

RESEARCHING INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

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Re-displacing the Displaced: Rethinking the Dual Strategy of Large-scale Resettlement and Peaceful Coexistence in Metekel, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Ethiopia has experienced a massive rise in internal displacement recently, primarily due to inter-ethnic conflicts, protests and unrest, as well as climate change and the failure of the state to adequately respond to these challenges. Owing to these various factors, Ethiopia is among the countries that account for one of the largest population of internally displaced persons worldwide. Given this unprecedented forced displacement, this study re-examines the case of Metekel zone in the Benishangul-Gumuz region of northwestern Ethiopia, a large-scale and state-led resettlement site for internally displaced persons set up in the 1980s where displaced people have consistently witnessed multiple waves of displacement. The policymakers put forward a dual strategy for a large-scale resettlement, by utilising the abundant ‘untapped’ natural resources in Metekel while easing land pressure and reducing the severity of drought and famine in the places of origin of internally displaced persons. People from diverse ethnic backgrounds have been resettled in Metekel. However, besides the immediate resistance of indigenous peoples to the establishment of the sites, Metekel’s hidden negative externalities have also gradually surfaced, manifesting through simmering ethnic tensions, resistance, violence and conflict between the hosts and the resettlers. This led to ethnically targeted massacres and the eventual re-displacement of thousands of people— about 30 per cent of the Metekel’s entire population – between 2018 and 2021. By investigating the complex dynamics of conflict and the re-displacement of the resettlers in Metekel, this study underscores the need for a deeper understanding of humanitarian protection, forced internal displacement, as well as peace and security dynamics, in order to mitigate existing and potential future challenges in Ethiopia.

Keywords

Ethiopia; IDPs; Insecurity; Metekel; (re)-Displacement; Resettlement

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1. Introduction

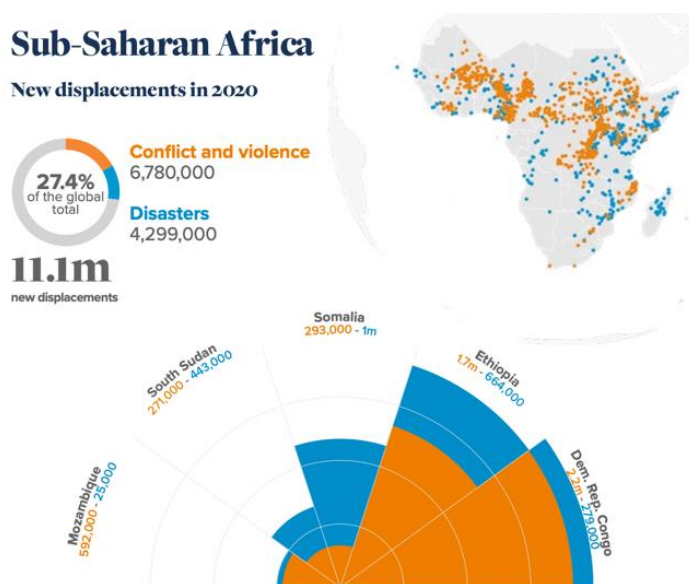
While internal displacement and resettlement are neither new nor emerging phenomena, the deployment of ‘planned resettlement’ approaches for developmental purposes is however rather recent. The emergence of forced and planned resettlement schemes can be triggered by the convergence and interplay of poverty, agro-ecology, disasters and climate change, economic and socio-political factors, and can also be underpinned by the intention of averting spontaneous mobility. Building on classic theories of migration and human mobilities from the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the conceptual and empirical understanding of displacement and resettlement has been evolving over the last six decades. Roy Burman’s early work in 1950s-60s in Rourkel, India was notably key in modelling and understanding forced displacement caused by development and industrialisation. His research was then further expanded by the work of many anthropologists and sociologists in Africa, including in Ethiopia and Tanzania, but also in China, Brazil, the US and other countries (Scott, 1998; Cernea, 2006).

However, the conceptualisation process as well as the social enquiry of displacement and resettlement that engaged social movements, multilateral development actors and practitioners has not been ‘smooth and easy [but] occurred through a constant uphill battle against cognitive dissonance’ (Cernea, 2006:9). Such resettlement-focused analytical works have indeed grown exponentially with the expansion of development-induced megaprojects, such as dams, environmental conservation areas, industrial parks, etc. In this regard, the Metekel region in northwestern Ethiopia, which serves as a case study for this research, has experienced compulsory displacements. Accordingly, this study aims to link the complex relationships between resettlement and re-displacement with a view to showing the interplay of historical and socio-political legacies in causing new displacements in Ethiopia. It does so by identifying the triggering factors and long-term impacts of internal displacement, as well as policy interventions meant to respond to this challenge.

As per the annual report 2020 of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2021), the agenda of internal displacement as a global concern has been gaining momentum, since the impact of the phenomenon – both in scale and magnitude – has been increasing exponentially. For instance, by the end of 2020, 55 million people were displaced globally, including 40.5 million newly displaced that same year. This is by far the highest recorded figure in one single year (IDMC, 2021: 8), especially considering the COVID-19 mobility restrictions. Within sub-Saharan Africa, the same report shows that Ethiopia, the second most populous country in Africa with a population of 115 million, has seen a significant increase in internal displacement in 2020, with 2,356,000 people newly displaced. Indeed, escalating conflicts and violence in the country reportedly caused the internal displacement of 1,692,000 people that year, while an additional 664,000 were newly displaced as a result of disasters (see *Figure 1* below for the sub-Saharan

Africa [SSA] data).¹ Accordingly, these figures demonstrate a failure of the government to protect those vulnerable from aggravated humanitarian crises and prolonged suffering. Ethiopia thus recorded a quarter of SSA's entire internal displacements, mostly caused by inter-ethnic as well as inter-communal violence and conflicts, protests and unrest, climate change and disasters. Some of these displacements are linked to the long history of the large-scale resettlement programmes run consistently by the state since the 1950s, such as the Metekel zone, whose case has been at the forefront of some of the violence instigated by new re-displacements.

Figure 1: Five countries with the highest number of new displacements in sub-Saharan Africa in 2020 (Source: IDMC, 2021)



Within the broader internal displacement and resettlement dynamics in Ethiopia, the Metekel case attracted the government's attention recently as the violence and killings of civilians increased in the zone, resulting in multiple waves of new displacements of the already displaced population. Metekel zone, located in Benishangul-Gumuz regional (BGR) state and bordering Sudan, comprises a vast land area with a low population density (EUTF-REF, 2016). Its abundance of natural resources encouraged the policymakers of the previous three consecutive governments (Stapleton et al., 2017) to push for state-induced large-scale resettlement programmes in the zone. Consequently, people from different corners of the country with diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds were resettled there. This allowed to ease land pressure by reducing the severity of drought and famine in their places of origin while making it possible to utilise the resources at the destination. In the 1980s, 82,000 people (Agneta et al., 1993) were resettled in Metekel, a number that has increased over the years.

¹ IDMC (2021). Another report from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) also reported that there were an estimated 2.7 million people internally displaced in Ethiopia in 2020, of whom approximately 68% were displaced by conflict (OCHA, 2021b).

However, the hidden negative externalities of the resettlement programme in Metekel have been gradually surfacing over the years. Ethnic and resource-based conflicts, as well as ‘brutal tit-for-tat massacres’ and retaliations between the natives (the Gumuz and other ethnic groups) and the resettled people from several ethnic groups (predominantly the Amharas),² have been exacerbated by the ‘ethno-nationalism’ based federal system (Gerth-Niculescu, 2021). As various reports show, during 2018-2021 alone, more than a thousand resettled people died due to mass killings, while over 200,000 people were displaced, and some thousands fled to neighbouring Sudan (OCHA, 2021a; 2021c). Further aggravating the situation in Metekel, the state response was slow. Its thin security resources were indeed stretched (Fuller, 2020; Gardner, 2021) due to the Tigray conflict in the north, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)-Shene attacks in Oromia and the sporadic clashes in other regions, not to mention the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.³ This has therefore adversely affected the safety and protection of the people, displaced thousands, and disrupted relief operations in the Metekel zone. Through critical engagement and analysis of the complex dynamics of the new displacements still unfolding, this research aims to further develop our understanding of the long-term impacts of large-scale resettlement programmes within the context of peace and security dynamics in Metekel. In turn, this could contribute towards designing a robust resettlement intervention that ensures the peaceful coexistence of the communities involved.

