**Tigray Youth Association**

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**Postwar Status, Needs, Challenges and Aspirations of Tigray Youth: A Rapid Needs Assessment and Recovery Roadmap**

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**Prepared by:**

* Girma Niguse PHD Follow Mekelle University, School of Population and Development department( TYA project Department Head )
* **Assefa Leake Gebru** (PhD), Mekelle University, Department of Political Science
* **Tsegazeab Kahsu Abay** (MBA), Mekelle University, School of Management
* **Abrha Tesfay Asmerom** (Asst. Prof), Mekelle University, Department of Political Science

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**Acronyms and Abbreviations**

AYPSD African Youth for Peace and Sustainable Development

CBO Community Based Organization

CSOs Civil Society Organizations

CSSP Civil Society Support Program

FGD Focus Group Discussion

GBV Gender-based Violence

HIV/AIDS Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired

Immunodeficiency Syndrome

IDPs Internally Displaced Persons

IGO Intergovernmental Organization

IO International Organization

KII Key Informant Interviews

NGO Non-governmental Organization

SGBV Sexual and Gender-based Violence

STDs Sexually Transmitted Diseases

TDF Tigray Defense force

TPLF Tigray People’s Liberation Front

TYA Tigray Youth Association

UNDESA United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

UNSDG United Nations Sustainable Development Agency

USAID United States Agency for International Development

***Executive Summary***

*Tigray Youth Association sponsored this Rapid Needs Assessment aiming at collecting data on the overall conditions of youth in Tigray. The information generated through the assessment will inform Tigray Youth Associations’ programming and projects, which will be designed considering the actual concerns, needs, and problems of the youth. To this end, semi-structured survey questionnaires, FGDs, and Key Informant Interviews were used to generate qualitative and quantitative data. The study identified females, rural males, youth with disabilities and mental health problems, injured veteran youth, and student youth as the most vulnerable youths in Tigray. The deliberate large-scale gender-based violence and physical assault during and post-war time, wartime injuries, inhumane treatments, and economic deprivations have crippling effects on the most vulnerable youth groups. The study revealed that the most vulnerable youths enduring psychological and mental health problems, and physical impairments and injuries are undergoing economic, social, and political hardships. The interaction of trauma, stress, physical injury, joblessness, and lack of functioning government, which is leading to pervasive youth hopelessness, is not only affecting their current state of affairs but also their future ambitions and aspirations. The findings of the survey indicated that unemployed youth are the vast majority (81%) of the youth surveyed. The economic collapse, plunder of assets and sale of assets during the war, and lack of functioning government are some of the reasons underlying the staggering youth unemployment. Furthermore, the majority, 66 percent, of the youth respondents indicated that they have no political goals or aspirations. Low youths’ political ambition is attributable to the restrictions of authorities on youth civic engagements in fear of the emergence of more competent political contestants. Authorities actively discourage youth engagement to conceal their maladministration and corruption. The youth also lack the firm political will and courage to influence government authorities to open up the youth civic engagement space.*

*Likewise, the overwhelming majority, 78 percent, of the youth have no goals or aspirations to continue their education. FGD study confirmed the propensity of the youth- enrolled above 8th grade before the war- to education sharply declined for different reasons. Persisting war-inflicted psychological trauma and stress, graduated youth unemployment and inflated cost of education and poverty are attributable to declining youth propensity to education. Moreover, the vast majority (86%) of single youth have no intention or aspiration to build a family through marriage in the coming three years. This may be attributable to the pervasive youth hopelessness induced by war-inflicted mental trauma and high youth unemployment. Youths’ aversion to marriage may also be attributable to the region’s economic, social, and political conditions, which are less likely to improve shortly. Still, to come a considerable, 40 percent, portion of the youths are likely to cross the border in search of a better way of life and opportunities in the developed world. Specifically, the region will lose nearly 4 out of 10 and 6 out of 10 youths that are in their early and prime working ages respectively. Generally, the assessment identified a lack of good governance and bureaucracy, absence of youth-inclusive basic government services, limited access to credit services, substance Abuse; and lack of technical and entrepreneurial skills and work ethic, and political instability and insecurity as major challenges impeding youths’ socioeconomic and political aspiration, progress and satisfaction. The assessment also identified construction and construction materials, urban agriculture, small and large-scale farming, mining, and manufacturing, and services as the major potential local resources and opportunities for youth livelihood if the fundamental challenges and problems are unraveled. The study highlighted that Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) including HIV, unwanted pregnancy, and unsafe abortion are increasing at an alarming rate. The study revealed that no government and NGOs youth related health awareness education and counseling (related to development and maturation, boy-girl relationships, decision-making about sex, gender issues, sexual abuse and exploitation, sexual and contraceptive negotiation, adoption of contraceptive methods, and pregnancy options) services are available to reverse the situation. Finally, governments, youth, and women associations, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), International Organizations, and communities should provide the most affected youth groups with comprehensive, integrated, all-inclusive, and participatory packages of interventions to help youths lead a better life. The following are the potential sets of interventions that all pertinent stakeholders need to implement to restore youth to their prewar status and for improved living conditions.*

* *Provision of mental and psychological support*
* *Provision of Life-Saving Healthcare Services*
* *Provision of Socio-economic Support*
* *Provision of efficient public services*
* *Provision of working facilities*
* *Promotion of Community, Government and Stakeholders’ Youth Voice and GBV Advocacy*
* *Provision of entrepreneurial and life skills training*
* *Provision of Educational Materials*
* *Provision of School Meals*
* *Creating a convenient School Environment (Class Rooms, Access to potable Water, Blackboard, Student chairs, and table, access to text and reference books, library, and labs)*
* *Increasing public engagement in education*
* *Providing physical fitness and sporting facilities*
* *Provision of Decent Work by attracting private companies*
* *Provision of youth-centered health services*

# **Part I: Introduction, Methodology and Literature Review**

## **Introduction**

Tigray is one of the regional states of Federal Ethiopia. It constitutes a population of 5.7 million people with a geographic area of about 54,569.25 km². In terms of settlement or urban–rural divide, the rural population assumes the predominant size of the entire population. Estimates indicate about 1.6 million of the entire population is within the category 15 to 35 age group. Other sources also indicate that about 2.1 million people are within the age category of 5 to 17, and about 1.8 million are supposed to be in the category of 15-34 years old. At the same time, the median age is estimated to be 16.0. Following the recent war, the region hosts several IDPs, war veterans, massive unemployed youth, disabled youth, victims and survivors of rape, and several returnees from other parts of the country. Basic infrastructures and amenities are aggressively destroyed; previously available meager industries and small-scale manufacturing sectors are damaged and shattered. The current realities of Tigray present a complex challenge to the livelihood of the youth and the entire population. Thus, any effort aimed at addressing or at ameliorating the complex realities of the youth calls for proper identification of their statuses, needs, and aspiration in post-war Tigray. Efforts geared towards reconstruction and rehabilitation on the wider regional scenario, presuppose the identification of critical concerns of the youth, as they represent a larger segment of the population and major working age group, where development efforts are unthinkable to realize without their contribution.

## **The Rationale for Conducting Rapid Needs Assessment**

The rationale of conducting this rapid need assessment encompasses several foundations ultimately instrumental for need-based interventions by all relevant stakeholders. Thus, the rationales include, among others, proper identification of statuses, needs, and aspirations of the youth, which are imperative to develop short, medium, and long-term strategies and programs to address the prioritized needs of the youth. The assessment will serve as a baseline study to inform youth-related projects in postwar Tigray. It will also provide evidence-based advocacy initiatives and programs in the affairs of government and relevant stakeholders in their efforts of addressing critical concerns of the youth. The rapid need assessment is critical in identifying the emerging needs of the youth in postwar Tigray. This is particularly instrumental to influence government policy initiatives, decisions, and programs relevant to the youth within the region. Institutional mapping is conducted as part of the assessment, which is imperative in identifying the potential stakeholders critical to the overall efforts of the Tigray Youth Association. Such identification helps to design ways of mutual engagement in the affairs of the youth. The noteworthy rationale is best explained in terms of its role in identifying future youth programming and policy changes relevant to the regional youth.

# **The Objectives of the Assessment**

This rapid needs assessment has the following general and specific objectives.

## **General Objective**

The general objective of the needs assessment is to assess the status, needs, challenges, and aspirations of the youth in postwar Tigray, and identify and draw a recovery roadmap in collaboration with pertinent stakeholders.

## **Specific Objectives**

* To assess the status and needs of the youth about youths’ livelihood, health, education, civic engagement, and security thereby identifying the core challenges inhibiting them
* To assess the livelihood status of the youth and identify potential areas for youth livelihood
* To assess the strategic issue and concerns of youth informing pertinent stakeholders future intervention
* To identify relevant stakeholders of the TYA instrumental in its overall efforts of empowering the youth

# **Scope of the Assessment**

The scope is tailored to fit into the core guiding objectives of the assessment. Thus, the scope of the rapid needs assessment is limited to assessing the status, needs, challenges, and aspirations of the youth along with identification of priority concerns of livelihood, education, health, civic engagement, and security and potential stakeholders pertinent in addressing identified concerns of the youth in post-war Tigray. Geographic-wise, the assessment is conducted in the six zones of the region excluding the Western zone due to security concerns. Hence, the assessment has covered major urban areas, like Maichew, Mekelle, Adigrat, Shire, and Axum. At the same time, some rural areas were considered to represent the voice of the rural youth. Methodologically, the assessment study employed qualitative data and data analysis gleaned via survey questionnaires, FGDs, Key Informant interviews, and to some extent quantitative data. The details of the methodological approach are explained in the separate section of methodology.

# **Ethical Considerations**

The assessment study seriously takes note of the various ethical issues and considerations in collecting, organizing, transcribing, and analyzing the available data. Thus, while undertaking the study, proper acknowledgment of sources, informant consent, and anonymity whenever required is strictly adhered to, and unrewarded informant exploitation and partisanship are avoided.

# **Methodology of the Assessment**

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This part covers the methodological details and justifications in the selection of data collection instruments, data sources, and data types in undertaking this rapid needs assessment. This rapid needs assessment is conducted as a field study on the status, needs, challenges, and aspirations of the regional youth. Given this, a description of the study area, sampling techniques, and data collection instruments are discussed herein below.

## **Description of Study Area**

The region constitutes a population of about 5.7 million with a geographic area of about 54,569.25 km² where the majority of its population is engaged in subsistence agricultural activities than any mode of economic sector. Taking note of the current political, security, and socioeconomic realities, the assessment study considered both urban and rural areas in the data collection process. Accordingly, major urban centers included are Maichew, Mekelle, Adigudom, Adigrat, Hawzen, Gijet, Axum, Shire, Abi Adi, and Mehoni. From rural areas, Raya Azebo, rural Hazen, Ganta’afeshum, Kola Tembien, Sahirti, Enderta, Endabaguna, Lailay’koraro (Selekleka area), Ahferom (Enticho area), Laelay’Maichew (rural areas of Axum) were included for the assessment purpose.

## **Methods of Data Collection, Sources and Data Types**

In this assessment, qualitative types of data were gleaned basically from primary sources via survey questionnaires, key informant interviews, and FGDs as well as to some extent quantitative data were included. Besides, relevant literature was reviewed to look into some demographics and in the identification of pertinent stakeholders. For this assessment, data collection protocols were designed as adopted but contextualized from a model utilized by USAID Ethiopia. In this regard, the FGDs were meant to look into the current livelihood status and needs of the youth, their aspiration in postwar Tigray, their attitude toward resuming school, and their outlook on current education.

The FGDs were held aiming at collecting data on education, health conditions, and the state of peace and security issues in the study area. Similarly, the survey questionnaires were dispatched to gather data about the aspirations and challenges of the youth as well as youths’ interest in migration. Besides, the survey was meant to look at the employment status and their access to technology. On the other hand, a Key informant interview was conducted with individuals selected from civil society organizations. Across the purposively selected sample areas, a total of 60 FGDs comprising 608 discussants were conducted. In the same area, around 600 survey questionnaires were administered out of which 580 were collected as being filled properly. About 5 Key informants from Civil Societies Organizations were also included to look at their activities and plans relevant to ameliorating the challenges and concerns of the youth. In the end, gathered data were triangulated whenever the need arises to substantiate assertions of one over the other.

## **Analytical Techniques**

The analyses of the qualitative data were carried out using thematic selection, categorization, description, and interpretation of ideas; informant views were also used in direct quotes to indicate subjective experiences of needs, aspirations, status, and threats. In this regard, data collected from FGDs were transcribed, and recurring themes are selected and interpreted. In the case of the survey questionnaire, recurring themes were selected and interpreted on the one hand, and descriptive statistics were made on the other side to elucidate the background of the informants. Similarly, data from Key informants were considered to substantiate available literature pertaining to stakeholder mapping. In general, the analysis was based on qualitative techniques.

## **Review of Related Literatures**

### **States, War and the Youth: The Interplay**

It is the palpable reality that the youth is a bridge between the past and future generations that has a direct relationship with war and peace. According to Njeru[[1]](#footnote-1), both war and peace benefit from the youth. A nation without youth is vulnerable to nonexistent threats. He went on to say that the youth makes the core base for the continuous production and reproduction potential of a given society. In peacetime, the youth is the source of energy to deal with states’ current situations and future challenges. Similarly, the youth is a backbone that supplies the fighting human capital in any nation in times of war. In line with this Peters et al[[2]](#footnote-2), argued that young people are fighters and victims of war. Young people are said to be daring and have energy, nevertheless account for heavy casualties of war as well. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs report[[3]](#footnote-3) also shows that the youth represents the majority of the population in most countries affected by armed conflicts and hence disproportionately affected by the impact of war. Their pain carries many faces. They are recruited as soldiers, killed and maimed, deprived of education and health care, and separated from their families. Sexual violence is increasingly a characteristic of conflict with detrimental long-term psychological effects on the part of the youth. The implication is vivid that young people play destructive or/and constructive roles in times of both war and peace. Similarly, the potential of young people in post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction remains very essential. Thus, post-conflict rehabilitation will be less successful if efforts are unable to reintegrate the young people and access their potential benefits and address their core concerns.

