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## CAUSES AND IMPACTS OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN ETHIOPIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The overall objective of this study was to explore the causes and impacts of internal displacement in Ethiopia. This study has mainly employed qualitative research approach in which the data were collected from secondary sources and the research method is descriptive because the study has attempted to describe and explore the main contributing factors of internal displacement and its socio-economic, and psychological impacts on the community and internally displaced persons (IDPs). In order to assure the relevance and importance of the collected data, the researchers reviewed related literature on the causes and impacts of internal displacement in Ethiopia, Africa and other parts of the continents. As the method of data analysis, content analysis was applied for this study. This study highlighted that the internal displacement of people in Ethiopia is a severe human tragedy that results in huge numbers of people being displaced every year. The study showed that conflict (i.e., inter-communal violence, regional political instability, ethnic tensions and localized conflicts), climatic induced factors (landslides, flooding, famine and drought) and the country's policy of resettlement and relocation (development-driven causes), and poor governing capacity of the country were major contributing factors which aggravated the internal displacement in the country. The conflict took the primary percentage and followed by the climate-driven causes and policy of resettlement and relocation. Finally, this study revealed that internal displacement disrupted the social intimacy, economically affected the IDPs and the host communities, led the IDPs into homelessness, brought economic hardship, made them to be more vulnerable to psychological violence and led IDPs into death.*

**KEY TERMS:** Causes, climate, conflict, Ethiopia, IDPs, impacts, internal displacement, resettlement and relocation

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## INTRODUCTION

Internal displacement has emerged as one of the greatest human tragedies in the world today. It has further been reported by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) that in the world today, there exist over 25 million IDPs as a result of violent conflict and human rights violations, with notable cases of Iraq, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia and Colombia containing over 1 million IDPs each (IDMC, 2011). Population displacement and conflict are among the most significant contemporary problems facing the Horn of Africa today than ever before. Political instability, economic deprivation, changing population dynamics and resource scarcity are considered as the natural features of the Horn of Africa. On top of more than 1.7 million new displacements happened associated with conflict and communal violence in Ethiopia and Somalia, and significant numbers of people fled due to devastating floods and drought in both countries (IDMC, 2018a & 2018c).

Internal displacement denies innocent persons access to food, shelter, and medicine and exposes them to all manner of violence. The United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (2004) and African Union (AU) (2009) defined IDPs as persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or other natural or human-made disasters' and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border. This concept incorporates both the involuntary or coerced nature of the movement and the movement takes place within national borders. From this, we can infer that internal displacement is an involuntary and forced movement, evacuation or relocation of persons or groups of persons within internationally recognized state borders (AU, 2009).

According to Lwabukuna (2011), internal displacement can be caused by natural disasters (famine, flood, and drought), conflict (war and ethnic violence), violation of human rights and development induced displacement. Terminiski (2013) distinguishes four root causes, which he calls the dominant classification of internal displacement including conflict-induced, environmentally induced, disaster-induced and development-induced internal displacement. Furthermore, several studies include government policies and systematic human rights violations as a cause of internal displacement. Conflict-induced displacement refers to people who are forced to leave their habitual place of residence as a result of the escalation of internal violence or internal armed conflict (Lwabukuna, 2011; Van der Ploeg & Vanclay, 2017).

People might be evacuated from their habitual homeland without adequate compensation, guarantees or mechanisms of social support, or to the initial phase of a process of resettlement which is associated with physical relocation of people from their homes (Terminiski, 2013).

Internal displacement has remained pervasive throughout Ethiopian history. In view of that, both natural and man-made disasters are displaced people in Ethiopia. Accordingly, as of December 2013, there were 316,000 people internally displaced in the country, which is living in a protracted displacement situation (NRC/IDMC, 2014). Mehari (2017) identified four causes of internal displacement: natural disaster-induced displacement; man-made disaster-induced displacement; conflict-induced displacement; and development induced displacement. According to Mehari, natural disaster-induced displacement, conflict-induced displacement, and development induced displacement were the main causes of internal displacement in Ethiopia.

