Research Article

Factors affecting human security: A focus on community security in West Gondar Administrative Zone

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Abstract: This study examines the factors influencing human security, with a specific focus on community security in the West Gondar Administrative Zone (WGAZ). The research investigates various human security issues and the role of the government in addressing them. A qualitative research approach, employing in-depth single case study design was utilized incorporating both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected through key informant interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and observations; while secondary data were obtained from published and unpublished materials. The data were thematically analyzed, identifying key themes related to human security problems and the government's involvement in WGAZ. The analysis revealed that factors such as ethnic conflicts, territorial disputes, human trafficking, illegal migration, arms proliferation, contraband trade, property theft, kidnappings, insurgent activities, resource conflicts, and government weaknesses contribute to human insecurity in WGAZ. The study recommends strengthening local state institutions, particularly the security sector, building trust between the community and authorities, and urging the federal government to address external threats and resolve border demarcation issues with Sudan. The findings of this research contribute to a better understanding of human security challenges and provide insights into effective interventions in WGAZ and similar contexts.

1.Introduction

Human security is a concept that focuses on the protection and well-being of individuals, rather than states or governments. It encompasses a wide range of issues including economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) defines human security as "freedom from fear and freedom from want" (UNDP, 1994).

One of the key aspects of human security is its emphasis on the individual and their rights and well-being. As outlined by the Human Security Report Project, "Human security is people-centered, focusing on the safety and well-being of individuals" (Human Security Report Project, 2009). This stands in contrast to traditional security approaches that prioritize state security and national interests.

Community security, on the other hand, is a vital aspect of human security, emphasizing the well-being and protection of individuals within a community. This concept encompasses various dimensions or elements that contribute to a secure and stable environment for residents. These dimensions include economic security, social cohesion, access to justice, conflict resolution mechanisms and effective governance (UNDP, 1994). By addressing these elements, community security aims to promote the safety and prosperity of individuals within a community, ultimately enhancing their overall quality of life and well-being.

Therefore, the foremost concept of security, conventionally, was state centric, encompassing support and lawfulness to instruments of states and protecting the principle of state sovereignty (UNDP, 1994; Chekol, 2019). However, a fundamental change has taken place in the debate on international security since the end of the Cold War (Mohammed, 2017). Therefore, as it was fundamental to deepen and widen the traditional state centric concept of security into HS, which made people the subject of security, Mohammed (2017) underscores the most complete recent document on the issues of HS is the Human Security Now Report 2009 issued by the UN Commission on Human Security. It addresses the most prominent HS issues such as poverty, disease and violent conflict; mostly these face developing countries, in this context Ethiopia's and particularly WGAZ's HS problem would not be an exception.

To highlight Asia's case, Navid suggests that despite a global shift in security paradigm, countries in South Asia continue to overwhelmingly rely on traditional security instead of human-centric security. Although the region has achieved a persistent economic growth, it has not been able to improve the lives of common people and remains one of the most deprived regions of the world with pervasive inequalities (Yousaf, 2020).

Regarding the continent of Africa, Akokpari (2007) states that human insecurity has attained high levels in Africa, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Africa has high incidents of conflicts and

instability. In addition, according to Bayeh (2014), African countries had suffered the most terrible form of exploitative colonialism in addition to the inter-state and intra-state conflicts. Besides, he added that the Horn of Africa's insecurity results from political exclusion/power struggle, ethnic- and religious-based discrimination, piracy, terrorism, violation of human rights, proliferation of small arms and light weapons and poverty.

Among the human security threats that negatively impact community security, Firrisa (2016) pointed out that Ethiopia is facing internal security threats, namely ethnic conflicts and lack of coherent idea of national identity, income inequality and uneven development, insurgent groups, environmental problems and natural disasters and lack of good governance.

Similarly, as noted by Wolemu (2016), problems related to governance, law enforcement, and justice systems are other issues identified as key factors that stimulate conflict in Gondar. For instance, he added that farmers in North Gondar Zone are well armed and have small and large firearms; the easy availability of small arms and the government's failure to maintain security in the districts exacerbated the problem. He further suggests that the state loses control over its security functions as it fails to maintain the security of its citizens. Thus, it should not be forgotten that access to firearms has both securitizing and galvanizing role of community security in West Gondar Administrative Zone (WGAZ).

Since there are limitations of previous studies in WGAZ from human security perspective, particularly on community security, it is better to disclose some of the debates on HS in Ethiopia. Although Wolemu (2016) studied two districts of Gondar, he emphasized the personal security dimension that characterizes personal conflicts over farmland among farmers, revenge, and even bearing arms as a culture of the society endangering local people's lives. In another study, Leake (2020) found that the geopolitical setting by itself affected the human security of the Afar people in the Afar region. Hutchful (2005) argued that regime security is the antithesis of human security, Asfaw showed how the Ethiopian government engaged in maintaining the regime's security rather than HS (cited in Asfaw, 2014).