### **The Impact of War on the Youth and Postwar Challenges**

War and armed conflicts bring the destruction of materials, infrastructures, and loss of life. Thus, all social, political, and economic evils like poverty, unemployment, poor governance, displacement, and the disintegration of families and communities prevailed. For instance, schools are systematically attacked jeopardizing the life of youth and preventing them from going to school. The long-term impact of war and armed conflicts persist even in the aftermath period. The memories of the past yet remained intact in the minds of the youth, haunting them daily. It is the youth who remain victims of the disaster including anxiety and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, loss of motivation to see the future[[4]](#footnote-4). Sadly, most female youth also faced social crises where prostitution as a result of economic crisis from the side of teenaged females is expanded (ibid). Hence, the absence of war does not imply the existence of peace. If effective and proper therapy is not applied, the ruins of the violent past continue to replay in the mind of the youth even in post-war situations, implying the multitude of youth challenges.

Post-war challenges of the youth are characterized by many faces. Atari et al[[5]](#footnote-5)argue that war violates every right of the youth age group. Supporting the claim, Jabry[[6]](#footnote-6) explained that war systemically alters the trajectories of hundreds of thousands of young lives. It completely disrupts their infrastructure of social support and networks. Likewise, Francois[[7]](#footnote-7) argues community [youth] that have experienced political, economic, and socio-cultural breakdown as a result of war is vulnerable to socio-economic and political challenges. As studies indicate postwar period is characterized by post-war traumatization, with limited educational and job opportunities, and high propensities of insecurities to persist in most conflict-prone areas. The insecurity is attributed to the youth’s frustration due to unemployment and irregular payment of government employees[[8]](#footnote-8). In many developing countries, the post-war challenges of young people are related to a lack of stable government, economic growth, or basic material and physical security. Young people are uprooted and alienated from socio-economic and political benefits, became jobless and hopeless, and have few opportunities for positive engagements due to the massive destruction of war[[9]](#footnote-9).The argument is that in post-conflict/wartime, the youth has high demands to resume a healthy life or a life similar to the prewar situation. In most cases, the war-torn socio-economic and political structure of governments, particularly in poor countries, are unable to adequately address the demands of the youth by creating new livelihood options and/or supplementing traditional livelihood modalities. Consequently, deprived, frustrated and traumatized youth groups can continue to provoke conflicts and thus remained a source of a cycle of violence and insecurity if their concerns are left unanswered[[10]](#footnote-10).

### **Engaging the Youth in Postwar Reconstruction Efforts**

There are different modalities or approaches to engaging the youth in postwar reconstruction and rehabilitation endeavors. Conflict sensitivity, peacebuilding, and sustaining peace are critical modalities or approaches in the efforts. Although not mutually exclusive, conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding are different concepts. Conflict sensitivity emphasizes working in conflict and how activities are implemented. It aims to manage potential harm and maximize opportunities to enhance peace. Peace-building activities on the other hand primarily are motivated by the intention to reduce conflict and promote peace. Its focus is working on conflict -on what or how activities are implemented. Nevertheless, the tools of both peace-building and conflict sensitivity can be similar in terms of promoting sustaining peace[[11]](#footnote-11). In other words, while peace-building aims to address the underlying drivers of conflict to strengthen capacities to promote peace and reduce the risk of violent conflicts in a given context, conflict sensitivity is basically about how all interventions operate in a context based on sound analysis, awareness of peace and conflict dynamics and with attention to unintended consequences[[12]](#footnote-12).

Sustaining peace as a process and goal also focuses on the idea that peace must be built, strengthened, and sustained across all contexts pre, during, and post-conflict. It prompts actors to take a long-term, inclusive, comprehensive, and collaborative orientation to work across the conflict cycle. This aims at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation, and recurrence of conflict[[13]](#footnote-13). Given this as it may, this assessment adopted a conflict-sensitive approach. It understands the context in which stakeholders operate and the nexus between their intervention and context to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impacts. Furthermore, this approach advocates efforts on gender, children, and young people's resilience to conflict and promote positive outcomes for them. This approach is sensitive, aware, or quick to respond to slight changes in the dynamics of conflict contexts. It allows actors to integrate an enhanced awareness of context into their interventions. This approach is selected as it is about bringing awareness of conflict dynamics to stakeholders that deliver rehabilitation and humanitarian assistance to minimize the risks that worsen conflict dynamics and associated costs.

### **Contextualizing the Needs of the Youth**

Ending war following a peace accord or due to the defeat of either of the parties may not help to directly secure peace and its dividends. Immediate periods are assumed to be fragile periods where all effects of war are still intact. Most importantly, in postwar situations the tension and mortified trauma tend to be perceptible within the society in general and particularly in the mind of the youth[[14]](#footnote-14).Therefore, understanding the context (conflict-sensitive approach) of the post-conflict situation and identifying the key aspirations or needs of the youth at the grassroots level is a critical work. This activity not only paves sound intervention mechanisms but also plays a great role in the success of the postwar peace-building efforts. The needs of the youth should not be imposed from above but rather initiated from below. About this, Edward and Albrecht[[15]](#footnote-15) stated that it may be possible to impose a sense of order from the outside, but the sense of community [youth] has to grow from within.

Postwar reconstruction programs should be implemented in a way that recognizes that the greatest victims of the war are young people who have been ‘targeted as a matter of strategy[[16]](#footnote-16). No approach to dealing with the past would be complete without taking the context of the process into account. The end of any conflict represents a complete turn-around in perspective. Ideally, the structural and underlying causes of the conflict must be eliminated, solid and efficient institutions must emerge, and they must serve the entire human security- social, economic, and political security.

Empirical studies done in post-conflict situations and a post-war setting in Africa, for instance in South Sudan, underlined that educational, vocational, and social needs are the fundamental needs of the youth in both urban and rural areas. According to Peters, schools are the most valued possessions of the youth. The collapse of the educational structures has often fueled violence in some parts of Africa. For the youth, formal education and job opportunities are the key to a good life[[17]](#footnote-17). He went on to say that vocational training programs also provide functional skills of survival for many people who cannot be absorbed in formal school life, be it by age or by fate. Therefore, vocational education must provide the necessary bridge to the working world.

Similarly, Elizabeth stated that war-affected youth often exhibit co-occurring psychological problems, suggesting a need for evidence-based mental health interventions. Interventions that ready youth for educational and vocational activities have the potential for increasing well-being and economic recovery[[18]](#footnote-18). Social needs especially in urban settings are also the major vices that have destroyed the potential of the youth including; violence, drug abuse, prostitution, and youth gangs. These are also the legacies of the violent past and the pastime for the unemployed. The youths often get on drugs to temporarily overcome memories of the past. Drugs often lead to a sense of boldness and sexual carelessness, in turn, contracting STDs and HIV/AIDS. Addressing the aforementioned challenges affecting the youth need be the utmost priority in a post-conflict society. Thus, dealing with the past in the framework of conflict transformation and rehabilitation, activities should have a forward-looking orientation and should work to bring about a sustainable change in the youth to be capable of meeting their needs and aspirations.

### **The Role of Stakeholders in Postwar Reconstruction and Rehabilitation**

Rehabilitation is a means to rebuild a new way of life in postwar situations for war or conflict-affected youth. Likewise, reintegration is critical for youth formerly linked with armed groups. These activities are helpful to break cycles of violence and to find a new existence after a life of conflict and distress. Society is facing total loss in postwar situations where social systems and institutions may be in tatters. Particularly, the youth is highly vulnerable to insecurity pools. In the aftermath of war, state structures are unlikely to be youth-oriented and may fail to have the capacity to deliver equitable public goods worthy of addressing the youth's needs and aspirations[[19]](#footnote-19). Here, **e**ven if state structures do wish to deliver equitable public goods, politicians and civil service managers will not have the capacity as well as effective control of the mechanisms of the state**.**

It is at such a critical time that the contribution of pertinent stakeholders is needed utmost[[20]](#footnote-20). The postwar or post-conflict situation is a time of management, resolution, and transformation of conflicts that encompasses a range of activities aimed at promoting peace and strengthening human security. According to Massard, postwar conflict transformation demands building up the skills, action, and capabilities of non-state actors like NGOs, and CSOs that can contribute to civil peace promotion[[21]](#footnote-21). Thus, the major role of stakeholders is to fill the critical (financial, material, knowledge, skill, and attitude) gaps of the conflict-torn society (state) particularly to rehabilitate the youth and enhance capacity building. In a post-war recovery program, societies affected by war will take time to rehabilitate from the negative effects of war/conflict as a starting point for a new, productive, and reconciled life. Hence, a broad, deliberate, and comprehensive program of rebuilding lives and institutions to restore them to their pre-war levels or better is the indispensable role of stakeholders to rehabilitate the youth**.**

# **Part II: Results and Discussions**

# **Background of Respondents**

# **Survey Respondents’ Demographic Background**

The researchers planned to distribute six hundred semi-structured questionnaires in the research areas. The number of survey questionnaires filled out by the youth respondents was five hundred eight questionnaires, representing a 96.67 percent response rate. Three hundred eleven (54%) and two hundred sixty-nine (46%) respondents were respectively urban and rural youth respondents. The sex composition of the respondents includes 54% male and 46% female. Furthermore, 11 percent of the respondents were persons with disability and 89 percent of the youth respondents were without disabilities. The religious background of the respondents includes 95 percent Orthodox Christians and 5 percent Muslims. Likewise, the marital status of the respondents was 61% single, 33 percent married, and 6 percent divorced. In terms of age, 40 percent of the youth fall within the 15-24 age category and 60 percent of the youth fall within the 25-35 age category. Finally, the educational background of respondents includes 17 percent 1-8 primary school, 50 percent senior secondary school, and 17 and 16 percent TVET and higher educational institutions respectively.

# **FGDs Participants’ Demographic Background**

The following two tables summarize the demographic backgrounds of the focused group discussion participants. Accordingly, fifty-two percent of the youth participating in the focused group discussion were urban and forty-eight percent of the participants were from rural areas. Fifty-four percent of the youth participants falling within the 15-24 age category represent urban youth and forty-six percent of the participants falling within the 15-24 category were rural youth. Likewise, fifty-one percent of the participants falling within the 25-35 age category represent urban youth and the remaining forty-nine percent of the youth falling within the 25-35 age category were rural youth. Similarly, fifty-six percent of the participants were male youth and the remaining forty-four percent of the participants were female. Of this, fifty-two percent were male and rural youth, while the remaining forty-eight of the participants were male and urban youth. Moreover, female and rural youths constitute forty-three percent of the participants, while female and urban youths represent fifty-seven percent of the youth.

**Table 1**: sex and settlement background

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sex | Rural | Urban | Rural and Urban | Rural (%) | Urban (%) | Total |
| Male | 176 | 162 | 338 | 52 | 48 | 100 |
| Female | 116 | 154 | 270 | 43 | 57 | 100 |
| Total | 292 | 316 | 608 |  |  |  |

**Table 2**: Age and settlement background

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Age | Rural | Urban | Rural and Urban | Rural (%) | Urban (%) | Total |
| 15-24 Years | 119 | 137 | 256 | 46 | 54 | 100 |
| 25-35 Years | 171 | 181 | 352 | 49 | 51 | 100 |
| Total | **290** | **318** | **608** |  |  |  |

# **Identification of Most Vulnerable Youth Group**

About the question as to which youth group is mostly affected by the war, focus group discussants have blatantly identified several of them. Is important to take into account that almost all youth groups were affected by the war if it was not for the slight difference in the degree and severity. However, female youth, student youth, youth with disabilities and lingering health problems, rural youth, injured veteran youth, and male youths are identified by FGD participants as most affected by the war in Tigray.

**Female Youth**

Almost all FGDs participants claimed that female youth were the ones hard hit by the war. Female youth of Tigray were victims of gender-based violence and sexual assault including gang rape and extrajudicial executions. Female youth are undergoing excruciating mental and physical crises unprecedented in known history. The subsequently enforced siege exhausted female youth not only psychologically and physically but also economically. The FGD participants disclosed that female youth are undergoing awful living conditions because of the direct physical and psychological assault and joblessness. Female youth are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, shame, anger, self-hate, resentment, guilty feeling, and suicidal thoughts and attempts.

Female youth who are the victims of SGBV are languishing in despair, physical injury, and mental trauma not only because perpetrators assaulted them but also because of the prevailing rampant pervasive social stigma. They are forced to live a life of isolation suffering from acute mental trauma, physical injury, and abject poverty. The degrading insults of the combatants and brutal sexual assaults of female youth literary dimmed their future and aspiration. Worst, some female youth victims of GBV are no longer able to bear pregnancy making healing them complicated and demanding. Consequently, they have developed profound hatred towards their male counterparts; and their ability to show love and affection to their siblings is at stake the disintegration of family casts a shadow on the well-being of victims, family, community, and society.

The FGD participants reported that female youth victims are pitted every time they go out to the market and social activities for the community sees the victims as cursed. They reported that the social stigma forced female youth victims to close their doors cursing themselves and their community and hence living a life full of despair and infamy. The problem is compounded by their lack of access to economic means/resources necessary to sustain their life. Consequently, FGD participants indicated that the number of destitute girls engaging in socially undesirable activities is increasing at an alarming rate. The complex intermingling of these factors is surely destroying female youths’ spirits in Tigray. In essence, the destruction of the spirit of women/girls is nothing short of the destruction of the foundations of the family and society. If this is left unaddressed, it is a sure ticket for social, economic, and political decay and ruins of consequential repercussions on Tigray.

