

OVERCOMING EDUCATIONAL IMPEDIMENTS: LESSONS FROM THE TIGRAY CONFLICT IN ETHIOPIA FOR NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education serves as a crucial foundation for the advancement and prosperity of any nation, shaping individuals, empowering communities, and fostering economic growth. Nevertheless, educational systems are vulnerable to disruption caused by conflicts and violence, resulting in significant consequences for students, teachers, and educational institutions. This study investigates the educational challenges faced by Ethiopia during the Tigray conflict and examines the potential lessons that Nigeria can learn from this experience, together with strategies Nigeria should implement to mitigate these challenges. Using a qualitative research approach, primary and secondary data were collected through interviews and the review and analysis of scholarly publications, journals, articles, and online materials. The findings revealed common obstacles encountered by Ethiopia's educational sector, including disrupted access to schooling, displacement of students and teachers, infrastructure damage, loss of learning resources, and psychological trauma among students. These challenges significantly hindered the provision of quality education and impeded progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in education. This study concludes that education plays a vital role in Nigeria's economic growth, and by drawing upon Ethiopia's experiences, Nigeria can proactively address potential obstacles, strengthen emergency response mechanisms, and promote inclusive and high-quality education for all citizens. The research recommends key strategies for Nigeria to enhance its resilience and preparedness in similar crises, such as strengthening emergency education response mechanisms, investing in inclusive and community-driven education, bolstering infrastructure resilience, and prioritising psychosocial support for affected students among others.

Keywords: Africa, conflict, education, Ethiopia, Tigray conflict.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental pillar for the development and progress of any nation. It plays a crucial role in shaping individuals, empowering communities, and fostering economic growth and societal development. However, in regions affected by conflicts, access to quality education becomes severely compromised, impeding the overall progress of the population (Human Rights Watch, 2021). One such conflict-ridden region is Tigray in Ethiopia, where the recent conflict has had significant ramifications on the educational system. The Tigray conflict, which erupted in 2020 between the Ethiopian Federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), has had devastating consequences on the educational sector; as schools were destroyed, educational resources depleted, and teachers and students

displaced, resulting in a disruption of the learning process. Impediment in academic research refers to any obstacle or hindrance that obstructs the progress of research endeavors. The Tigray Conflict emerged as a focal point of regional and international concern due to its multifaceted nature. According to Mlaba (2021), the conflict posed numerous challenges, including limited access to education, increased dropout rates, and a decline in the quality of education. These impediments have had a profound impact on the lives of children and youth in the region, hindering their educational advancement and future prospects. The Tigray conflict officially began on November 4, 2020; after Abiy Ahmed, the Ethiopian Prime Minister, declared the "Law enforcement operation," which ordered the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) and the Armed Forces against the Tigray Region (Ethiopian Embassy, London, 2021). The unexpected attack carried out during the night by members of the Tigray Regional Special Forces and Militia on the offices and bases of the ENDF in Mekelle - which is the capital of Tigray; was the immediate precipitating factor that led to the conflict. The conflict became an international crisis as it escalated beyond Ethiopian boundaries to neighbouring countries in East Africa and international organisations (Plaut, 2021). This caused the conflict to involve military forces from other countries, including Amhara special forces, Eritrean military forces and Somali military forces. Reported by Ghent University, Belgium, the Tigray conflict caused more than 500,000 deaths from direct violent killing and famine. The estimate comprises 50,000 to 100,000 victims of direct homicides, 150,000 to 200,000 fatalities from malnutrition, and more than 100,000 additional deaths brought on by a lack of access to healthcare (Ghent University, 2023). According to the 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), more than 20 million people required protection and humanitarian aid by the end of 2022 due to the Tigray conflict (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2022). Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, faces its own security challenges, which has over the years affected its educational sector and effectiveness of policies. Despite commendable efforts to improve access to education, Nigeria continues to grapple with issues such as inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, low enrolment rates, and disparities between urban and rural areas. Even though elementary education in the nation is both free and required by law, 10.5 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 do not attend. Only 61% of children aged 6 to 11 routinely attend primary school in Nigeria, while only 35.6% of children from 36 to 59 months receive early childhood education (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2022). In addition to this, Nigeria's security situation has deteriorated over the years, which has forced more schools to close, and more people relocating within the nation as well as outside its borders. Many schools have been forced to close in recent years due to insecurity, particularly in regions of northern Nigeria, without explicit orders from the government because school administrations could not ensure students and teachers safety (UNICEF, 2022).