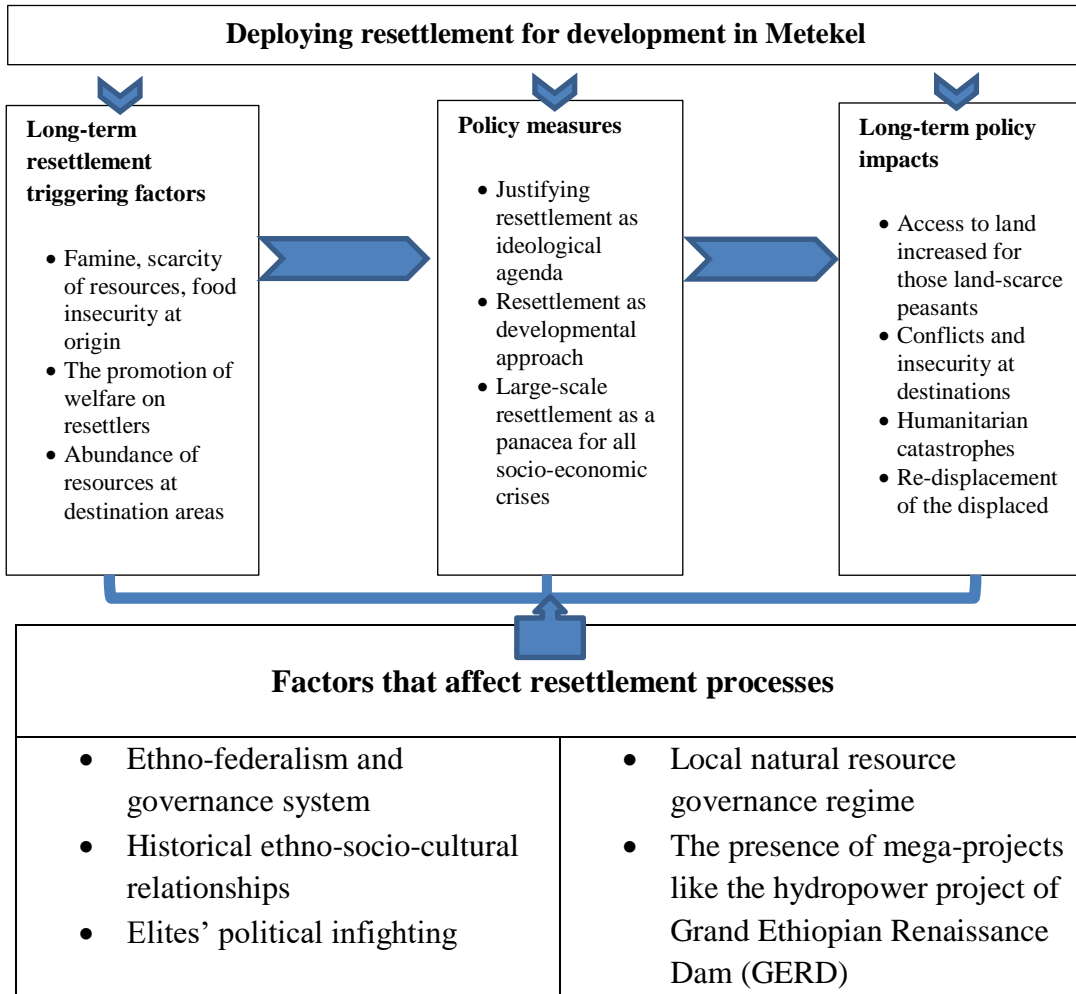
2. Methodology

This research uses qualitative data analysis. It is based on an extensive desk review and eight remote key informant interviews with resettlement and humanitarian assistance experts who, at the time of research in 2021, were working for NGOs, academic institutions, local authorities or in the field of policy making in the Metekel zone. In order to understand the historical background of the resettlement programme implemented by the Ethiopian government in the 1980s, relevant literature on the programme’s design, delivery and assessments is reviewed in this study. Additionally, recent statements from the Human Rights Commission of Ethiopia, the UN and other reports are re-examined to explore the main causes of inter-communal conflicts in the Metekel zone, as well as to be informed of the new re-displacements occurring there. Finally, framing the context in Metekel (see *Figure 2*) allows the researcher to assess the long-term causal relationship between resettlement and internal displacement.

² The second largest ethnic group and comprising 27 per cent of the population in Ethiopia (CSA, 2008).

³ As of 5 February 2022, a total of 466,455 COVID-19 cases have been reported, with 7,356 deaths (JHU CSSE COVID-19 Data, 2022).

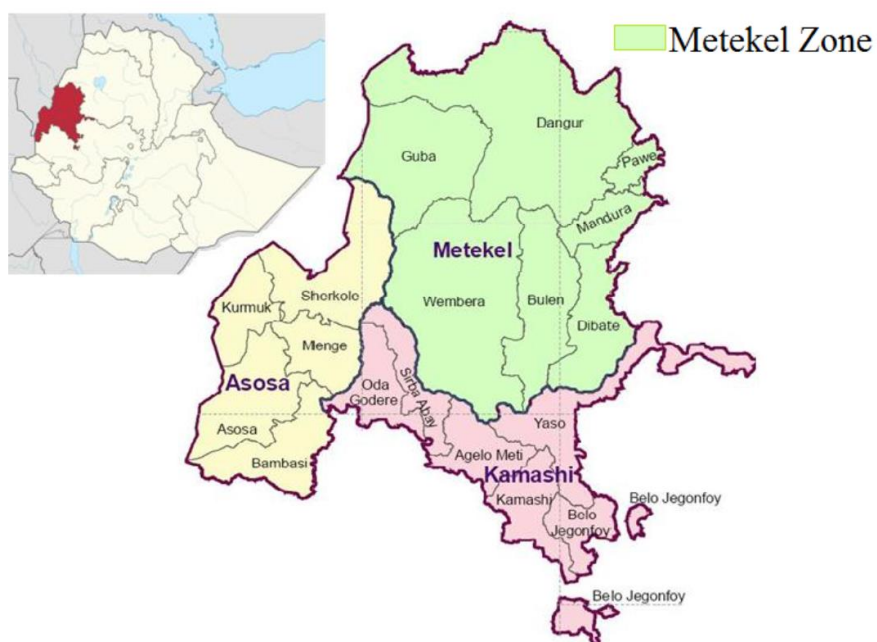
Figure 2: Framing assessment of resettlement dynamics in Metekel (Source: Author, 2021)



3. The Metekel zone: An overview

Metekel, located in the western lowlands of Ethiopia, represents an area of 26,272 square kilometres and as such, it is the largest of the three administrative zones of the Benishangul-Gumuz region (see *Figure 3*). It shares borders with the zones of Kamashi and Asosa, Amhara region, and with Sudan. The zone comprises of seven districts, namely Dangur, Guba, Womera, Mandura, Dibate, Bullen and Pawe. Geographically, Metekel is a hot and humid area with a high rainfall and is 'surrounded on its northern and eastern rim by spectacular mountains, and its southern by the turbulent Abbay [Blue Nile River], [...] form[ing] a giant circular depression' (Rahmato, 1988:16).

Figure 3: Benishangul-Gumuz region and its three administrative zones (Source: Assaye et al., 2015)



The Benishangul-Gumuz region was ‘formally incorporated into the Ethiopia empire in the late 19th century and [...] has long been a frontier space between more powerful neighbours: the Sudanese to the west, highland Ethiopians to the northeast, Oromos to the south. Its indigenous populations [...] were prey to slave-raiding from all three for centuries and treated as racial inferiors for many years after’ (Gardner, 2021). Though this has been changing during the last three decades, in the Ethiopian regional power struggle and politics, Metekel is considered as a periphery zone — understood as an administrative entity with lower economic and political influence to the political economy of federal government.

