



GIEWS Update

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Dire food insecurity situation in northern areas due to conflict

Highlights

- In northern Tigray Region and neighbouring Amhara and Afar regions, conflict has severely damaged rural livelihood systems and displaced about 3.2 million people.
- In Tigray Region, crop production of the main 2021 “Meher” harvest, currently underway, is estimated to be 58 percent below the already poor 2020 main harvest, resulting in the third consecutive season with reduced production since the start of hostilities in November 2020.
- About 15 percent of the heads of livestock in Tigray Region has been looted or slaughtered.
- In June 2021, about 4.4 million people in conflict-affected areas were projected to face severe food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 [Crisis] and above) between July and September, including 401 000 people in IPC Phase 5 (Catastrophe).
- The current prevalence and severity of food insecurity are likely to be higher as the projection could not be carried out for all areas affected by the conflict in June and due to the expansion of hostilities to most of Afar and Amhara regions since July.
- Unimpeded humanitarian access is urgently needed to support vulnerable households in conflict-affected areas to avert the risk of famine.

Overview

The country's northern areas of Tigray, Amhara and Afar regions are experiencing a severe humanitarian crisis and facing a dire food insecurity situation due to the conflict that started in November 2020. The hostilities resulted in widespread violence against the civilian population and large-scale displacements, with the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) currently estimated at 3.24 million. The conflict is hindering crop and livestock production, food transport and trade, and severely constraining food availability and access, with adverse impacts on food security. According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis conducted in June 2021, about 4.4 million people in Tigray and neighbouring zones of Amhara and Afar regions were projected

to face severe food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 [Crisis] and above) between July and September. This figure included 401 000 people in IPC Phase 5 (Catastrophe), characterized by an extreme lack of food and/or other basic needs even after the full employment of coping strategies, resulting in starvation, death, destitution and extremely critical levels of malnutrition. However, as the projection for July-September could not be carried out for all the areas affected by the conflict in June and due to the expansion of hostilities to most of Afar and Amhara regions since July, the current prevalence and severity of food insecurity are likely to be higher. The delivery of humanitarian supplies to the conflict-affected areas is heavily restricted and unimpeded access is urgently needed to support the vulnerable households and avert the risk of famine.

Insecurity and population displacements

In early November 2020, growing tensions between the federal and the regional governments escalated to an armed conflict in the Tigray region, involving also some neighbouring areas of Amhara and Afar regions. In July 2021, the conflict spread to most of these two regions. Hostilities have exposed communities to widespread violence and large-scale displacements. Currently, about 2.1 million people are displaced in Tigray, 1 million in Amhara and 140 000 in Afar regions, while about 57 000 people sought refuge to the Sudan. Since the beginning of the conflict, the international community has been engaged in a voluntary relocation of IDPs to organized sites in order to provide humanitarian assistance in a safe environment. However, assistance operations are impaired by several challenges, including the high number of displaced people and access constraints. Most IDPs are living with host communities or in makeshift collective shelters, including churches and hospitals or in the open, raising concerns of tensions for the available resources and exposing them to health and safety risks.

Livelihood activities and sources of income

In Tigray Region, crop production and livestock rearing contribute to about 36 and 17 percent, respectively, to the regional gross domestic product (GDP) and rainfed crop production is the main economic activity for over 85 percent of the population. When the conflict broke out, the main 2020 “Meher” harvest, normally gathered between October and mid-January, was well underway. Several farmers were forced to abandon their fields and significant crop losses were reported due to burning and looting. The lean season, normally starting in June, began earlier in March 2021 due to the faster-than-normal depletion of household food stocks. In Southern Tigray Zone, the only area of the region that receives the February–May “Belg” rains, the area planted with secondary 2021 season “Belg” crops was below average as insecurity hampered access to fields and reduced availability of inputs, including draft animals and labour. In addition, yields were severely affected by delayed and erratic rainfall, leading to a near failure of the harvest that was gathered in July, with about a one-month delay. Sowing operations of the major

2021 “Meher” crops, which took place in May and June, were also affected by insecurity and lack of inputs, resulting in a substantial reduction of the planted area. As a result, although average to above-average June–September “Kiremt” rains had a positive impact on yields, crop production is expected to be about 60 percent below the already poor 2020 main harvest, resulting in the third consecutive season with reduced production since the start of hostilities in November 2020. The production shortfall is also the result of crop losses due to desert locusts as control operations could not be carried out due to insecurity. The expansion of the conflict to Amhara Region raises a particular concern as the region accounts, on average, for about 30 percent of the national cereal output. In the conflict-affected areas, income levels have been affected by the significant reduction of crop sales and seasonal and migrant labour opportunities. The livestock sector has been also severely affected by the conflict and, as of June 2021, it is estimated that about 15 percent of the Tigray Region’s heads of livestock were looted or slaughtered. The destruction of 158 of the region’s 198 veterinary clinics had adverse implications for animal health and disease outbreaks have been reported. The recent expansion of the conflict to Afar Region resulted in livestock looting and slaughtering, a major concern for a predominantly pastoral area.