About 2.9 million new displacements associated with conflict were recorded in Ethiopia, the highest figure in the world and four times as many as in 2017. The old conflicts became more entrenched and new conflicts escalated along various state borders, prompting the government to establish a new Ministry of Peace in response to the increasing violence. Disasters also triggered 296,000 new displacements; many of them were associated with flooding in the Somali region (IDMC, 2019a & 2019b).

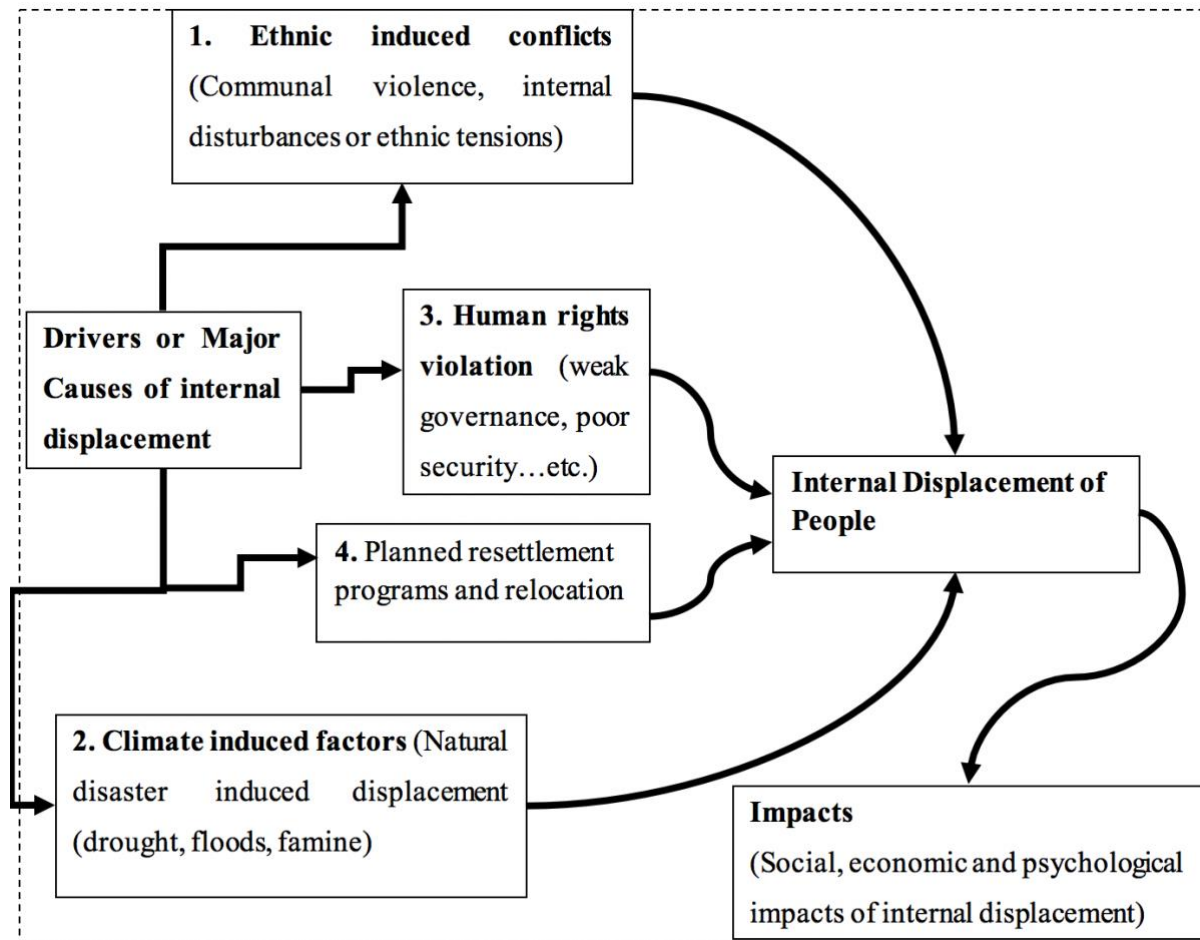
Internal displacement leads the people to dramatic changes in family structure and gender roles, relations, and identities. It affects the lives of many people in Ethiopia. The IDPs themselves, the host and surrounding communities and the image of their country are affected due to internal displacement. This humanitarian crisis breaks the social relationships between and or among the adjacent communities, leads the IDPs into the state of economic hardship and thereby poverty, declines their living standard and makes them more vulnerable to psychological and physical violence.

