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**Community Engagement in Emergency School Feeding Among Internally
Displaced Persons in Oromia and Tigray Regions of Ethiopia :**

A Comparative Case Study

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Displaced persons in Oromia and Tigray Regions of Ethiopia:**

A Comparative Case study

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**A dissertation submitted to the Center for International and Comparative
Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in International and Comparative Education.**

Declaration

I the undersigned, declare that the dissertation entitled “Community Engagement in Emergency School Feeding among Internally Displaced Persons in Oromia and Tigray Regions of Ethiopia: A Comparative Case Study” is my original work.

I also declare that the above work has not been presented for any academic study at any other university. All sources and materials used for this work are properly cited and duly acknowledged in accordance with the academic standards and ethical guidelines.

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Abstract

The global decline in external aid to education in emergencies poses significant challenges to children's access to education in conflict-affected settings, necessitating new paradigms. This study explores how community engagement practices have influenced post-enrollment retention among displaced and host communities in the Oromia and Tigray regional states of Ethiopia. It mainly focused on the role of trust and networks in mobilizing local assets, thereby enhancing social capital to motivating children's reintegration, particularly through emergency school feeding programs implemented over two years.

Employing a qualitative exploratory case study approach, the research was conducted in two purposefully selected localities recognized for their social cohesion with conflict induced internally displaced persons for two or more years. Participants, including village leaders, parents, teachers, students, NGO representatives, and officials were selected using purposive sampling, in particular snowball and availability sampling techniques. Data collection involved focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs) and focused observation checklist, which were transcribed, coded, and thermalized to facilitate thorough triangulation. An inductive qualitative data analysis technique allowed comprehensive interpretation aligned with the research questions. Findings indicate that internally displaced persons including their children, face substantial survival challenges impacting their right to basic education and social cohesion. Amid scaling conflict induced displacement, host communities exhibiting strong social bonds regardless of homogeneity or diversity demonstrated effective local asset mobilization to support IDPs. This engagement catalyzed social capital practices that fostered trust and mutual support, even amidst resource scarcity. Notably, the study found that community-based pathways, aligned with traditional cultural assets, proved more effective in enhancing post-enrollment retention compared to NGO or school-based feeding programs. The research highlights the importance of recognizing and integrating local community practices and indigenous assets within educational response policies during crises. Such an approach shows promise in sustaining educational initiatives and enhancing resilience among affected populations. Overall, the findings suggest that activating community engagement and local resources can create a robust support system for displaced and host communities, ultimately serve to catalyze cohesion and facilitate better educational outcomes during emergencies.

Keywords: Community Engagement, Conflict, Host Community, IDPs, School Feeding, Social Capital

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Acronyms

AEP	Accelerated Education Program
CBO	Community-based Organization
CESA	Continental Education Strategy for Africa
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standards
DRPCC	Disaster Risk Prevention and Control Commission
EiE	Education in Emergency
EMIS	Education Management Information System
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
GGE	Geneva Global Ethiopia
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Center
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
MoE	Ministry of Education
OEB	Oromia Education Bureau
ORE	Operation Rescue Ethiopia
REB	Regional Education Bureau
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NSA	Non-State Actor
SFP	School Feeding Program
TPLF	Tigray People Liberation Front
TREB	Tigray Region Education Bureau
TYES	Tigray Youth Empowerment Solutions
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WFP	World Food Program

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter provides background to the dissertation focusing on key information about internal displacement in global and national contexts as well as its trend over the years. It also discusses community engagement in school feeding programs in the context of emergency. The chapter, in its statement of the problem section, also discusses the knowledge gap with respect to studies about community engagement in school feeding programs in emergencies. The objectives, research questions, significance, scope and organization of the research are also presented in a respective order. Taking note of the qualitative comparative case, limitations of the study are also highlighted.

1.2. Background

Community engagement is defined as a multifaceted collaboration between individuals, groups, or communities to address issues, solve problems, and make decisions that affect them. It is a two-way interaction that seeks to build relationships, share information, and gather input to ensure that the perspectives and needs of the community are considered in decision-making processes (Jain, 2023).

Community engagement in a school feeding program has positive effect on enrollment, enabling students to attend school regularly, and it not only allows school-age children to attend school, but also allows students who have dropped out of school to restart schooling. Community engagement supplements government spending on education by devising alternative income generating activities, and in the context of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), it involves active collaboration with IDPs, local communities, and relevant stakeholders to address the needs and concerns of IDPs, promote their participation in decision-making processes, and develop sustainable solutions to support their well-being and integration into the host communities (Ayenew, 2023). IDPs are individuals or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, often as a result of armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations, or natural or human-made disasters (Kadariya et al., 2023; Ahmad & Saeed, 2024). Similarly, various national and international reports indicated that Ethiopia is one of the countries with substantial numbers of IDPs. Some of these displacements are

caused by internal conflicts, such as war while others are caused by drought, flooding and locust infestation (Woldemariam & Gebreluel, 2025).

According to the INEE (2023), internal displacement in Ethiopia is multi-causal and complex. The interaction between high levels of prevailing specific needs in rural populations (water, shelter, food, firewood, and others) coupled with severe droughts, and frequent conflicts in multiple regions have contributed to the complexity of the agenda. In Ethiopia, despite constant attempts to solutions, there is already long-standing trend of internally displaced persons with a high-risk and challenging environment in which new displacements are likely to continue (Tsegay & Gezahegne,2023; UNESCO, 2023). Preliminary data from the latest round of the IDMC (2023) on displacement tracking indicates that nearly 2 million people are displaced in over 1,220 sites in Ethiopia (IDMC, 2024). Most of these IPDs (68%) are displaced due to inter-communal conflicts, 19% are due to drought, and 6% are displaced due to seasonal floods (Girma, 2023; UNICEF, 2023). Within the IDPs, women and children are strikingly targeted and subjected to considerable challenges including but not limited to lack of access to basic needs such as food, water, and shelter, as well as exposure to gender-based violence (Desalegn et al., 2023).

