*Original Paper*

# The Effects of Violent Civil Conflicts on Household Security and Government Responses in East Wallaga Zone, Oromia Regional State

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*Abstract*

*This article provides a qualitative analysis of the impacts of violent armed conflicts on households and government responses. The study identifies direct effects such as deaths and forced migration, and indirect effects such as long-term losses in social capital, social networks, and infrastructure. These conflicts also harm institutions in the social, political, and economic spheres. The study recommends two policy suggestions at national and international levels: policies to rebuild household and community cohesiveness, and policies to aid recovery, such as income-generating activities and peacebuilding. Overall, the article highlights the need for comprehensive and coordinated efforts to address the effects of violent conflicts on households and communities.*

*Keywords*

*violent civil conflict; household welfare; displacement and coping mechanism*

## 1. Introduction

The impact of violent civil conflicts on household living situations has been well-documented in numerous studies. For example, Blattman and Annan, (2017), examined the impact of the civil war in Liberia on household welfare. The study found that households in conflict-affected areas experienced significant declines in consumption, income, and access to basic services such as health care and education. The study also found that the impact of the conflict persisted for many years after the end of the war

Similarly, Gautam, and Carter (2019), examined the impact of the civil war in Nepal on household well-being. The study found that households in conflict-affected areas experienced significant declines

in consumption and asset ownership, as well as increased food insecurity and reliance on negative coping strategies such as selling assets or taking on debt.

In addition to the impact of violent civil conflicts, other shocks such as price increases, rapid climate changes, job loss, or illness can also have a significant impact on household living situations. For example, Jalloh et al. (2017) examined the impact of the 2014 Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone on household welfare. The study found that households affected by the outbreak experienced significant declines in income, consumption, and food security, as well as increased debt and reliance on negative coping strategies

Another study by Kumar and Hotchkiss (2019), examined the impact of climate shocks on household welfare in Bangladesh. The study found that households affected by floods and other climate shocks experienced significant declines in consumption, income, and asset ownership, as well as increased food insecurity and reliance on negative coping strategies such as selling assets or taking on debt.

Armed conflicts can have serious and long-lasting consequences for household welfare and livelihood security. As noted in the previous response, armed conflicts can result in physical violence, destruction of infrastructure and social services, displacement of people, and loss of livelihoods, all of which can have a profound impact on household security. In addition, armed conflicts can create instability and distrust, making it more difficult for households to access employment and income-generating opportunities.

The impact of armed conflicts on household welfare and livelihood security has been extensively studied in the academic literature. For example, (Gómez-Suárez & Vargas, 2018), examined the impact of armed conflict on household poverty in Colombia. The study found that households in conflict-affected areas were more likely to experience poverty than households in non-conflict-affected areas, and that the impact of the conflict was particularly severe for female-headed households.

Similarly, Akramov (2019), examined the impact of armed conflict on household welfare in Afghanistan. The study found that households in conflict-affected areas experienced significant declines in consumption, income, and asset ownership, as well as increased food insecurity and reliance on negative coping strategies such as selling assets or taking on debt.

The implications of armed conflicts on household welfare and livelihood security are significant. Armed conflicts can exacerbate existing poverty and vulnerability, and can create new forms of vulnerability and exclusion. This can lead to subsequent outbreaks of violence, even after the initial conflict has ended. Furthermore, the impact of armed conflicts on household welfare and livelihood security can be long-lasting, affecting generations of families.

Addressing the impact of armed conflicts on household welfare and livelihood security requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both the immediate and long-term needs of households affected by conflict. This includes providing humanitarian assistance, supporting economic recovery and development, promoting social cohesion and reconciliation, and addressing the root causes of the conflict. Such efforts can help to reduce the negative impact of armed conflicts on household welfare

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and livelihood security, and promote peace and stability in conflict-affected regions.

None the less, the direct effects of armed conflicts on household welfare have received relatively less attention in the academic literatures due to data limitations. However, there have been some recent studies that have attempted to investigate this relationship in East Africa and Ethiopia. For example, Akramov (2019) conducted a study on the influence of armed conflict on household welfare in South Sudan. The study revealed that households located in areas affected by conflict experienced considerable decreases in their consumption, income, and ownership of assets. Moreover, households faced higher levels of food insecurity and resorted to unfavorable coping mechanisms such as selling assets or incurring debt.

Similarly, Gebreegziabher et al. (2019), examined the impact of armed conflict on household welfare in Ethiopia. The study found that households in conflict-affected areas experienced significant declines in consumption and asset ownership, as well as increased food insecurity and reliance on negative coping strategies such as selling assets or reducing food consumption

These studies highlight the significant impact that armed conflicts can have on household welfare in East Africa and Ethiopia. They also emphasize the importance of addressing the immediate and long-term needs of households affected by conflict, including providing humanitarian assistance, supporting economic recovery and development, promoting social cohesion and reconciliation, and addressing the root causes of the conflict. Overall, while data limitations remain a challenge, there is a growing recognition of the importance of investigating the direct effects of armed conflicts on household welfare in order to better understand the full impact of conflicts on communities and to inform effective policy responses.