**Rural Male Youth**

This Focused Group Discussion indicated that the outbreak of the war in Tigray had a consequential effect on the male youth residing in rural Tigray. This is the case because male youth are the predominant youth engaged in armed conflict as combatants. They are the ones sustaining physical injury, death, and psychiatric disorders. Male youth who did not join the armed conflict were also hard hit by subsequent siege for they were unable to descend into doing low-profile work compared to their female counterparts.

The focused group participants argued that most of the military operations and battlefield engagements were undertaken in rural Tigray and hence, rural youth of both sexes were most vulnerable to the most devastating war. They were the direct victims of the war both as combatants and as civilian youth. The rampant extrajudicial killings, physical and mental abuse, plundering and economic deprivations literarily exhausted rural youth physically, mentally, and economically.

**Rural Female**

The focused group discussions outlined that the female youth group, particularly of those from rural areas, was hard hit by the brunt of the war for they were subjected to physical assault, gruesome sexual abuse, and dehumanizing treatments. FGD participants reported that parents forced their daughters into early marriage in fear of gender-based violence. Further, female youth also descended into engaging in commercial sexual activities to sustain their life and substance abuse as stress coping mechanism.

**Injured Youth Combatants**

FGD participants disclosed that the male youth, who directly participated in the worst armed conflict, were the most vulnerable youth group. The majority of the Tigrian Armed Force combatants were male youth and it is this youth that felt the brunt of the war. This youth group sustained death, physical injury, and psychiatric disorders. Many youths have perished, and many more continue to endure lasting physical injuries and psychiatric disorders. The youth group sustaining physical injuries and psychiatric disorders continues to suffer immeasurably because of a lack of medication and drugs. In this regard, the otherwise minor and curable physical injury is fast turning into a permanent disability.

Lack of proper psychological support has become the major cause of despair and hopelessness among the injured combatants. The way psychiatric cases were handled is the main reason for the sustenance of permanent psychiatric disorder. Injured youth veteran combatants developed deep sense of betray and resentments. Having lost their productive capacities to permanent disabilities, this group constitute the most adversely affected youth section in Tigray.

**Student Youth**

FGD participants strongly argued that it is the student youth group that was and continues to be most vulnerable due to the war and its ensuing effect. The student youth were cut off from education for more than three years. Instead of continuing their education, most student youths have descended into criminal activities, substance abuse, and a high propensity to migrate. Those student youths that have currently enrolled to continue their education were forced by their parents. Had it not been for the parental pressure, many student youths would have abandoned schooling.

The FGD participants indicated that student youth were forced by the war and siege to engage in economic activities in the hope that they support their families and themselves. And in the process learned that engaging in business activities was far more rewarding than engaging in economic activities after college or university graduation. As the assessment has eloquently identified, it is the graduated working class that was the ones hard hit by the effect of the war in Tigray. Conscious of this effect, most students tend to be anxious that they may face the same fate as those holding graduate jobs in case another cycle of conflict erupts. Consequently, student youths’ propensity to engage in educational activities has sharply declined.

The war has significant negative ramifications on the hopes and aspirations of youth and youth’s affinity to education and resuming school. It is not naïve to imagine what the socioeconomic conditions of a society will look like in a situation where knowledge has no role. Indeed, over the long term, the fragrant problem will have irreversible consequences on the economy of the region, and the country, as access to knowledgeable and skilled human resources is likely to dwindle.

**Youth with Disabilities and Mental Health Problems**

According to the FGD participants, the Tigrian youth with disabilities are adversely affected by the war and its subsequent effect. The participants proclaimed that these youth groups were victims of extrajudicial killings, demonizing insults, torture, and economic deprivation. Their physical impairment, which curtails mobility, was their source of vulnerability in the early phase of the war. For instance, they were unable to flee from the war zone. The group suffered immensely from the economic hardship brought about by the last year’s complete siege. Even though the siege severely affects the entire community, in comparative terms this group was the most vulnerable as they are unable to do any sort of work to sustain their life in this time of great crisis. This group suffered from the physical, psychological, and economic crisis of unprecedented scale creating an additional burden to their previously existing reality. The plundering of the hard-to-accumulate assets of this youth group also exasperated their living conditions. Even in time of conducting these FGDs, it is revealed that these youths have no capital or asset to resume any productive activities notwithstanding the mental and physical sufferings they continue to endure. While youth with physical disabilities, in general, suffered immeasurably, it is the youth with mental disorders that felt the brunt of the war. These groups of youth were subjected to inhuman treatment and beaten to death under the guise of serving as spies. The idea is that TPLF in its history is known to have had secret agents camouflaging as crazy or acting like someone with mental health problems so that they can deceive government security agents and the public. Knowing this historical fact of political tricks, Eritrean forces killed several youths with real mental health problems. Regrettably, they realize the issue after perpetrating inhuman measures and killings.

# **Coping Strategy and Local Capacities**

The worst situation is survived by many via the adoption of different survival strategies. Rural parents, where subsistence agriculture is a predominant source of their livelihood, were forced to feed urban extended families and relatives. Support from local communities was also taken as one coping strategy. Most vulnerable civil servants, such as teachers and medical professionals, survived the indescribable life situation through the support and contribution of local communities. These two coping strategies were the norm throughout the study areas.  Some engaged in urban farming, cultivating tomatoes, potatoes, onions, and a variety of vegetables for personal consumption. Some youth civil servants engaged in activities such as shoeshine, loading and unloading, a waiter in small coffee shops, bars and restaurants, and small-scale merchandising of goods. Yet others who didn’t receive any support and were unable to engage in economic activities were forced to beg. According to some of the FGDs, the situation was very complex, harsh, and unimaginable to survive, which forced many young people to beg in public and private establishments. One FGD participant explains the harshness of life during the war saying that: “I know several youth groups of both sexes who have been forced to beg on the streets, and some were anguished and cry loader. And publicly narrate the severe economic and health problems they underwent expecting someone to give them daily subsistence and some medications”[[22]](#footnote-22).

The FGD participants also claimed that there were community support mobilizations and religious-based volunteer associations that have played a pivotal role in supporting the neediest section of society. These religious-based voluntary associations were able to mobilize the public to contribute cash, and cereals, including flour, second-hand dresses, and shoes. Then they rationed them to the neediest individuals in the locality. They also initiate and encourage relatively well-to-do individuals to buy medicines for those with chronic health problems. For instance, in Adigrat a religious-based volunteer association named St. Kidanamhret has done a very praiseworthy task of initiating and organizing community-based supports. Local nonreligious community-based associations played similar roles. Mahiber Haben Tigray, for instance, having about 120 youth members was one of the most vibrant associations active in mobilizing and organizing the public to extend their supporting hands to the most vulnerable members of the community in Maichew. Local civic associations including women, youth, and sons of Martyr's associations provided support to those most affected ones urban centers like AbyiAdi. Other modalities of survival were selling assets including household materials, like personal jewelry made of Gold and silver, sofa, refrigerator, TV, wardrobe, bookshelves, etc. just for mere survival. This is almost common in all urban centers. Eating one time per day or two was also assumed as one option for survival.

Making use of expired medical tablets and equipment, and traditional medications were also used as a solution for health-related problems. One of the discussants who was suffering from blood pressure and diabetes has explained her personal experience of treating herself in the absence of formal medications. She went on to say, “The situation has forced me to look for alternative treatment and consulted by some senior citizens to mix two spoons of powdered Moringa in my everyday dish and at least a single spoon with each cap of tea. I did it as per their advice and

I manage to survive the difficult time”[[23]](#footnote-23).

# **Priorities of Most Vulnerable Youth Groups**

The FGD participants outlined different priorities of the different most vulnerable youth groups and are summarized in the following table.

**Table 2:** Priorities of Most Vulnerable Youth Group

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Youth Group | Priorities |
| Female Youth | * Provision of mental and psychological support * Provision of Life-Saving Healthcare Services * Provision of Socio-economic support (credit from lending organization, seed capital support from donors * Provision of efficient public services * Provision of working facilities * Promotion of Community, Government and Stakeholders Advocacy * Training and counseling |
| Rural Male Youth | * Provision of mental and psychological support (Psychological Counseling and Mental Healing Training and Treatment) * Provision of Socio-economic support (credit from lending organization, seed capital support from donors * Provision of efficient public services * Provision of working facilities * Promotion of Community, Government and Stakeholders Advocacy (increasing public and stakeholders’ awareness, supporting youth to integrate to their communities) * Training and counseling |
| Youth with disabilities and mental health problem | * Provision of mental and psychological support * Provision of Socio-economic support (credit from lending organization, seed capital support from donors * Technical and entrepreneurial training * Provision of working facilities * Provision of efficient public services |
| Injured Veteran Youth | * Provision of Life-Saving Healthcare Services * Provision of mental and psychological support (Psychological Counseling and Mental Healing Training and Treatment) * Provision of Socio-economic support (credit from lending organization, seed capital support from donors * Provision of efficient public services * Provision of working facilities * Promotion of Community, Government and Stakeholders Advocacy (increasing public and stakeholders’ awareness, supporting youth to integrate to their communities) * Training and counseling |
| Student Youth | * Provision of mental and psychological support (Psychological Counseling and Mental Healing Training and Treatment) * Provision of Educational Materials * Provision of School Meals * Creating convenient School Environment (Class Rooms, Access to potable Water, Blackboard, Student chairs and table, access to text and reference books, library and labs) * Increasing public engagement on education * Providing physical fitness facilities |

# **Youth Livelihood Status**

## **Youth Employment Status**

## 

According to the survey, employed and youth unable to work represent 18 and 1 percent of the youth respectively. Of the 107 employed youth, 64 percent are self-employed and youth employed by either government or private employing organizations make up 36 percent of the employed youth. Furthermore, the survey indicated that unemployed youth are the vast majority (81%) of the youths surveyed. This indicates that nearly 8 out of 10 youths are unemployed. It shows that if this high youth unemployment persists, it will have a cataclysmic effect on the hopes of the youths for their future, which will culminate in creating damaging repercussions on the individual, communities, economies, and societies. Still, to come, an economy that ends up with high youth unemployment is more likely to affect itself adversely. This is because youth will lack the ability to spend as well as to save for future investments. Furthermore, failure to engage youth in employment is very likely to stifle innovation leading to the degeneration of organizational, regional, and national competitiveness.

Inequalities in the distribution of wealth and economic power make youth experience frustrations. Experience of frustrations produces the tendency for aggression. To be sure, although at their early stage hidden from the general view, conflicts are looming on the horizon derived from the malfunctioning of a system to meet expectations of the youth and lack of progress towards demands of the youth for a better life. Such high youth unemployment- economic marginalization of youth-is more likely to foment social and political unrest. Moreover, such high youth unemployment presents regional and national security dangers; and is a litmus test to maintaining the unity and integrity of the region and the country alike. This must be unraveled with a sense of urgency for it will be difficult and uneconomical to stop the conflict once it has broken out. The pervasive youth hopelessness and rapidly expanding youths’ addictions to substances unequivocally reveal what rampant unemployment can do to the youth, community, and society. Hence, it is safe to conclude that high youth unemployment poses a serious threat to the economic, social, and political resilience of the region and the country if the problems and concerns of the youth continue ignored.

**Fig 1:** Youth Employment Status

## **Additional Income and Average Daily Expenditure**

The following table summarizes the percentage of youth having additional income opportunities. Accordingly, the overwhelming majority (89%) of the youth have no additional income opportunities. Only insignificant (11%) of the youth indicated that they have additional income opportunities. The fact that the vast majority of youths have no additional income opportunity indicates that youth living conditions are awful and their ability to save in raising seed capital for future investment is quite low. The mean daily expenditure of the youth, which is ETB 58, further magnifies the dire economic conditions of the young people in the region. This is likely to create hopelessness on the part of the youth; and hence prompt economically disadvantaged youth to engage in criminal activities, prostitution, and youth substance abuse and induce illegal migration. To be precise, economic deprivation of the youth is a real threat to the economic, social, and political resilience of the youth, communities, and society of irreversible consequences.

**Table 3**: Opportunity for Additional Income

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Youth's Opportunity to Additional Income | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
| Yes | 61 | 11 |
| No | 519 | 89 |
| Total | **580** | **100** |

## **Youth Access to and Ownership of Technology**

Technologies in communications have a critical role in the day-to-day life of individuals. To cope with the demands of the day, thus, everyone strives to have access to technologies including but not limited to mobile phones, computers, and access to networks. These technologies are key success factors in work and personal life by supporting individuals to make informed decisions. The following two tables summarize youths access to technology (mobile phone and computer) and internet services.

## **Access and Ownership of Mobile and Computer**

Considering this, the survey looked at the access of respondents to particular technology and services. Accordingly, 89% of the total number of respondents have access to mobile phones out of which 70% of them have their own mobile while the remaining 19% use mobiles from relatives and friends. 11% of the respondents have no access to mobile phones. Looking at ownership for computers, only 3% of them have their computer while 7% have only access without ownership. The remaining 90% of respondents have no access to a computer. This might imply the lowest level of computer use by most of the respondents relative to mobile usage. Yet, in all cases, access to mobile and computers appears very low, which might affect their daily communications.