Education is the crucial element to healing trauma, maintaining psychosocial and emotional skills and enhancing normalcy and wellbeing. Education in Emergencies (EiE) interventions require engagement of communities in the quest to improve access to education to IDPs children (Hanon, 2022). Equally, school feeding programs in IDPs camps or areas convenient for the community and students foster not only access to adequate nutrition but also students' enrolment and retention in schools. In humanitarian context, the programs concerned with emergency cases have been shown to be community efforts to boost retention rates at schools. The continuity of efforts helps children stay in schools (Hanon,2022; WFP, 2022). For example, a recent study by the WFP showed that 40% of the IDP have poor attention due to poor food consumption, indicating a pressing need for school feeding programs (WFP, 2023). Both the information emphasizes the vital role of school feeding in boosting enrollment, supporting the quality education and wellbeing of internally displaced children including in IDP shelters and refugee camps.

The significance of school feeding programs for back to life and schooling is well established. Nevertheless, the particular features of armed induced emergencies in countries like Ethiopia are not addressed. Furthermore, such host community interventions to mitigate demands of IDPs to

back to life is a major agenda. In this case, in Ethiopia, school feeding programs mainly have been implemented to address geographic and gender equity including the problem of malnutrition and hunger to enrollment and engagement (Sharma et al., 2023; Takele & Lema, 2022).

Since mid-2020s, the school meals provision for children helped to improve their health and nutrition status, as well as their academic performance. School feeding reduces the socioeconomic burden of the family, student retention and decreased social stigma and increased social integrity (Semegn et al., 2023). In Ethiopia, school feeding has been suffering from various challenges. These challenges include issues related to timely delivery of meals (Hannmer et al., 2024), funding inadequacy (WFP, 2023), weak commitment and ownership from the side of the government and other stakeholders to school feeding programs (Hatløy & Sommerfelt, 2017). Globally, community engagement though not a panacea for every challenge can address some of the problems related to school feeding.

Taking the possible community initiatives, Inter Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE,2024) reported that the response to emergency, by far goes beyond immediate humanitarian support as recipients. It requires the communities' psychosocial, emotional and cultural aspects to survive, recover, continue life, pursue education of their children and commit to durable solutions for normalcy and local development agenda. Depending on the context, emergency and emergency responses hold several dimensions; yet they shall place the target beneficiaries at the center. In so doing, including IDPs, local community members, village leaders, partners, intermediate actors, development actors are expected to engage the targets to exercise their social assets for the betterment internally displaced children. In such effort, how and to what extent those affected community members, through availed opportunities, which include the mobilization and utilization of community resources, are engaged in the emergency response is a vital point that this study would like to address.

During emergencies, children's education and emergency school feeding stand critical. In this case, communities, in particular schools, parents and guardians play pivotal role in the feeding to ensure children's learning, protection and food access, in support of educational goal (Hatløy & Sommerfelt, 2017). At the same time, the intervention beyond ensuring education for children, can significantly benefit recovery and resilience of parents, youth, and adults affected by crisis, including conflicts, natural disasters, and displacement (INEE, 2024).

In view of Iyengar (2012), community engagement is a process both in normal and emergency situation that holds several contexts and dimensions from within and outside. The engagement of affected population, which includes both active participation and commitment of the displaced, local host communities and partners, seems pivotal in planning, decision-making, resource mobilization and program implementation. Involving all actors, in particular local communities, local knowledge and social networks improved and leveraged to ensure the relevance, inclusivity, consistently proving to advance education, and sustainability of education interventions such as school feeding (Semegne et al., 2023).

Holistic and systemic support to internally displaced communities and their children require a clear understanding of both host and IDP community engagement dynamics. A short fall of exploring engagement practices in emergency school feeding programs to achieve the right to children education and intended impact is pivotal which existing literature and research found to have gaps in how the engagement in emergency school feeding practices contributed to communities' recovery and their children learning continuum. This study therefore aims to address the existing knowledge gap in engagement practices of local communities, both internally displaced persons and host communities in emergency situations.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

Since the mid-1990s, both natural and manmade disasters, particularly armed conflict, have severely impacted children's right to basic education and the overall well-being of communities. Despite growing concerns, efforts to address post-enrollment retention for displaced children remain either overlooked or insufficient (UNESCO, 2023). Furthermore, amid increased displacement research discussing the actual nature and scope of community engagement practices in particular to emergency education response of internally displaced children and parents caused by armed conflict are unaddressed and thus requires exploration. While local communities demonstrate resilience, governments frequently lack a comprehensive understanding of the direct and indirect effects of conflict on children, including malnutrition, health issues, reduced educational opportunities, and increased poverty (Bahgat et al., 2017). In the context of Ethiopia, as a result of escalated vulnerability, over 3.3 million school aged children who are victims of arm induced internal conflicts seek huge attention and response to safe quality education (MoE, 2024). In this regard, while 45% of the internally displaced population is reported to live with the host communities across the nation, little evidence is available on how the engagement practices are

taking place in communities. Thus, it is crucial to explore how host communities engage with displaced persons , particularly regarding children post enrollment retention efforts toward relief and recovery of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ethiopia.

In both normalcy and emergency, community engagement in education is one of the long-standing policy pillars to many countries in the world including Ethiopia. Several education leaders and educational institutions recognize the vital roles communities play in children’s learning, resource mobilization, educational assessment and evaluation. Equally, during emergencies communities’ role in early interventions focusing on life saving initiatives are crucial to mitigating the adverse influences following the crisis (Nicolai, 2003; Watkins, 2012). In recurrent crisis affected locations, local communities participation in supporting the global and local initiatives such as “back children to school” ensure holistic recovery and resilience not only to gain hope in life but also to nurture normalcy (UNESCO, 2023; Bouvier, 2024; Jen & Ogu, 2016).