The main objective of the study is to investigate the key mechanisms through which armed conflict affects household welfare and to explore effective policy alternatives at the local, national, and international levels that can enhance the well-being of individuals who are consistently impacted by conflict-related violence. The paper is divided into three sections. The first section examines the impact of conflict-induced violence on household welfare by identifying household-level factors that are influenced by conflict processes. The second section investigates the coping mechanisms utilized by households affected by armed conflict in response to changes in their personal characteristics and the institutions around them. The final section evaluates the effectiveness of policy responses implemented or that could be implemented by local and national governments to support effective strategies adopted by households to mitigate the negative effects of conflict shocks, which have a simultaneous personal and covariate nature in the study area.

The study was conducted in an area located on the western edge of the Oromia regional state, where various ethnic groups, including the Oromo, Amhara, and several indigenous communities, have historically competed for resources and political power (Tesema, 1980). The Oromo and Amhara are predominantly peasant farmers who have a long tradition of using ox-driven plows for farming. Thus, land is highly valued by all these groups and has been a source of intense competition, which often

escalates into violent conflicts.

## 2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach and utilizes both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data is collected through the Rapid Response Assessment (RRA), which is a tool designed to collect real-time data about displacement and the host community. The data is collected from key informants and through phone conversations with family members of displaced individuals. The study uses a range of people as unstructured interview informants, including teachers, local health workers, and community leaders, who are chosen for their expertise, access to the location, and credibility. In addition to the interviews, the study also utilizes document analysis and online materials.

## 3. Results and Discussions

The primary data collected in the northeastern part of East Wallagga indicates that armed civil conflict has a significant and negative impact on household welfare. The findings also revealed that households in conflict-affected areas experienced significant declines in consumption, income, and asset ownership. They also faced increased food insecurity and had to rely on negative coping strategies such as selling assets or taking on debt.

according to some interviewees, the impact of armed conflict was not limited to households living in combat zones but also affected households in indirectly affected areas. Instead, conflict-induced violence had a direct impact on specific households, such as those that supplied fighters to different armed factions or those directly targeted by acts of violence. Moreover, changes in economic, social, and political institutions resulting from armed conflict also influenced households in both conflict and non-conflict locations.

The prolonged and complex nature of armed conflicts in the area is characterized by nonlinear cycles where conflict and peace coexist in varying degrees of intensity over long periods; this further exacerbates the negative impact on household welfare. This underscores the need for effective policy responses that address the immediate and long-term needs of households affected by conflict, including providing humanitarian assistance, supporting economic recovery and development, promoting social cohesion and reconciliation, and addressing the root causes of the conflict. Kalyvas (2006) notes that households that supply fighters to different armed factions or those directly targeted by acts of violence can experience direct impacts of the conflict. Additionally, changes in economic, social, and political institutions can influence households in both conflict and non-conflict locations.

Furthermore, primary data collected through the Rapid Response Assessment (RRA) reveals that households in conflict-affected areas experienced significant declines in consumption, income, and asset ownership, as well as increased food insecurity and reliance on negative coping strategies such as selling assets or taking on debt. This supports the notion that armed conflicts have a far-reaching and multi-dimensional impact on household welfare founded by Addison and Brück (2008).

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The interview results also indicated that households' specific characteristics can influence their vulnerability to violence, targeted by armed groups, and displacement. Belonging to a specific ethnic group can increase the likelihood of being targeted by violence because conflicts can often be driven by ethnic, religious, or political differences. in support of this, history indicates the similarity of different violent conflicts with that of north-eastern Wallagga. For example, the conflict in Rwanda in the 1990s was largely driven by ethnic differences between the Hutu and Tutsi populations, leading to widespread violence and displacement of both groups. Similarly, the conflict in Darfur, Sudan, was driven by ethnic and political differences between the Arab-dominated government and non-Arab rebel groups, leading to targeted violence against non-Arab populations.

Owning targeted land holdings or property can also make households more vulnerable to violence and displacement, particularly in contexts where land is a valuable resource. For example, in Colombia, land ownership has been a significant risk factor for violence and displacement, as armed groups seek to control valuable land resources. In some cases, these armed groups may forcibly evict households from their land or use violence to intimidate them into leaving.

Vulnerability is another key factor that can influence household welfare in the context of conflict and displacement. Vulnerable households, such as those headed by women, children, or the elderly, may be more at risk of violence and displacement due to their limited resources and social support networks. For example, a study by UNICEF (2017) found that children in conflict-affected countries are at a higher risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse, particularly those who are displaced or separated from their families.