**Table 4:** Access and Ownership of Mobile and Computer

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Access/Nature of Ownership | Mobile | Percentage | Computer | Percentage |
| Own Technology | 408 | 71% | 20 | 3% |
| Others-owned Technology | 112 | 19% | 42 | 7% |
| No ownership & Access to Technology | 60 | 10% | 518 | 90% |
| Total | **580** | **100%** | **580** | **100%** |

## **Access to Internet**

**Table 5:** Access to Internet

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Youth Access to Internet | Frequency | Percentage |
| Yes | 160 | 28% |
| No | 420 | 72% |
| Total | **580** | **100%** |

# **Goals and Aspirations of the youth**

The survey asked youth respondents to state their economic, social and political goals, and aspirations over the coming three years. The findings are summarized in the following sections.

## **Youth Economic Aspiration**

The survey asked respondents to identify the areas in which they aspire to engage to earn livelihood over the next three years. According to the table below, the majority (40%) of the youth respondents aspire to get employment by migrating to other countries. Furthermore, 31% of the youth aspire to engage in entrepreneurship, and 29% look for employment opportunities in either private or government-employing organizations. This also indicates that 60 percent of the youths aspire to secure livelihood through either entrepreneurship or employment. Combining those youth aspiring to secure livelihood through employment and migration in search of employment overseas; it shows that 69 percent of the youths do not aspire to entrepreneurship to earn their livelihoods.

This may suggest that youth’s entrepreneurial skills and mindsets are at the grass root and youths’ dependence on employment is very high in a situation where employment opportunities are limited. The focused group discussions confirmed this fact: one of the challenges impeding youth from progress was the lack of entrepreneurship skills and mindsets. Furthermore, the fact that a considerable (40%) of the youths aspiring to secure livelihood through oversea employment may suggest that youths’ hopelessness is pervasive; and the economic, social, and political environment is at best uncomfortable to the youths

**Table 6:** Youth Economic Aspiration

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Item | Frequency | Percentage |
| Entrepreneurship | 180 | 31% |
| Employment (Private and Government) | 170 | 29% |
| Migrate to other countries and get employment | 230 | 40% |
| Others | 0 | 0% |
| Total | **580** | **100%** |

## **Youth Political Aspiration**

The survey asked participants if they plan to participate in political life or not in the coming three years. Participation of this kind may include; in local administration, joining opposition parties, and engaging on social media as political activists, etc. Interestingly, the majority (66%) of the youth respondents indicated that they have no political goals or aspirations. Only 7 percent and 10 percent of the youth aspire to participate in local administration and join opposition political parties respectively. The remaining 17 percent of the youth respondents indicated that they have set their goals and aspirations to participate as political activists via social media. This indicates that only 34 percent of the youth intend to participate in political affairs while the majority section of the youth have no interest.

The fact that the majority of the youth have no interest in political participation may indicate several implications. The poor political culture, in the sense that a non-participatory political environment, that is long overdue in the political history of the county can be one cause that hampered youths’ political aspirations. The tight systemic control under the arms of the local government structure can be another reason inhibiting youths’ interest in political participation. Yet, the dominant narration from the survey indicates the latter is a more powerful factor than the earlier. Substantiating this, most of the FGDs indicated that governments at all levels deliberately and systematically discourage youths’ political participation. From the several FGDs, it is learned that lack of good governance and absence of genuine youth-inclusive government services are responsible for poor youths’ political participation. Almost all discussants have the conviction that no government authority at all levels tends to be enlightened and capable of upholding the value of youths’ political participation which is universally recognized as human and democratic rights. According to some of the discussants, power, affiliation, bribery and loyalty to the incumbent party are the drivers when it comes to youth political participation which has a direct effect on the youths declined interest.

**Table 7:** Youth Political Aspirations

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Item | Frequency | Percentage |
| Participation in Local Administration | 40 | 7% |
| Join Opposition Political Parities | 60 | 10% |
| Social Media Political Activist | 100 | 17% |
| No Political Aspiration | 380 | 66% |
| Total | **580** | **100%** |

## **Youth Social Aspirations**

The survey questionnaire asked respondents if they have goals and aspirations to pursue education, participate as volunteers, improve their physical and mental fitness, and establish families through marriages for the next three years. The findings are summarized in the subsequent tables.

### **Youth Education Aspirations**

According to the following table 8, only 22 percent of the youth have plans to continue education. The overwhelming majority (78%) of the youth have no goals or aspirations to continue their education in the next three years. This indicates that youths’ affinity to education is generally very poor. The findings of the focused group discussions substantiated this factual finding. The FGDs indicated that youths’ general propensity to education is low because of youths’ perception that education is not rewarding in the current social, political, and economic contexts. No matter what the attributing reasons are, the findings indicate that youths’ low aspiration to pursue educational goals tends to have a far-reaching implication not only to the livelihood of the youth and the generation but also to the wider regional community.

**Table 8:** Youths’ Education Aspiration

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Continue Education | Frequency | Percentage |
| Yes | 130 | 22% |
| No | 450 | 78% |
| Total | **580** | **100%** |

### **Youth Aspiration to Engage on Voluntary Social Activities**

Table 9 below indicates that the vast majority (74%) of the youth have no goals and aspirations to engage in voluntary social activities for the next three years. It also indicates that 26 percent of the youth will engage in voluntary social activities in the stated period. The fact that the vast majority of the youths do not intend to engage in voluntary social activities indicates low youth engagement in the social aspects of their community. This may suggest that youths’ awareness and/or role in social affairs is at its grassroots. It also shows that much of social ills will remain unaddressed without the voluntary participation of the youth as government/public services are usually far from inadequate in addressing all social problems.

**Table 9:** Youth Aspiration to Engage on Voluntary Social Activities

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Volunteer | Frequency | Percentage |
| Yes | 150 | 26% |
| No | 430 | 74% |
| Total | **580** | **100%** |

### **Youth Aspirations to Improving Physical and Mental Fitness**

Participants were asked if they have goals and aspirations to improve the physical fitness and mental health conditions that are found. The majority (66%) stated that they do not have goals and aspirations to take care of their physical and mental fitness. In other words, 34 percent of the youth are found to have goals and aspirations to improve their physical and mental health conditions in the next three years. The implication might indicate a sense of hopelessness in the mind of the majority of youths. Otherwise, how can someone at a young age can decline to have the interest to fit physically and mentally in this age of utmost health consciousness? This is particularly true when we consider the need for physical exercise and mental health conditions in a postwar situation where the youth are supposed to get healed from complex trauma via the instrumentality of physical exercises and other modes of improving mental health conditions. Indeed, the finding also contravenes the generally accepted mode of healing the youth from war-born traumas. This might also indicate that the state of health conditions of the youth is concerning which any sensible person can understand.

**Table 10:** Youth physical and mental fitness aspirations

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Improve physical and Mental Fitness | Frequency | Percentage |
| Yes | 200 | 34% |
| No | 380 | 66% |
| Total | **580** | **100%** |

* + - 1. **Youth Marriage Aspirations**

Table 11 below summarizes the goals and aspirations of 351 unmarried youth in establishing a family in the next three years. Accordingly, the vast majority (86%) of single youth have no intention or aspiration to form a family through marriage arrangements. It also summarizes that an insignificant number of unmarried youth (14%) have goals and aspirations of building a family through marriage. The fact that the vast majority of the youths do not aspire to establish a family may suggest that youths’ hopelessness, attributed to war-inflicted mental trauma and high economic deprivation, is having a significant impact on the future of the youth. It may also suggest that youths perceive that their economic, social, and political conditions are less likely to improve shortly underlying the majority of youths’ aversion to marriage. Regardless of the causes, it is safe to conclude that youths’ aversion to marriage will more likely upset the continuity of society unless the concerns and problems of young people are unraveled with a sense of urgency. Because they represent the main nuclei for the continuation of societies as they are assumed to have high potential for production and reproduction capabilities.

**Table 11**: Youth Marriage Aspiration

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Marriage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Yes | 50 | 14% |
| No | 301 | 86% |
| Total | **351** | **100%** |

# **Youth Migration Intention**

## **General Youth Migration Intention**

According to Table 12, 40% of the survey respondents are interested to cross the border to other countries in search of a better way of life. The remaining majority accounting for 60% of the youth respondents’ assert to have no intention for migration. Though the proportion of youth groups with the intention to migrate is smaller compared to those aspiring to remain at home, it suggests that a considerable portion of the youth group is likely to cross the border which will have a far-reaching implication. This may be attributable to the rampant youth dissatisfaction with the local contexts permeating the economic, social, and political landscapes. In this context, the region will face a huge labor force deficit in the face of massive demand during the reconstruction and rehabilitation process. Moreover, it suggests that the considerable proportion of youths intending to migrate is likely to create migration pressure on countries to which the youth intend to migrate, particularly developed countries of Europe and Middle East. In both cases, the situation calls for urgent intervention by pertinent stakeholders.

**Table 12:** Youth Migration Intention

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Youth Migration Intention | Frequency | Percent |
| Yes | 230 | 40% |
| No | 350 | 60% |
| Total | 580 | 100% |

## **Youth Migration Intention by Settlement**

The following table summarizes the proportion of youth from urban and rural areas intending to migrate. According to Table 13, the propensity of youth to migrate is higher in urban areas than in rural areas in relative terms. To elucidate, 59 percent of the respondents with migration intention are urban youth, while the remaining 41 percent are rural youth. This indicates that out of the total youth respondents, 2.3 youths out of 10 youths and 1.6 youths out of 10 youths intending to migrate represent urban and rural youths respectively. On the other hand, considering total youth respondents, from both urban and rural areas 3 out of 10 indicated that they prefer to stay at home to migrate.

**Table 13:** Youth Migration Intention by Settlement

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Settlement | Frequency | Percentage |
| Urban | 136 | 59% |
| Rural | 94 | 41% |
| Total | 230 | 100% |

## **Youth Migration Intention by Sex**

Youths’ intentions seen in terms of their sex composition or ratio are also summarized herein below. The summary indicates about 67% of youth interested to migrate accounts for males while the remaining 33% are female youth. Meaning, from the total number of youth aspiring to migrate, 40% of the total, male youth accounts for 26.8% while 13.2 % represents female youth. Looking at those with no intention to migrate, male accounts for 45% while the remaining 55% account for female youth group. This means, out of the total number of youth intending not to migrate, which is 60% of the total, 27 % and 33% account for male and female youth respectively.

**Table 14:** Youth Migration Intention by Sex

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Sex | Frequency | Percent |
| Male | 154 | 67% |
| Female | 76 | 33% |
| Total | 230 | 100% |

## **2.7.4. Youth Migration by Age Category**

In terms of age group, 37 percent of the youths interested in migration fall under the prime working age group, 15-24 years of age. The majority, 63 percent, of the youth intending to migrate fall under the prime working age category- the age group representing the 25-54 age bracket. Stated otherwise, the region will lose nearly 4 out of 10 and 6 out of 10 youths that are in their early and prime working ages if the youth migrate to other areas. Considering the total youth respondents, nearly 2 out of 10 and 3 out of 10 youths intending to migrate are respectively in their early and prime working ages. In other words, 3 out of 10 and 4 out of 10 youths in their early and prime working ages respectively will stay at home. Consequently, the fact that the majority of the youth intending to migrate are in their prime working age indicates the region is likely to fall short of a relatively more skilled, mature, experienced, and productive workforce. Failure to meet the needs and address the problems of the youth is more likely to place the productive capacities of the region at stake, making the effort of registering sustainable development after reconstruction pointless.

**Table 15:** Youth Migration by Age Category

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Age | Frequency | Percent |
| 15-24 Years | 84 | 37% |
| 25-35 Years | 146 | 63% |
| Total | 230 | 100% |

# **The Causes of Migration Intention**

The respondents included in the survey indicated numerous reasons attributable to considerable youths’ intention to migrate. The causes of youth intention to migrate fall into two categories: pull factors and push factors. The main cause of youths’ intention to migrate is however the push factor. Unless efforts are exerted in ameliorating, the daunting challenges of life at home, the situation will flare up to have far-reaching implications for the overall future of the region and the country at large.

**Pull Factors:** The respondents indicated that the most important pull factor inducing youths to migrate is the search for a better way of life and opportunities, which they perceived are available in the developed and developing countries alike.

**Push Factors:** The respondents also indicated that there are numerous push factors in Tigray inducing youths to cross the border instead of staying at home. Here are some of the factors pushing youth out of Tigray.

* Absence of reliable peace, stability and security,
* Poor employment and working opportunities,
* Lack of good governance,
* Pervasive negligence of the government on the conditions of the youth

# **Civic Engagement, Peace and Security Situation, and the Youth**

# **The Sociopolitical Environment for Civic Engagement**

It is a palpable datum that civic associations have an imperative in addressing the social problems of a given society or community. Civic societies are avenues that can serve as platforms for peer-to-peer discussion, influencing the behavior of governments and interest articulation and lobbying. Notwithstanding the several benefits of civic organizations and associations, there is little attention and engagement on the part of the youth for several reasons. According to some of the FG discussants, local politicians are systematically restricting the participation of the youth in the guess of having hidden political motives. Even on matters that have nothing to do with politics, youth meetings/assemblies in the name of civic associations were seen as threats to the government. The perception of local politicians on youth engagement in civic associations is skewed to the negative side hence youths’ meeting is perceived with suspicion of unidentified political conspiracy.

Significant sections of the youths have the conviction that commenting against practices of maladministration and corruption is unwelcomed by local politicians otherwise; they label opinion holders as traitors or renegades. Indeed, meetings and discussions centered around youth-centered interests and concerns are arranged. However, they remained fruitless as they are manipulated for political purposes. One FGD participant from Endaba-Gunna said, “Though some youth engagement forums are organized, they never solve any of the youths’ problems raised during the forums and hence discourage youth from participation.”