Since December 2020, more than 11,536 schools have been closed due to insecurity. In less than two years, 1.3 million children's education in Nigeria has been impacted by security issues (Abdullahi, 2022). Insecurity has altered education in South-Eastern Nigeria to the extent that pupils were not permitted to complete part of their papers for the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WAEC) in 2022. Stated by Umar (2022), schools in the northern part of Nigeria have been forced to close in recent years due to insecurity, as

school administrations could not ensure the safety of students. Educational observers claim that the country's educational system is still under threat from insecurity to the point where it affects students, teachers, and the government, resulting in the decline of education (US Department of State, 2022). By examining the educational impediments faced in Tigray as a result of the conflict, this study aims to provide valuable insights for Nigeria. Understanding the specific challenges faced in Tigray, such as the disruption of educational infrastructure, the psychological impact on students and teachers, and the long-term consequences on the education system, can help Nigeria in addressing its own educational impediments even before the escalation of conflicts and instability. The experiences in Tigray offer a unique learning opportunity for Nigeria on the strategies and measures which should be taken to mitigate educational challenges during and after a conflict. This includes examining the role of local communities, international organisations, and non-governmental organisations, in restoring educational stability.

Review of Related Literatures

Concept of Conflict

Conflict has been a part of human history for as long as people have been around. It is a prominent trait that can be passed on from generation to generation in current society. Morgenthau (1948) proposes that even in situations where individuals do not have access to firearms or other instruments of violence, they are nonetheless likely to fight using only their fists. According to Miodownik and Barak (2013), Conflict represents a state of heightened tension and discord either between sovereign states or among opposing factions within a nation, manifesting as external manifestations of political, economic, or military strife. This close relationship might be between two states or between rival sections within a state. In agreement, Folarin (2015) states that the surrounding of the society with other humans brings up issues of disagreement, clash of interests, which would commonly lead to confrontations or disagreement, thus creating a community of men and women who succumb to conflicting behaviour and disagreement. In addition, Folarin (2015) states that the surrounding of the society with animals brings up issues of disagreement, clash of interests, which would commonly lead to confrontations or disagreement.

According to the explicit definition of conflict in politics, conflict is a manifestation of the competing interests of opposing or complementary political organisations. Conflict frequently results in political violence, which, when understood in the context of Weberian theory, makes political violence an acceptable tool for venting rage (Anifowose, 1982). However, conflicts can either be dominant or recessive, non-violent or violent, and resolvable or unresolvable depending on the circumstances. However, the vast majority of conflicts that have been documented throughout the course of human history have been characterised by violence, having a severe impact not only on the states involved but also on the residents of those states (Omotosho, 2004). Accordingly, it would be acknowledged that not all conflicts are intrinsically violent, but that some conflicts could potentially take the form of violence.

Tigray Conflict

The Tigray conflict was a violent struggle that raged from November 2020 to November 2022; between the Ethiopian Federal Government and the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF). The conflict is said to have been caused by some underlying factors such as: ethnic diversity, unacceptance of Abiy Ahmed as the new Prime Minister by the TPLF; introduction of the Prosperity Party by the Prime Minister as a replacement for the dissolved Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) (which was the former ruling party under the leadership of TPLF); and the immediate cause which was the TPLF attack on the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) offices and bases in Mekelle - capital of Tigray. The conflict saw violent confrontation of arms (guns, T-72 tanks, rockets, M20/A200 missile launchers, AR2 MRL, jet fighters, etc.) by both parties, which caused more than thousands of deaths from direct violent killing and famine (Al Jazeera, 2021). By its spillover effect to other communities, the conflict attracted the intervention of the Amhara ethnic group, Oromo ethnic group, Egypt, Somalia and Eritrea and other external actors. The Tigray conflict was the most erupted conflict in the Horn of Africa between 2020 and 2022; with high humanitarian crises - more than 20 million people were in desperate need of humanitarian aid and protection, more 500,000 deaths were recorded (UNOCHA, 2022), and about 5.5 million people were compelled to flee their homes and seek refuge in other parts of Ethiopia, due to subsequent escalation of the conflict to neighbouring states of Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan (Wilson Center, 2023).