Similarly, Yayew (2019) revealed the absence of political security in Ethiopia as the government itself denied the political security of the people. Besides, Woldemariam (2009) argued that building defense capability still takes precedence over ensuring human security in today's

Ethiopia. Belachew (n.d.) also identified the existence of a contradiction between state security and human security in the Ethiopian government policy. In general, based on the above debates among scholars, let alone in the study area in particular, HS in Ethiopia in general seems a much neglected concept, especially from the government side. In doing so, today Ethiopia in general and WGAZ in particular is in a situation of insecurity where the security of the people is in danger. Thus, this research was limited to investigating human insecurity in West Gondar. Basically, the limitations of previous studies in the study area and the pervasiveness of the problem were the main reasons behind this investigation. The research was ultimately aimed at revealing the reality of human insecurity in WGAZ with a particular focus on community insecurity.

2.Methods

The research was guided by interpretivist paradigm as a basis for designing all methods used in this investigation and to interpret the data from the research participants. Therefore, in line with the research paradigm mentioned above, this study employed a qualitative research method for exploring the problem at hand. Creswell (2009) stated that qualitative approach [QA] is best suited for research that is detailed and requires a complex analysis of a given issue as well as for problems that cannot easily be quantified and measured. In addition, qualitative approach is primarily verbal and derives meaning from the participants' perspectives and also aims to understand meaning that people attach to the research problem. Case study is a design in which the investigator explores a bounded system or a case or multiple cases over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information such as observations, interviews, audiovisual material, documents and reports; and analyses a case description and themes (Creswell, 2009).

Cognizant of the three types of case study design, namely single instrumental case study, collective case study and intrinsic case study; this article was done through the use of a single instrumental case study design. According to Stake (1995), in a single instrumental case study the researcher focuses on an issue or concern and then selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue, whereas collective case study involves selecting several programs in multiple sites or multiple programs within a single site (iited in Creswell, 2007). Thus, this article was a single case study because of the issue and the site and focused on human security and WGAZ, respectively.

This research employed a non-probability sampling technique. Purposive sampling technique was used for collecting data from the informants who were in charge of government offices to maintain the security of people from various dimensions, mainly from community-based problems. Thus, security officers, district and town administration officials, local residents or elders and religious leaders – mainly for the FGD – were purposively selected to get data about human insecurity situations and the government's role in managing the crisis in WGAZ.

Both primary and secondary data sources were used. For the primary sources key informants from each district and town administration, zonal and regional level government officials and elders were purposively selected for the interview and FGDs. There were participants other than LG officials such as ASF, policemen, elders and religious leaders. Moreover, secondary sources were collected from both published and unpublished materials.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Human security

The concept HS has been defined by different authors and international agencies such as UNDP, governmental and academic institutions. Despite having the first and the most widely used definition of HS by the UNDP in 1994, Alkire (2003) argued that there are around twenty five estimated definitions of human security. Among the various scholars' views on the conceptual clarification of HS, Hammerstad (2000) has defined human security as attaining the social, environmental and economic conditions conducive to a life in freedom and dignity for the individual. Before the articulation of the human security concept by UNDP (1994), it was first coined in 1945 at a conference in San Francisco that established the United Nations (UNDP, 1994; Alkire, 2003).

Alkire (2003) further explicates that the report in the San Francisco conference that the phrase 'freedom from fear' is intended to indicate freedom from violence, and the phrase 'freedom from want', freedom from poverty. Nugraha and Ludiro (2013) argue that even though the concept lacks precise and consensual definition, the broad concept of human security was first articulated by UNDP. UNDP has provided two major ways of defining human security: freedom from fear and freedom from want; the former refers to safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression.

3.2. Human security dimensions and threats

Keeping in mind the two components of human security (freedom from fear and want) as inclusive views, UNDP (1994) has come up with the list of seven human security dimensions. These are economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security.