Impact on the national economy

The country is facing its worst economic shock in decades due to the combined impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Tigray, Amhara and Afar regions. Tigray hosts an important portion of the country’s manufacturing and mining activity, including more than 5 000 manufacturing enterprises with a large presence of international investors. Physical damage to infrastructure and labour shortages due to insecurity resulted in substantial economic losses and output contractions. In addition, the Tigray and Amhara regions are key producing areas for sesame, with their output amounting to nearly 30 and 40 percent of the national production, respectively. The country’s oilseed sector plays an important role as a source of foreign exchange, with sesame, soybean and niger seed, the three major oilseed crops, contributing to nearly 20 percent of national agricultural export earnings, second only to coffee. According to the United States Department of

Agriculture (USDA), in the 2020/21 marketing year (October–September), sesame production declined by about 10 percent from the previous year, partly due to labour shortages caused by displacements and constraints to labourers' movement in the Amhara and Tigray regions. Following the expansion of the conflict to Amhara Region and persisting disruptions to agricultural operations, it is expected that sesame production will further decline in the 2021/22 marketing year.

In recent years, the country was already facing macroeconomic challenges, including a steady depreciation of the national currency and low foreign exchange reserves. In 2020 and 2021, the military expenses related to the conflict and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in production and export contractions, with an ensuing further degradation of the economic environment. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the GDP is estimated to grow by only 2 percent in 2021, compared to increases ranging between 6 and 10 percent during the previous five years. The general inflation rate is at very high levels, with its food component estimated at 42 percent in September, the highest rate recorded during the last nine years, resulting in severe food access constraints for vulnerable households across the country.

Market activity, trade flows and food prices

The conflict has disrupted market functioning and trade flows in the conflict-affected areas as well as in neighbouring areas, severely constraining physical and economic access to the markets. Several private traders and transport companies are currently not travelling to the conflict-affected areas and the movement of goods is reported to be minimal. Most markets are mainly supplied by local production or by residual and dwindling wholesale traders' stocks, leading to widespread shortages of food and non-food commodities and to sharp price increases. According to the United Nations Office of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in the Tigray Region's capital, Mekele, between mid-June and early October, prices of bread increased by 140 percent and prices of rice by 100 percent, while prices of cooking oil and diesel fuel increased by about four and six times, respectively. By contrast, prices of livestock have substantially declined and, in markets in Central, North West and Eastern zones of Tigray

Region, prices of cattle, sheep and goats decreased by up to 50 percent over the last 12 months.

This is mainly due to increased market supply, as households could not afford to buy feed due to surging prices. The increase of feed prices, which in some areas tripled over the last 12 months, is due to shortages following the destruction and damage to several feed producing farms. The negative impact on food access of soaring prices is compounded by the significant reduction in households' purchasing power due to severe income losses, including the non-payment of salaries for civil servants since last June, thus making market purchases often not affordable.

Humanitarian access

Tigray Region was completely inaccessible during the initial months of the conflict at the end of 2020. The situation slightly improved in the second quarter of 2021, but the improvement was short-lived as the expansion of the conflict into neighbouring Amhara and Afar regions in June slowed down humanitarian operations. The delivery of humanitarian supplies to the conflict-affected areas is currently heavily restricted and insufficient compared to the needs. The only available route is the Semera-Abala-Mekele road through Afar Region, where multiple checkpoints significantly delay cargo movements. In addition, looting incidents and difficulties in adequately targeting the most vulnerable households are affecting the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Food security outcomes

The conflict, causing large-scale displacements and livelihood losses, and severely constraining food availability and access, has resulted in a dire food insecurity situation. According to the IPC analysis conducted in June 2021, about 4.4 million people in Tigray and neighbouring zones of Amhara and Afar regions were projected to face severe food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 [Crisis] and above) between July and September 2021, including 401 000 people in IPC Phase 5 (Catastrophe). However, the projection could not be carried out for all areas affected by the conflict in June, including zones 2 and 4 of Afar Region, Southern Tigray and North Wollo zones in Amhara Region. In addition, the analysis were conducted before the expansion of hostilities to most of Afar and Amhara regions in July 2021. Therefore, the current prevalence and severity of food insecurity are likely to be higher.

This report was prepared by the **Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS)** of the Markets and Trade Division of FAO. The updates focus on developing anomalous conditions aimed at providing early warnings, as well as latest and more elaborate information than other GIEWS regular reports on the food security situation of countries, at both national and sub-national levels. None of the information in this report should be regarded as statements of governmental views.

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