The study indicates that youths do not have a meaningful influence on matters that affect their life. Youths are merely informed of prior decisions that are imposed upon them during the implementation phase. This lack of youth engagement in decision-making has a frustrating effect on the part of the youth. A considerable number of FGD participants opined that youth-related decisions rest in the hands of the government and that most of the policies, decisions, and actions most often fail in addressing the needs of the youth. Whenever the youths raise questions, government officials and local politicians follow deceptive approaches aimed at only cooling down the emotions of the youth. The FGD participants indicated that no viable long-term strategic approach is in place to articulately address the concerns, voices, and demands of the youth.

The FGD participants without exception indicate the absence of genuine inclusive and democratic youth-centered platforms and forums. In case, youth engagement platforms are arranged, officials select those youths who happen to be in the inner circle of their political cliques. Thus, try to manipulate the opportunities instead of addressing the genuine concerns of the youth. Given this as it may, youths’ failure to resist, reassert and question the corrupt political body and make a meaningful influence in policy decisions is a critical contributing factor in youths’ civic disengagements. Most discussants believe that they lack political courage for reasons of reprisal of any form to actively participate in civic and political matters.

Similarly, societal attitudes toward participating in civic and political matters have little room for appreciation. Indeed, the social environment is either restricting the participation of the male youth or discouraging female youths to engage in civic affairs. This is particularly true in the rural centers of Adigudem, Hawzen, Abyiadi, and Raya Azebo areas. Thus, such deliberate denigration of one's right to engage in civic associations debilitates the quality and strength of the civic association itself and the possible contribution of the youth to the life of their community. This calls for a viable intervention by all relevant stakeholders indiscriminately.

In general, it is found that there are no adequate and genuine forums organized for youth’s voices to be heard. Policies and decisions are centrally made by the government where there is no adequate room for the youths’ influence. The youth’s role is to abide by the policies and decisions made above. The recommendations, ideas, and opinions of youth to amend policies and reverse decisions are ridiculed all the time. Youth cannot influence meaningful changes and thus remained at a distance even from the sparingly available forums.

# **Peace and Security Concerns**

Since the start of the war in Tigray insecurity and instability are becoming a grave challenge of life not only to the youth but also to the wider public in the region. Following the war, regional security institutions are weakened, and security institutions like the regional police commission are officially dissolved by the incumbent party in power. The special regional force, currently named TDF, is preoccupied with major security concerns coming from the Amhara region and Eritrea. To fill the gap, the regional administration has reformed the police institution. However, the reform seems incapable of rectifying prevalent security threats, thus insecurity and instability go unabated in both rural and urban centers of Tigray. According to the FG discussants, daytime looting, robbery and assault, group quarreling and stabbing, and killing are becoming common practices that most often go unpunished. Accordingly, the following security concerns are rampant in almost all urban and rural centers of the region. Gange rape, nighttime robbery, assault, a group fighting after getting drunk, and stabbing are identified as some of the security concerns in both urban and rural areas of the study area. According to the discussions Bajajs are serving as mobile boxes of robbery and assault. Besides, Bajajs are instruments of rape and sexual violence.

Another security concern in areas like Mehoni is coming from a group of political opposition groups named Siber. They are a group of politically motivated young men dominantly from Mehoni and Alamata. They usually came to Mehoni in the night and take action against young politicians in the area to force them to stop their political backing to TPLF. They threaten them and took action from warning up to stabbing and execution. Adding to this, one of the discussants has said that “Kalashnikovs and revolvers are in the hands of many irresponsible individuals, bullets are easily accessible in the black market, and there is no control from the incumbent, remained as dominant source of insecurity. Besides, armed groups and individuals are entertaining in night clubs having their arms at hand and creating insecurities on other civilians.

It is also found that security challenges are proliferating in Raya Azebo woreda which was previously assumed a very safe place and convenient for living. Owing to the huge agricultural investments, a substantial workforce from other parts of Tigray is migrating to the area. This has brought a new security concern to the local community. Most of the newly arriving daily laborers have their arms in the name of personal protection. Yet they make use of it for threatening others, robbery, and rape. In the nighttime, they fight with each other and at times they fight in groups against the local youth after getting drunk. Under the circumstances of such a group fight, stabbing to death has come a daily encounter. Imagine the intensity and severity of the action where formal police and legal institutions are missing and incapable. Similar insecurities are widespread in Maichew, Adigudom, Shire, Axum, and Abi Adi where TDF returnees and some unethical members of the TDF are committing crimes of rape, robbery, and assault, against the local community. Some TDF members are engaged in crimes of robbing and assault saying that “we are suffering to liberate you but you fail to recognize and support us[[24]](#footnote-24)”. There are numbers of young men, unidentified whether they belong to TDF or not, involved in crimes having guns and knives making insecurity at its alarming stage. Adding to this, one of my discussants in Maichew said that she knows about four individuals being robbed and stabbed by unidentified armed individuals. To most of the discussants in Maichew, the town is turning into lawlessness that once was proclaimed as a very stable and peaceful area in the southern zone of Tigray.

 Similarly, cattle rustling is becoming a new normal in our localities, daytime robbing of mobile phones, cash, and other valuable materials is also becoming a daily phenomenon in areas like Tembien and its vicinity. Bandits, mugger men, and highway men are common in the village areas of QolaTemben that by and large create massive insecurity. Besides, transfer of light weapons and arms, and arms sell are commonly held in most localities that by and large intensified the prevalent security predicament. Adding to this, one of the discussants said,” two electric transformers were looted by a bunch of criminals in his locality[[25]](#footnote-25).” Cattle rustling is also common in some rural areas of Raya Azebo. Bandits are creating insecurity notably against those assumed to be well-to-do families in the rural area. They came at midnight and forced them to hand over their finance, otherwise, they threaten to kill[[26]](#footnote-26). It is also found that Cattle rustling is rampant in rural and urban areas of Hawzen Woreda. Group fighting and stabbing, fighting after drunk, robbery, and stabbing by muggers are common happenings in most urban centers. Supporting this claim, FG discussants of AbyiAdi, Adigrat, Axum, Shire, and Enticho think that these perpetrators go unpunished

reflecting the weak enforcement mechanism of the regional government.

The situation creates hopelessness on the part of the entire community in the existing legal system. Annoyed by prevalent security concerns, a young man aged 32, from AbyiAdi has said that “the current security situation is by far worse than any time before”, coupled with this, he boldly added that muggers and gangs are well armed, in turn, threaten security personnel, and there is no functional police and justice system to maintain our security and safety interests. He continued by saying that “taking personal care is what we are left with to remain safe under such harsh security environment”. Supporting such claims, discussants from Adigudem, Quiha, and Mekelle have affirmed the pervasive nature of security concerns. For instance, theft, robbery, and assault are omnipresent in residential and marketplaces. In most cases, it's unimaginably unsafe to get back home late or after 2 local time. Elders cannot go to religious institutions during the night time for religious ceremonies and prayers held after midnight. Youth unemployment and hooliganism along with weak security apparatus take the lines share for the reasons of security concerns. In all these urban centers, it has become the norm of the day to lose properties and money for theft. Likewise, in Adigrat, AbyiAdi, Axum, and Shire, security concerns and challenges are common that affect the smooth running of daily life. According to most of the discussants, robbery, assault, and stabbing by muggers aimed at looting mobile phones, valuable materials and cash are common happenings. Particularly, Kebelle 04 and 06 localities of Adigrat are the worst in all measures of security concerns. Almost all discussants in the area believe that it is almost impossible for someone to walk or travel via those particular places in the evening and night times. According to them, the two areas are highly populated with impoverished inhabitants, concentrated with bars and local beverage houses, and these places are on the outskirts of the town and closer to the neighboring rural areas where street lights are inadequate, concomitantly assumed to be dangerous places in Adigrat town.

Similarly, nighttime robbery of individual houses is also prevalent in rural areas of Adigrat like Sasun and Diblasieet Tabias, a nearby local area located to the west of the town. Worst of all is the security challenges created by Eritrean immigrants in Adigrat. Some Eritrean immigrants with forgery documents, like Id card, which is illegally arranged for them in Zala’anbessa town, have arrived in Adigrat. They immediately rent houses and engage in criminal acts of robbery and assault. These days it has become difficult to identify them as they have the same ID card as local communities. On the other hand, instead of cooperating with security arrangements for a viable formal control of Eritrean immigrants, some local youth groups hijack them seeking ransom money. They forced them to call abroad to amass the required ransom money. Likewise, FGD respondents from Enticho and Endaba-guana study sites claimed that there is a peace and security threat from Eritrea and Amhara external forces respectively as they are placed in near areas. FGD participants from Entichogoes on saying; **“w**e can’t engage in our daily activities with a stable mindset. For Eritrean invading forces are near to our locality and ample infiltrates are with us creating insecurity”. Likewise, FGD participants from the Sero area of Enticho claim “Eritrean forces are hijacking youths and Eritrean immigrants are increasing from day to day for a reason which we don’t know, both cases are creating insecurity in the local community”**.**This reflects on the one hand the existence of weak border control and on the other hand the widespread nature of lawlessness in several areas of the region.

In general, the study identifies that there is a real peace and security concern in almost all localities. In most rural and urban areas, people are not sure to get back home safely from their daily activities. Free movement in the evening and nighttime is getting difficult and at times may result in injury and death. In most areas where FGDs were conducted, it is found that there are unidentified armed and unarmed gangsters who loot, assault, and mugger indiscriminately. Religious institutions-churches and mosques-even in rural areas are targets of theft which is a new shocking development to the regional security environment of Tigray. The severe security situation calls for formal concerted actions on the part of the federal and the regional governments.

# **Alternative Conflict Resolution Mechanisms**

Conflict is inevitable in every walk of humankind and social settings as long as human relationship exists which demand ways of addressing them. All discussants affirm that formal court systems and police institutions are dysfunctional due to war-induced crisis, thus formal mechanisms remained weak relative to their needs at this time of heightened conflicts and insecurities. However, in most urban and rural centers in Tigray, there is a commonly held assumption on the imperative role of traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution.

According to the FG discussions, the dominant mechanisms available are community conflict resolution forums, elderly and religious leaders-led mechanisms, and peer group-led discussions. In most cases, local elders play the leading role in resolving quarrels, disagreements, and conflicts of any kind at the local level. Given this common tradition all over Tigray, some places tend to have very well-established modalities of elders’ engagement that by and large emboldened the role of traditional conflict mechanisms. Among others, the experience in southern zone of Tigray is a case in point elucidating its commanding character that scaling it up to other localities may help ameliorate the identified aspects of insecurity. Regarding this, discussants in Mehoni, Raya Azebo, and Maichew have said that “there are a group of traditional elders, named as ‘Abo’Gereb’, at both woreda and Kebelle/ Tabia level aimed at resolving crimes like homicides”. At the same time, they support individual initiatives of addressing minor personal quarrels, be it at the individual or group level, and disagreements among neighborhoods and within families, etc. Taking note of their reputation in the community, local administrations are providing them with platforms and opportunities to get established at the grassroots level. Thus, Abo’Gereb members are playing the level best possible in resolving local disagreements and conflicts via cooperating with formal committees named Abo’Selam, literally meaning peace committee.

# **The Role of the Youth in Local Peace and Security**

The security situation in the region tends unimaginably shoddier than ever before which calls for vigorous efforts on the part of the community and the incumbent. Unfortunately, the regional and local administrative structures are incapacitated following the war. It is therefore logical for the community to engage themselves in protecting their safety and security via the application of various local modalities. Indeed, the youth may be supposed to contribute more in this regard. With this spirit in mind, male youth groups have done some praiseworthy tasks of overseeing and scrutinizing their locality in the nighttime. Female youth groups on their part, did the same surveillance, control, and regulation of their locality in the day time having established checkpoints where they stand in groups and request ID cards for anyone assumed alien or unfamiliar. This is found to be a common practice in most urban areas of Tigray. However, most often than not it is interrupted in most urban and rural areas due to further challenges assumed to be out of their control/capacity. In urban centers, a significant number of the youth group have done praiseworthy tasks in maintaining local security in the last year. But now, they found it hard to continue as they themselves become victims and threatened by unidentified armed groups in the face of missed support from formal security institutions.

Participating in local security effort is becoming risky and discouraging the youth to contribute their part. A discussant from Maichew has said, “Why should I to loss my life while fighting with group of armed gangs in a situation where there is no support from the government side, for me I prefer to go home too early.” He goes on to say that there is no guarantee from the side of the incumbent body to even cooperate with local government security forces. For instance, if you cooperate with security officers and take the suspected criminals to the police station, in most cases they are released on bail after 24 hours of imprisonment. After they are released, the suspected ones took revenge measures against those who cooperate with government security forces. A similar attitude is common in other parts of Tigray. Supporting this claim, for instance, FG discussants from Adigrat town have uttered “We know an innocent young man, who cooperate with the police in the investigation of a suspected criminal, was stabbed to death by the suspected himself after he was released from imprisonment on bail.”

On the other hand, there are groups of associations that are keen and supportive of security matters in their locality. For instance, Rago Association and Haben Tegadelti Volunteers Association are important ones to mention. The first association having 60 members was initially established for loading and unloading tasks while the latter association having more than 100 members was initially established to support TDF’s endeavors. Yet, parallel to their initial respective goals, both associations are vibrant in supporting the local communities’ effort of maintaining peace and security in Mehoni town. Similar to these associations are available in Maichew. An association named Haben Manaesey, literally meaning ‘Pride of the Youth’, having about 350 youth members is a volunteer association initially aimed at provision of logistics and blood donation to TDF combatants. Parallel to its formal goal, the association is engaged in efforts critical to the security and stability of the local community. Efforts about matters of peace and security have become an integral part of the association with the conclusion of the peace deal between the federal and the regional government. Undeniably, such group efforts are imperative for the healthy functioning of the community. However, there are still daunting challenges of material and facilities shortages imperative in the day-to-day functioning of the identified association that calls for supportive mechanisms before the disruption of these plausible efforts.