Metekel is multi-ethnic. It is inhabited by the indigenous ethnic minority groups of Berta (also known as Benishangul), Gumuz, Shinasha, Mao and Komo, Amhara, Oromo, Tigrigna, as well as other ethnic group resettlers, which include the victims of the 1980s’ famine. According to the 2007 census of the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), the ethnic population breakdown is as follows: Gumuz (36.77%); Shinasha (21.60%); Amhara (17.38%); Agew Awi (11.33%); Oromo (11.09%); Tigray (0.45%); Berta (0.20%), with the remaining 1.18% of the zonal population comprising other ethnic groups (CSA, 2008).⁴ Based on this census, Metekel’s total population was estimated to be about 479,162 in 2020 (CSA, 2008; OCHA, 2021a). The area was endowed with a ‘diverse agro-ecology’ suitable for a ‘mixed crop livestock production

⁴ The ethnic composition of Metekel has been calculated based on the actual CSA 2007 census of a population of 276,367.

system’ (Assaye et al., 2015:104). The majority of the people depend on agriculture (96%) for their subsistence and livelihood, while traditional gold mining and fishing also play an important role. The zone however has a high incidence of malaria as well as of trypanosomiasis — a sleeping sickness caused by an infestation of the tsetse fly —which affected the health security of many resettlers.

4. Resettlement policies and mobilities in Metekel: What history tells us

As history shows, migration has been part of human life throughout centuries while mobility has long been a key feature of people’s livelihoods. However, in the period from the 1960s to the 1980s, the compulsory resettlement of a large part of the population became common in many countries, including Tanzania and Ethiopia in Africa (Scott, 1998; Cernea, 2006), a trend inspired by revolutionary theories, socialist ideals, development-induced interventions, industrialisation, urbanisation, conservation and other socio-economic factors. In this context, Ethiopia has experienced several types of mobilities and resettlements, including emergency and/or forced non-planned resettlements, as well as the planned settlements of 1957-74, 1975-83, 1984-91 and post-1991 (Woube, 1995). For instance, the *Derg*⁵ regime policies were part of the greater socialist ideals of villagisation (*Mender Misreta* in Amharic) and planned resettlement (*Sefera*). These policies were highly criticised by several scholars and practitioners (Woube, 1995; Pankhurst et al., 2013; de Waal, 1991) who assessed them as failed top-down interventions. Furthermore, since the great famine of 1984, the special planned resettlement patterns were replaced by conventional planned resettlement (*Medebegna Sefera*), while the ‘formerly low-cost planned resettlement’ were replaced by ‘integrated resettlement (*Sigsega*) and pastoral resettlement’⁶ (Woube, 1995:95). Such a process was prescriptive from the top, amounting to social engineering in the making (Scott, 1998). The aggressive state-sponsored resettlement schemes were, as Pankhurst (1997) noted, the established political centre’s push to relocate to the peripheries. As an example, the Emergency Phase of Resettlement (1984-86) is described by Pankhurst and Piguet (2004:867) as the most ‘complex, ambitious and draconian measures ever attempted by the Ethiopian state’, since the latter relocated ‘more than half a million people [...] within a year and a half’ (Kassa, 2009:867). The migrant-producing regions in Ethiopia were mainly the northern and the southwestern regions.

During the post-*Derg* period from 2003 until 2010, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)⁷ also set up a ‘renewed state-organised resettlement’ (Pankhurst et

⁵ The Marxist-socialist military government that ruled Ethiopia after disposing Emperor Haile Selassie from 1974-91 – the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Policy and Territorial Army.

⁶ *Medegegna Sefera* refers to moving people to planned settlement sites (like highland resettlers to the Metekel area); *Sigsega* refers to collective agricultural or state farm schemes and pastoral resettlement includes moving pastoral communities (see Woube, 1995).

⁷ EPRDF was a coalition party that was succeeded by the Prosperity Party (PP) in 2019 (withdrawing the Tigray People’s Liberation Front [TPLF] from its coalition).

al., 2013:226), resettling over 230,000 households. The programme reached a peak in 2004 but then ‘declined substantially from 2006’ onwards (Ibid:251). In its two resettlement rounds, more than 1.2 million people were thus resettled (Cernea, 2009; Hammond, 2008). However, despite attempts at learning from past failures, the recent resettlements have demonstrated ‘the strong continuity of top-down, distant, elitist and exclusionary decision making’ (Vaughan and Mesfin, 2020:7; Hammond, 2008). This case study focuses substantially on the 1980s resettlements.

4.1 Why was large-scale resettlement needed?

As experience has shown, Ethiopia’s policies of large-scale resettlement and population mobility over the past decades were a state response deployed as the ‘quickest’, ‘cheapest and viable’ (Abbute, 2003), as well as ‘radical’ and ‘durable’ (Pankhurst et al., 2013:243-5) solution. These were intended as a panacea for the many socio-economic and environmental ills of the rural communities. As a political decision, resettlement has been consistently promoted. Millions of people have thus been moved to reduce the impact of the shortage of land, food insecurity, famine and environmental disaster (Planel, 2007; Hammond, 2008; Pankhurst et al., 2013). For instance, Woube notes that the long-term environmental degradation and ecological imbalances that existed in the places of origin and which triggered the 1980s resettlement schemes, were caused by the compounded effects of ‘poor settlement patterns, lack of land-use planning and appropriate technology, and animal and livestock population pressure in limited areas’ (1995:98). These forces made the farmers more vulnerable to natural risks (climate oscillations – i.e erratic and unpredictable rainfall, and declining soil fertility), leading to household food insecurity, famine and internal displacement (Tafesse, 2009). Therefore, the move of a large number of people from the highlands to a fertile, productive and less populous land was a ‘dual strategy’ (Pankhurst and Piguet, 2004:871), believed to effectively utilise the lowland resources while improving the food self-sufficiency and welfare of resettlers.

The Ethiopian farmers in the long-inhabited highlands were forced to resort to coping strategies in response to natural and human-made disasters as well as high population density. As such, they made changes to their diets and explored alternative sources of income at their localities or nearby towns and exhausted their extended family support (Tsegay, 2017). Unable to cope with informal safety net assistance and with the intensification of the interventions by external actors, among others, the government’s large-scale resettlement programmes seemed inevitable. However, beyond its economic value, village land in the highlands of Ethiopia also constitutes part of the community’s social fabric, representing identity, lineage, livelihoods and power. Hence, delinking farmers from their ancestral land should only be ‘a last resort’ (Tafesse, 2009:851; Adhana, 1991; Pankhurst et al., 2013).

In the context of the national dual strategy, the planned resettlement of 1984 was established to achieve the following key objectives (Woube, 1995): a) resettle 1.5 million rural dwellers

affected by drought, famine and war conditions in the northern of Ethiopia as well as densely populated areas of its southern regions;⁸ b) make use of the land and water resources for development purposes; c) achieve self-sufficiency with respect to food and income-generating activities over a three-year period; and d) introduce physical and social infrastructure in the resettlement areas. However, the planned resettlement was overshadowed by the devastating famine of 1984 that affected some 10 million peasants, killed 1.2 million people, caused the internal displacement of another 2.5 million, and created 400,000 refugees (Rahmato, 1988; Giorgis, 1989; de Waal, 1991; Gill, 2010). Consequently, in Metekel, a swift replacement of the planned resettlement by the emergency resettlement (Rahmato, 1988) led to a reactive, quick and ad hoc policy response to the famine crisis, rather than a solid long-term and focused developmental intervention for the resettlers and hosting communities.

Furthermore, the identification and delimitation of land for resettlement in Metekel was done hastily. The ‘highly unsuitable’ site was ‘picked by President Mengistu during a helicopter tour’ and ‘[m]ost sites were chosen within three weeks of the launch of the program[me]’ (de Waal, 1991:220). One of the resettlement lands suggested by the identifying teams was Metekel’s 174,000 hectares of land — known as the Pawie catchment area — selected for being ‘suitable for resettlement and traditional farming’ (Rahmato, 1988:17). A total of 73,000 hectares were thus cleared for cultivation and mechanised state farms (Vaughan and Mesfin, 2020). Indeed, the plan was for Metekel to receive 250,000 people, a figure corresponding to ‘more than the entire population of the Awraja [province]’ (Rahmato, 1988:17), but which failed to take into consideration the ‘reasonable and acceptable settler-host ratio’ (Gebre, 2004b). Out of the 600,000 people ultimately resettled during the period from 1984 to 1986, ‘over 82,000 people moved to Metekel’, where the total population of ‘the Gumuz was estimated at 72,000’ (Agneta et al., 1993).