Human security dimensions	Subsequent threats of human security
Political security	Political repression, human rights abuses, lack of rule of law and justice
Community security	Inter-ethnic, religious and other identity-based tensions, crime, terrorism
Personal security	Physical violence in all its forms, crime, terrorism, domestic violence, child labor
Environmental security	Environmental degradation, resource depletion, natural disasters, pollution
Economic security	Persistent poverty, unemployment, lack of access to credit and other economic opportunities
Health security	Deadly infectious diseases, unsafe food, malnutrition, health care, epidemics, poor sanitation, lack of access to basic health care
Food security	Hunger, famine, sudden rise in food prices

Source: Adapted from UNDP, 1994 and Human Security Unit, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (HSU-OCHA) United Nations, 2009:7

3.3. Basic features of human security

The Human Security Unit Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (HSU-OCHA, 2009:7-8) has developed the following elements of human security: people-centered, multi-sectoral, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented. As a people-centered concept, human security places the individual at the 'center of analysis.' Human security is also based on a multi-sectoral understanding of insecurities. That entails a broadened understanding of threats and causes of insecurity. Human security involves comprehensive approaches that stress the need for cooperative responses that bring together the agendas of those dealing with security, development and human rights. In addition, as context-specific insecurities vary across different settings and as

such advances contextualized solutions that are responsive to the particular situations they seek to address. Finally, in addressing risks and root causes of insecurities, human security is *prevention-oriented* and introduces a dual focus on protection and empowerment (CHS: 2003: 2).

Weller also argues that the human security approach should be people-centered, multi-sectoral, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented. It has to be implemented through a protection and empowerment framework. Protection refers to 'top-down' measures and strategies set up by states, international agencies, NGOs and the private sector to shield people from menaces. Empowerment implies a 'bottom-up' approach focusing on developing the capacity and resilience of individuals and communities to act on their own behalf and to participate in the design and implementation of solutions to ensure human security for themselves and others (Weller, 2014: 8).

In addition to the above fundamental features of human security stated by the HSU-OCHA, UNDP (1994) pointed out that the basic concept of human security must focus on four of its essential characteristics. First, human security is a *universal* concern to people everywhere, in rich nations and poor. There are many threats that are common to all people. Their intensity may differ from one part of the world to another, but all these threats to human security are real and growing. Second, the components of human security are *interdependent* and when the security of people is endangered anywhere in the world, all nations are likely to get involved. Famine, disease, pollution, drug trafficking, terrorism, ethnic disputes and social disintegration are no longer isolated events, confined within national borders. Their consequences travel the globe. Third, human security is easier to ensure through early prevention than later intervention. It is less costly to meet these threats upstream than downstream. Fourth, human security is *people-centered.* It is concerned with how people live and breathe in a society and whether they live in conflict or in peace (UNDP, 1994: 22-23).

### 3.4. Description of West Gondar Administrative Zone

West Gondar Administrative Zone is one of the three newly restructured zones from the former North Gondar Administrative Zone (NGAZ). It is now located to the west of NGAZ near the Ethio-Sudan border. It is found within a low-altitude climatic zone. WGAZ consists of four rural and three town districts; these are Metema District, Quara District, West Arimachiho District, Adagn Ager Chako District, Genda Wuha [1] Town Administration, Metema Yohannes Town

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[1] Administrative town of WGAZ, formerly called as *Shehedi.*

Administration and Midre Genet[2] Town Administration (Tadele, 2019; WGAZ Plan Commission, 2020).

As the Zone is found on the Ethio-Sudan border, it is highly liable to contraband trade and outsiders' gateway. It is politically sensitive since it is bordered by Tigray and Benshangul Gumuz regional states and the Sudan republic. Lack of good-governance was the other problem that the zonal administration was blamed for by the local people. It was unable to resolve border disputes with the Tigray regional state and the Sudan government. While examining its security situation, Wolemu (2016) and Tadele (2019) revealed that NGAZ – WGAZ was part of NGAZ before the restructure was made – was known for conflicts among rural people, caused by competition for scarce resources, deadly family feud as a cultural practice and conflicts related to land registration and ownership. There has been high rate of insecurity and conflict in most districts of the Zone. The problem of insecurity is further worsened by the weak capacity of the Zone in enforcing mechanisms of conflict prevention.