There are some empirical studies (for instance, Mehari, 2017; IDMC, 2018, 2019) which assessed causes and background figures of internal displacement in Ethiopia. However, these studies have given less emphasis to further explore multiple factors of IDPs and the negative impacts of internal displacement in Ethiopia. Besides, little effort was made to assess the causes and impacts of internal displacement in a coherent and structured way which clearly gives a meaningful indication to understand this human tragedy in Ethiopia.

Thus, this study was conducted to address the following research questions: 1) What major drivers (factors) are causing people to be internally displaced in Ethiopia? 2) What are the major socio-economic and psychological

impacts of internal displacement? Thus, the figure below clearly shows the overall conceptual framework of the study.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study



**RESEARCH METHODS**

This study exclusively employed secondary sources of data. In fact, the secondary data are those data which have been collected by somebody else but used in this study. The documentary sources are treated as secondary sources of data in this study (data collected from different international and national organizational reports, newspapers, published journal articles, and other internet sources and relevant books were used). Once the source of documents and reports were identified, a desk review was conducted. In order to assure the relevance and importance of the collected data, the researchers have made an extensive review of the existing related literature on the causes and impacts of internal displacement in Ethiopia in particular and other parts of the continent in general. Accordingly, secondary data sources such as Global Report on Internal Displacement, DTM Assessment reports or archived data, scholarly articles, IDMC report documents, UNHCR reports as well as other internet sources were reviewed and clearly utilized in their appropriate places to explore causes and impacts of internal displacement in Ethiopia.

Hence, this study mainly employed qualitative research approach in which the data were collected from secondary sources and the research method is descriptive because the study has attempted to describe and explore the main contributing factors of internal displacement and its socio-economic, and psychological impacts on the community and internally displaced persons (IDPs). According to Kothari and Garg (2014), descriptive research provides an accurate account of characteristics of a particular individual, event or group in real-life situations. It also presents a picture of the specific details of a situation, social setting, or relationship (Neuman, 2014, 38). As

far as the method of data analysis is taken into consideration, content analysis (i.e., secondary data analysis and existing statistics) was applied in this study. Besides, the numeric data were presented in the form of a table.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This part of the study has attempted to describe the major contributing factors causing people to be internally displaced in Ethiopia. Besides, it highlights the socio-economic and psychological impacts of the internal displacement of the people in the country.

### Major causes of internal displacement in Ethiopia

According to the United Nations Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs report (OCHA), about 28 million new people became internally displaced by conflict and disasters worldwide in the course of 2018. From these data, 10.8 million people were displaced by violence and conflict, and 17.2 million by natural disaster. In sum, there are over 41.3 million IDPs worldwide, the highest number ever recorded in the history of the world (see <https://www.unocha.org/es/themes/internal-displacement>). Ethiopia is not an exceptional country. The top three countries with the largest internally displaced populations due to conflict and violence in 2018 were Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Syria. The top three countries with the largest number of IDPs due to disasters in 2018 were Myanmar, Kenya, and Afghanistan. An overlap of conflict and disasters repeatedly displaced people in Afghanistan, Nigeria, Somalia, and other countries (IDMC, 2018a & 2018b).