In the Ethiopian context, under normal circonstances, school feeding programs have positive influence in contributing to post enrollment retention (MoE, 2024), increase class attendance (Zenebe, Samson & Nigatu, 2018), decrease the dropout rate (Desalegn, Gebremedhin, Fikadu, et al., 2021), and increase enrolment (Destaw, Wencheko, Kidane, et al., 2021). The majority of studies have reported favorable results on the importance of school feeding programs for educational outcomes (Mideksa, Getachew, Bogale et al., 2024). Based on the socioeconomic and policy framework, many countries of the world exercise school feeding programs mainly for improving learning outcomes through integration of other aspects of children’s cultivation which may include sanitation, nutrition, deworming, peace and safe school building.

In times of crisis, effective emergency responses depend on the involvement of various stakeholders. Specifically, local community engagement, through the mobilization of local assets and social capital, is vital for the recovery of IDPs and for promoting educational interventions. Amid the scaling displacement of parents and detachment of children from the right to education there are local efforts in social cohesion and reintegration of internally displaced children to schooling, which to be appraised. However, from field observations and reports, there is a lack of evidence regarding why and how local communities engage, collaborate, and respond to educational emergencies in challenging circumstances in Ethiopia.

The ongoing emergency crisis in Ethiopia affected over eight million people across nine regions, whom 33% are children deprived of education and bearing the brunt of repeated displacements (IDMC, 2024; INEE, 2023; UNICEF, 2023). This situation has become chronic, draining resources and placing significant burdens on stakeholders in particular the host communities. Alarming, while the challenges of displacement intensify, international support is dwindling, leaving vulnerable populations increasingly dependent on unpredictable humanitarian aid. However, amidst this backdrop, there are showcases of resilience that make use of local assets particularly to respond to displaced children enrollment and emergency school feeding in local context. Such efforts can inform policy and practice, contributing to community capacity-building and effective emergency programming strategies.

Scope missions and filed reports of witness the significance of community involvement in school feeding programs to safe enrollment and continued mutual engagement. Nevertheless, building rapport and interactions between the hosts and IDPs in relief, resources mobilization, collaboration and sustainability of community-based initiatives is usually unaccounted and faces challenges (Alegbeleye et al., 2019; Wall et al., 2022; WFP, 2023). In particular, during prolonged emergencies the challenges faced by actors, mainly hosts and IDPs is multifold. It extends beyond the immediate basic survival needs which amid create competing demands leading to conflict. This situation unless handled properly negatively affects both hosts and IDPs against trust and social cohesion. Despite the scaling emergency circumstances evidence on exemplary showcases of typical host and IDPs in navigating and harmonizing their differences is vital. The joint efforts on how the communities handle challenges, manage resources and collaboratively promote children's recovery and continuity of learning is hardly explored. This gap underscores the relevance of exploratory research in the communities. From field observation most interactions between host communities and IDPs tend to tension and disputes over meager resources leading to lack of trust and cycle of conflict. Counter to such challenges, few typical communities that stand mutual cooperation with displaced persons toward children safety enrollment require further exploration. In this case, examining how community engagement functions within challenges toward successful enrollment and school feeding stands to be a critical area of inquiry. Most policies advocate community participation in both normalcy and emergencies. However, clarity is in place on the motivations, initiatives and practices of the communities during the emergencies. With little description, some studies indicate that effective community participation enhances

program outcomes (Tull & Plunkett, 2018). Others consider stronger community engagement efforts are influenced by clear codes and guidelines both pre- and during emergencies (Colón-Ramos, Monge-Rojas & Weil et al., 2022). In the context of conflict affected areas, concerns on the persistent low participation rates of displaced children in emergency education which links to host community engagement to address back to schooling and significant risk of food insecurity for many students, necessitating innovative approaches to mitigate these challenges (Agbetsise et al., 2024).

In Ethiopia, addressing the right to education of over 3.3million internally displaced children across the nation requires serious attention. Due to the complicated nature and escalated trend of displacement the need to explore the existing socio-cultural landscape of communities in the implementation of relief and recovery is essential. In this regard, important gap lies on appreciative inquiry and drawing lessons of resilience of host communities to emergency education responses. Specifically, the sociocultural contexts of localities within regions such as Oromia and Tigray of Ethiopia, have resulted in varying degrees of community engagement, significantly shaping relief efforts and reintegration of children. Understanding the specific practices surrounding school feeding programs, particularly the engagement of local community members and groups is essential to comprehend and cultivate knowledge that can inform tailored engagement strategies for Education in Emergencies (EiE) in Ethiopia.

1.4. Objectives

1.4.1. General Objective:

The general objective of this study is to explore the community engagement practices in emergency school feeding in selected location where IDPs are hosted in Oromia and Tigray regions of Ethiopia.

1.4.2. Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the research are:

- a. To comprehend how the existing policy provisions and organizational arrangements inform community engagement in emergency school feedings in Ethiopia.
- b. To identify the current community engagement practices in emergency school feedings in two locations that hosted IDPs in Oromia and Tigray regional states of Ethiopia.

- c. To explore how emergency school feeding pathways influence engagement among actors in two locations that accommodated IDPs in Oromia and Tigray regional states of Ethiopia.
- d. To investigate how the host communities activate their social capital in emergency school feedings to children in post enrollment retention in Oromia and Tigray regions of Ethiopia.

1.5. Research Questions

- a. What are the existing policy provisions and organizational arrangements that inform community engagement in emergency school feeding in Ethiopia?
- b. What are the existing community engagement practices in emergency school feeding programs in two conflict-induced IDP locations in Oromia and Tigray regional states of Ethiopia?
- c. How do the school feeding pathways link to the level of community engagement in two IDP hosting locations in Oromia and Tigray regional states of Ethiopia?
- d. How do communities in two IDP locations in Oromia and Tigray activate social capital (local assets, trust, networking, and mutual support) to enhance emergency school feeding programs for the post enrollment retention of internally displaced children?

1.6 Significance of the Study

Currently, responsive and resilient action to education in emergencies is a top priority for many developing countries including Ethiopia. In view of the mounting challenges, evidence-based knowledge on how to enhance community engagement deserves huge relevance. Moreover, taking the context into account, fostering meaningful learning, recovery and resilience of internally displaced children and families is vital. In this regard, this study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of comparative education and educational policy, focusing on community engagement practices in emergencies (EiE). This study provides quite relevant insights on how interactions, networks and trust contribute to knowledge of planning and implementation of education for displaced children within host communities.