One way in which armed conflict can affect households is through changes in household composition due to killings, injuries, and recruitment of fighters. Conflict-related deaths and injuries can result in changes to the size and composition of households, including the loss of breadwinners and caregivers, which can have significant impacts on household welfare. The recruitment of fighters, either by government or rebel groups, can also result in changes to household composition, as young men may be forced to leave their families to join armed groups.

Economic losses due to asset destruction is another direct effect of armed conflict on households. Conflict-related damage to infrastructure, property, and crops can result in significant economic losses for households, particularly those dependent on agriculture and livestock.

These losses can have long-term impacts on household welfare, as they may reduce household income and increase food insecurity.

Displacement and migration are also direct effects of armed conflict on households. Displacement refers to the forced movement of people within their own country, while migration refers to the movement of people across international borders. Both displacement and migration can result in significant disruptions to households, including the loss of social networks and access to basic services, such as education and healthcare. Displaced and migrant households may also face discrimination and marginalization in their new communities.

The displacement of hundreds of thousands of people from their homes due to communal violence in the East Wallagga zone has significant implications for the affected households and the wider community.

Firstly, the displaced households are likely to face significant challenges in terms of access to basic needs such as food, water, shelter, and healthcare. Displacement often leads to the loss of assets and livelihoods, making it difficult for households to meet their basic needs. This can result in increased vulnerability to poverty, malnutrition, and disease.

Secondly, the displacement of such a large number of people can put a strain on host communities, as they may be required to accommodate and support the displaced households. This can lead to increased competition for resources and services, which can exacerbate tensions and lead to further conflicts. The following figures indicates the displaced community from different Kebeles.
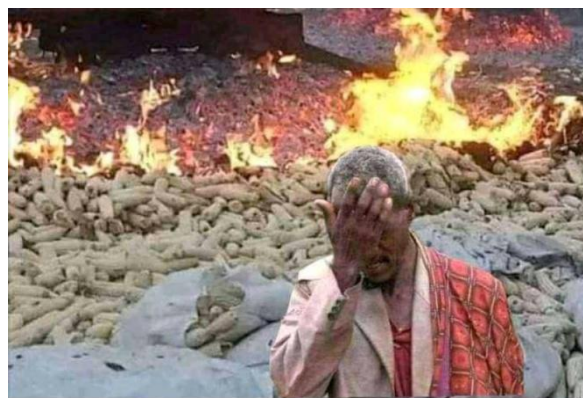


Thirdly, the destruction of homes and property, as well as the looting of belongings, can have long-term impacts on the affected households. Even after the violence subsides, households may struggle to rebuild their lives and recover from the economic losses.

Finally, the involvement of armed groups, including the Benishangul Gumuz People's Liberation Movement (BPLM) and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), highlights the ongoing problem of armed conflict in the region.

The use of violence and coercion to achieve political goals can have significant negative impacts on civilian populations, and it is important for policymakers and practitioners to address the root causes of conflict in order to prevent future outbreaks of violence.

**Figure 3. Looted and Burned Homes in Guto Gidda and Limmu ( Fiti Baqqo) Woredas**
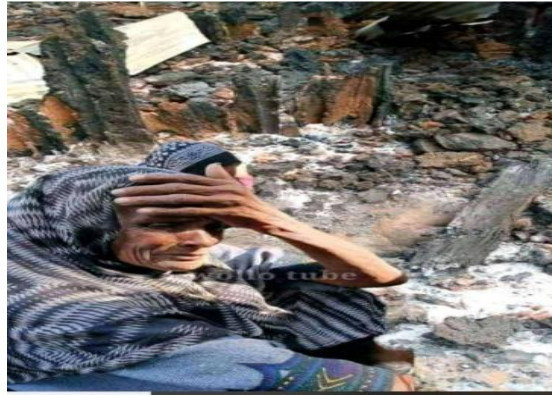
**Figure 4. Looted and Burned Homes in Amuru Woreda and Jarte Woreda**

The displacement of people from different kebeles of the Guto Gidda Woreda has significant implications for both the displaced households and the wider community. Firstly, the displacement of people from different kebeles means that a large number of households have been uprooted from their homes and communities. This can have significant social and psychological impacts on the affected households, as they may be separated from their support networks and face difficulties in adapting to new environments. Displaced households may also be vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, including gender-based violence.

Secondly, the displacement of people from different kebeles can put a strain on host communities, as they may be required to accommodate and support the displaced households. This can lead to increased competition for resources and services, including land, water, and healthcare, which can exacerbate tensions and lead to further conflicts.

Thirdly, the displacement of people from different kebeles can have long-term impacts on the affected households. Displaced households may struggle to rebuild their lives and recover from the economic losses, particularly if they are unable to return to their homes and communities. This can result in increased poverty and vulnerability to food insecurity and malnutrition.