In Metekel, defining land as unused was prone to misconceptions. For instance, the Pawie resettlement was the common land of the Begga of Mandura and of Mambouk, and according to the community members, ‘there [was] very little unused land’ (Rahmato, 1988:25; see also Vaughan and Mesfin, 2020). Hence, the very definition of a common resource was the subject of strongly differing views between the elites and the indigenous communities in Metekel, ultimately leading to the disposition of the common land of the indigenous shifting cultivators and gatherers. For instance, as Gebre’s account shows, ‘the residents of Manjeri village were forced to surrender their farmland, hunting/gathering grounds and fishing sites to the resettlement authorities. Furthermore, many families who used to live on the banks of the Beles and Little Beles Rivers were forcefully displaced and had to find other lands for their agricultural

⁸ Throughout the three phases of the resettlement plan (November 1984-May 1985; October 1985-January 1986; and November 1987-March 1988), despite the initial plan to move 1.5 million people, an actual number of 600,000 were resettled, which still represents a large part of the population (de Waal, 1991:211).

activities’ (2004b). Such encroachment followed by dislocation made many families from the hosting communities food insecure.

As Abbute (2003) underscored, the resettlement target group was composed of ‘healthy, young adults, and peasant farmers capable of producing enough (if possible, a surplus) by enduring the inevitable initial hardships in the new sites’. However, many scholars agree on the ‘pretence of voluntarism’ (Henze, 2000:309), as the government’s drastic technique consisted in ‘announc[ing] a time and place for food distribution and then ship[ping] off the crowd that assembled’ (Scott, 1998:412), or in ‘surrounding busy market places and loading people onto trucks’ (Henze, 2000:309). De Waal (1991:227) therefore estimated that such an abusive process might have killed a minimum of 50,000 people.⁹ Indeed, Henze describes the resettlement programme interventions as ‘[i]nhumane and economically wasteful’ as well as ‘an unsuccessful experiment’ (2000:309). One of the deserters from the 1984-86 resettlement scheme describes the horrific situation in the following terms:

We come from Gojjam Metekel resettlement area. We were forced by the *Dergue* from Korem to go there last year. When we went to collect ration cards off the Red Cross we were forced into armed trucks by the military and sent to Metekel.... Many people were killed by gun shots when we were forced away. Ten people died by jumping off the truck. 30 more people were wounded. I personally saw 20 people die. (Testimonial of a returned resettler to Tigray, de Waal, 1991:219)

The peasants’ resettlement process usually involved access to the land first, albeit predominantly through the male household heads. It was then followed by clearing forest areas to turn them into farming plots and finally, once settled, peasants would be able to bring over the their remaining family members. The resettlement programme was directed and coordinated by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) and delivered in collaboration with various national and local government offices as well as development partners, mainly with the technical and financial support of the Italian government.

Such policy measures changed the pre-resettlement demographic composition and local socio-economic situation of the Metekel zone, as argued by Rahmato:

Neither in ecological terms nor in sociological is Mettekel part of Gojjam.¹⁰ The region, always a periphery of the Ethiopian highlands, was joined to the province mainly for administrative convenience. Despite that, however, it continued to retain its own identity, and peripheral status, chiefly because of the inhospitable nature of the environment, and

⁹ de Waal (1991:225) refers to the RRC report of 110 death rates per thousand during the first year of the resettlement in Metekel (based on this data, there could be about 9,020 deaths related to the resettlement).

¹⁰ Historically, this shows the regional configuration of Ethiopia before 1992 – next to the state, there was a province and then *awrajas*.

the absence of basic infrastructure. This was true until 1984, when famine, war and pestilence played havoc with the highlands themselves, and thousands of destitute peasant[s] - survivors of the worst rural tragedy in Ethiopian history - had to be hastily relocated in the awraja [province]. For good or for bad, Metekel will never be the same again. (Rahmato, 1988:16)

The adverse effects of the resettlement were indeed multiple, affecting livelihood dynamics as well as the political administration and resource governance of Metekel, including its demographic composition, the population density, but also the state of inter-ethnic relationships and social cohesion. For instance, historical and thus pre-existing inferiority- superiority perceptions between host and resettlers resurfaced with regards to local land and resource governance practices, causing a deleterious dynamic of power struggles between both groups.

Furthermore, the resilience of Metekel residents has been challenged. Their vulnerability to shocks has been increased due to multiple factors, such as demographic pressure, partly caused by the presence of refugees from Sudan and South Sudan,¹¹ climate change, land degradation as well as instabilities in Sudan and South Sudan (EUTF-REF, 2016). Gebre (2004a) asserts that the programme was ‘tremendously painful’ to the Gumuz communities. In particular, the shifting cultivation/agriculture undertaken by indigenous peoples, which is carried out by shifting or slash and burn farming, was being challenged. As a result, the local food production system was affected.

Shifting agriculture, which was practiced in the region, is particularly threatened by agricultural investment, infrastructure projects, expansion of sugar plantations, land individualization and migration of large number of highland farmers to the region for spontaneous settlement or to farm land by entering into share-cropping arrangements and by renting land. (EUTF-REF, 2016:33-34)

In Metekel, the socio-cultural differences of the multi-ethnic groups brought challenges that deterred the integration process. In this regard, Young for instance notes that, ‘little scope [...] for the integration of the various ethnic groups, beyond the selective incorporation of individuals who accepted assimilations into the Amhara culture and society’ (1996:533). The Amhara hegemony has been repetitively perceived as a dominant narrative in the Ethiopian polity, which has been affecting the Amharas’ relationship with other ethnic groups of the country – and this has not differed in Metekel.

¹¹ In 2009, BSG had hosted around 63,000 refugees of Sudan and South Sudan (Vaughan et al., 2020).

4.2 The dysfunctional nature of the resettlement and challenges faced

According to Gebre (2004a), the resettlement programmes in Ethiopia lacked a ‘clear conception, a feasibility study, proper planning, adequate physical preparation and responsible management’. As a consequence, they negatively affected the peaceful coexistence of the host and resettlers, bringing about intercommunal conflict and mismanagement of environmental resources, best exemplified by the worsening of soil fertility and deforestation (Abbute, 2003; see Gebre, 2004a; Pankhurst et al., 2013). Indeed, the post-settlement brought both immediate and long-term challenges. For instance, as predicted by Rahmato, the relationship between the natives and the resettler population had started to ‘increasingly deteriorate as more and more resources claimed by the latter to be theirs by long tradition fall to the resettlement programme’ (1988:32). As the report by Rahmato further shows, the native people had started firing on non-native residents as they were feeling encroached by an ‘alien population’ (Ibid). In fact, three decades later, in the period 2018 to 2021, a conflict escalated and a massacre occurred in the Metekel (Pawe) resettlements that had been set up in the 1980s. This only demonstrated the failure of long-term peace and reconciliation approaches to deal with the long-awaited potential conflicts.

A summary of the main challenges of the resettlement programmes of the 1980s is presented below:

- a. The resettlement programmes lacked a ‘serious scientific and agronomic investigation’ (Rahmato, 1988:17), ‘hydrological surveys’ (de Waal, 1991:220), were ‘hurriedly designed and executed’ with ‘improper allocation of resources, poor administrative systems’ (Woube, 1995:100; see also Gebre, 2004b).
- b. The planned and emergency resettlement process was not inclusive and the government ignored the voices of the host communities (indigenous shifting cultivators/hunters/gatherers) which later became the main cause of resistance among the natives and deterioration of a peaceful coexistence (Rahmato, 1988; Kloos and Adugna, 1989; Gebre, 2004b).
- c. The resettlement’s potential negative impact on the land resource and environment was undermined, including ignoring the indigenous local resource governance, which risked environmental degradation, conflict and poverty (Woube, 1995). Environmental protection was not prioritised – displacing the problems at origin into the place of destination.
- d. Beyond the geographic relocation, delinking and uprooting the resettlers from their ancestral land, identity, livelihoods and cultural landscape is a social dislocation. They lost social and cultural networks of mutual support and cooperation developed over

centuries at origins, thus making it a socially disruptive process (Tareke, 2009; Cernea, 2006).