It is a fact that internal displacement is a serious problem in Ethiopia today than ever before. Persons or groups who have been forced to flee their homes and habitual residences suddenly or unexpectedly in large numbers are increasing in the recent time than ever before due to communal violence or ethnic tensions, governance crises such as poor security, development-induced causes such as planned resettlement programs and relocation, and natural disasters related causes; for instance, drought and famine, specifically in Gambella, Dire Dawa, Afar and Somali regions of the country.

### Conflict as the cause of internal displacement

Communal violence and ethnic tensions played the primary role in displacing huge numbers of people in different parts of the country. According to the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) (2019) report, Ethiopia had ranked at the top level of severe internal displacement in the world. Very large numbers of people fled their permanent residence due to ethnic clashes between and or among different regions of the country.

In line with this, DTM (2019) site assessment found that communal conflict was the primary driver of displacement in Ethiopia. About 1,623,716 people were displaced because of the conflict before 2018. The ethnic federal structure and ethnic conflict were identified as the primary causes of internal displacement in the country. In the same manner, several studies conducted on internal displacement showed that the persistent happenings of communal violence in Ethiopia are the major driving forces that rapidly increase the number of people who fled from their habitual residence and homes (Mehari, 2017). According to Mehari, in terms of the humanitarian crisis (i.e., IDPs), Ethiopia becomes the first country in the IGAD region to have the highest IDPs because of inter-communal conflict. Hence, the most contributing factor which causes people to be internally displaced throughout the country in Ethiopia today is communal strife or otherwise termed as ethnic-based violence.

The key findings of the Global Report on Internal Displacement (2019) stated that protracted crises, communal violence, and unresolved governance challenges were the main factors behind 10.8 million new displacements associated with conflict and violence. Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Syria accounted for more than half of the global figure (IDMC, 2019b). Ethiopia has ranked at the top of the internal displacement hierarchy. This implies that the internal displacement of the people in Ethiopia is much higher than any other country because the highest figure of IDPs was recorded in the country in the years 2018 and 2019.

Table 1 below depicts the inter-communal violence and ethnic tensions as the primary cause of internal displacement (i.e., displacement within the country and within the regions) by taking the case studies of Amhara, Oromia, Gambella, Tigray, and Southern Nations Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR, specifically, Gedeo zone).

Table 1: Number of persons displaced due to conflict in Ethiopia

No.	Region	Causes of displacement	Time period			Total
			Before 2018	During 2018	In 2019	
1.	Amhara	Conflict/inter-communal violence and/ or ethnic tensions, localized conflict	23, 437	57, 115	9, 331	89, 833
2.	Oromia		554, 306	112, 930	6, 973	674, 209
3.	Gambella		16, 010	3, 085	---	19, 095
4.	Tigray		77, 246	14, 462	2, 834	94, 542
5.	SNNRP (Gedeo zone)		-----	-----	690, 364	690, 364
6.	Somali		-----	-----	722, 180	722, 180
Grand total			670, 999	187, 592	1, 431, 682	2, 290, 223

Source: DTM, Round 16 data, from March to April, 2019

As it has shown in Table 1, a total of 670, 999; 187, 592, and 1, 431, 682 people were displaced within the regions and within the country because of the escalation of conflict before 2018, during 2018 and in 2019 respectively. This shows that very severe, otherwise called as a human tragedy in the Ethiopian historic event occurred in 2019, with almost 1.432 million people have fled their homes and habitual residence due to inter-communal violence in the country. The highest number of IDPs were recorded in the Somali region with a population of 722, 180 IDPs, SNNRP in the Gedeo zone with a population of 690, 364 IDPs and followed by Oromia region with a population of 674, 209 IDPs. On the contrary, the least number of IDPs were recorded in the Gambella region with a population of 19, 095 IDPs before and during 2018.