The vital social services in the Tigray region and in the nearby regions of Afar and Amhara, notably the educational system, suffered tremendous harm as a result of the two years of violent conflict in Ethiopia. On 28 February 2022, UNICEF reported that in 2021, more than 2.8 million children missed school from Afar, Amhara, Tigray regions. The devastating conflict prevented Tigray's children from receiving further education, which is especially worrying given that the COVID-19 pandemic had previously caused a protracted disruption and that many children are still unable to attend school. It is unfortunate that even after the African Union (AU)'s African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, for instance, urged African nations to "either ban the use of schools for military purposes, or, at a minimum, enact concrete measures to deter the use of schools for military purposes," throughout the conflict, schools were used as military bases by all combatants, as well as for sexual violations (Human Rights Watch, 2021). In particular, the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) engaged in widespread abuses of civilians while fighting alongside the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) against Tigrayan forces. Both the EDF and ENDF bombed, plundered, and invaded schools on occasion, these locations have been used to perpetrate further crimes, such as weaponized rape; as Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) became a major weapon during the conflict; pervasive and systematic. According to the Human Rights Watch (2022), an eyewitness reported to have seen various women taken inside a school where they occasionally stayed for two, three, or five days with the militants, only to be released with battered and sobbing faces. The environment made it difficult to inquire about the women's whereabouts, and no one dared.

Education in Ethiopia During the Tigray Conflict

Education in Ethiopia is a critical sector that the government has prioritised for the country's development. With the creation of the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) in (1997), which is a government-led initiative that outlines the strategies, priorities, and goals for the development of the education sector. According to the Federal Ministry of Education, Addis Ababa (2015), the Program aims to improve access, quality, and relevance of education through various interventions, including infrastructure development and teacher training, the Ethiopian government over the years have maintained significant educational growth, especially the children and youths. Ethiopia introduced free primary education in 1994 (World Bank, 2009), to increase access and enrolment rates. This policy helps remove financial barriers to education for families and has contributed to improved school attendance. Although the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy focuses on enhancing access, quality, and relevance of education - emphasising inclusive education, technical and vocational education, and technology integration in teaching and learning, according to the World Bank (2023), the literacy rate for individuals aged 15 and above in Ethiopia was estimated to be around 56.8% in 2018. There is a gender disparity, with the male literacy rate at approximately 63.5% and the female literacy rate at about 50% (Galal, 2022). As of 2019, the net enrolment rate for primary education in Ethiopia was reported to be around 86.6%, reflecting increased access to education. However, despite progress, Ethiopia still faces challenges of out-of-school children. The number of out-of-school children was estimated at 3.3 million in 2019. Efforts are being made to reduce this number through targeted interventions and policies (Carmichael, Darko, Kanji, & Vasilakos, 2022). It is not deniable that Ethiopia recognizes the significance of education as a catalyst to development. While progress has been made, challenges remain in terms of access, quality, and inclusivity. The government, in collaboration with international partners, has been working towards addressing these challenges and improving education outcomes for all Ethiopian citizens. However, during the Tigray conflict which erupted in November 2020, until November 2022, the educational system and stability of Ethiopia were highly devastated, especially in the Tigray region; where the military forces attacked and fought the opposition.