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[2] Formerly known as *Abderafi town* and before its establishment as town administration it was part of West Arimachiho District.
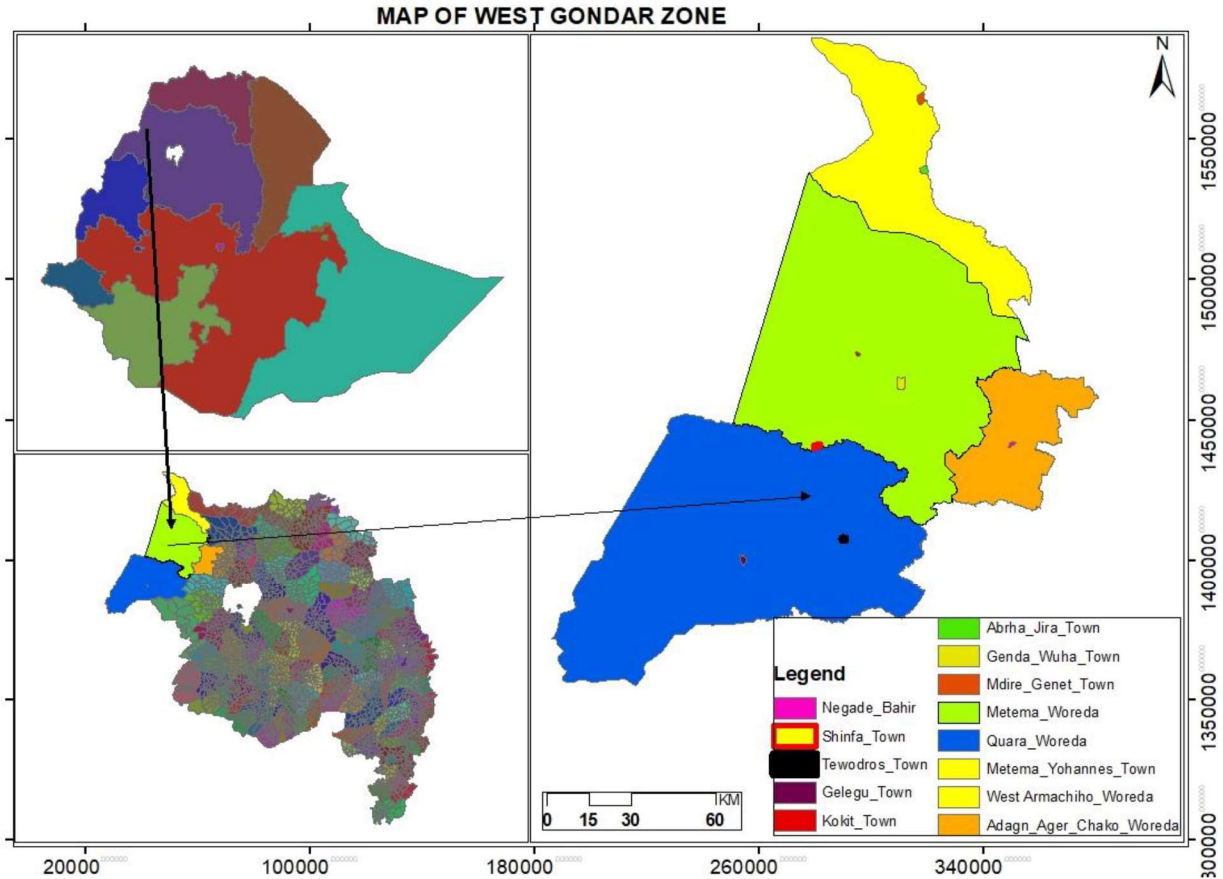
Source: Adapted from ARC GIS, February 10, 2021

3.5. Determinants of community insecurity in WGAZ

As John Akokpari (2007) noted, there are always deep-seated reasons for people to be violent; it is therefore not enough to point to human insecurity without identifying its root causes. Accordingly, it would be misleading to talk about human or public insecurity in West Gondar Administrative Zone without highlighting the real causes behind. Thus, this section underlines the reasons for the escalation of community insecurity that led to the instability of WGAZ.

Based on this fact, among others, the study found that ethnic based conflicts exacerbated by Qemant's identity and self-administration question, border conflicts over territorial claim with the neighboring Sudan, human trafficking and illegal migration, movement of small arms and light weapons (SALW), contraband, robbery of property on the borders, kidnapping of individuals, involvement of insurgents and pastoralists, tense relations with Tigray and Benishangul Gumuz region, leadership failure and/or negligence, government weakness and infrastructural problems

are discussed in a manner that shows how they have affected the security of communities in WGAZ. However, it should not be forgotten that some of the factors mentioned here can be seen as consequences as well. For instance, the local government's weakness galvanized the proliferation of SALW and kidnapping in some of the districts investigated in the study.

As cited in Birhanu (2018), the current federal system in Ethiopia was established with the objective of creating a country of equal nations, nationalities and peoples and ending a long authoritarian rule by democratizing the Ethiopian state and society (Merera, 2006). On the contrary, Aalen (2006) commented that TPLF devised this policy to divide the people of Ethiopia along ethnic lines so that it could maintain its strong political grip at the expense of other political groups. Therefore, no matter how the legal basis and intentions behind ethnic federalism in Ethiopia is perceived, both the ANRS (2001) and FDRE (1995) constitutions in Article 39 guaranteed that "every nation, nationality and people[3] in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession."