- e. Within weeks of the programme delivery, some resettlers deserted back to their homes due to ‘disillusionment’ and a clash between expectations and reality (Abbute, 2003; see de Waal, 1991). This is clearly a consequence of forceful displacement and lack of access to fair and adequate information that contributed to developing expectations among the resettlers that ultimately were not fulfilled.

To summarise, the dysfunctional nature of the resettlement programme constituted an immense socio-economic, environmental and political threat to both resettlers and host communities. The situational analysis of the Metekel zone which follows therefore sets out the nature, magnitude and scale of the challenge posed to the target communities.

5. Situational review: Conflict, displacements and responses in Metekel

5.1 The state of peace and security, human protection and new re-displacements

The involuntary resettlement in Metekel failed to meet the fundamental principles of resettlements, as the aforementioned facts demonstrated (see also the Operational Manual of the World Bank, 2013). The unfolding situation of internal displacement in Metekel include inter-communal conflicts and retaliatory killings between ethnic Gumuz, Amhara and other resettlers, as well as attacks by unidentified armed groups (UAGs), resource-based conflicts and lack of a consistent long-term efforts to peacebuilding (see Birhanu, 2020; Gerth-Niculescu, 2021; Mekonnen and Fasil, 2020). In Metekel, it seems as though history is going backwards. Indeed, the link between history, resource governance and the prevailing state of peace and security, as well as forced displacements in the Metekel zone, was summarised by Human Rights Watch (2020) as follows:

Longstanding grievances over access to land and complex questions of identity and demarcation of internal borders on occasion led to abuses, including open conflict between ethnic groups, killings, and large-scale internal displacement.

Beyond the impacts of the historical resettlement and with the promotion of ethno-federalism in Ethiopia, the Benishangul-Gumuz region ratified a Constitution in 2002. The latter notably provided natural rights of ownership and governance to the indigenous Gumuz, Berta, Komo, Mao and Shinasha and allowed the resettlers to live in the region. It however failed to grant them ownership or ‘full local citizenship rights’ (Gerth-Niculescu, 2021; see Gardner, 2021). Indeed, six of the seven districts of Metekel are controlled by the Gumuz and Shinasha, whereas the resettlers are not eligible to run for local leadership or representation (Etefa, 2021). This has been

aggravated by the native people's perception of the resettlers' claim for land ownership, or at the very least, of getting more governing power, as witnessed by a public servant informant (Interviewee 4, Appendix A):

The Gumuz people accuse the Amhara and other resettling migrants for establishing land claim and destroying the forests, intruding the cultural landscape, getting illegal firearms, cattle raiding and demanding to have their own representation or zonal administrative rather than under the Metekel zone.

In Metekel, since the 1950s-60s, there has been continued resistance by the native people against the highland resettlers of Ethiopia. This notably caused two major conflicts between the resettlers and the Gumuz, respectively in 1991 and 1993, both leading to displacement (Gebre, 2004b). Indeed, as the case of Metekel shows, 'low-intensity violence is less the exception than the norm' (Gardner, 2021). However, the Metekel security situation had started to deteriorate from 2018 onwards. It significantly escalated in 2020, and the calamity on both resettlers and hosting communities has since continued to increase. It goes on unabated at the time of writing of this paper, in the last quarter of 2021. Metekel has therefore become one of the most violent zones in Ethiopia, with heightened ethnic polarisation. Brutal, repetitive attacks on non-Gumuz inhabitants, including the Amhara and Agaw in Western Ethiopia, reached a peak in 2020 with the killing of hundreds of people thrown into mass graves. Outbreaks of violence have usually started with disputes between farmers or labourers or by organised groups and have then led to mass killings as well as the torching of houses and looting of assets.

For instance, as clearly stated in the 2021 OCHA *Flash Update* report on Metekel Zone, on 23 December 2020, 'at least 207 people were reportedly killed by UAGs in one day' in Bakuji Bulen district (2021a:1). Furthermore, between September 2020 and January 2021, an 'estimated 500 people lost their lives [...] [m]ore than 4,400 houses have been burned in three woredas [districts]' (Ibid). Most of the victims of the Gumuz attacks were from Shinasha ethnic groups (Birhanu, 2020). They were torched while sleeping or stabbed. In response to the attack, the national defence force killed '42 anti-peace elements' and arrested seven officials who allegedly collaborated in orchestrating the massacre in Metekel zone, as reported by Fana Broadcasting Corporation (2020).

The following three statements partly describe the state of violence and its adverse impacts on the Metekel communities, detailing the nature and magnitude of the inter-ethnic clashes, as well as the motivations of the attackers.

Dozens of civilians were shot dead in ethnic clashes in Ethiopia's northern Amhara state, ... [a] as retaliation for earlier violence. [...] more than 80 people were injured in the assault on the Gumuz ethnicity in the state, and 90 others had taken shelter in a local

school [...] the attacks appeared to be retribution for the killing of at least 21 people in separate clashes [during the] last weekend [of April 2019] between the Gumuz and Amhara ethnic groups. (Agence France-Presse -AFP, 2019)

In July [2020] unidentified gunmen attacked a village in Guba District, Metekel Zone of Benishangul-Gumuz Region, killing 14 ethnic Amharans [...]. This conflict was followed on August 6, 7, and 13 [2020] by attacks on three different areas in Metekel Zone. The violence included livestock raids, ambushes of travellers on roads, attacks, and robberies of churches, resulting in an estimated 160 deaths. (US Department of State, 2021:28)

[On 9 July 2021] a total of 14 people including a one-year old child were confirmed dead at the [Bullen Primary] hospital. Three of the victims were women while 11 were men [...]; 15 others were admitted to the hospital for injuries. [...] two of the injured who sustained heavy injuries were referred to Pawi hospital but could not be transported due to security concerns. (A medical doctor at Bullen Primary Hospital [Mekonnen, 2021])

Therefore, as a consequence of the political violence, from 2018 until mid-2021, at least 1,052 fatalities were recorded (EPO [Ethiopia Peace Observatory], 2021b). Many reports described the perpetrators of political violence as heavily armed yet undisclosed groups or UAGs who might be linked to the Gumuz Liberation Front, Buadin, and the Gumuz People's Democratic Movement. The armed assailants pejoratively describe the resettlers as '*Qey*' in Amharic, or light-skinned people who include the Amharas and Agaws (Gardner, 2021). The Amhara activists have been campaigning with a hashtag #AmharaGenocide in Metekel (see Mekonnen and Abera, 2020). The massacre triggered a relative increase in media coverage, after the killing of more than 207 women and children in a week, and this forced the government to declare a 'state of emergency' in the Metekel zone at the beginning of 2021 (see *Section 6.1* for details). As reported in the 2021 OCHA *Flash Update* report, '[s]ince mid-2020 [until early January 2021], 180,000 civilians have been displaced within Metekel and in Amhara' (OCHA, 2021a:1). Both the intra-community violence and the premeditated attacks aimed at triggering ethnic conflict have brought a new wave of displacements. In this regard, while it is common to see the Amhara and other resettlers displaced within the Metekel zone or the Amhara region, the Gumuz largely tend to cross the Ethio-Sudanese border, effectively becoming refugees in the Blue Nile Province of Sudan (OCHA, 2021a).

From the total of more than 538,000 people displaced in BGR, about 384,490 (71 per cent) are residing within Metekel, [that is] (270,684), Kamashi (95,989) and Assosa (17,817) zones. The remaining 148,000 are displaced to the neighbouring Awi (77,543) and Wellega (69,469) zones. (OCHA, 2021c)

Since July 2020, attacks by UAGs have cumulatively displaced 150,000 people in Bullen, Dangur, Dibate, Guba, Mandura and Wombera woredas, representing over 30 per cent of the total population of Metekel Zone, which was about 479,162 people. (OCHA, 2021a:1)

During 2020-21, inter-communal violence took place in Wenbera woreda and Gilgel Beles town, but violence also spread to Manbuk town in Dangura and Mandura woredas as well as in Jawi woreda, Awi zone. Furthermore, retaliatory violence against the ethnic Gumuz took place in March 2020, such that the latter subsequently fired at the homes of the Amhara, Oromo and Shinasha, stabbing and shooting them (AFP, 2020).