The Tigray conflict has led to the disruption of school activities in the region. Many schools were damaged, destroyed, or occupied by armed forces, preventing students from accessing education. As reported by the Save the Children Organization in 2022, between June and December 2022, Ethiopia's out-of-school population increased from 3.1 million to 3.6 million, in part due to recent war in the Afar, Amhara, and Tigray regions and ongoing instability in some areas of Oromia that displaced more civilians. With 24.1 million people hit by the greatest drought in four decades, including 12.6 million children, Ethiopia experienced one of the biggest humanitarian disasters in its history. The drought caused more than 1 million people to be displaced, only in the Somali region. The World Food Programme estimated that 20 million people nationwide were in desperate need of food aid. From the statement made by Henrietta Fore - UNICEF Executive Director, in 2020, many children were forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in other areas, leading to interruptions in their education. Due to the security situation, many schools in Tigray were forced to close, depriving students of learning opportunities. Some schools were repurposed as shelters for

displaced individuals, further impacting access to education (Wilson Center, 2023). During the conflict, education infrastructure, including schools, classrooms, and educational materials, were not left undamaged. This hampered the ability to provide a conducive learning environment for students, nor save environment for all.

Education in Nigeria

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Policy was introduced in 1999 to provide free and compulsory basic education for all children in Nigeria. It covers nine years of formal schooling, comprising six years of primary education and three years of junior secondary education. According to Labo-Popoola et al. (2009), all governments in Nigeria from colonial times until the present have consistently placed primary education at the centre of their educational policies, raising the possibility that the difficulties may not lie in the creation of the policies themselves but rather in their implementation. Since Universal Primary Education (UPE) was first based on regions (Eddy & Akpan, 2009), universalizing primary education became a national endeavour in Nigeria in 1976. All students, regardless of any disability, are entitled to equal educational opportunities. The strategy states that education should level the playing field and provide prospects for achievement for everyone, regardless of background (Labo-Popoola et al, 2009). Everyone has the fundamental human right to a basic education, as stated by the Convention on Human Rights and the Treaty against Discrimination in Education (Babalola, 2013). The right to education enlightens a person to understand his or her other human rights because it aims to ensure the development of a fully formed human being and is one of the most effective ways to lift people out of poverty and into society (United Nations, 2000). In response to the security challenges facing the education sector, the Safe School Initiative (SSI) was launched in 2014 by the Federal Government, in order to provide safe and secure learning environments for students and teachers in areas affected by insecurity through measures such as increased security presence and infrastructure improvements. According to Umar (2022), schools have been forced to close in recent years due to insecurity, particularly in regions of northern Nigeria, without explicit orders from the government because school administrations could not ensure student safety. Since December 2020, as reported by UNICEF (2022), more than 11,536 schools have been closed due to insecurity in the country. Additionally, the Organization reported that in less than two years, 1.3 million children's education in Nigeria has been impacted by security issues, affecting all aspects of their lives, including education - which during crises is not usually recognised to be important (Abdullahi, 2022).

According to the World Bank, the literacy rate in Nigeria for individuals aged 15 and above was estimated to be around 62.0% in 2018. In a survey conducted by Enyioko (2021), in 2016, the literacy rates among young Nigerian men and women, aged 15 to 24 were respectively 70.9% and 59.3%. In the 2014/2015, 2015/2016, and 2016/2017 academic sessions, respectively, 46.1, 47.3, and 46.4% of students in Nigerian colleges of education were female. The study also discovered that, in 2017, enrolment in Nigerian universities was 43.1% and 56.9% for females and males, respectively. Nigeria, according to the 2022 UNICEF report has one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children globally - which is estimated to be around 10.5 million. Although the allocation of budgetary resources to the

education sector is essential for its development, and the Nigerian government in recent years has committed to allocating a significant percentage of the national budget to education, the actual implementation and disbursement of these funds remain areas of concern. While Nigeria has made efforts to improve its education sector through various policies and initiatives, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, high number of out-of-school children, and regional disparities persist. Addressing these challenges requires sustained commitment, increased investment, and comprehensive reforms to ensure inclusive and quality education for all Nigerians.