In general speaking, more than 2.9 million people were internally displaced in the country as a result of conflict and violence or political instability. Therefore, ethnic tensions, violence and/ or localized grievances, in general conflicts, are the primary causes of internal displacement in Ethiopia.

### Climate induced causes of internal displacement

Environmental factors such as natural disasters (i.e., drought, famine, landslides, and floods) were taken as the second most contributing drivers of internal displacement in the country. Findings conducted by DTM from March-April (2019) show that a total of 499,336 persons were evacuated from their homeland and habitual residence due to climate-induced factors. Furthermore, displacement caused by environmental factors such as drought, seasonal floods, flash floods, and landslides are triggering causes of domestic displacement in the country. In most cases, regions such as Afar, Oromia, and Somali are highly affected due to environmental factors. When we take the case study of the Afar region in Ethiopia, 1, 799 people in 2018, 3, 203 people in 2017 and 38, 793 people before 2017 were displaced due to natural disasters (DTM, 2018). According to site assessment done by DTM (2019) round 16, the highest number of people were displaced (i.e., 344, 552 IDPs) in the Somali region due to climatic born conditions. This is the largest number of IDPs recorded in Ethiopia in 2019. The study conducted by Mehari stated that:

Between August 2015 and April 2016, there were 454,457 IDPs caused by drought, flooding, local conflicts, and wildfires. From these, 64.5 percent of people were displaced in the Somali region due to flooding and 10.6 percent of IDPs were from Southern Ethiopia due to flooding (2017: 6).

The Oromia region has experienced the 2nd humanitarian crisis of internal displacement having 111, 102 number of IDPs followed by Afar region with 41, 633 number of IDPs registered in 2019 due to climate-induced causes. The smallest numbers of people were displaced in the Amhara region due to natural disaster risks (i.e., drought, flood, landslides), with accounting only 261 IDPs. However, zero numbers of people were internally displaced in the Tigray regional state because of climatic factors in 2019.

In line with this finding, Terminiski (2013) described that population displacements are associated with sudden natural hazards and industrial accidents (disaster-induced displacement), and environmental transformations (environmentally-induced displacement). A similar study conducted by Mehari (2017) found that both ethnic

federalism and climatic drivers, such as famine and drought are triggering factors that forced the people to leave their homes, properties and if it is serious, leave their homes without having their children in Ethiopia. From these all, one can infer that the natural disaster-induced factors are the 2nd most contributing drivers of internal displacement in Ethiopia.

### **Other related causes of internal displacement**

Poor governance, otherwise termed as bad governance (such as poor security and human rights violation), factors related to development programs were identified as the third contributing drivers of forced internal migration and or displacement in Ethiopia. Drivers attributed to planned resettlement programs and relocations due to development projects by the Ethiopian government and regional states were taken as other causes which have led to forced displacement of the people in the country. Despite its positive progress towards assuring the food security of the people in the country, the new resettlement program developed as the component of the Food Security Program has aggravated forced internal migration in the country.

Mehari (2017) found that the government of Ethiopia has massively implemented forced resettlement programs that displaced more than 0.6 million people to relocate them to areas traditionally inhabited by ethnocultural indigenous and minority groups, and thereby led to gross human rights violation and vulnerability of women and children of IDPs. Inadequate preparations during settlement action and lack of prior consultation between the host communities and the intended settlers as well as weak governability are negatively causing other localized grievances between the host community and IDPs. A similar study conducted by Van der Ploeg and Vanclay (2017) identified government settlement policies and systematic human rights violations as causes of internal displacement.

Moreover, very large numbers of people are still being displaced due to the policy of resettlement and relocation program. Urban development and relocation programs formulated due to rapid urbanization are also aggravating internal urban displacement in the country. Urban renewal and sustainable development programs are contributing their parts to relocate and displace huge numbers of the people into very periphery areas around surrounding urban centers. In Ethiopia, many people were forced to move from their historical residence due to development and infrastructure projects, such as the construction of urban industries, building international stadiums (example, in Bahir Dar, more than 352 households were relocated due to Bahir Dar Hulageb Stadium), and housing projects.