Finally, the displacement of people from different kebeles highlights the ongoing problem of armed conflict and violence in the region. The use of violence and coercion to achieve political goals can have significant negative impacts on civilian populations, and it is important for policymakers and practitioners to address the root causes of conflict in order to prevent future outbreaks of violence and displacement.

*3.1 Household Responses to Armed Civil Conflict*

Household responses to armed civil conflict can take many forms, ranging from coping strategies to more fundamental changes in household composition and economic activities. These responses are shaped by a complex set of factors, including the nature and intensity of the conflict, the availability of resources, and the social and cultural context of the affected households.

One common household response to armed conflict is the adoption of coping strategies to deal with the

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immediate impacts of violence and displacement. These coping strategies may include changes in consumption patterns, such as reducing food intake or selling assets, as well as changes in production activities, such as shifting to less intensive or more flexible livelihood strategies (Justino, 2009).

Another common response to armed conflict is the fragmentation of households due to the loss or displacement of family members. Conflict-related deaths, injuries, and recruitment of fighters can result in changes to household composition, with women and children often left to manage households on their own (Justino et al., 2017). This can have significant impacts on household welfare, as female-headed households may face particular challenges in accessing resources and support.

In addition to changes in household composition and coping strategies, armed conflict can also lead to more fundamental changes in household economic activities. Conflict-related damage to infrastructure and property can result in significant economic losses for households, particularly those dependent on agriculture and livestock. In response, households may shift to alternative income-generating activities, such as trading or wage labor (Justino, 2009).

The implications of these household responses to armed conflict in East Wallagga are significant. Coping strategies may help households to deal with the immediate impacts of violence and displacement, but they may also lead to longer-term negative impacts on household welfare, such as increased poverty and food insecurity. Fragmentation of households can also lead to increased vulnerability, particularly for female-headed households, who may face additional challenges in accessing resources and support. Finally, changes in household economic activities can have long-term impacts on the economic well-being of households and communities, which may require longer-term interventions to address.

## 4. Conclusion

The effects of violent civil conflicts on household security and government responses in the East Wallaga Zone of Oromia Regional State have been significant and complex. Armed conflict and violence have led to displacement, loss of life, destruction of property, and economic losses for households in the region. These impacts have been compounded by factors such as climate change, natural disasters, and ethnic tensions, which have further destabilized the region.

Households have responded to these impacts in various ways, including the adoption of coping strategies, changes in household composition and economic activities, and migration. While these responses have helped households to deal with the immediate impacts of conflict and violence, they may also have longer-term negative impacts on household welfare, such as increased poverty and food insecurity.

Government responses to the conflict have been mixed, with some efforts to address the root causes of the conflict, promote peacebuilding and reconciliation, and provide humanitarian assistance to affected households. However, there have also been reports of human rights abuses, restrictions on freedom of movement and expression, and lack of access to justice and accountability for victims of violence.

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To address the effects of violent civil conflicts on household security and government responses in East Wallaga Zone, it is important for policymakers and practitioners to work together to address the root causes of the conflict, promote peacebuilding and reconciliation, and support affected households. This may involve efforts to improve access to justice and accountability, strengthen social safety nets, promote economic recovery and livelihoods, and address grievances related to land and resources.

Recommendation

Based on the effects of violent civil conflicts on household security and government responses in East Wallaga Zone, Oromia Regional State, the following recommendations can be made:

1) Promote peacebuilding and reconciliation: Efforts should be made to address the root causes of the conflict and promote peacebuilding and reconciliation among different ethnic groups in the region. This may involve community-based approaches, such as dialogue and mediation, as well as efforts to promote social cohesion and intergroup understanding.

2) Strengthen social safety nets: To address the immediate impacts of conflict on households, efforts should be made to strengthen social safety nets, such as cash transfers and food assistance, to support affected households. This can help to reduce poverty and food insecurity, particularly for vulnerable groups such as female-headed households and children.

3) Promote economic recovery and livelihoods: To promote longer-term recovery and resilience, efforts should be made to support the recovery of local economies and livelihoods. This can involve supporting agriculture and livestock production, promoting alternative income-generating activities, and improving access to markets and credit.

4) Improve access to justice and accountability: To address human rights abuses and promote accountability for violence, efforts should be made to improve access to justice for victims of violence. This can involve strengthening the justice system, promoting the rule of law, and ensuring that perpetrators of violence are held accountable.

5) Ensure human rights are respected: Governments and security forces should ensure that human rights are respected, including freedom of movement and expression, and that civilians are protected from violence. Efforts should also be made to address any allegations of human rights abuses and hold perpetrators accountable.

6) Foster inter-governmental collaboration: The national and regional governments should work together to ensure that aid is reaching the affected communities and to coordinate efforts in the region to restore peace and stability.

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