Conflict and Instability in Nigeria

Education in Nigeria, in relation to insecurity challenges, is a complex and multifaceted issue. In recent years, Nigeria has faced significant security challenges, particularly in the form of insurgency, terrorism, banditry, and communal conflicts. These security challenges have had a detrimental impact on the education sector in various ways. There have been instances where schools have been directly attacked by insurgent groups, such as Boko Haram. These attacks have resulted in the loss of lives, injuries, and abductions of students and teachers (Momodu, & Tukur, 2021). Such incidents have created fear and trauma among students, parents, and teachers, leading to a decline in school enrolment and attendance. Especially in the northern and south-eastern part of Nigeria, insecurity has led to the destruction of school infrastructure, including buildings, classrooms, and educational materials. This hampers the ability of schools to provide a conducive learning environment for students and further disrupts educational activities (Shinge, Barde, Umar, Suraj, Bukar, and Garba, 2022). Additionally, many students and teachers have been forced to flee their homes, seeking safety in other regions. This displacement disrupts their education and results in the loss of valuable educational opportunities. Regrettably, insecurity has created an environment where young people, particularly those who lack access to quality education and economic opportunities, are vulnerable to recruitment by insurgent groups. Lack of education and prospects for the future make them more susceptible to radicalization and involvement in violent activities. The level of violence in Nigeria puts schoolchildren at serious risk. Attacks by armed non-state groups have reduced a number of educational institutions to ruins. In the northeast region of Nigeria, where the insurgency has lasted for well over twelve years, incidents are increasingly frequent. Due to widespread kidnappings at educational facilities, banditry also poses serious dangers to education in the northwest and north-central zones. Since 2021, as argued by Anyadiegwu and Nzekwu (2022), the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has designated Mondays as a day of solitude in honour of their respected leader Nnamdi Kanu, who has been facing prosecution by the Federal Government. In addition, both the IPOB and various South-East regional groups have consistently enforced "sit-at-home" orders on Mondays and other days, resulting in the suspension of all activities, including educational activities, leading to significant and negative impacts on the educational sector.

The 2023 UNICEF report stated that Nigerian school enrollment is severely hampered by pervasive dread. From 10.5 million in 2021, there are currently over 18.5 million out-of-school children, which significantly impedes the educational and economic growth of the country. The Northeast terrorism and banditry in the northwest and north-

central regions are factors, according to UNICEF, in the spike. Beyond the violence, there are restrictions to supporting numerous children who are trapped in conflict-affected environments, typically due to security considerations. Additionally, a lot of children live in areas affected by war where both social and economic resources are scarce. In the face of a protracted humanitarian catastrophe, educational services seem to take a back seat, it would not be a necessity nor priority. The statistics on poverty will get worse if barriers to education persist. A lack of educational possibilities for the younger generation will have an impact on their vulnerability, productivity, and self-reliance. Recruits are required to fill out the ranks of the numerous non-state armed groups. Therefore, groups that are uneducated, unskilled, and underproductive are susceptible to the antics of violent businesspeople. According to the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), a good education safeguards cognitive growth and psychological well-being, offering kids hope in difficult situations. In order to provide educational services to millions of disadvantaged children in Nigeria, it is necessary to persistently address the institutional, cultural, security, and humanitarian barriers to education (NextierSPD, 2022).

Educational Impediments in Ethiopia During the Tigray Conflict

Disrupted Schooling: The Tigray conflict led to the closure of schools and universities in the Tigray region and surrounding areas, resulting in a significant disruption of education. The Tigray education bureau in 2021 carried out a preliminary assessment that comprised 2,054 primary, elementary, and secondary public schools as well as two teacher-training institutes, but excluded schools in Western and Northern Tigray that were under the control of Eritrea and Amhara. From their findings, 88.3% of classrooms suffered substantial damage, according to the study's conclusions. This damage included the theft, demolishing, and burning of 96.5 percent of student desks, 95.7 percent of blackboards, 63.5 percent of student textbooks, as well as the vandalism or destruction of 85.1 percent of computers, 79.9 percent of plasma screens, 84.5 percent of science lab equipment, 92.5 percent of educational models, and more than 48% of restrooms (Tigray Education Bureau, 2021). Additionally, many schools were damaged or used as shelters for internally displaced people, making them inaccessible for learning purposes.