However, according to Belay (2013), unlike Argoba, Awi, Himra and Oromo nations, who are recognized and have self-administration rights in the ANRS, the Qemant do not enjoy self-government, nor are they recognized as distinct people of the region. For this reason, Amnesty International (2019) reported that based on the rights stated under the constitution, members of the ethnic Qemant community in the Amhara National Regional State have been mobilizing for self-determination, and this led to bloodshed in recent years.

Therefore, in terms of highlighting the reasons behind why people or a community identifies itself as a group, UNDP (1994) reported that it is not only because of the desire for recognition and self-rule but also most people derive security from their membership in a group, a family, a community, an organization, a racial or ethnic group that can provide a cultural identity and a reassuring set of values. Community security protects people from the loss of traditional relationships and values. The aim is to protect people from sectarian and ethnic violence. Traditional communities, particularly minority ethnic groups, are often threatened. However, Qemant's community-based

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[3] According to Art 39 (5) of the FDRE and ANRS constitution (5th Nov, 2001), "Nation, Nationality or People" for the purpose of the constitution is defined as a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility or language, beliefs in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit in identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory.

identification can mostly be viewed from the need for self-rule rather than due to fear of losing one's identity.

One of the major problems threatening public/community security in west Gondar was the conflict between the Amhara and Qemant communities since 2015 (IZA1, March 26, 2020). The mutual relationship between Amhara and Qemant community has been disrupted at the end of 2015. In November 2015, violent conflicts with disastrous consequences upon human life and destruction of immense property occurred between the long-time friendly peoples (Birhanu, 2018; IZA2, February 18, 2020). In an empirical study, Daniel (2014) analyzed the human security situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2007 which was caused by ethnic antagonism. He stated that ethnic antagonism appears as the root cause of violence which is often ethnically motivated.

After the Qemant people had got recognition, their further quest for self-government became intensified. Although the delay of the decision by the regional government had its own implication in the recent ethnic-based conflicts around Gondar, even after the self-administration question was answered by the ANRS government, the Qemant Committee's question of self-rule has dramatically changed the dimension[4] and involved forceful action to include areas they lost through referendum that led to the death of people from both sides (IRGo1 and 2, September 8, 2020).

Moreover, according to the local security chiefs, the problem escalated when the Qemant community started to accuse Amhara Special Forces (ASF) and sided with the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF). On the other hand, the Amhara community blamed the national Defense Force for siding with the Qemant Committee members and attacking them. They also added that though the defense force is believed to be neutral of any ethnicity, members of ENDF were killing innocent people including kids in Metema district where the majority of the community are Amhara (IPS1 February 19, 2020 and, IPS4, March 24, 2020). However, Qemants also accused the ENDF units in nearby military camps of indifference because they did not intervene promptly

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[4] In addition to engaging in forceful actions, informants believed that 'Qemant committee's members and militant groups' are not representative of the whole Qemant people and they were being helped by the TPLF, some people called the situation in and around Metema as it was a proxy war.

although community members had repeatedly called on the ENDF officials to intervene during the violence on 10 and 11 January and in September 2019 (Amnesty International, 2020).

3.5. Ethio-Sudan border land conflicts

Starting from the historical point of view of Ethio-Sudanese border issues, Alemayehu (2019) underscored the following:

> The boundary negotiation between Ethiopia and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan started in the immediate post Adwa period with the coming of James Rennel Rodd led mission to Addis Ababa in April 1896. Since that time tensions grew between Ethiopia and the Anglo-Egyptians over the frontier territories. A month after the Anglo-Egyptian victory over the Mahdists, on 5 October 1898, Britain appointed John Lane Harrington as its official consul to Addis Ababa to handle Emperor Minilik [5] II diplomatically.

Harrington informed the emperor that Britain had no plan to occupy frontier territories which had not been part of the Egyptian administration in the nineteenth century (Ibid). As stated by Bahru, however, the British position had changed dramatically. Earlier, Harrington had been told that Gallabat[6] had been found to be more valuable than expected. He cautioned Menelik that he "… should not go further in this direction than [he] can help." And by May, 1899, Harrington had driven such a hard bargain that Menelik was forced to make a rather sentimental plea to retain even Metema, let alone putting a claim for Gedaref (Zewde, 1976: 68-69). In response, Menelik pleaded with Harrington for the following:

> Tell your Government, I do not wish to claim Matamma[7] as a right. I do not wish to make any question of rights about Metema; even if I did, I have not the force to make my rights good against you. I merely ask your government for friendship's sake to let me have Metema, on account of the associations the place has for me and my people. There are many Christians there. King John[8] was killed there, and the blood of many of my people has been spilt there and it is for these reasons we wish to have it. (Ibid)

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[5] Alternatively spelt as Menelik.
[6] Sudanese border town close to Metema Yohannes town.
[7] Hereafter spelt as 'Metema'.
[8] Referring to Yohannes IV of Ethiopia .