A study conducted by Muhidin shows that:

Urban infrastructure projects that causes displacement include slum clearance and upgrading, the establishment of industrial and commercial estates, the building and upgrading of sewerage systems, schools, and hospitals. Urbanization and re-urbanization have been among the dominant causes of development-induced displacement (2016, pp. 27-28).

Terminiski (2013) identified the expansion of urban areas into new territories, re-urbanization of existing units including the demolition of poverty districts, water supply projects, public transport projects, mass population redistribution schemes within urban space, and reconstruction of housing units as the most significant contemporary areas leading population to forced displacement in the urban centers. It is possible to conclude that the capacity of the government to properly administer the country and allow the community to participate determines the pace and frequency of internal displacements across the country in Ethiopia.

Generally speaking, factors attributed to political instability (conflict, ethnic violence, and localized grievances), climatic conditions, planned resettlement programs and relocations due to development projects and excessive urbanization, and governance crises aggravated internal displacement in Ethiopia today than ever before. The number of sites opened has increased from year to year. DTM (2019) round 16 site assessment confirmed that 61, 273 and 890 sites were opened for IDPs before 2018, during 2018 and in the year 2019 respectively.

### **Major impacts of internal displacement**

Ethiopia suffers from long-standing conflicts driven by ethnic motives, competition for scarce resources, land issues, limited social services, infrastructure, and weak governance. Inter-communal violence has in recent years resulted in the displacement of some 2.7 million people, of whom 1.4 million people were displaced in the first six months of 2018 alone, making it the world's highest level of internal displacement in 2018 (DTM/NRC, 2018;

IDMC, 2018a; Humanitarian Crisis Analysis (see the link: <https://www.sida.se/globalassets/sida/eng/how-we-work/humanitarian-aid/hca-2019/hca-ethiopia-2019.pdf>)).

It is a fact that internal displacement affects multiple aspects of persons making them more vulnerable to man-made and natural disasters. It is a phenomenon that is affecting its direct victims (IDPs), and the local and host communities, the state, neighboring regions, and the natural ecology. It forces people from their homes, depriving them of shelter and the basic protection it can provide. It forced them to leave their land, traditional livelihood, and means of generating income and compelled to leave all but a few possessions behind. Moreover, IDPs unexpectedly find themselves stripped of their means of survival. As a result, displacement breaks up families and community support networks.

State of the World's Refugees states that:

Displacement breaks up families and severs community ties. It leads to unemployment and limits access to land, education, food, and shelter. The displaced are particularly vulnerable to violence. The internally displaced frequently suffer the highest mortality rates in humanitarian emergencies (UNHCR, 2006).

This implies that displacement leads to massive loss commodities, such as the home, income, land or other forms of property, and less tangible symbolic goods, such as cultural heritage, friendship and a sense of belonging to a particular place. Its malevolent effects on individuals, families, and communities are wide-ranging and include 'impoverishment, social isolation, exclusion from health, welfare and education provision, the breakdown of social relationships and support structures, and the undermining of authority structures and social roles. Mothers and their children are more vulnerable because displacement disrupts children from education and normal development, and frequently results in their being separated from their families in the chaos of flight, psychologically affects both children as well as women and make them at a sharp risk of abuses. They are exposed to acts of violence and human rights violations, including round-ups, forced conscription and sexual assault (Mooney, 2005; UNHCR, 2006).

An assessment conducted by UNHCR (2006) found that displacement dramatically disrupts livelihoods, and leads to a severe reduction in access to the basic necessities of life including food, clean water, shelter, adequate clothing, health services, and water sanitation.