Inaccessibility and Safety Concerns: The conflict and insecurity in the region made it difficult for students to attend school regularly. Ongoing violence and attacks on educational facilities created safety concerns for students and teachers, leading to decreased school attendance. Further survey by the Tigray Educational Bureau stated that, because of damage to schools, Tigray's primary school children now walk an average of 7.3 kilometres rather than the 2.5 kilometres they did just two years ago to get to school. The average distance high school students must travel to get to their schools increased from 7 kilometres in November 2020 to 17 kilometres by the end of 2021. From the study, it was reported that 1,911 students and 235 teachers (from elementary and secondary schools) were killed in the war, but there could be more unidentified persons (Tigray Education Bureau, 2021). This made it difficult for both students and teachers to attend school, and with further escalation of the conflict and reported number of displacements and deaths, education ceased to be a priority or necessity to the teachers and students.

Displacement of Students and Teachers: Reported by the European Parliament (2022), hospitals and schools, among other important facilities, were devastated by the conflict. Armed groups from all sides attacked and destroyed several of the camps housing over 100,000 Eritrean refugees living in Tigray before the crisis began. Amnesty International reported in February 2021 that in the Tigrayan city of Axum in December 2020, Eritrean forces targeted and killed more than 100 civilians and unarmed individuals. Despite pressure from the international community, Eritrean forces have not complied with promises to remove their presence in the area. Just a year into the conflict in 2021, Ethiopia claimed to have 5.1 million internally displaced people, the most of any nation in a single year (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). The conflict caused large-scale displacement of populations, including students and teachers. Many students had to flee with their families to safer areas, resulting in interrupted education and difficulties in finding alternative schools. Teachers were also displaced, leaving schools with a shortage of qualified educators.

Lack of Educational Resources: Schools in conflict-affected areas often faced shortages of teaching materials, textbooks, and essential resources necessary for effective learning. The destruction of infrastructure further exacerbated the lack of resources. According to the Wilson Centre report (2023), the Tigrayans were the main target of the Eritrean military force, who equally blocked and damaged the roads and links that would deliver humanitarian assistance to Tigray from external organisations. Particularly when fighting alongside the ENDF against Tigrayan forces, the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) engaged in extensive abuses against civilians. Schools were attacked, plundered, and occupied by EDF and ENDF soldiers. During the conflict, according to the responses from the interviewees, there was restriction on movement within regions, violating the rights to freedom of movement. The Tigray conflict promoted human rights abuse and corruption through the unlawful arrest and detention of citizens across the country, especially those found to support or promote the TPLF.

Psychological Trauma: The violence, displacement, and insecurity experienced during the conflict resulted in significant psychological trauma for both students and teachers. The tigray conflict caused a high degree of sexual violation, robbery, demolition of infrastructures in Tigray - schools, hospitals and religious institutions. Although the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child of the AU urged African nations to "either ban the use of schools for military purposes, or, at a minimum, enact concrete measures to deter the use of schools for military purposes", during the conflict, all belligerents utilised schools as military installations. The Eritrean Defence Force (EDF) and the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF), occasionally used schools, religious buildings and demolished health centres to conduct other crimes, such as weaponized rape - conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) on women and young girls. The Human Rights Watch in 2022 interviewed an eyewitness who reported to have seen various women taken inside a school where they occasionally stayed for two, three, or five days with the militants, only to be released with battered and sobbing faces. According to Wilson Center (2023), over 20 million people were affected by the war, of which nearly three quarters were women and children. Witnessing or being victims of violence can have long-lasting effects on mental health, affecting the ability to concentrate and learn effectively.

Humanitarian Aid as a Necessity over Education: Despite the communication blackout and efforts to impede the flow of information out of Tigray, evidence revealed that "starvation crimes" occurred and were adopted against the Tigray region as a weapon of war. Commentators have referred to the conflict as a "war of starvation," suggesting that there was widespread understanding that food was used as a weapon to crush dissent. Hunger was a means to an end in and of itself. In order to eliminate the threat to the federal government and its Eritrean and Amhara allies, it was seen necessary to drive the TPLF and its supporters out of the area, by utilising hunger. Reported by the International Peace Information Service (IPIS), 90% of the population of the Tigray region, or an estimated 5.2 million people, were at risk due to the de facto blockage of humanitarian aid by the Ethiopian government, according to the United Nations Acting Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia. The famine was "man-made," according to the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and it could be "remedied by the act of Ethiopian government. "The Tigray conflict diverted resources away from the education sector, as funds were redirected to address immediate humanitarian and security needs. As of 2021, up to 5.2 million people were food insecure and in need of help. Education was no longer a priority or necessity, as both the government and the people strived to survive and overcome the humanitarian challenges of hunger, safety, and health. Even the Ethiopian government and international organisations such as the European Union, Red Cross, World Food Programme and others, were focused on mitigating hunger and starvation.