Despite encouraging efforts by government and partners on promoting and maintaining school feeding to educational goal, attainments encounter significant challenges. In particular, in response to the dynamics in internal displacement and emergencies, policies seem to insufficiently address the host communities' motivations and practices to mitigate vulnerability and aspiration of

displaced persons within host communities. In this regard, this research gives insights into the communities' roles in emergency education and emergency school feeding. It also contributes to the literature on community engagement in conflict -induced IDP communities in Ethiopia and other countries in similar challenges. Moreover, the study may assist partners to understanding community members and groups to better engage in educational initiatives , including school feeding. Thus, the study shades its own positive mark for crafting responsive strategies and promoting relief and resilience in emergencies. Thus, this study on community engagement practices in emergency school feeding in typical locations of rural Ethiopia may shade light on addressing creative community-based responses to educational needs in emergencies that stakeholders need to consider.

1.7 Scope of the Study

Field reports of humanitarian workers and international development partners including UNICEF (2023) apart from those unaccounted, indicate that there are four major categories of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ethiopia. These include those absorbed into the original home root, the movers, those that live in identified camps and live within the host communities. Those who live with host communities are estimated to cover 45% of the total IDPs in Ethiopia which this qualitative research is most interested to explore. Thus, it allows evidence-based experiences and lessons on practices of host communities and IDPs particularly in the context of emergency education and school feeding programs.

The study focuses on typical IDP populations residing within host communities in two specific administrative areas of two regions of Ethiopia. These communities are noted for their capacity to mobilize resources, foster social cohesion, and implement initiatives that address the needs of both residents and IDPs. The acknowledgment of local administrations for their efforts in providing shelter, resources, and support for the enrollment of displaced children is also part of this scope.

The primary focus of the study is exploring the existing community engagement practices related to the retention of displaced children post-enrollment, with an emphasis on local assets and social capital within the context of armed conflict. The study highlights key practices that host communities and IDPs take part in emergency school feeding programs and their role in enhancing child retention. Notably, the causes of conflicts resulted to the IDPs are not the scope of the study. Furthermore, the research concentrates on those salient engagement practices that directly

link and influence the major feeding pathways and children's retention within public primary schools.

1.8 Operational Definition of Key Terms

This qualitative exploratory case study follows the constructivist research paradigm. In the context of the research, it is logical to consider operational definitions that are appropriately aligned with the specific goals and objectives of the research. Accordingly, the following key terms frequently used in this study are defined as follows:

Community: The group of host population and internally displaced persons sharing common interests, experiences and functions within specific locality under the study. Beyond defined administrative location, emphasizes cohesive social interactions and trust in mobilizing resources for emergency feedings and school retention (INEE, 2011).

Community Engagement (CE): A conscious and purposeful commitment. It involves joint process of both host and internal displaced persons in defining problems, initiatives, planning and strategic decision making. This collaborative effort aims to mitigate and foster children's learning, mutual support and unique context-based challenges faced by the communities in action (UNESCO, 2020).

Emergencies: unexpected, unpredictable urgent situations that require immediate action or response to life saving and life sustaining. This includes efforts to prevent harm, damage, destruction, or loss while fostering support from all actors , including host communities for relief, recovery and resilience (INEE, 2010).

Emergency School Feeding Programs (ESFP): Initiatives designed to provide meals for children in schools, primary in conflict of disaster affected areas. These programs serve as an incentive for families to keep their children in education during times of crisis, contributing to school attendance, relief , recovery and community resilience (Burdy,2013).

Education in Emergencies (EiE) : the provision of equitable, inclusive and quality learning opportunities for individuals of all ages in crisis situations, encompassing preparedness, response, recovery and retention phases (INEE,2018).

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) : Persons who have been living in specific geographic location with shared social-cultural assets, yet lost their material wealth and other assets, forced to be displaced into areas they assume are safer than their earlier residence (INEE, 2004).

Host community (HC): local inhabited population in defined areas of administration with established livelihoods. It is recognized for its settled life, ability to mobilize resources , promote social cohesion, and undertake initiatives that meet the needs of both its residents and internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have escaped conflict. The host community plays a vital role in offering shelter, resources and support to displaced individuals while managing these complexities (INEE, 2023).

Retention : In the context of this study, retention mainly involves back to safe access and ensuring vulnerable children have the post enrollment motivation to learning environment to mitigate dropout and relapsing into out of school life (Africa Union, 2024).

1.9. Limitations of the Study

This study on exploration of actual engagement at the grassroots, although allows amazing experiences, observed to have inherent limitations, particularly within post conflict contexts. The qualitative nature of the research proved to have its own influence on establishing rapport and trust building during field missions. Moreover, time to establish confidence so that reliance on deep exploration of relatively small sample sizes for generalizability was observed to have been another limitation. To mitigate these limitations, rigorous interactions and continuous communications were employed throughout the research process. This effort was complemented by acknowledging opinions and resolving biases regularly. Moreover, to generate maximum information to the basic research questions, deep exploration of the thematic topics, triangulation of data and information from available sources for its quality and credibility was addressed with attention. In order to substantiate limitations, detail contextual descriptions were provided to strengthen discussion and coin the findings along the themes.

During the study period, security challenges posed significant obstacles against timely execution of planned field work. Disruptions of land transport availing to the research locations resulted to delaying data collection and rescheduling field mission. Thus, participants' revisits were rescheduled and rounds of visits were doubled. These safety risks were encountered through

establishing and maintaining interactive communication with local leaders and IDP representatives to ensure informants' availability and readiness. During the field mission official letters outlining the purpose of the research were obtained to counter security checkpoints. The researcher further addressed the financial limitations through navigating and maintaining strategic partnership with concerned partners working on emergency education. This approach helped to access logistics and information most relevant to the study.