The persistent violence and attacks on the internally displaced people in Metekel violate the fundamental right for life, as stipulated by Article 14 of the Ethiopian Constitution of 1994, that promotes ‘the inalienable and inviolable right to life, the security of person and liberty’ (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia [FDRE], 1995). Depriving the right to life and security is unlawful. However, as per an interview conducted with a local expert (Interviewee 1, Appendix A), IDPs are facing discrimination and obstacles in enjoying their basic human rights in Metekel. Such insecurity of life in Ethiopia has been increasing given the sporadic clashes and riots occurring in the country, particularly over the last eight years. In such humanitarian crises, UN Ethiopia (2020) reported that ‘[w]omen and girls suffer disproportionately [...], as existing inequalities are magnified, and social networks break down, making them more vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation’.

To sum up, the Metekel case has been one of the most neglected situation of forced displacement. The conflict attracted relatively low media coverage, especially in comparison to the Tigray conflict as well as to the violence and displacement in the Oromia region. Compounded by multiple escalating factors, the violent situation in Metekel has been aggravated periodically, as discussed in the next section.

5.2 Factors that escalated the conflict and increased the scale of re-displacement

The re-displacement of the displaced people in the Metekel zone caused several aggravating factors that contributed to an escalation of the state of insecurity, further exacerbating the calamity of forced internal displacement and lost livelihoods’. These include the federal governability arrangement, local natural resources governance, the flagship hydropower mega-project, and the vested interests of local and regional actors.

5.2.1 Ethno-federalism and governance system

Ethiopia promotes an ethno-federal constitutional system, which means that the country's regional structure primarily depends on the ethnic identity of the groups in configuring its regional territories. This was believed to be partly an 'answer to the [centuries long] problem of state centralism and Amhara domination' (Young, 1996:538). Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, created in 1992, was an outcome of this political arrangement which enabled the Gumuz and other minority groups to claim a regional state status in Ethiopia. This seemed to give more relative power and autonomy to the minority groups. However, on the flip side, the Amhara resettlers, and particularly the Amhara nationalists, have been contesting this decision and want to reclaim Metekel as part of their regional state. For instance, one of the key political party leaders officially declared that they will not leave any stone unturned in 'bringing Metekel back' to the Amhara region (Birhanu, 2020). Solomon Atanaw, the leader of the Amhara armed group — the *Fano* — said that until Metekel returns to the Amhara regional state, they 'will not lay arms down' (Ezega News, 2020). As the interviewed key informant from the Metekel district said (Interviewee 7, Appendix A), this has created a dilemma with the region's autonomy as there have been a large number of conflicting claims and stakes. In Metekel, the Amhara leaders and resettled tend to influence the governance system, since their claim emanates from the pre-1991 administrative system, at a time when the Gumuz was part of Gojjam province and predominantly controlled by the Amharas.¹² These claims and tensions have been brewing for years and would thus be sensitive to any triggering factors. According to a key informant, the governance system has been in a constant quest to identify who would leverage more control in power and authority to govern in Metekel zone (Interviewee 3, Appendix A). In general, the politicisation of ethnicity has dominated Ethiopia's polity and has been consistently used to instigate conflict and cultivate hatred and antagonistic views.

Ethno-federalism and its historical legacy have brought their own challenges to the internal displacement regime in Ethiopia. Indeed, far from observing an increase in diversity and the promotion of a peaceful co-existence in the country, affiliation to ethnic identity and a general inclination towards ethnic-based hatred have gained momentum (Young, 1996). The instigated violence can be seen within the context of this wider ethno-federalism and governance agenda which has negatively affected thousands of resettlers in the Metekel zone. In-fighting by local elites, politicisation of ethnicity, as well as the ambition of Amharas and resettlers to influence the politics of the zone have exacerbated the violence. The host community elites complain about the resettlers' derogatory attitude towards them, which finds its roots in the 'brutal history of slaving, exploitation and marginalisation' (Vaughan and Mesfin, 2020:7), 'appropriation of property, and violence' as well as 'discrimination and subjugation' by the Amhara, Agaw and other resettlers (Gebre, 2004b). In general, the historical relationship between these two groups is

¹² After 1995, the Metekel zone was formed taking the largest part of western Gojjam (of the former administrative area). The rest part of Gojjam became part of the Amhara region.

marked by ‘conflict and distrust’ (Ibid). As a consequence, the resettlers were excluded by the natives from local governance of Metekel within the federal system. According to the district officer (Interviewee 5, Appendix A), a key informant, there is a tendency of ‘them and us’ or ‘you do not belong here’, which has been the cause of deep controversy.

The ethnicisation of politics within the federal system, compounded with history, power struggles and economic interests, have continued to be a ‘vector of controversy and tension’ (Vaughan and Mesfin, 2020:8), violence and new displacements in Metekel. There are also demographic and socio-economic differences. The Amhara have for instance become one of the largest groups in the BGR demonstrating ‘disproportionate economic power and influence’ (Gardner, 2021), with a ‘considerable economic and political clout’ (Gerth-Niculescu, 2021). On the other hand, the federal system, beyond formal political power, has not brought considerable ‘economic advancement or local service delivery’ among the indigenous groups (Vaughan and Mesfin, 2020:8). As a consequence, the resettlers have been consistently given orders to leave the zone, failing what ‘they would be killed for not respecting orders’ (Gardner, 2021). Indeed, any durable solution for the decades-long tension and mistrust should reflect the socio-cultural perspectives and power relations among the local actors within the federal system.

5.2.2 Deteriorating land and land-based resources

Resource-based conflicts have been very common in Ethiopia, especially between farmers and those who practice pastoralism. However, the promotion of resettlement schemes by politicians in ‘unused land’, ‘no-man’s land’ or ‘free land’ since the 1950s has proven to be a wrong policy intervention (Vaughan and Mesfin, 2020:8). Indeed, as previously mentioned, the land designated for resettlement was commonly used for shifting cultivation, grazing, and hunting and gathering-based livelihoods – leading to land dispositions. Hence, the selection of Metekel as a resettlement area was a result of the elites’ misconceived political decisions. In turn, as predicated by several authors such as Rahmato (1988), deteriorating natural resources have been a major cause for conflict between the natives and resettled. As confirmed by a key informant, the Gumuz community members complain that the resettlers, whose population size has increased in the zone, have destroyed their local ecological resources, including soil fertility, trees and forest-based foods, thereby causing environmental degradation of the zone, far beyond the carrying capacity of local resources (Interviewee 5, Appendix A). Furthermore, in addition to the previous resettlement interventions, the recent large-scale land acquisition and land-grabbing undertaken by large corporations in the Metekel area with the complaisance of political leaders, has also worsened the situation (Moreda, 2012; Vaughan and Mesfin, 2020). Hence, alternative livelihood sources, or a durable local economy that ensures sustainable ecology and improved livelihoods, should be part and parcel of future programmes, so as to avert the long-term impact of environmental degradation in resettlement areas.

5.2.3 The GERD: The multiplicity of actors, their interests and influences

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)¹³ is the Blue Nile River or *Abay*-based hydropower dam located in Guba district in the Metekel zone, only about 30 kilometres upstream of the border with Sudan, and which has been under construction since 2011. The geopolitical stakes and controversy over the GERD — primarily involving Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt — have also had an impact on local peace and security in the Metekel zone, now of strategical importance. Indeed, the GERD has the capacity of generating 6,450 megawatts per year of electricity. Hence, by exploiting the potential of the hydropower dam, Ethiopia aims to become a regional hydropower hub in East Africa, notably by exporting clean energy to Djibouti, Kenya, Sudan and other African countries. However, both Sudan and Egypt have been expressing serious concerns about Ethiopia's bold decision to construct the largest dam in Africa, claiming that downstream water supply would negatively affect the livelihoods of millions of people. The three countries have been on a knife edge, oscillating between cooperation and confrontation over the dam. After years of negotiation, no agreement has yet been reached.