# **Education and the Youth**

It is common knowledge that education is the engine of any development endeavor. Educating the community, thus, constitutes a core element of states' development efforts and processes. Notwithstanding this bare fact, the education system in Tigray collapsed over the last three years. Besides, most tertiary-level students formerly attending their education in different parts of Ethiopia are forced to stop due to the hostile political circumstances of the country. Currently, there is a move to resume education in Tigray following the Pretoria agreement. Much appreciation may be required for the initiative, yet the task of coming back to normalcy and education seems not without challenge. Indeed, it is true for the youth as we consider their particular experiences of the conflict and its concomitant effect on psychosocial and socioeconomic conditions, not to mention the present political and security environment. With this in mind, the FGDs were tailored to look into the subjective experiences and objective realities about education in particular localities. Accordingly, the dominant attitude of the youth towards education tends unsatisfactory which calls for vigorous intervention on the part of the community, the government, and other stakeholders.

According to the FGD participants, the students most likely ready to resume education after the conflict are those students below 8th grade. The participants emphasized that a considerable number of youths in this category would not have resumed education had it not been for their parents’ pressure. However, the participants disclosed that the majority of students above grade 8 are generally less interested to resume their education. The practical observation of the dominant section of discussants across the various FGDs administered is that a significant number of youth students above the age of 18 tend to prefer migration or opening private businesses to resume education.

The FGD participants explained that different reasons are attributable to low youths’ motivation to resume education. First and foremost, youth have been enduring psychological trauma and stress over the last three years of the war making youths’ readiness to resume education quite challenging. Second, youth consider education as unrewarding and prefer engaging in income-generating activities to pursuing education. They explained that when the war started, the educated social class immediately started leading a miserable life. The educated class did not accumulate wealth before the conflict. Their livelihood was entirely dependent on the meager monthly salary. While elucidating this viewpoint, a young girl aged 27 from Quiha said, “The day the payment of salary stopped, the life of the educated social class shattered”. Consequently, many educated social classes descended into begging and a considerable number of them committed suicide for they had nothing at their disposal to sustain the life of their starving children. Some started merchandising businesses and are less likely to get back into their hired job. A young youth female discussant from Quiha said, “If being educated meant living a life of misery, what motivation would any rational person have to pursue education? Some discussants have disclosed the bare fact on the ground saying that the educated are discouraged and become hopeless of their current economic and social status, thus spending their golden time taking local beverages and chewing Khat in vendor shops failing to affirm their social expectations. Here it is not difficult to imagine what it would mean to the youth students when they practically observe the educated section of the public leading poor living condition, incapable of sustaining their life under the existing economic hardship, and failing to confirm their social expectations.

The dominant section of FGD discussants convicted that the current state of affairs of the educated section of society has a direct impact on shaping the future of youth students. However, taking note of this, now is the time when youth students have failed to find educated role models in terms of economic and social status, and political participation; that they can imitate and follow suit in shaping their future. The assessment revealed that the declining interest of youth students is attributable to the absence of an adequate number of role models to influence youth students to pursue education. In this regard, the majority of informants claimed that several graduates remained unemployed, either for reasons of nepotism or bribery, or incompetence, while the employed ones are living miserable life under the current state of conditions, both cases have contributed to the declined interest of youth students to resume education.

Another noteworthy point reverberated in the discussions concerning the cause for a declined educational interest is associated with TDF. Discussants think that with the outbreak of the conflict their friends, relatives, and classmates have joined TDF, and they don’t know their current status as to whether they survive or not. This has a contributing factor for youth students to have a declined interest to resume school.

A significant number of FGD participants claimed that the unknown status of their loved ones who joined TDF has a direct impact on the mental stability of the youth and their declined interest in education. Avery young student is observed by his uncle to have been saying temperamentally “What is education for me, what will benefit me if it doesn’t benefit my young brother who graduated with very great distinction from University”. This young boy is worried about his big brothers’ existence after joining the TDF. He and his family have no clue about the existence of the young graduate. This might indicate that those who lost loved ones whom they consider their role models have a debilitating effect on their declined interest to resume education.

As illustrated in most of the discussions, elementary school students are relatively eager to resume schooling. However, senior school and university students have declined interest. For instance, one of our discussants in Mehoni town has said “I feel discouraged to continue my undergraduate study after three years of interruption”. Further affirming his point, he boldly elucidates his observation of the local community’s attitude, “most parents seem discouraged to send back the youth students to the school. They rather encourage female youths to get married and encourage the youth male to start small businesses.

It is also found that some students have already adapted to a new way of life as retailers and small business owners which debilitate their interest to restart their school. A dominant number of FGD participants have indicated that youth students were forced by the conflict and concomitant siege to engage in economic activities in the hope that they can support their families and themselves. And in the process learned that engaging in business activities was far more rewarding than engaging in economic activities after college or university graduation. The graduating working class was the ones hard hit by the war in Tigray. They fear that they will face the fate of those holding graduate jobs in the event of an outbreak of another wave of conflict. This has two implications. The student youth believe that the Pretoria Treaty does not settle the conflict between Tigrian forces and Ethiopian Allied (including Eritrean forces) forces. It also indicates that student youths’ propensity to engage in educational activities is very low. In other words, the war has significant negative ramifications on the hopes and aspirations of youth and youth’s affinity to education. This, over the long term, will have irreversible consequences on the economy of not only the region but also the country, as access to knowledgeable and skilled human resources is likely to dwindle with declining youth motivation to engage in educational activities. It is hardly difficult to imagine the socio-economic conditions of a society in which knowledge has no role at all.

The economic cost of living and educational expenses owing to the ever-increasing of price hikes have further drained youth students' interest to resume education. In the discussions held in major towns like Mekelle, Adigrat, Axum, and Shire, it is said that school monthly payments in private schools are getting more expensive, and, no viable modalities of government control are there to regulate the erratic school payment arrangements. Besides, the ever-increasing cost of living and educational expenditures are adding fuel to the declined interest of the youth students who were highly traumatized and discouraged by the conflict situation.

“I am a high school student who recently resumed schooling, as per my observation, most of us in class are discouraged from properly attending lectures, we are only 11 students in number for some of my former classmates have already joined TDF, some get married or migrated while others declined to get back to the school because of trauma and hopelessness. Adding to this, she also uttered that ‘age is critical to female youth students in their schooling, so you can imagine what it would mean for a young girl aged 17 or 18 to resume schooling after three solid years of interruption, similarly the young male students went to urban centers during the siege aimed at working for daily subsistence and now they found it difficult to get back to school for they already have adapted to a new way of life” (FGD53, Hawzen, kebelle, hadinet).

In General, it is found that dominant sections of the youth-age students are highly traumatized by existing situations that most often than not with a resultant effect on the declined interest of the youth-age group to resume education with utmost motivation. It is not an easy number of students who are currently indulged in addiction born of current trauma, hopelessness, and economic hardships. However, if proper trauma healing tasks are undertaken, school materials are provided, and school feeding is arranged, particularly for those from the neediest family, improvements can be exhibited.

## **Role of Prewar Educational Curriculum in Helping Youth to Lead Better Life**

The focused group participants were asked if the prewar education curriculum had a role in leading a better life. Few participants claimed that the education curriculum had a significant role in leading a better life. These participants asserted that the education curriculum helped them acquire the knowledge and skills necessary in getting employed in government organizations. It was the source of income for the youth. It helped them broaden their paradigm which would have been impossible without getting the education. Besides, most of these discussants clarified that before wartime, the education system was helpful to build youth capacity with a promising future. The youth was more or less stable and was busy in schooling anticipating a better future. What FGDs participants complain about is the quality of education.

However, many argue that the education curriculum had no effect in leading descent or a better life. They asserted that their education did not have a role either to get employed or to lead successful businesses of their own. For instance, one participant, a graduate of engineering, claimed that his degree was of no use in employment and establishing business organization, rather he remained idle even after graduation.

The participants claiming that the curriculum did not have a significant role indicated that the quality of the curriculum was too poor to help lead a better life. The role of the curriculum in being employed in government organizations was insignificant for the criteria of being employed in these organizations have nothing to do with qualification. One only gets employment if he/she has a close relative holding a government office or pays a bribe to those in charge of recruitment.

They claimed that the fate of most youth after graduation was idleness and joblessness. They blamed nepotism for not being employed and lack of entrepreneurial skill for not establishing and running businesses. That is the education curriculum was not designed to help youth fit into employment and entrepreneurship. This suggests that the mechanism for anticipating and developing skills relevant to employment and entrepreneurship is not functioning at the necessary level. In other words, the quality of education curriculum is poor resulting in minimal impacts on the lives of learners and reduced prospects for social participation denying youth employment and the resultant incomes and improved quality of life. It also suggests that the motivation of active students for continuing their in higher educational institutions is less likely in a situation where graduated youth are neither employed nor able to create their jobs. Furthermore, poor education quality reinforces inequality and paves the way for inter-generational poverty and marginalization of serious social, economic, and political consequences. Consequently, it is difficult- if not impossible to eradicate poverty, promote sustainable economic growth and development, and address social and political crises.

## **Availability of Institutions Providing Informal Education**

The FGD participants were asked to identify institutions providing life skills, communication skills, conflict management skills, anger management skills and listening skills, and other life-serving training to youth. All focus groups claimed that no institution exists providing this informal education. The only institutions available focus on shaping the ethical behaviors of youth. These are the family and religious institutions that are keen on teaching value systems. Similarly, local elders and the community are sources of certain norms. These are values or norms that are supposed to be adhered to by every member of the particular community. In terms of teaching pertinent skills imperative in today’s complex social, political, and economic environment, pertinent institutions are missed.

Given the failure of formal education in providing youth with the basic skills, informal institutions are meant to fill the gap, which is the missed link. Thus, the current reality is reflecting neither the formal nor the informal education systems equip the youth with pertinent life skills to meet the competing demands of today’s life.

## **Relevant Skills Helpful in Restoring the Youth to the Prewar Status**

All FGDs without exception claimed that the youth are undergoing mental trauma and hence, the most important skill helpful in restoring to the prewar status is mental and psychological support and life skill training. Adding to this, most FG discussants in urban areas demand to have short-term training skills including metal and woodwork, office equipment maintenance, mobile, refrigerator and related equipment maintenance, and entrepreneurship related once. At the same time, rural youth demands to get training in modern animal farming and agricultural-related works.

# **Health Conditions and the Youth**

## **Factors Affecting the Health Conditions of the Youth**

The study looks at the possible factors that affect the general health conditions of the youth age group. Young people are currently unable to find any meaningful employment opportunities owing to the collapse of the economy. The staggering youth unemployment indeed created hopelessness. In fact, hopelessness permeates the social, economic and political environment of the Tigrian youth. They are enduring immeasurable stress and mental trauma due to joblessness, hopelessness and war induced mental trauma. Thus, the most daunting challenge with the health conditions of the majority of the youth age group is associated to stress and trauma inflicted during and after the war.

To most of the youth groups, addiction and substance abuse are considered as a viable opting out prevalent trauma and stresses. Here the absence of sport and recreation centers, like gym, cinema centers and other recreation areas has a direct impact on youth’s preference to addiction and substance abuse. Taking local beverages and poor quality and cheap alcohols, smoking cigarettes and Shisha, chewing Khat and smoking harmful locally produced drugs, commonly called ‘weed or ganja’ has become the fashion of the day. Currently, youth’s excessive consumption and misuse of such substances, in the hope of therapeutic effects on their mind or body, is expanding at alarming rate. The proliferation of khat vendors, bars and in certain cases cocaine type local drugs, for instance Hawzen, Adigrat, Mehoni towns, is drawing significant number of the youth into excess consumption of those substances. The extent of the expansion of Khat consumption in Tigray is alarming to the extent that it is being consumed in sub urban areas including Maymekden and adjacent rural areas of Adigrat, and Hawzen.

The excessive consumption and misuse of substance is contributing to the growing number of mentally ill youth, the expansion of gender-based violence, unwanted pregnancy, alarming sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV), prostitution, and crimes in Tigray. Substance Abuse is affecting young people of all backgrounds, male, female and persons with disability. However, the ones suffering the most are women for they are additionally exposed to GVB and unwanted pregnancy; and persons with disabilities as it brings additional health complications. In general, the use of such drugs and alcohols is believed to give them temporary relief, but ultimately incur them with unprecedented health cost. Besides, it makes them senseless, gangling, gawky and hopeless in their entire life.

According to the discussions held in different part of the region, peer pressure due to youths’ perceived healthy ‘life style’ to some extent; the inaction of communities, government and other stakeholders in creating engaging, safe and free environment for young people to a large extent are the underlying causes for the expansion of Substance Abuses. Quite considerable participants claimed that the government is complacent to the problems of Substance Abuses. The government failed to provide adequate employment opportunity to the young people and thereby significantly contributed to youths’ hopelessness and hence, to youths’ addiction. The government shows little interest to control the proliferation of bars and khat vendors throughout the region. Worst, the government has given Khat houses a legal business licenses. The participants further explained that no civil society organization and community based organization is engaged on the elimination of Substance Abuse, which is consuming young people at an unprecedented pace. In fact, participants underscored that the local community’s commitment to support youth victims and prevent the flourishing substance activities has sharply deteriorated.