Alemayehu (2019) even stated that, though the tensions grew between Harington and Menelik II, they agreed to limit their further expansion and continue the boundary negotiations based on the principle of effective occupation. For this reason:

> *In 1898, Britain appointed an Irish cartographer Major and Captain Austin to conduct preliminary field survey. Gwynn was assigned to survey the frontier territory from the River Sätit in the north to the Sobat River in the south, while Austin was instructed to study south of the Sobat River as far as the Lake Turkana. Based on the preliminary survey reports, Colonel Harrington and Menelik II signed the boundary agreement on 15 May 1902 in Addis Ababa. (Alemayehu, 2019)*

However, Alemayehu noted that the demarcation was unilaterally carried out only by Major Gwynn in 1903 and left several resource rich and strategic sites on the Anglo-Sudanese side. In some areas, especially along Sätit-Humära and Metema, Major Gwynn intentionally left Ethiopia's land, 30-40 kilometers on the Sudanese side (Ibid). Kebede (2020) also argued that the existing contested border was drawn up when Sudan was under British rule in the 1900s without the participation of Ethiopian representatives.

Similarly, in an in-depth key informant interview with IE1(March 23, 2020) in Metema Yohannes town the study found that the border conflicts between the Sudanese military and the local community has increased over time. The informant noted that *"in 1958 when I was a child I used to serve as a shepherd for my family on the borderland between Sudan and Ethiopia and I grew up hearing conflicts with the Sudanese militants in the border areas".* IE1 continued narrating as follows:

> *In 1968 I remember there was a war in Abderafi (now Midre Genet town) between our community and the Sudanese because the Sudanese people were crossing our borders[9]. On our side, there was a Tefertegna[10]militant group to protect and inspect the border areas frequently from Humera up to Quara district. But currently they are not as influential as the earlier times and most of them are part of the formal government forces such as in Tsereshimk[11]and Kebele militias (*March 23, 2020).

Due to the contested boundary, Ethiopia and Sudan have not yet reached a conclusive agreement, but the border areas are still source of conflict and instability. In this regard, Kebede (2020: 13)

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[9] Similar trends are still happening around Midre Genet town and West Arimachiho, for instance, the Sudanese military invaded Ethiopia's border on 17, December 2020.
[10] Amharic name for local militant groups who inspect and check the security of border areas.
[11] Monthly salaried militants at district level in WGAZ.

have also identified local communities that have been the victims of farmland conflict as shown below:

> *The border is a threat to their life and their livelihoods. The border, according to them, is an obstacle to farming on their own farmland due to competing land claims by the Sudanese. Therefore, they describe the border as a peril and have rigid views of it. In 1996, because of cross-border land conflict in Delelo farmland, residents of Metema Yohannes town were forced to move back to the town center. The lack of a clearly demarcated international border between Ethiopia and Sudan accepted by both sides has been a source of cross-border tension and conflict.*

The Ethio-Sudan border problem is not only limited to territorial claims, farm and grazing land conflicts, but there are also more complicated problems than what has been stated in the above section. Among others, the following points are some of the visible challenges which frequently occurred around the border areas between Ethiopia and Sudan. Key informants and focus group discussants commented that there was higher involvement of robbery of livestock by the Sudanese military. Moreover, there were huge amount of cattle illegally transferred by Ethiopian brokers and robbers to the Sudan merchants by threatening Ethiopian cowboys and shepherds in the border areas. In addition, the Sudanese military – including the *Difasha*[12]– also robs property owned by Ethiopians. In response, Ethiopian civilians and robbers bring Sudanese property back to Ethiopia as revenge. For instance, based on the report of peace and public security office of WGAZ 368 sheep, 87 goats, 1154 heads of cattle, 1 tractor, 15 fugitives, 24 Kalashnikov, 1 motorbike and 1 pistol have not yet been returned to Ethiopia during the writing of this report (Second quarter annual report, April 20, 2019).

In addition, selling property through collaborating with robbers, intentional gunfire in the farmland of local people, trading firearms and drugs with smugglers, providing illegal visas for illegal Ethiopian migrants are some of problems observed by individuals. Similarly, on the Ethiopian side also the presence of robbers that herded cattle into the Sudan; kidnapping Sudanese individuals, engaging in contraband trade, trafficking illegal migrants and the weakness of LGs are the major challenges that affect the peaceful coexistence and security of the borderland communities (IZA2, February 18th, 2020 and IPS6, March 24th, 2020).