The internationalisation of local conflicts seems evident and given such vested political interests, Ethiopia blames Egypt and Sudan for equipping and sponsoring the Gumuz armed forces in the Metekel area, thereby contributing to mass killings, as well as to the forced displacement of thousands of people. Both countries are indeed being accused of inflaming ethnopolitics to disrupt the advancement of the GERD. For instance, the Benishangul Gumuz regional state's Police deputy commissioner, Commander Nega Jarra, stated that “‘counteragents of peace’” have connections with foreign agents and are recruiting young people for membership’ (Gerth-Niculescu, 2021). Similarly, the following statement by Egypt's leader, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, certainly does not help halting insurgencies in Ethiopia: ‘I am telling our brothers in Ethiopia, let's not reach the point where you touch a drop of Egypt's water, because all options are open’ (Al-Jazeera, 2021). Sudan already has a border dispute with Ethiopia as the latter blamed the former for having occupied vast agricultural land of the Al-Fashqa, just a few days after the eruption of the Tigray conflict at the beginning of November 2020. Before this occupation in October 2020, Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, declared that ‘the attackers were trained and armed in neighbouring eastern Sudan’ (Fisayo-Bambi, 2020).

The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) —which used to be the leading political party during 28 years of what is now a partly dissolved coalition government, and which has also been fighting against the Addis Ababa government — is also allegedly equipping and financing anti-government groups against the non-Gumuz settlers in the Metekel area, thereby inflaming an already volatile situation (Mekonnen and Fasil, 2020; Gardner, 2021). The regional and international actors claim that attempts to influence the ethnopolitics and armed forces in Metekel overshadow the violence and new displacements in the zone. To conclude, multiple

¹³ The GERD itself has displaced around 20,000 people (Vaughan and Mesfin, 2020).

factors exacerbate Metekel's already polarised socio-economic fabric and political crises, which include inter alia, the ethnopolitics arising from the ethno-federal arrangement, historical mistrust and ethno-cultural perspectives, deteriorating local resources and the interplay of multiple regional and international actors. The next question should thus ask how effective has the government's response been to the unprecedented crises. The following section therefore examines the state's response to the political crises, humanitarian protection and the increasing re-displacements in the Metekel zone.

6. State responses: Lacking a pro-active policy and its impact

The hastily ad hoc response to the violence and re-displacement has been common, as Ethiopia has lacked a multi-sectoral and comprehensive internal displacement and mitigation policy (see Pankhurst et al., 2013). However, in February 2020, it ratified the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Africa (the Kampala Convention), just a decade after its adoption. This was seen by the UNHCR as an encouraging and positive move. Leveraging this, Ethiopia has recognised the electoral rights of the IDPs by issuing Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2019, which enabled the establishment of special polling stations for IDPs (Ashine and Enigbokan, 2021). However, on the ground in Metekel, the state response was not proactive and its intervention in ensuring the rule of law and protecting the settlers was slow, as highlighted by the 2020 Ethiopian Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) report. A few of the peace-building, state of emergency and humanitarian assistance interventions, as well as the return of IDPs, are discussed below.

6.1 State of emergency, formation of a command post and the militia

Following the failure of the governing structures to hold control of the UAGs and the resulting state of violence in Metekel, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed visited Metekel town on 22 December 2020 to discuss with the regional officials how to resolve 'the repeated violence targeting' of the resettlers (Amnesty International, 2020). However, on the day following the Prime Minister's visit, more than 100 civilians were killed in Bullen district. As confirmed by various reports, before violence escalated, persistent calls were being made by the EHRC to protect the civilians from 'repeated attacks with unmitigated cruelty [...] [as well as] to enforce the rule of law and bring perpetrators to account' (EHRC, 2020). Such calls and the escalation of violence ultimately triggered a change in the state policy agenda in Metekel.

The unprecedented ethno-political and humanitarian crises in Metekel forced the government to declare a state of emergency on 21 January 2021 as well as to strengthen the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF)-led command post. The latter was established with the aim of restoring law and order, ending the cycle of violence, ensuring the supply of relief assistance and facilitating the return of IDPs in the zone. To this end, it was further capacitated by the special

forces of Amhara, Sidama, Gambela, and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ (SNNP) regional states in the third quarter of 2021, which imposed a curfew and restrictions on carrying all types of arms in the zone (see Mekonnen, 2021).

The federal government also formed a new 9,000-member strong multi-ethnic self-defence militia¹⁴ ‘to restore confidence’ among the displaced resettlers (Gerth-Niculescu, 2021). However, there were concerns that this revenge could further exacerbate the conflict and displacements, failing to secure a lasting peace in the zone. Despite the formation of the militia, the displaced people did not have the confidence to return to their place of origin, such that the military intervention only brought a ‘little success’ (EPO, 2021b).

While the greater presence of federal security forces and the installation of the command post would generally contribute to reducing the vulnerability of the population, the attacks on civilians in Metekel have persisted (Fuller, 2020). Alongside the military intervention, reconciliation should therefore be given priority.

6.2 Bringing peace and reconciliation

Following the massacre and re-displacement of civilians, the federal leaders undertook some peace-building measures. Indeed, the federal government has engaged in reconciliation processes in the BGR, but has ‘failed to curb months of ethnic conflict that has claimed hundreds of lives and left more than 100,000 people displaced’ (Gerth-Niculescu, 2021). Peace forums involving elders and religious leaders were established to narrow the divisions, and peace agreements were signed with some armed groups. These initiatives have however not substantially improved peace and security in Metekel.

In May 2021, an agreement was signed between representatives of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional government and members of an armed group [the Gumuz People Democratic Movement] who are undergoing reintegration training in the region. However, other armed groups, including the Gumuz Liberation Front, were not included in this peace agreement and training (EPO, 2021c).

Moreover, besides concerns about the inclusiveness of the peace agreements, there have been doubts about the effectiveness of the trainings provided by the command post. Indeed, these do not ‘appear to be having the desired effect’, as those who graduated from the training were found to be involved in ‘the attacks on civilians that occurred during August of 2021’ (EPO, 2021c). Based on the aforementioned EPO report as well as interviews conducted with key informants (Interviewees 2 and 8, Appendix A), it was therefore observed that the training can only be

¹⁴ This figure is from February 2021.

effective if complemented with adequate economic packages, post-training monitoring mechanisms, and initiatives that strengthen socio-cultural relations. Furthermore, the government provided ‘land and political positions’ to members of the armed groups who attended the rehabilitation training (Ibid). However, such incentives along with the trainings cannot ensure peace and security in Metekel.

Indeed, despite these reconciliation and rehabilitation efforts, the attacks were not halted and the deep resentment not reduced. A rapid review on the peace and reconciliation processes, inclusiveness and complementary livelihoods packages by the federal government as well as development partners is therefore urgently required.

6.3 Humanitarian assistance

As the attacks and violence intensified in Metekel, the livelihoods of the re-displaced were adversely affected, especially considering that some of the attacks occurred during the farming and harvesting season. To support the humanitarian assistance, the federal government has formed the Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) in the zone and humanitarian assistance personnel have been escorted by the military. Schools and meeting halls and temporary tents were being used to host the IDPs, but some were forced to hide in the forests or live in the open fields. Describing the risk of destitution, a displaced farmer from Metekel said, ‘Our worst fear now is that if the harvest is not collected on time, those of us who survived from these attacks might die from hunger’ (Mekonnen and Abera, 2020). Humanitarian assistance has therefore been necessary for the survival of the re-displaced people of Metekel.

However, providing this assistance and conducting relief operations has been difficult due to the ongoing ethnic and resources-based violence that cause security concerns. This was compounded by the government’s ‘limited life-saving assistance [delivered] since July 2020 [until January 2021] using armed escorts’ (OCHA, 2021a:1; 2020b). Describing the dire situation of the Metekel IDPs in Awi zone, Amhara region, the 2021 OCHA *Flash Update* report states that ‘food aid [was] distributed to IDPs for the first time in nine months’ (OCHA, 2020a:1). Additionally, it notes that there were significant gaps in delivering non-food assistance, including social services, shelter and sexual and gender-based violence support. Furthermore, assessing the situation, the United Nations also reported that it was unable to access the Metekel zone during the last half of 2020, since COVID-19 posed ‘an additional layer of complexity to relief operations’ (OCHA, 2021b:34).