Discussions held in Hazen town and surrounding rural areas indicate the widespread phenomenon of youth addiction to alcohol and local beverages. According to most of the discussants, gambling and alcoholism are expanding due to their highest demand including in rural centers. “Locally produced or planted drugs are available with an average price of 5000 up to 6000 birr per Kg. To the dismal of many observers’ rural areas are also sources and victims of such drugs, alcoholism and gambling.”[[27]](#footnote-27) Similar experience is observed in rural areas of QolaTembien and urban areas of Shire, Axum, Mekelle, Adigrat and AbiAdi, where the latter is supposed to be center of drug plantation.

Alcoholism is another health concern common to most urban and rural areas of the study area. The worst case of alcoholism is observed in Adigrat town where locally made alcohols are assumed to have immediate health effects. For instance, a local beverage named Dima Dimo, unknown for others how it is made, is a case in point that make some users bloody vomiting after drunk. In Adigrat area local beverages like Tej were traditionally known for its quality as it is made from honey. However, this day’s local producers are adding alien ingredient, commonly cement and expired biscuits, to get fermented so fast and to become strong. According to the discussants, such alcohols are unregulated and being under usage by the youth community which will undermine the youth’s health. The idea is that poor quality alcohols and its excessive usage will have health effect on the part of the youth. In Maichew and Mehoni, alcohols of this kind are common that affect the youth’s health. Besides, Khat is quite common in rural centers of Raya Azebo woreda and in most of urban centers in Tigray. Yet the number of youths who consume Khat is by far more dominant in Raya Azebo areas and urban centers of Maichew and Mehoni. According to discussants, the worst aspect of chewing Khat is that it calls for a number of addictions to follow. Most of the youth group who chew Khat tends to drink a lot and consume much cigarettes, some are also interested in smoking shisha or ganja, the local weed.

Another health challenge can be explained in relation to the proliferation of prostitution centers in most urban areas of the region. Besides, pornographic centers are available in Adigrat in the name of video centers in which school ages are encouraged to entertain there while the health effect is obviously HIV/ AIDS and other forms of sexually transmitted diseases, as well as unwanted pregnancy, with concomitant effect of abortion and associated health costs.

Almost all FDG participants in shire and Axum affirmed that health centers and hospitals have no qualified professionals and adequate laboratory facilities. The buildings of health centers their equipment are either fully or partially destroyed. There is no medical supply even to serve with available capacities. This is particularly true to most of publicly owned health centers in all over the region where medical equipmentes and medicines are inaccessible. Patients are supposed to get prescription papers so as to buy medicine from private pharmacies where people are incurring extra expenses otherwise remained untreated for expensive medical cost. It is a puzzle to most of local communities when government hospitals claim to have no medicine supplies while private medical centers have ample supply of them in relative terms.

This will have serious economic, social and political ramifications not only for the region but also for the country. Tigray, over the long term- if not in the immediate future, will not only fall short of productive workforce but also loses its capacity to innovate. Hence, the prospect for registering sustainable, accelerated and integrated economic development in the region in particular and the country in general is at best gloomy. Furthermore, the prospect for social and political unrest is apparently looming in the horizon notwithstanding to the situation’s contribution to the destruction of the social norms of the society. To be sure, the situation will have damaging consequence on the resilience of the youth, community and society in general.

## **Availability of Youth Centered Health Services**

The trend in health conditions of the youth is heavily under complex situations for intertwined factors. Making things worst is the lack of youth-friendly health centers indiscriminately all over the region that can teach health-related matters, and provide protective materials-like condoms and pills- and treatments. Adding to this, most discussants think that the trends with addiction, prostitution, gambling, and committing crimes are alarming which calls for immediate action by relevant institutional and regulatory mechanisms.

Participants of FGDs almost without exception indicated that the health system of the region has collapsed. According to BMJ Global Health, ‘Six months into the war, only 30% of hospitals, 17% of health centers, 11.5% of ambulances and none of the 712 health posts were functional.’ That was the situation in June 2021, and it has continued to deteriorate since then. Consequently, acute shortage of treatment drugs and poor medical diagnosis services are the features of the health system of Tigray, particularly of the government healthcare centers. They claimed that while the collapse of the health system has affected the entire society of the region, however, it is the youth who were differentially affected by the obliteration of the health system due to their economic conditions and state of mind.

In peace times, it is a fact that sexual abuse was a major issue for adolescents with the effects on the sexual and reproductive health of young adults. The adolescent behavior of young people compels them to want to try new things including sex feeling which make them vulnerable to its negative consequences. Tigray youths’ exposure to undesired pregnancy and STDs was very high even though the health system somehow accommodated the needs of young people. Before the outbreak of the war, reproductive health services, psychosocial support, and health-related awareness creation campaigns were to some degree available in health centers, schools, and community organizations.

The FGD participants indicated that economic deprivation due to historical inequality and the destruction of the economy following the war in Tigray is forcing youth into engaging in commercial sexual activities exposing them to undesired pregnancy and STDs. They also disclosed that large numbers of youth have been engaged in unsafe sexual activities in the hope of relieving inflicted mental trauma. Consequently, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV, unwanted pregnancy unsafe abortions are increasing at an alarming rate.

Unfortunately, the participants unequivocally indicated that no government and NGOs are providing youth health-related awareness creation campaigns and services. Education and counseling- related to development and maturation, boy-girl relationships, decision-making about sex, gender issues, sexual abuse and exploitation, sexual and contraceptive methods, and pregnancy-related services are not available to reverse the situation. The participants further indicated that physical examinations, including pelvic and breast examinations for females and testicular exams for males, STD screening, counseling, and treatment, HIV testing and counseling prenatal and postpartum care, well-baby care, and nutritional services are not being given to youth in almost all health establishment. One participant said, “The government health centers prescribe syrups for all medical examination results, and by far worst, you have to buy it from a private pharmacy at an unusually high price.”

The problem is magnified in the rural Tigray where previously available limited health centers are destroyed due to the conflict. The lack of basic youth-friendly health services is silently sweeping away generations. Neither the governments nor the charity organizations or NGOs seem to notice this glaring fact. The social, economic, and political cost of not attending to the health service needs of young people in Tigray is just incalculable with significant ramifications on the region’s future in particular and the entire Ethiopian nation in general.

# **Challenges to Youth’s, Aspiration, Progress and Income Generation**

In postwar Tigray, massive efforts of healing and economic recovery activities are badly needed. Yet challenges are there that debilitate the effort of the youth and their empowerment. Herein follows some the list of factors setting back youths from progress.

**Lack of Good Governance and Bureaucracy**

Almost all the FGDs indicated that lack of good governance is the single most important challenge hindering youth from their goals and aspirations. One participant said, “Lack of good governance is deeply entrenched in Tigray even before the war. It is monstrous and eats you alive[[28]](#footnote-28).” The participants indicated that the inner circle of the political and administrative cadres, and their relatives dominated the entire economic, political, and social affairs of Tigray. The participants underscored that the majority of youth outside the network are marginalized from the economic, political, and social affairs of their community and society. Bureaucracy is horrendous, there is no access to land, and corruption and nepotism are rampant and deeply entrenched.

**Absence of Youth Inclusive Basic Government Services**

For youths’ economic, social, and political goals and aspirations to be realized, access to youth-inclusive basic government services and support is crucial. Contrarily, as the FGD participants claimed, access to robust government services is limited, if not unavailable. Government officials in all hierarchies and sectors do not feel responsible for the conditions of the youth.  The un-participatory nature of politics and the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the youth to peacefully struggle and thus change the political environment are responsible for the current debacle and its effect. Here the point is vivid that the youth are supposed to accept policies affecting their life- the policies and decisions crafted by a few politicians and bureaucrats on the top government echelon. The lack of a transparent and fair justice system, absence of practical rule of law, and modalities for equal treatment of the youth threaten youths from getting ahead. Hence, youth perceive that the absence of youth-inclusive basic government services represents a strong challenge for youth in getting ahead.

**Limited access to credit services**

Related to this, the FGD participants indicated that access to cheap credit opportunities is limited and corrupt. The most common available credit opportunity found in the region is the Dedebit microfinance institution. Yet the interest rate of Dedebit Microfinance, which is 17 percent, is too expensive making it hard to start a private business through loan financing. The FGD participants asserted that the plundering of the properties of youths’ parents deprived youth of financial support from their family and friends. As a result, the shortage of seed capital is a visible challenge for the youth in getting ahead. One focused group discussant said, “Cash is very important for starting your private business enterprise which is a critical challenge for most of us. Looking for employment opportunities in government organizations is the remaining alternative. However, this also requires one to pay a bribe, which has become the dominant tradition and norm in the region, which is another critical challenge. Consequently, youths neither can start their own business nor are hired by government organizations[[29]](#footnote-29)”.

**Discouraging Societal Norms and Traditions**

Social problems related to gender bias, and extravagant marriage ceremonies with associated effects of dowry present serious challenges to youth. A female discussant in FGD has an eloquent explanation regarding society’s gender bias. According to her, “It is a common believe that women are supposed to remain at home and work on household activities which hampered their engagement in business activities and to participate in political and civic matters[[30]](#footnote-30). Supporting this claim, another female discussant from Abyiadi has said, “while improvements are there, there is still bias on the part of the society for female youth groups to participate in public matters[[31]](#footnote-31)”.  Concerning extravagant marriage ceremonies and associated costs of dowry, it is said to have a very negative effect on the life of many youth. The feeling of being irrelevant is common in the mind of some young girls and boys coming from families of poor economic backgrounds in case they aspire to marry loved ones from a well-to-do family. At the same time, it also creates expectation crises. For instance, a young man may expect a huge sum of dowry from his parents in law (couple’s family), and in case what he got is lower than what he expected, it creates dissatisfaction and most likely end up in divorce and migration[[32]](#footnote-32).

**Substance Abuse**

The dominant FGD participants asserted that the government's failure to control the rapid proliferation of bars, khat, and Shisha houses is responsible for the youths’ growing alcoholism and addiction. Furthermore, the un-participatory political environment along with poor economic opportunities and the absence of peace and stability at home are catalysts that encourage the youth group to go addicted, to migrate, and to remain hopeless. Consequently, substance abuse is a real threat to youths’ growth and progress.

**Lack of Technical and Entrepreneurial Skills and Work Ethic**

FGD participants maintained that the absence of an encouraging environment for job creators and innovators, insufficient technical, entrepreneurship, and business skills, and limited access to market linkages hamper youths’ progress. Furthermore, lack of work ethic and rent-seeking behaviors expressed in terms of youths’ tendency to follow a shortcut way to get rich remained another glaring challenge.

## **Potential Local Income Generating Resources and Opportunities**

Identification and effective utilization of available resources and capabilities are imperative in the reconstruction of post-conflict Tigray. It will also serve as a window of opportunity to economically empower the youth. Thus, proper identification is an imperative priority task of any reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts. Accordingly, the researchers asked FGD participants to identify potential income-generating opportunities available in their localities. The income-generating opportunities available for youth were diverse and different administrative areas have peculiar potentials and opportunities. Some administrative areas have natural resources that can be processed, still, others have rich potential in the service sector. Yet, the different administrative areas and localities have commonalities in which youth can engage in generating income. Some of the income-generating resources and opportunities are briefly highlighted here under.

### **Construction and Construction Materials**

Youth can generate income by engaging in the construction sector by processing construction materials including gravel, sandstone chiseling/ carving, stone crusher works, and provision of sand for construction purposes. These resources are abundant throughout Tigray because of Tigray’s geological features. This sector deserves due emphasis because the reconstruction of the infrastructures of Tigray will require significant construction and construction materials. The demand for construction and construction materials in the reconstruction process represents huge potential for youth employment, and hence for income generation. It is if the complex bureaucratic hurdle is stress-freed and the problems of good governance, in accessing finance, working facilities, and market linkage are radically unraveled that this opportunity is exploited.

**Urban Agriculture:** It is to be recalled that urban agriculture, particularly vegetable cultivation, was one of the coping strategies adopted throughout the cities and towns of Tigray. The FGD participants throughout the study areas indicated that urban agriculture is one of the opportunities available for generating income for young people. The participants identified urban farming as one of the lucrative income-generating opportunities for the youth as land and water currently unutilized by farmers are available in large supply. Youth can generate income by engaging in urban agriculture including animal fattening and dairy farming, apiculture, and poultry. Urban farming is particularly suitable in small towns on the outskirts of which unutilized land and water are available. Youth can also engage in processing and supplying animal feed, which is in demand due to a shortage of processing establishments. The resented problems of bureaucracy, corruption, nepotism, and good governance should be unraveled with impact to exploit the opportunity urban agriculture presents to the youth.

**Small and Large-scale Farming:** Youth can also engage in small and large-scale farming in generating income and improving their life. The rural area particularly, Woreda Raya Azebo, is most suitable for large-scale commercial farming. Large tracts of land and abundant groundwater are available in this Woreda making large-scale commercial farming suitable. Small-scale farming in rural areas renders an opportunity for youth to generate income and improve their livelihood. Most of the focus group discussants, in Mehoni, Raya Azebo, and Maichew, have the highest conviction that they will outsmart in agricultural works if they can have the opportunity and environment that is conducive. In other words, problems of land governance and administration highly resented by the youth need reconsideration with a sense of urgency.

**Mining Sector:** Gold mining particularly in the northwestern and central zones of Tigray is one area of engaging youth in the generation of income for young people. Endabaguna, Tembien, and Hawzen are rich in gold deposits and hence offer income-generation opportunities for the youth if the structural mining governance system that is spinning out of control is unraveled with impact.

**Manufacturing and Services:** The commonly identified areas of small businesses include woodwork and metal works, retailing, City cleaning and gardening, garage and spare parts, car wash services, cafeterias, restaurants, parks, and youth-friendly entertainment centers and parks and similar once are identified.