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[12] The name of Sudanese *militia.*

Moreover, focus group discussants and key informants remarked that local communities' resources and local produce were destroyed by Fellata's cattle. For instance, 670 sheep and goats destroyed sesame, cotton and sorghum farms owned by Ethiopians within Ethiopian borders called *Merterahad* and *Jezira* (IPS1, February 19th, 2020). The other challenge is when the Sudanese people lost their property like cars, camels, cattle, sheep or goats; they frequently closed the border route – Ethiopia's international land route – that connects Metema with Gallabat, not only in Metema but if something happened in the border areas, for instance, in Quara district, they closed the same road at Metema Yohannes town. IPS6 (March 26, 2020) suggested that *"on the Ethiopian side the only time that I know the Metema –Gallabat road was closed is during the outbreak of Corona Virus (COVID-19)."* After a State of Emergency (SOE) was declared in 2023, I also observed that the road was closed by the decision of the Ethiopian government during my visit to Metema.

3.6. Kidnapping

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2015) kidnapping is the unlawful detainment and taking away of a person or persons against their will (including through the use of force, threat, fraud or enticement) for the purpose of demanding an illicit gain, any other economic gain or other material benefit for their liberation, or in order to oblige someone to do or not to do something.

Even though banditry is a common problem in West Gondar Zone, the situation in the case of Qemant-Amhara conflict exacerbated kidnappings of individuals because of their ethnicity. In the beginning, the "Qemant Committee" sponsored militant groups to block roads and kidnap drivers and ask ransom[13] in return for releasing the kidnapped people, if not the kidnapped people ended up being killed. Similarly, Amhara militant groups kidnapped individuals thought to be Qemants as retribution (ITM1, March 24 and IPS5, March 25, 2020). Besides, focus discussants from Metema and IDA4 (March 28, 2020) noted that "this condition has brought threats of moving from place to place and traveling particularly to Gondar city was difficult and travelling to the city was temporarily halted. However, kidnapping still becomes a means of generating income in addition

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[13] To pay the ransom people collect money from neighboring community without the knowledge of local government because kidnappers first warn the families of the kidnapped individual not to tell to anyone unless they would kill the person in hostage

to being a means of politically gains or ethnic-based attacks. Further, IDA4 stressed that lack of cooperation among town and district administrative bodies to control such crimes exacerbated the situation. Due to this fact, militant groups made money out of kidnapping individuals they knew and identified as rich and who could pay the ransom the kidnappers demanded. One of the elderly men from West Arimachiho district, AbrehaJira town, who participated in the FGDs, noted that "we found individuals who kidnapped their cousins and nephews to get money from their uncles and brothers (FGDWA, March 12, 2020)." Similarly, IE3 (August 28, 2020), ITM2 (March 9, 2020) and focus group discussants of Midre Genet town commented that it was common to kidnap one's family member. Surprisingly, there were individuals who staged their own kidnapping to get many from their own parents.

Most of my key informants argued that kidnapping was firstly motivated by ethnic politics, but later it became a source of income for kidnappers. As I understood from their words, some of the key informants and group discussants were surprised by my decision to come to Midre Genet and West Arimachiho at that difficult time and risk being kidnapped.

3.7. Human trafficking and smuggling in WGAZ

As stated in Trafficking in Persons (TIP) (2018) Department of State, USA report, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 described "severe forms of trafficking in persons" as:

> *The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery. Or sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age.*

Individuals are trafficked to Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Russia; young women, are also commonly sold as prostitutes to clients primarily in the United Arab Emirates, Syria, Turkey, China, Germany, Greece, South Korea and Cyprus. In this regard, though Metema Yohannes is not an independent state like the Kyrgyz Republic, it serves as a transit for illegal migrants.

In terms of examining the trafficked persons, one of the militias in Metema Yohannes town IE2 (March 24th, 2020) underscored his observation as:

> *I don't know why but our local youths are not as interested as the youths from Southern Ethiopia, Oromia and Somali to emigrate towards Sudan. Most of the time, our [local] youths go to Sudan usually as daily laborers and get back to their homes.*

Regarding the spread of human trafficking in WGAZ, Metema district IPS1 (February 19th, 2020), Metema FG discussants (March 25th, 2020) and key informants from Metema Yohannes town administration IPS6 (March 24th, 2020) argued that *"there is unbreakable chain of trafficking not only in Metema but it extends to Addis Ababa. There are always traffickers who recruit and entice illegal migrants to come to Metema. When the migrants are caught by government's security forces they tell them that that they have been sent by traffickers and convinced to get better life abroad."*

After the trafficked arrived in Metema Yohannes town, migrants would be kept in small shelters until the traffickers find a possible way out to transfer them to the Sudanese traffickers so that emigrants will be ready to go on foot or if possible to get vehicles (IE1, March 23rd, 2020). For this purpose, they use hidden trails in forests and jungles until they deliver them to the Sudanese traffickers (IPS1, February 19th, 2020).

