the FGD participants aligns with the results of the survey respondents:

The BGNRS Constitution does not adequately represent 'other people' in government roles, leading to underrepresentation at all levels, including regional, Woreda, and Kebele administrations. As a result, decisions are made without input from those affected. Government institutions often neglect the needs of these individuals, except when collecting taxes or enforcing evictions. This problem stems from ethnicity-based federalism, which leads to conflict and displacement.

Social and cultural dimensions of exclusion

According to Kottak (2002), conflict emerges due to prejudice against other groups, including stereotypes, dehumanization, and looking down on one group. Regarding the social and cultural dimensions of exclusion before displacement, survey respondents reported an inability to socialize and network in marketplaces (103), followed by different forms of stigma and discrimination (73) and challenges in practicing their household livelihood (63).

The FGD and KII participants highlighted the multifunctional role of markets as places for socializing, seeking support, and engaging in economic activities. However, due to a lack of security information, people fear going to markets alone. This represents significant social change over a short period.

These institutions are foundations to intermediate the vertical and horizontal interactions at different administrative levels and in inter-and intra-community relations. We used nine Likert-scale questions to assess the sources of displaced households' exclusion at Chagni Ranch camp. Participants rated their perceptions on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Among the respondents, 271 households (75.5%) strongly agreed, and 88 households (24.5%) agreed, resulting in mean scores of 4.75 and 4.67, respectively, on a five-point scale. No households expressed neutrality, disagreement, or strong disagreement. This sentiment was reflected by a mean score of 4.67, with 120 households agreeing and 239 households strongly agreeing.

The perception measurement questions addressed the social and cultural dimensions of exclusion, focusing on irregularities in social relationships, networking, and cooperation with other ethnic groups, such as the Gumuz and Shinasha. The results revealed that 245 households agreed and 114 strongly agreed to experiencing social and cultural exclusion, with an average rating of 4.32. The respondents felt uncertain about social networks; clear indicators of exclusion from social networking, accessing social capital, participating in rituals, and engaging in social events were observed, such as *Iddir* and *Mahber*, with a mean value of 4.30. *Iddir* is a traditional community-level burial association (Feleke 2015). *Mahber* is a community-based institution that recognizes and celebrates a religious saint (Amsalu, Bisaillon, and Tiruneh, 2020). These results demonstrate the breakdown of social relationships and networks recognized by the BGNRS Constitution, resulting in a lack of trust in the informal institutions these communities have relied on for generations. The empirical evidence discussed in Section 3 and the findings from the FGD and KII support these results.

IDPs are excluded from participating in political, economic, and social decisions at the woreda, kebele, and village levels. These factors considerably affect their livelihood and quality of life. In the survey, 256 households agreed, and 102 strongly agreed with this perception, with a mean value of 4.28. The FGD and KII highlighted that decisions regarding livelihood opportunities, political representation, and holding officeholders accountable were made in these meetings. These gatherings are also regarded as platforms for exchanging information, through which some individuals have privileged access to information that directly affects their livelihood, well-being, and safety. A total of 75 households identified unequal access to information as a display of political exclusion, where those represented in political and administrative institutions had greater access to information than 'others' who were not part of these institutions.

> *The Woreda administration and National Defense Forces recently hosted a workshop to communicate and counsel the consequences of continued violence for both the representatives of the indigenous and 'other' people in the area. Each participant was paid a daily allowance of 450 birr during the workshops. A few days after the workshop, the Gumuz hung a dress on a tree, symbolizing their courage, in contrast to others who were unwilling to confront them. This event had cultural significance and was understood by both sides, leading to significant conflict and displacement. Information access has been divided, as events attended by the Gumuz do not include non-Gumuz communities. This exclusion may have contributed to conflicting results.*

CONCLUSION

This study examined the various forms of institutionalized exclusion in the BGNRS and Metekel Zone, which have led to conflict and the internal displacement of individuals. Through a mixed-methods approach, the research reveals that exclusionary policies and practices have systematically denied non-indigenous groups access to vital livelihood resources, employment, political representation, and social networks. Scholars must examine the causes of conflicts arising from institutionalised social exclusion and suggest solutions, as these conflicts desensitise people, harm lives and livelihoods, and reveal institutional

failures to protect individuals. These failures have resulted not only in economic deprivation and loss of property, but also in the breakdown of social capital, psychological trauma, and political marginalization.

The study participants' understanding of conflict encompasses various dimensions: economic losses (property damage, loss of livelihoods, financial impacts, lack of equal employment opportunities, and livestock loss); social capital and network disruption (instability, dehumanization, discrimination, and injustice); psychological effects (trauma, mental illness, anxiety, and fear); and political and institutional challenges (lack of access to political representation). These several dimensions of fiascos across institutions have deprived people of the basic human rights as enshrined in the FDRE and BGNRS constitutions, such as protection from bodily harm, access to gainful employment, security of life, and protection of property.

The findings reveal that formal and informal institutions have been used to perpetuate households' exclusion from accessing political, economic, and social resources crucial to their livelihoods and well-being. Formal institutions in the BGNRS have distorted the FDRE Constitution by categorising 'indigenous nationalities' and 'others'. This has led to laws like the BGNRS Land Proclamation #85, which grants Mao, Komo, Shinasha, Berta, and Gumuz access to natural resources, including land, while excluding 'others' from these rights. Informal institutions help formalize land property transactions at the woreda and kebele levels. These activities involve transferring land use rights through purchasing property, establishing long-term rental agreements, and sharecropping. Survey and qualitative data highlight the multidimensional impact of exclusion: loss of assets and income, limited access to social and financial services, underrepresentation in political and administrative spheres, and a pervasive sense of insecurity. The study's theoretical framework and empirical findings underscore that social exclusion is not merely a consequence of conflict but a driving force behind its escalation and the ensuing humanitarian crisis. These exclusionary functions of administrative processes at different levels within formal institutions have led to conflict, displacement, and the loss of housing, agricultural production, livestock, and human lives.

Addressing these challenges requires a critical reassessment of constitutional and legislative frameworks to promote genuine inclusivity and equitable resource distribution. Reforms must ensure equal protection, access to livelihood opportunities, and representation for all groups, regardless of ethnicity. Trusted formal and informal institutions must be strengthened to foster social cohesion and resilience among displaced and vulnerable populations.

Therefore, the exclusionary and inclusive intentions of both the FDRE and BGNRS Constitutions, laws, and proclamations should be discussed; areas requiring amendments identified; and revisions made to address the effects of conflict and mitigate its impact on people's well-being and livelihoods. These revisions should ensure the protection of people's well-being through trusted institutions for inclusive development opportunities. Additionally, a comparative assessment and analysis of losses among displaced households and those who are not displaced would provide new insights into the institutions they trust to provide protection, including the Gumuz community's perspectives on the conflict and its subsequent outcomes. Ultimately, this study calls for scholars, policymakers, and community leaders to prioritize the root causes of institutionalized social exclusion and to champion reforms that safeguard the rights, well-being, and livelihoods of all citizens. Only through inclusive development and the restoration of trust in institutions can Ethiopia move toward lasting peace and stability in regions affected by conflict and displacement.

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