1.10 Organization of the Study

The research is structured into six comprehensive chapters designed to logical flow of the study to readers including the scientific community and broader audiences interested in community engagement in education in emergencies.

Chapter one which deals with introduction presents the statement of the problem, basic research questions, objectives and operational definition of key terms frequently applied in the study. This chapter highlights four fundamental questions centered on policy provision, community engagement practices, emergency school feeding pathways and its connection to local assets and social capital. By framing these inquiries, the chapter sets the stage for deeper exploration of the bridge and bond between host and internally displaced persons in accessing education.

Chapter Two concentrates on the literature review and theoretical foundations of the study. It examines the critical challenges that emergencies create on both children and parents in arm-induced crisis situations and discusses how local communities mitigate challenges through community-based response. The chapter further draws on theories of social capital and community organizing explaining their relevance and implications for fostering resilience in the face of adversity.

Chapter three forms the core of the research. It focuses and treats the ontological and epistemological backgrounds of the study. It outlines the paradigms and designs employed by emphasizing both the axiomatic and qualitative approaches. The chapter provides a robust justification of the purpose, sampling techniques employed, ensuring methodological rigor and relevance. Chapter four deals with data presentation and cross case analysis. Hence the chapter addresses the details of the basic questions allowing to thematic areas and findings. In this chapter extra care was taken to capture and align all informant's voices and opinions and maintain balance through comparative lens. Moreover, taking note of the volume of information, salient cases were

aligned with primary research questions for further triangulation during discussions. On each major topic, the locational case analysis complemented with cross case investigation, although a tough task, has allowed the researcher to have a logical and consistent flow toward a comprehensive understanding and interpretation of the research data. Hence chapter Five engages in a detailed discussion of core thematic areas of the research and connects and also argues the findings with the theoretical framework. In doing so, through providing critical insights to the implications of the research, it analyzes and comprehends the alignment and congruence or incongruence between empirical results and existing theories served as reference to the research.

Finally, Chapter Six presents the conclusions and implications for policy and practice. This chapter based on the findings and discussions of the previous chapters, offers practical recommendations tailored to the current context. This chapter is structured to contribute significantly both to the body of knowledge in the field of education in emergencies and field work. As a result, the research ultimately aims to enhance evidence-based knowledge driven emergency response strategies and resilience building efforts for affected communities.

CHAPTER TWO : Review of Related Literature

2.1. Introduction to the chapter

The chapter aims to thoroughly examine prior research, identifying key insights and arguments that discuss and align with the major issues and features of communities in response to emergency and education in emergencies.

The review begins by introducing the major causes of emergencies which are broadly categorized under natural and manmade calamities and addresses the consequence on both host and IDPs. Then it tries to identify and explore the major international responses to the right to education in timeline and its implication to children's retention. Then salient research and academic discussions were addressed. Based on the key ideas noted in the review process, appropriate theories have been identified and treated. Following the discussions the conceptual framework and the variables were identified and specified how it is considered in the research.

2.1.1 Causes of Emergencies

Natural disasters (earthquake, volcano, wind, flood, etc.) and manmade (political, economic and social unrest that is followed by armed violence, ethnic conflict) are the two broad categories that cause emergencies (INEE, 2020). According to the UNICEF (2023), the trends on emergencies are increasing across the globe with displacement of 244 million people and multiple life complications and consequences

Emergencies in Africa are increasingly frequent and complex due to factors like political instability, ethnic conflicts, economic hardships, environmental degradation, and public health crises. These emergencies lead to significant internal displacement, disproportionately affecting children. The ongoing conflicts such as in Sudan and Ethiopia, exacerbated humanitarian crises resulting in millions of IDPs facing deep shocks and lifelong damage. Public health issues, including disease outbreaks further strain already fragile systems, while environmental factors like droughts and floods contribute to food insecurity. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes conflict resolution and support for displaced populations (UNICEF, 2023).

Emergencies caused by either natural or man-made calamities are categorized under acute, chronic and protracted emergencies, which last between six months to two years (INEE, 2024).

In less developed countries including Ethiopia, while causes to emergency are several, the responses seem out looking, linear and casual with peculiarities on the magnitude of the responses to victims due to the emergencies (Tsegaye & Gezahegne, 2023). In line with internally displaced persons relief and speedy recovery, Sharma et al., (2023) discuss that host community engagement practices including availing education in emergencies seem critical which shall be conceptually clarified and addressed contextually.

The Kampala Convention (2020) on forced displaced population during emergencies emphasizes the urgent need to address the rights and well-being of displaced persons particularly focusing on children's reintegration and recovery in emergency contexts. The convention highlights that displacement often disrupts educational opportunities, intensifies vulnerabilities among children. Thus, it calls for comprehensive strategies that prioritize safe access to education, psychosocial support and community involvement to facilitate effective reintegration. Key provisions stress the importance of collaborating with local communities to foster relief and recovery. This ensures that displaced children regain hope for life and resume learning and better social integration. Furthermore, the convention underscores the necessity of joint monitoring and evaluation programs aimed at supporting displaced children and fostering successful recovery and long-term stability. By integrating these principles, the convention advocates and requests for a holistic approach to addressing the needs of displaced children and thereby the basic rights are upheld during and after emergencies.

2.1.2 Consequences of Emergencies

Emergencies emanating from both man-made and natural disasters have significant consequences both at personal, family and community levels. Such crises frequently result in widespread displacement, the loss of assets, health impacts and destabilization of decent livelihoods which profoundly affect displaced and host communities. In line with the acute and chronic emergencies, many reports outline consequences along with socio cultural socio-economic, political and governance effects.

2.1.2.1 Socio- cultural and economic consequences

Displacement occurs without prior plans, usually seriously affecting embedded socio cultural and economic fabrics. In this regard, evicting from destiny to new location exposes the victims to new

challenges that may contradict traditional cultural practices along with host communities. Moreover, conflicts and disasters compel individuals to abandon their homes, leading to a sharp increase in the numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) with prolonged trauma and stresses including cultural shock. The UNHCR (2022) reported that over 26 million people in Africa have been forcibly displaced due to these circumstances, placing immense pressure on resources in host communities in eleven countries dominantly in sub-Saharan Africa.