3.8. Disputes between Gumuz and Amhara Communities

In Metema District some Gumuz communities[14] moved to Sudan due to fear of the conflict (IPS1, February 19, 2020). Although no one was targeting the Gumuz people, they felt insecure when the conflict between Qemant and Amhara erupted in the zonal administration. According to IPS3 (May 5), IDA3 (May 6, 2020) and FGDQ (May 7, 2020), however, the ethnic relations between the Amhara and the Gumuz were worse in the district of Quara where they share administrative borders with the current Benishangul Gumuz region.

Focus group discussants and KIs from Quara district noted that the conflict with the Gumuz community was not first caused by ethnicity but due to natural resource exploitation and use. In addition to the local residents, the presence of migrant farmers who were originally from the nearby areas of Gondar – such as Alefa and Quara District, the residents fueled the conflict in places where

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[14] As noted by the same KI after the communities moved to Sudan – nearly 300 persons – the local government of Metema had contacted them in Sudan with the help of the Sudanese government; however, they did not volunteer to get back and some of them claimed they had been called by the Sudanese local administrators – but there is suspicion that they might have been agitated and welcomed by the TPLF-led proxy combatants infiltrating Metema and the borders of Sudan.

the present Benishangul Gumuz region and Quara district share borders (IPS3, May 5 and FGDQ, May 7, 2020). However, the conflict later got worse when individuals got killed and wounded on both sides. IPS3 (May 5, 2020) stressed that, in fact, this was not within WGAZ but the territories were then administered under Benishangul Gumuz region that shares administrative boundaries with Quara district. Due to this reason, FGDQ (May 7, 2020) discussants added that in the last months of 2019 and at the beginning of 2020, conflicts with the Gumuz community brought severe clashes and loss of life and property damages. IPS3 (May 5, 2020) noted that it ultimately eroded the community security of the Amhara and Gumuz communities in *kebeles* like Abay Dar along the Ayima River bordering the Benishangul-Gumuz region. The conflict was more of resource based since the area is highly suitable for sesame production by migrant farmers of both regions, but it was also transforming into inter-ethnic conflict.

However, according to the data collected from both focus group discussants and KIs the real reasons of confrontations went back to the problems of land annexation and the current administrative demarcation between the Quara district and Benishangul Gumuz region. Quara – used to be known as Quara-Omedla – the district that currently borders the Benishangul Gumuz region in the South of WGAZ, according to local residents and some key informants and as noted by IAc1(Dec 31, 2020), for instance, has been annexed by the current Benishangul Gumuz region and moreover large territories formerly administrated under Chilga[15]Awuraja (alternatively read as district) of the former Begemider province were taken by Benishangul Gumuz. Therefore, after the coming to power of TPLF/EPRDF, a key informant from Quara noted that it was not only from Gojjam that land was taken into Benishangul Gumuz region but also from the former Begemider administration as well. Thus, this demarcation has further negatively affected the relationship between the Gumuz people and local communities in Quara district.

4.Conclusion

The article has, in general, tried to cover major human insecurity issues. Conceptually, the study used HS definitions of UNDP and the literature that focuses on the narrower approach, namely freedom from fear dimension of HS. Based on this fact, this article, through exploring the security situation in the study area, has revealed the reasons behind the human security crisis in WGAZ.

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[15] A town found within Central Gondar Administrative Zone.

Among others, ethnic conflict, firearms and human trafficking, border conflicts with Sudan, robbery, the negative impact of external forces and so forth were by definition factors affecting human security in West Gondar. However, these factors were also caused by other primary factors such as instrumentalizing of conflicts for political means and personal gains, resource grabbing and the interest of generating income, by kidnapping persons, for instance.

Moreover, the above-mentioned factors were not without any negative impact, as it was discussed in the preceding sections that the factors caused a cumulative effect of death, property destruction, breakdown of good governance, social mistrust and suspicion, intensification of robbery and lawlessness, increasing number of illegal migrants and illegal trade, the continued conflict with the Sudanese local community as well as the military that has led to the eviction of Ethiopian farmers from their land.

Finally, it is argued that the government failed to manage the human security of the people in West Gondar for the past five consecutive years since 2015. Although the LG had attempted to bring a peaceful resolution to the conflict, it was blamed for fueling the situation due to personal greediness and interest. However, the government has currently contributed positively to managing the post-conflict situation through deploying the military and discussing with the conflicting parties to facilitate reconciliation among them.

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