6.4 The efforts of returning the re-displaced

Returning the re-displaced has been the key government response to the internal displacement crises. In coordinating the humanitarian response, the government formed the IDP Technical

Committee in Awi zone, but the return projects reveal ‘the lack of consultation and preparatory work in areas of return’, as well as the ‘concern about the voluntariness of returns’ (OCHA, 2020b:4). However, some of the re-displaced still feel existentially threatened and tend not to return, as explained by one of them in Chagni, ‘[t]he neighbours who were eating and drinking with us started to slaughter us’ and ‘[l]iving with them is not safe anymore’ (Gerth-Niculescu, 2021). Such inter-ethnic mistrust is still prevailing in Metekel and after the massacres and retaliations, healing and reconciliation may take some time.

However, once the peace and security of the Metekel zone was assessed as satisfactory, re-displaced people were assisted to return to the IDP temporary resettlement camps in the zone. For instance, the Benishangul-Gumuz region’s Disaster Risk Management Commission head, Tareqegn Tasisa, reported to the Voice of America (VOA) that more than 50,300 IDPs were returned from the Amhara region (where the federal government closed the IDP camps in Chagni and Awi) to the IDP temporary camps in Metekel zone (with the aim of taking them back to their former resettlement villages) during May-June 2021. Furthermore, in order to avoid any logistical delays caused by the rainy season, they were provided with a three-month's food ration (Melka, 2021). Tareqegn Tasisa further said that in the BGR, there were more than 360,000 IDPs who were getting emergency food assistance. Moreover, one of the key informants stated that ‘the situation is still highly insecure due to the continuous attacks by the UAGs on the resettled people, which forced them to flee again’ (Interviewee 1, Appendix A). The high degree of uncertainty and inter-communal mistrust, along with the lack of coordinated humanitarian response, negatively affected the resettlement of IDPs in the zone.

7. Linking the past to the present: Impacts of long-term resettlement and conflicts

The Metekel case shows to what extent two to three decades-long resettlement policies are becoming the root causes of the ethnic-based clashes and new displacements. It demonstrates a strong correlation between resettlement programmes and conflicts, since resettlement programmes without conflict transformation measures can instigate violence and massacres.

In Metekel, the past is thus dictating the current situation. As discussed above, the resettlement intervention worsened as ethno-federalism brought its own repercussions. An emphasis on ethnic identity is being given priority over peaceful co-existence and a unified national identity.

The recent incidents in Metekel showed us that ethnic groups residing outside of their regions are being labelled and targeted as outsiders and are exposed to violent and brutal attacks and ill-treatment. (Interviewee 6, Appendix A)

As mentioned, the government attempted to address the concerns by establishing a command post and by appointing peace committees in Metekel. However, all of these efforts appear to have failed in bringing about a peaceful coexistence and reconciliation. Therefore, the measures should look at the historical relationships of the concerned ethnic groups, land ownership, inter-ethnic power struggles and centre-periphery relocation.

As regards the national internal mobility of Ethiopia, due to the exponentially economic growth and social protection policies pursued over the last two decades, the country had avoided famine. Nonetheless, recurrent droughts still appear every few years. In addressing the food insecurity, widening employment opportunities and maintaining the economic growth in Ethiopia, the government is establishing industrial parks, and mobility is expected to continue either to these parks or to commercial farming sites. However, as both the analysis of this study and Cernea's (2009) findings have shown, resettlements and development-induced displacement still dominate the internal migration agenda of Ethiopia. Due to the degraded environment and land scarcity, regular or irregular internal migration is indeed inevitable (Tsegay, 2021). Therefore, a comprehensive review of internal displacement and peace and security policies must be jointly conducted by the federal state as well as local and international development actors. Doing so would indeed avoid that Ethiopia derails its agenda of socio-economic transformation.

The Metekel resettlement case shows the complex nature of the legacy of large-scale human mobility, violation of human rights and the lack of humanitarian protection for the resettlers, as well as the dislocation of the natives and resettlement-induced conflicts. Based on the analysis of this study, the following six ideas are being pinpointed to create an inclusive dialogue and political process among the federal and regional authorities, local and non-governmental organisations, command post leaders, local chief leaders and their local committees. It also serves as a roadmap to address the complex issue of resettlement and internal displacement with a view to bringing sustainable peace to the Metekel zone.

- The resettlement scheme must obtain the host communities' consent and its willingness to include long-term inter-communal co-existence and resettlement plans, preceded by an adequate socio-economic, ecological and political governance investigation.
- Previous resettlement policies and practices should be revisited and a comprehensive and rigorous investigation should be carried out on the main drivers of the new re-displacements. An inclusive participatory mechanism should be devised, working closely with the key actors, particularly the communities, to restore peace.
- The local peace committees should be restructured and strengthened so that they have the greatest say in leading the reconciliation processes. Traditional and indigenous conflict resolution strategies, along with the formal state initiatives, should be constituted to

address the complex issues of internal displacement. The short-term and long-term vested interests of all actors should be clearly spelled out.

- The issues of land grabbing, economic power and dominance should be addressed to lessen the incidences of conflict, safeguard the rights of the residents and strengthen the economic interdependence of the resettled and host communities. Resettlement programmes should therefore be retrospectively complemented with options that widen job creation, social welfare and economic opportunities for both natives and resettlers.
- The resettlement intervention should be seen as subset of wider local sustainable development, not as a time-bound programme. It should not be a one-off programme-focused intervention. Rather, it should embrace a living mitigation mechanism that identifies socio-economic inequalities and peace and security deficits, through consultative and constructive engagement.
- To ensure economic resilience and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, rehabilitation support should be provided to the IDPs who are returning back from other parts of the Metekel, BGR and Amhara region, as well as to refugees from Sudan. A response linked to ensuring human rights protection, promoting livelihoods, human capital and the local economy should also include food security, social assistance and job creation.

8. Conclusion

Large-scale resettlement for developmental purposes, underpinned by a dual strategy of alleviating food insecurity and poverty in the place of origin on the one hand, and utilising resources in the destination on the other hand, has been a common policy feature in Ethiopia. There has, however, been a missing link in promoting ill-designed ‘planned’ or emergency resettlement programmes that fail to meet the basic standards of long-term peaceful coexistence between the hosts and resettlers. Hence, lessons learned from the Metekel conflict and the re-displacement of resettlers point that the overriding socio-economic, environmental and political problems at the places of origin should be addressed following a careful process. Doing so would indeed avoid the creation, in the long term, of a lethal weapon at the destination, which could lead to the death and re-displacement of the resettlers as well as retaliatory attacks against the host communities. Metekel’s political security and new displacements remain highly unpredictable; a situation that can potentially worsen, unless the right policy instruments are put in place. The re-displacement pattern can only be averted through a deeper understanding of the wider spectrum of history, experiences and voices of the displaced, as well as through transparency and political will on the part of the policymakers, promoting the restoration of peace and stability while rehabilitating the victims. Confidence-building measures that promote

inclusive and sustainable peace are essential among the actors involved. Conversely, understanding resettlement as a technical solution to famine and underdevelopment is a narrow approach that threatens long-term societal co-existence and undermines the promotion of sustainable development in the host areas.

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Appendix A | Anonymized List of Interviewees

Interviewees	Date of Interview	Place	Field of expertise as indicated by each participants in Metekel, Ethiopia
#1	12/07/2021	Remotely	Local expert (researcher)
#2	15/07/2021	Remotely	NGO staff
#3	22/08/2021	Remotely	Humanitarian assistance staff
#4	04/08/2021	Remotely	Public servant
#5	11/08/2021	Remotely	District officer
#6	12/08/2021	Remotely	NGO staff
#7	16/09/2021	Remotely	Local expert (social services)
#8	20/09/2021	Remotely	NGO staff