The socio-economic crisis due to damage and loss of properties and assets is another critical issue that affects displaced persons. In agrarian community, apart from the displacement due to armed conflicts loss of farmland and assets, which are vital components of the family economies, negatively affect and force for dependency. In turn the host communities encounter deep challenges characterized by helplessness and frustration, due to saturated economic opportunities. According to Food and Agriculture Organization, climate related shocks have resulted in decreased crop yields worsening food insecurity and poverty levels across the region (FAO, 2023). Due to displacement, health problems and deprivation from basic educational services emerge as consequences of and escalate placing both displaced children and their parents to deep depression. Moreover, disasters and conflicts often lead to outbreaks of diseases like cholera and malaria resulting in grave consequences on both hosts and IDPs. The World health Organization (WHO,2022) noted that the COVID-19 pandemic further strained already vulnerable health systems, highlighting and tightening existing weaknesses exacerbated by ongoing crises

2.1.2.2 Socio political consequences

From the media and daily observations, in areas where disputes and conflicts are instigated by ethnic-political intentions, they experience severe damage and result in deep consequences during and after emergencies. In such cases emergency response face challenges due to deteriorated local governance structures, resulting in ineffective administrative responses. According to the International Crisis Group (2023), many governments find it difficult to adequately address crisis, which usually leads to heightened public dissatisfaction and unrest. In consequence, normal life and livelihoods got disrupted and conflict recurred. In such cases, some governments may resort to authoritarian measures limiting civil liberties under the mask of safety and security. This trend has been observed in several African countries where emergency powers were applied to repress dissatisfaction and opposition during times of crisis (Human Rights, Watch, 2022).

In majority of the African rural communities including Ethiopia, host communities exhibit empathy and willingness to embrace the displaced persons. However, challenges over competing meager resources happen inevitable obstacles. In context of high displacement intend to share already limited resources, such as water and arable land, imminently cause insecurity. Despite the good intention to embrace displaced ones, tension spark to violent conflicts extending the problems of victims and other groups. According to the African Union (2024), many conflicts in Africa are rooted in resource scarcity a situation compounded by climate change and poor governance.

Overall, the socio-economic and political consequences of emergencies are strongly linked to resource and governance issues. In failure to address these pillars give way to creating cycle of vulnerability that deeply challenging all groups including host communities. In the context of ethnic based armed conflicts, it observed to have all round breaking consequences (African Union, 2024). In response , these interconnected challenges require evidence and comprehensive strategies that focus on inclusive engagement to relief and resilience , effective community governance and the safeguarding of human rights.

2.2.1 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are individuals forced to leave their homes and loved ones due to threatening and life costing problems including armed conflict, violence, human rights abuses, or disaster, yet remaining within their country's borders. As of late 2024, there are approximately 73.5 million IDPs globally. These groups who are victimized at different levels and magnitudes, constituting about 60% of all forcibly displaced individuals (IDMC,2024). IDPs who once were settled humans face sever risks including violence, abuse and killings. Following unintended move from home, IDPs get surrounded by hopelessness, lack or inadequate access to essential services, food shortage, insecurity, highlighting the urgent comprehensive support (UNICEF, 2023).

The primary drivers of internal displacement are violent conflicts and natural disaster , which significantly impacting vulnerable populations, particularly women and children (Haybano, 2023). In 2020 alone, conflicts and disasters triggered over 40.5 million ne displacements across 149 countries (Cantor,2024). Understanding the micro -level dynamics of these displacements is crucial for developing effective policies and practices to humanitarian actions (Cantor, 2024). The

humanitarian and socioeconomic impediments associated with internal displacement in horn of Africa including Ethiopia are profound, disrupting basic livelihoods including housing, health social ties and children education (Lenjebo et al., 2023).

Reports indicate substantial variations in the annual levels of new displacements linked to conflict. These figures show increase from 32 million between 2010 to 2014 to 47 million from 2015 to 2019 (Ayele & Kebede, 2022). Organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) jointly work to protect and assist IDPs, although durable and lasting solutions remain otherwise. In this regard the several research reports indicate that voluntary repatriation is often hindered by ongoing conflicts and instability which requires integrated response of all actors (Asfour & Perspective, 2020; Cantor & Woolley, 2020).

The economic impact of internal displacement is significant. In 2020, for example, due to displacement of 55 million people, reports suggest a global economic cost of nearly \$20.5 billion. In consequence the socio-economic burden on host communities varies by regions, with costs per IDP ranging from \$109 in Afghanistan to \$830 in Syria (Khen,2023). In most cases host communities also experience substantial challenges, particularly in poor location and urban slums where access to public services is limited (IDMC,2024).

During emergencies community responses also vary in degree of relief and recovery efforts. Effective community reactions not only unleash own capabilities but also promote local ownership and mutual support , further addressing underlying social and livelihood issues (Sharma et al., 2023). Depending on the context key principles include social networking and capacity building. However, the practice is not that easy. Challenges such as power relations, resource constraints, dynamics to new demographic tensions and imbalances may impede the initiatives. In some locations, particularly in Africa, grassroots efforts have shown strong potential and creativity in resolving tensions, promoting peace and security (Africa Union, 2023). Addressing such multifaceted problems through community owned comprehensive approaches to the socioeconomic realities of both hosts and IDPs yields positive solutions and better impacts.

2.3 The Role of Education in Emergencies

Across Africa, millions of children affected by violence including armed conflict is a critical humanitarian challenge. In this context, lifesaving, reintegrating and retaining children is just beyond academic achievements. Hence, operationally the role of education and retention mainly involves ensuring hope against vulnerability. This endeavor includes access to safe environments for both children and their parents to motivating and mitigate dropout and relapsing into out of school life (Africa Union, 2024). Contrary to this notion, conflicts severely disrupt education by destroying schools and frustrating displaced families, which lead to profound trauma and psychological distress that make learning difficult (UNICEF, 2024). In such cases , this instability combined with economic hardships significantly heighten challenges of education including impossibility to second chance to learning.