Impact on Higher Education: Universities and higher education institutions in the Tigray region faced severe disruptions, affecting students' academic pursuits, research, and professional development. As reported by the Save the Children Organization in 2022, between June-December 2022, Ethiopia's out-of-school population increased from 3.1 million to 3.6 million, in part due to recent war in the Afar, Amhara, and Tigray regions and ongoing instability in some areas of Oromia that is displacing more civilians. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), more than 2.8 million children missed school in Afar, Amhara, and Tigray Region of Ethiopia in 2021. This is particularly alarming, as the conflict prevented children from receiving an education for two years, and many children are still affected by the protracted disruption brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic (UNICEF, 2022).

Lessons for Nigeria from the Educational Impediments of Ethiopia during the Tigray Conflict

The Tigray Conflict in Ethiopia has undoubtedly had significant implications for the country's education system. Nigeria, as an African country facing instability and insecurity, can draw valuable lessons from Ethiopia's educational impediments during this conflict to address potential challenges in its own education sector. On strengthening education in emergency preparedness, one of the critical lessons from the Tigray Conflict is the importance of safeguarding schools and educational facilities during periods of insecurity. Nigeria should prioritise protecting schools from being targeted, damaged, or used for military purposes during times of conflict to ensure that education can continue uninterrupted. However, based on findings from the Tigray conflict, it becomes evident that education is

often deemed less of a priority and necessity during periods of armed conflicts. Both national and international organisations tend to allocate their resources primarily to humanitarian aid and security initiatives. Even in cases where educational infrastructure is safeguarded by the government amidst crises and wars, there is no assurance that all school children and teachers can be adequately protected. Consequently, citizens may choose to prioritise personal safety over attending educational institutions, opting to stay within the confines of their homes. In light of these insights, Nigeria should take proactive measures by establishing dedicated institutions that focus on training teachers and educators to be well-prepared to provide education during times of conflict. By equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge, these trained teachers and coaches can create conducive learning environments, even in challenging circumstances, thereby ensuring that education remains accessible and effective despite the prevailing security challenges. This approach aims to address the apparent disparity in resource allocation during conflicts, where education tends to receive less attention than humanitarian and security assistance. By investing in the preparedness of educators, Nigeria can demonstrate a commitment to prioritising education and safeguarding the learning opportunities of its citizens, even amidst uncertain and volatile situations. Such initiatives are pivotal in fostering resilience and continuity within the educational system during conflict times, ultimately contributing to the overall stability and development of the nation.

Additionally, the Tigray conflict resulted in a significant number of people being internally displaced, including many children. Nigeria should develop robust mechanisms to ensure that children who are displaced due to conflicts or other emergencies have access to education, whether through temporary schools, catch-up programs, or distance learning initiatives. The Government should leverage digital technologies to facilitate distance learning during emergencies, provide access to educational content and resources, and train teachers and students on utilising technology for remote learning. However, a critical concern arises regarding the feasibility of implementing this strategy in rural areas, where schools often suffer from underfunding, resulting in inadequate educational facilities, unreliable internet connections, and mismanagement of infrastructure and educational budgets. In such circumstances, the use of digital technologies and distance learning becomes challenging for both students and teachers, given the unavailability and unfamiliarity with these facilities. In light of these challenges, this research recommends that, in addition to training teachers for emergency preparedness, the Nigerian government should also provide specialised training for teachers and educational administrators to establish localised educational centres in every street. These centres would serve as short-distance learning hubs, where instructors can gather all students residing within a specific street into a communal space, such as a house, to conduct classes for different groups. The adoption of such an approach is expected to yield several benefits. Firstly, it would encourage individuals who harbour safety concerns to attend classes, as the learning environment would be within their immediate community, eliminating the need for long-distance travel. Additionally, the creation of localised educational centres ensures that students and teachers can navigate the challenges posed by underfunded rural schools and limited access to digital technologies, making education more accessible and inclusive for all. By incorporating this recommendation into the broader education system, the