Internal displacement leads to food insecurity and a high rate of acute malnutrition in Ethiopia. Communities who suffered consecutive years of severe drought lost their productive assets, such as homes, their children, domestic animals, and crops. This humanitarian crisis disrupted vulnerable households' access to food and livelihood activities by worsening food insecurity and malnutrition conditions in the country.

There are 8.13 million people in need of food assistance. Most of these people are in Oromia (52 percent), Somali (25 percent) and SNNP (9 percent) regions. Most severe areas with regards to food insecurity are in Oromia and Afar regions. Moreover, there are 5.91 million people in need of nutrition assistance. Most of these people are in Oromia (37 percent), Somali (28 percent) and SNNP (15 percent) regions. The most severe areas for nutrition are in the Somali region (OCHA, 2019). According to OCHA assessment, displacement has a significant effect on people's lives and livelihoods. IDPs and IDP returnees are mainly exposed to protection risks and are disrupted in their education and vocational training, and lack sustainable livelihood means. Besides, lack of access to safe water and sanitation joined with poor hygiene practices continue to pose disease outbreak risks in parts of the country. The impact of poor sanitation practices on the health of IDPs and IDP returnees is particularly concerning; especially in areas where the infrastructure is weak and where depleted water tables limit access to safe water. When communicable diseases are combined with other ongoing problems, such as malnutrition and food insecurity, the effect on the population is immense.

Moreover, when IDPs are accommodated by host communities, these communities also experience immense pressure. The existence of overcrowding of IDPs could create informal settlements on communal and private lands. This also overstretchers social basic facilities, such as water and social services such as schools, clinics, and other social infrastructures including housing.

Similar findings conducted by Alobo and Obaji (2016) found that IDPs immediately become reliant on others for basic needs such as shelter, food, and water. At the same time, their susceptibility may be amplified by barriers to accessing health care, education, employment, economic activities, and electoral politics in their areas of displacement. These two scholars added that the longer displacement continues, the greater is the risk that traditional family and social structures break down, leaving IDPs dependent on outside aid and vulnerable to economic and sexual exploitation. Such dependency, in turn, reduces the chances of durable solutions and

sustainable reintegration into society once political and security conditions have changed to enable such solutions to take place.

More importantly, where the host community is urban, a number of IDPs turn into migrants, deciding to settle and reintegrate into urban life, seeking new livelihood opportunities and hope for a better life. As IDPs overburden existing community services, resources, and job or economic livelihood opportunities, tension arises between the IDPs and host communities, making effective local integration difficult and thereby leads to price inflation; the cost of living in the host communities increases, mainly cost of food, shelter, healthcare and education facilities. Therefore, the internal displacement of people in Ethiopia is a human tragedy that negatively affects both the IDPs and the host and adjacent communities. Severely, huge numbers of IDPs, especially women and children are more vulnerable to famine, different diseases and finally, these and other impacts lead them to death; which is a very shocking disaster to the IDPs, the government and the people of the world at large.

## CONCLUSION

The Internal displacement has emerged as one of the greatest human tragedies in the world today. It is the most severe humanitarian crisis and the human tragedy in Ethiopia today than ever before. As a result, Ethiopia took the largest percentage of IDPs in the world displacement figures. The country has experienced the highest number of people who were internally displaced within the region and across to the regions severely in the last 2018 and 2019. More than 2.9 million people were forced to flee their homes within their country. Political instability and insecurity (conflict, ethnic-based violence, and localized grievances); climatic born conditions, such as natural disasters (i.e., drought, famine, landslides and floods); and planned resettlement programs and relocations due to development projects and excessive urbanization were the major contributing causes which aggravated internal displacement in the country. Thus, internal displacement leads to loss of human life and commodities, brings food insecurity and malnutrition (vulnerability of IDPs to poverty and famine), leads to family breakdown, brings psychological and physical violence on the IDPs, economic crisis, leads to price inflation in the hosting communities, communicable diseases and the decline of social infrastructures. These and others are considered as the negative impacts of internal displacement in Ethiopia.



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