In cases of scaling conflicts and increased displacement, local governments shift attention and poorly function the right to education and retention. In such scenario, communities demonstrate exceptional efforts to provide focus to the right to education of all children, which perhaps a new social model worth education system. In so doing, based on the principles of mutuality, key interventions including creating safe spaces free from violence and offering psychosocial support to help children cope with trauma and reengage in learning routines (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2024; Adeyinka, 2024). Other communities also encourage flexible responses to accelerated learning programs, which is essential to offering opportunities to overaged children. These experiences gained in offering tailored learning activities for groups including young mothers serve as vital opportunity to go back to life and livelihoods (Amani Africa, 2024). In a nutshell, amidst chaos and protracted conflict, host communities serve critical and crucial roles in life saving and life sustaining through courage and continuity of helping displaced regain hope and engagement to educate their children.

Fundamentally education is one of the basic rights of human beings even during emergencies for it serves saving and sustenance roles (UNESCO, 2015). Amid adverse situations, thus, the necessity of responsive education to help get depression and maintain hope to normalcy is pivotal. This implies that education in such situation need to replan to serve as one of the necessities for the victims of displacement, in particular children who have an absolute right to basic education. Since 1948, the subsequent United Nation's declarations and continental strategies cherish the right to free and compulsory primary education without discrimination.

The timeline of the right to education highlights notable progressive evolution of educational rights at the international level through the key declarations. To begin with, in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established the rights to free and compulsory elementary education. This move emphasizes education's role in promoting human rights and parental choice. This had set foundations for universal standard for educational access. In 1951, acknowledging the vulnerabilities of displaced populations, the convention relating to the status of refugees granted and guaranteed refugee children the right to elementary education.

The 1966 Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expanded educational rights to include accessible secondary education and improved teaching standards. This reinforced education's role in societal development. Furthermore, in 1989, Convention on the Rights of the Child took a holistic approach emphasizing education that supports a child's potential and cultural identity. In turn the effort contributed to promoting non-discrimination and accessibility for children with disabilities.

In 1990, the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) reaffirmed a global commitment to basic education as a fundamental human right. Adding to the effort, the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action identified humanitarian emergencies as barriers to educational access. Hence it advocated target support for marginalized groups, particularly girls and conflict affected children.

The 2006 Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) emphasized community participation in education. With this principle the strategy encouraged member states to promote localized feasible approaches to educational challenges to ensure rights of children and adults. Finally, the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4) anchors on leave no behind and aim for inclusive and equitable quality education, reinforcing lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Overall, the content agenda across the timeline illustrates a growing recognition of the world to education to serve as a fundamental tool for human rights and livelihoods. In so doing it expands the need for recognition of diverse social groups' attention, emphasizing inclusivity and the need to address disparities in equitable access especially for displaced and vulnerable populations. Another interesting observation on each one of the declarations and convention builds on previous ones, reflecting an evolving understanding of the complexities to educational challenges to rights across all social groups (INEE, 2024; UNESCO, 2020; UNICEF, 2018).

In line with the above, in focus to local communities, the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 16 deals with peace and prosperity, which is crucial for effective community engagement in education in emergencies. Accordingly, promoting context responsive peace building, inclusion and justice is considered to address the root causes of conflict. This in turn is believed to create a more conducive environment for education, including in emergencies. Across the literature, thus, community engagement is placed as essential instrument for initiating and ensuring equitable quality education to all and means to instill sense of ownership through mutual and shared responsibilities toward cohesive and peaceful interactions. Ultimately, SDG 16 contributes to building resilience and creating a more sustainable future for communities affected by emergencies.

The conventions, declarations and strategies listed above uphold that the engagement of stakeholders differs with purpose. During emergency practices, despite the wishes of governments to maintain declarations and strategies listed above, responses hardly guarantee the fundamental rights to education. In the context of conflict, normal life disrupts, resources demolished and communities experience crisis. The situation immediately results in the vulnerability of children to school closure for an indefinite period. As discussed by Nicolai (2017), during crisis, survival becomes at stake and most of government budget channeled to military engagement. While uncertainty and instability, including shortage of resources, and the threat of violence are in place, at the same time, looking deep into all options to engage communities to cope toward building recovery and managing their children's education is mandatory.

UNESCO identifies education as a fundamental human right essential for empowering individuals and enabling the exercise of other rights. Their monitoring shows trends in expanding education rights within national laws and highlights ongoing challenges, such as climate change effects and the digital divide. Despite these efforts, 244 million children and youth remain out of school due to various barriers (UNESCO, 2023). In all angles, the discussions done above considered community participation as a key element in ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Nevertheless, the practices on how the social contexts favor or deter own community involvement in various contexts, during emergencies, are gray areas.

2.4. Community and Community Engagement in Emergencies

The concept of “community” is central in social sciences and humanities (Turin, et al., 2023). Historically, since late 1880s, the subject strikes widespread attention on the meaning, how communities evolve and grow, for example from pre-industrial to industrial society (Alter, et al., 2017). Regardless of the context and chronology, the studies on kinds and characteristic of communities underlie common frame of reference, which is social structure and relationships to be common denominators (Hanon, 2017; Burde & Linden, 2013).

In line with human development, the word “community” seems to have various meanings to different groups in different circumstances. The classic work by Arnstein (1969), in dealing with the ladder of citizen’s participation, identified over ninety alternative definitions of community and noted that the list is not exhaustive. In the context of this study, the research works on community engagement and grouping seem relevant. Accordingly, four broader community domains of understanding, i.e., geographic, ethnic/racial, shared values/assets and philanthropy, have framed the definition of communities which may expand or contract according to cases, needs and situations (Henry, 2017; Mashiko, Guarino, Franz, & Satoh, 2018).