Nigerian government can take significant strides towards mitigating the impact of underfunding and inadequate infrastructure on rural education. Furthermore, this approach has the potential to foster a stronger sense of community and collaboration among students and educators, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of education in rural areas. The government should also prioritise inclusivity and equity in education, ensuring that vulnerable and marginalised populations are not left behind during times of conflict. Special attention should be given to the needs of displaced children and those from conflict-affected communities, including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. Safe learning spaces, with non-discrimination, and provision of targeted support for students affected by conflict or displacement should be created.

The Nigerian government should also provide psychosocial support for students affected by conflict. The trauma and stress associated with living in a conflict zone can significantly impact a child's mental health and well-being. Implementing counselling services and resilience-building programs in schools can help students cope with the challenges they face and continue their educational journey. During conflicts and wars, human rights violations such as rape and assaults are inevitable; as the Tigray conflict witnessed the rape of women and young girls. The Nigeria government learning from this should employ therapists and psychologists who would visit and medically attend to the children and teachers, towards rehabilitation and healing. The sanity and mental stability of the victims of human and sexual violence will be at risk if not attended to. Furthermore, the government should address the challenges of child soldiers; children adopted into the conflict by the warring parties instead of going to school. Whether the conflict is between the Nigerian Federal Government and a region; as in the case of Ethiopia, or between other regions, the Nigerian Government should protect children from being utilised as war shields or as child-soldiers during wars or conflicts. There is also a need to advocate for international support and partnerships. Ethiopia faced challenges in accessing resources and assistance during the conflict. Nigeria should forge strong partnerships with international organisations and neighbouring countries to enhance its capacity to address educational issues during times of crisis and conflict. The Nigerian government should work with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international agencies to access additional resources and expertise to support education in crisis situations, to seek support for education in emergency initiatives, and for mitigating the impact of conflicts and crises on education. Additionally, Nigeria should seek and welcome humanitarian aid for education during conflicts. International organisations and donors often provide support for education in conflict-affected areas. Welcoming this assistance and using it effectively can help alleviate some of the educational challenges faced by students in Nigeria during times of crisis. Similarly, Nigeria should involve local communities in decision-making processes related to education. Engaging parents, community leaders, and local stakeholders can help ensure that education remains a priority during conflict and fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility for the well-being of schools and students. Through community engagement in supporting education during emergencies, by involving local actors in decision-making processes, this will promote their active participation in creating safe and conducive learning environments for their communities and children. Implementing these recommendations will require strong political

will, commitment, and collaboration among stakeholders. By drawing insights from the educational impediments experienced in the Tigray conflict, Nigeria can enhance its preparedness and response to educational challenges during emergencies, ultimately ensuring that all children have access to quality education even in times of crisis.

Conclusion

Studying the educational impediments faced during the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia provides valuable insights for Nigeria's education system. The conflict in Tigray resulted in widespread displacement, destruction of infrastructure, closure of schools, and disruption of educational activities. These challenges have severely impacted the learning and well-being of children and young people in the region. Nigeria, being a country with its own history of conflicts and security challenges, can draw important lessons from the Tigray conflict to enhance its preparedness and response mechanisms. One key lesson is the critical importance of ensuring the safety and security of schools and educational facilities. Nigeria can strengthen measures to protect schools from attacks, including developing robust security protocols, promoting community engagement in safeguarding schools, and raising awareness about the importance of protecting education in times of conflict. Additionally, the Tigray conflict has shed light on the need for coordinated humanitarian efforts to address the educational needs of affected populations. Nigeria can enhance its coordination mechanisms among government agencies, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, and local communities to provide timely and comprehensive support to students and teachers during crises. By learning from the educational impediments faced in the Tigray conflict, Nigeria can develop comprehensive strategies to safeguard and strengthen its education system, particularly in times of crisis. The insights gained can inform policy decisions, resource allocation, and collaborative efforts to ensure that all children and young people in Nigeria have access to quality education, regardless of the challenges they may face.

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