# **Stakeholder Engagement: The Needs and Ways**

The assessment study has come up with details of the challenges and concerns of the regional youth having a far-reaching implication to the wider regional scenario. The core message being echoed throughout the assessment reflects the need for urgent involvement of relevant stakeholders to fully address, or at least ameliorate, the identified concerns thereby contributing to the peace and development efforts at regional and national level. Given the magnitude and severity of regional youth concerns, the participation and contribution of stakeholders is of paramount importance. Stakeholders are understood as individuals, groups, or institutions who may directly or indirectly, positively or negatively affect or be affected by the interventions carried, by the activities and /or outcomes of the program or project.

Stakeholders are all those having an interest in determining the success and failure of an activity. Thus, identifying the right and relevant stakeholders plays a critical role in realizing identified organizational goals. Here comes the need for proper identification, classification, and analysis as a strategy for enhancing stakeholders’ engagement. Indeed, identifying a stakeholder with common areas of interest and with a high propensity for a positive influence is critical in mapping institutional support and securing enhanced participation of stakeholders. Studies conducted by Griffiths et al[[33]](#footnote-33), indicate that the level of stakeholder involvement or engagement is dependent on the level of pre-established closeness between stakeholders. Adding to this, Griffiths[[34]](#footnote-34) in his seminal works of 2011 elucidates on the role of mutual respect and trust amongst stakeholders for enhanced stakeholder involvement. Supporting the claim, Bussy & Kelly[[35]](#footnote-35) maintain that trust and respect generate diverse and impressive arrays of stakeholders’ engagement with a concomitant effect on the success of identified project outcomes.

TYA is looking for possible modalities and areas of engagement with stakeholders. The association has a well-established mechanism for reaching the regional youth in both rural and urban centers. In its long and recent past efforts, it has demonstrated its capability of working with pertinent stakeholders and can attract the attention of several civil society organizations and NGOs relevant to its areas of engagement.

Cognizant of this, the regional youth association holds strong partnerships and attachments with several stakeholders in its long-time experience. Thus, the association will have the highest propensity to further attract pertinent stakeholders in its future engagements. Taking note of this, the assessment study has conducted a Key Informant interview with representatives of CSOs, NGOs, and financial institutions, named Fana Youth Saving and Credit Cooperative. The aim was to identify and crosscheck whether or not their activities and engagements are relevant to the regional youth and the purported tasks of TYA. Besides, the assessment team has consulted available literature including official reports from TYA and its organizational profiles.

It is found that most of the consulted organizations have a detailed articulation of interests relevant to the regional youth which can be an entry point for mutual engagement in postwar Tigray. A key informant from Chura Abogida Artistic Association has said that they have done the laudable task of youth empowerment by providing training, particularly filmmaking, photography, videography, and film production training for free. The Association has established a youth-friendly entertainment center in Mekelle where the youth can entertain and spend their leisure time. Considering the current realities of the regional youth, the association expanded its areas of engagement to include GBV and youth livelihood activities.

According to the same informant, the potential areas of mutual engagement with TYA are democratization, advocacy for youth rights, economic empowerment, capacity building in the Arts and agricultural sector, and entrepreneurship skills of the youth. Another informant from African Youth for Peace and Sustainable Development (AYPSD), clarified that the youth-related activities that her organization is actively engaged in include the provision of training about peace and security, life skills, entrepreneurship, and job creation schemes. Besides, trauma healing and psychosocial support for survivors of GBV are at the core of their current programming, which can be common areas of interest for the specified organization and TYA.

A young informant from CSSP2 has the opinion that working on the critical concerns of the regional youth is at the core of its program. As the name itself is self-explanatory, capacity building in civil society organizations is at the heart of the program where gender inclusion, youth voice, and civic engagement are identified as the main thematic areas of engagement. According to the informant, several activities of the CSSP2 are assumed to demand mutual engagement with TYA. For instance, youth voice is particularly important. Relevant activities include, among others, creating platforms for youth voices to be heard, creating dignified opportunities for youth livelihood security and work environment, and substance abuse.

An interview made with Fana Saving and Credit Cooperative found no difference from other financial institutions when it comes to providing preferential treatment to the youth. To the dismay of many, this financial institution is shortly named Fana Youth, thus, it is logical for someone to anticipate new opportunities or modalities relevant to benefit the youth. The institution treats youth in the same way it treats its other customers when it comes to providing credit. This may call for other financial institutions to take the lead in filling the gap. Notwithstanding the above-mentioned predicament, this particular financial institution has a training scheme relevant to the youth. Project design, business plan, leadership, and other finance-related training are available that can help ameliorate the concern of the youth which can be a mutual area of engagement with TYA.

The assessment study has also identified some challenges facing stakeholders while working on youth-related activities. The most pervasive challenges include inadequate financial resources, a lower level of awareness on the part of local administration, and complex bureaucracy are mentioned by an informant from Chura Abogida Artistic Association. An informant from African Youth identifies instability and absence of peace, and expectation crises on the part of the youth as core of the challenges for Peace and Sustainable Development. According to the informant from CSSP2, the challenges are too many to enumerate. To mention a few, lack of pertinent skills including life skills, professional skills, and communication skills, as well as lack of visionary youth explained in terms of poor personal hygiene, degraded moral/ethical stance, extreme dependence on others, etc. are critical elements of the challenge. He goes on to say that good governance-related challenges and the mob psychology of the youth are also identified as challenges. This particular informant has said, “Only a few young people are capable of comfortably living in the current dynamic world while significant sections are not”. In general, the identified challenges call for further efforts of solidified and collective ventures of various stakeholders encompassing the community, government, beneficiaries, particular funders and project implementers, CSOs and NGOs, and IGOs.

# **Part III: Summary and Conclusions**

Tigray youth association sponsored this Rapid Needs Assessment intending to collect data on the overall conditions of youth in Tigray. The information obtained from the rapid assessment report will be used as an important input in Tigray Youth Associations’ programming and projects, which will be designed considering the actual concerns, needs, and problems of the youth. To this end, qualitative and quantitative data to some extent were collected using semi-structured questionnaires and FGDs from rural and urban areas of Tigray. Six hundred questionnaires are dispatched to collect data on the livelihood status, goals and aspirations, challenges, and migration intentions of youth in the research areas. The response rate is 96.67% and the remaining 3.33 percent of the questionnaires are excluded from analysis because of errors in filling out and no response on the part of participants.

Depending on the nature of the data, the analysis part summarizes the data in tabular form to compute the percentages of occurrences of items suitable for this purpose. Analysis of data relating to open-ended questionnaires is made by identifying and interpreting recurring themes. The survey was administered in 20 administrative Tabias of six administrative zones of Tigray[[36]](#footnote-36). In addition to the survey, 60 focused group discussions were held to generate purposeful qualitative data. Furthermore, the assessment included key informant interviews with five representatives of civil society organizations and youth-affiliated organizations. This assessment combined, where appropriate, survey, FGD, and KI data, for analysis purposes to benefit from triangulations. This section concludes by way summarizing the key findings of the rapid needs assessment.

The assessment indicated that 81 percent of youth respondents are jobless. The fact that the great majority of the youth have no employment indicates that the youth are undergoing economic hardships. It also indicates that the war has aggravated the already worrisome youth unemployment in the region. It will not be an exaggeration to conclude that the region is on the brink of social and political crisis only waiting for triggering factors.

In other words, the marriage of hopelessness due to joblessness and the rapid proliferation of alcohol bars, khat chewing, and shisha houses laid fertile ground for youths to engage in Substance Abuse, Alcoholism, criminal activities, sexual violence, and unsafe sexual activities. The assessment found that large numbers of youth continue to engage in unsafe sexual activities in the hope of relieving mental trauma inflicted by the war.

Consequently, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV, unwanted pregnancy, and illegal abortion are increasing at an alarming rate. The study revealed that no government and NGOs youth related health awareness education and counseling- related to development and maturation, boy-girl relationships, decision-making about sex, gender issues, sexual abuse and exploitation, sexual and contraceptive negotiation, adoption of contraceptive methods, and pregnancy options- services are available to reverse the situation. In effect, it shows that if youth joblessness persists in the face of the collapse of youth-centered health services, there is no doubt that the resilience of the youth, communities, and societies will weaken.

The staggering youth unemployment will also adversely affect the economy itself for youth will lack the ability to spend and save for future investment. Furthermore, failure to engage youth in economic activities will have a suppressing consequence on innovativeness leading to degenerated competitiveness of the region and the country.

The assessment indicated sixty-six, seventy-eight, and eighty-six percent of the youth, respectively, have no political, educational, and marriage goals and aspirations in the future. The figures indicate that youth, a considerable segment of the regional and national population, lack the interest to engage in the political and social affairs of their communities, the region, and the nation.

The study identified the attributing causes of youths detest of participating in political and social activities. Youths’ low political ambitions are attributable to the restrictions of authorities on youth civic engagements in fear of more competent political contestants, representing the youth, emerges. Authorities actively discourage youth engagement to conceal their maladministration and corruption. The youth also lack the firm political will and courage to influence government authorities to open up the youth civic engagement space.

Similarly, the propensity of the youth to enroll, above 8th grade before the war, education sharply declined for different reasons. Persisting war-inflicted psychological trauma and stress, high graduated youth unemployment, and inflated cost of education and poverty are attributable to declining youth propensity to education*.*Furthermore, youths’ aversion to marriage may also be attributable to less promising improvement in the region’s economic, social, and political conditions. Still, to come, a considerable, 40 percent, portion of the youths are likely to cross the border in search of a better way of life and opportunities in the developed world.

Still to come, the region will lose respectively nearly 4 out of 10 and 6 out of 10 youths that are in their early and prime working ages if the youth migrate to other areas. To wrap it up, it is hardly easy to bring about rapid and sustained economic, political, and social progress at the exclusion of young people.

The security situation is becoming complex even after the Pretoria peace treaty agreement. Daytime robbery of mobile phones, cash, and other valuable materials, as well as assault and stabbing, fighting in group after drunk, and cattle rustling in rural centers, are becoming day-to-day encounters. The weakness of present-day security structures, easy access to small arms and their illicit trade, the huge number of unemployed youth suffering under harsh economic environment, and addiction born of hopelessness and trauma are contributing to the existing worst security environment. This calls for a concerted effort of the government and relevant stakeholders to coordinately address the multitude of the regional youths’ concerns thereby saving the youth from the effects and at the same time enhancing their contribution to the socioeconomic and sociopolitical well-being of their community.

Considering the multifaceted problems facing youths, it can be concluded that peace is not prevailing in Tigray as the absence of conflict does not signify the existence of peace. Furthermore, it is safe to conclude that any reconstruction and rehabilitation programming and interventions without first identifying and addressing the social, economic, and political problems, concerns, and needs of the youth are futile- they will certainly fail for it is the youth with the most energy both in destructions and reconstructions.

# Annexes

## Annx1: A summary of potential and actual stakeholders’ instrumental in the overall efforts of TYA

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **NO** | **Name of the organization** | **Potential sectors of engagement** | **Remark** |
| 1 | USAID Ethiopia | Livelihood, Health,  Education,  wash,  Environmental Protection ,Youth Empowerment ,protection(child, women, disability) ,peace building and social accountability | 2 million USD at Environmental Protection |
| 2 | Save the Children | Health,  Livelihood, protection (child,  Women,  disability and environment), Education, main action, youth empowerment and peacebuilding | * HIV Prevention (Transaction Program * Child Protection (FDG program) |
| 3 | European Union | Capacity building, peace building, youth empowerment, Education,  health,  livelihood, protection (child,  Women,  disability and environment)  migration and  social accountability | Civil society fund I |
| 4 | CSSP(British council) | Capacity building, peace building, youth empowerment, Education,  health,  livelihood, protection (child,  Women,  disability and environment)  migration and  social accountability | Civil society support program I |
| 5 | PSI Ethiopia | Health | Mulu I |
| 6 | Pathfinder |  |  |
| 7 | UNFPA | Health (RH STI), Youth recreational aria, peace building, social accountability, Protection (child,  Women,  disability ,environment) and youth empowerment |  |
| 8 | UNDP | Local economic Empowerment, empowering youth and girls, peace building  education, health and social accountability | Led program collaborating with BOYA and BOSA |
| 9 | UNICEF | Health (RH STI), Youth recreational aria, peace building, social accountability, Protection (child,  Women,  disability and environment) ,youth empowerment community engagement and risk communication | Livelihood collaboration with BOYA |
| 10 | UNHCR | Livelihood, Protection (child,  Women,  disability and environment)social integration and collusion ,peace building, youth and girls empowerment |  |
| 11 | CCRDA | Capacity building |  |
| 12 | Plan international | Health,  Livelihood, protection (child,  Women,  disability and environment), Education, main action, youth empowerment and peace building |  |
| 12 | ZOA | Health,  Livelihood, protection (child,  Women,  disability and environment), Education, main action, youth empowerment and peace building |  |
| 14 | CARE | Health,  Livelihood, protection (child,  Women,  disability and environment), Education, main action, youth empowerment and peace building |  |
| 15 | CONCERN | Health,  Livelihood, protection (child,  Women,  disability and environment), Education, main action, youth empowerment and peace building |  |
| 16 | ACSOT | Capacity building,  Advocacy, peace building |  |
| 17 | UNOPOS | Health,  Livelihood, protection (child,  Women,  disability and environment), Education, main action, youth empowerment, wash peace building and social accountability |  |
| 18 | ESAP | Social Accountability | ESAPI,II and III |

## **Annex 2: Demographic Backgrounds of Respondents**

Fig 1: Settlement Background of Respondents

Fig 3: Sex Composition of Respondents

Fig 4: Health Status of Respondents

Fig 5: Age Composition of Respondents

Fig 6: Religious Background of Respondents

Fig 7: Marital Status of Respondents

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