According to Mekonnen (2022), in context of forced displacement, vulnerable groups instinctively flee to their neighborhoods where harmony with hosts in social dynamics seem interwoven elements. In this regard, researchers consider fluidity in the identification of communities rather than static generalizations (Juliana et al., 2017; Ginsburg, Haugen, Lokng Ong’uti., 2017). From the viewpoint of community engagement, Bray (2003) identifies three main features of communities: i) geography constituted by those living within relatively small areas such as villages, suburbs or districts; ii) identity – religious, socio-economic, ethnic or racial; iii) interests – philanthropic or shared concerns on collective issues. Whilst communities may be founded on more than one of these characteristics, it is important to recognize which of these features predominates in prompting collaborative actions including children’s education. This mark interconnectivity of community assets and its implications for the nature of social capital within and between communities and how others, including the state and non-state actors, perceive their participation (Birkeland, 2009).

In Ethiopian context, experience and field observations entails that the term community is a multifaceted concept deeply rooted in cultural, historical, and socio-linguistic factors, shared experiences, values, and identities and more intensified since 1991 (Tsegaye & Gezahegne, 2023).

Currently, it often transcends geographical boundaries and shared values to strong family ties, religious beliefs, geographic proximity, shared language and inner life experiences. This multifaceted nature of the community that is administratively defined as ethnolinguistic community (Got, Kebele, Woreda), would have significant implications for various aspects of relief, recovery and resilience to outside IDP community which is essential for effective policymaking and program implementation including holistic response to education in emergencies in Ethiopia.

In line with this research, in times of emergency, normal social life disrupts, forced communities face deep trauma and helplessness where their survival and social fabrics are challenged. In this regard, according to the positivist school of thought, social bonds get challenged, may not remain the same, thus, social changes are imminent (Macionis, 2012). On the other hand, the social constructivist school of thought argues that while changes on community life is obvious, new basis for social interventions and eventually, using opportunities to rebuilding community is necessary (Putnam, 2001). In favor of the later, taking note of the catalyst role of participation, (Iyengar, 2012) advocates that social structures and relationship constitute the social assets, norms and trust that may be capitalized during the challenges. In such context, communities are said to have social institutions that favor them, maintain their social relationships and engage in survival, recovery and build resilience. Based on above, this research would like to examine what social changes happened and how local social assets are mobilized to social capital, utilized to the school feeding and retention of internally displaced children in the specific location covered under the study.

2.4.1 Community Engagement in Education in Emergencies

A review of many development partners' field mission reports on crisis calls for local community participation to address the needs of displaced and war affected persons. The reports, related to conflict prone emergencies, underscore the vitality of engagement of the locale to holistic recovery and resilience (UNESCO, 2023). Taking note of the widely used principles by EiE actors, it is essential to explore whether the intended principles during crisis are applicable. In this regard, the INEE Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery (INEE, 2012) are a vital tool for quality and accountable programming. The INEE Minimum Standards cover five domains: foundational standards, access and learning environment, teaching and learning, teachers and other education personnel and education policy. Community participation is one of the core

elements of the foundational standards where all elements of the other domains are constituted (Ryan et al., 2020).

Many authors interested in community engagement seem to anchor on context, relevance, social dynamics and mutual benefits (INEE, 2024; Wales, Khan & Nicoli, 2020). To begin with, Arnstein's (1969) six ladders of participation (manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership) offer a framework for assessing the extent of community involvement in decision-making processes. These levels range from minimal manipulation to full partnership, with varying degrees of community influence. While this framework has been criticized for its limitations of overlooking context and content, it remains a valuable tool for understanding and evaluating the quality of community engagement. On another side, the "community engagement continuum," describes distinctive levels of community participation that range from inform to empower (Corbin et al., 2021). According to the theory, participation into a given ladder between the lower (inform) to the highest (empower) may depend on the relevance of the topic of participation. The same community, depending on the significance of the agenda, may happen at the lower (inform), the middle (involve) or the highest (engage with commitment). In line with active involvement, the "community-based participatory research" (CBPR) promotes collaboration between academics and community members in the research processes (Juliana, et al., 2021). To educate, improve practice, or effect social change, community-based participatory research involves collective, reflective, and systematic inquiry in which researchers and community stakeholders participate equally in all stages of the research process (Colon-Ramos, et al., 2018). There seems to be consensus among researchers that community participation in emergencies is critical to social healing, economic and ecological environments that make up communities, and they all interact with one another in intricate ways. Furthermore, engaged communities, beyond physical and financial contribution, mark and exert their unique skills, talents, knowledge, and perceptions to the rehabilitation process (Lele & Goswami, 2021; Russell, 2009). Nevertheless, evidence is hardly available on how these huge potentials of the communities are initiated and maximized during protracted emergencies in crisis affected poor communities.

In conflict affected social settings, IDPs being victims of safety and security concerns, require host community participation, which usually may not be an easy task. On the other hand, it serves as an essential means and a vital approach to improve social cohesion and create trust between host

communities, actors and local authorities for holistic recovery and resilience (Ginsburg, et al., 2017). Local authorities can help to create trust and foster positive relationships with affected communities by including them in the planning and execution of relief and children's schooling. Community engagement in conflict affected IDP environments beyond providing access to shelter and other basic needs, may be essential to focus on trust and mutual support which can be a rewarding means to build resilience and enhance social cohesion (INEE, 2010b).

2.4.2 Community Engagement Strategies During Emergencies

Engagement strategies seem to imply interactive natures of local assets and social capital in play. In this regard, Sharam, et al., (2023) discusses that community initiatives to collective engagement underline the individual, social and system perspectives. Building on the individual members, the social perspective anchors on the networks that link individuals, community organizations, and leaders toward a common goal. Like a living creature, a community, building on individuals and social groups, each operating within specific boundaries to meet community needs, represent specialized functions, activities, or interests for the common good. During emergencies, however, such interactions and cohesive perspectives face challenge due to the new phenomenon, which in turn requires maturity and reciprocity to exist during the emergences and crisis situations (Tazin, 2023). According to Khan (2017), community engagement strategies in the aftermath of conflict, drought, flood, and wind locust might differ based on the scenario and the magnitude in specific location. Some common tactics discussed by Khan (2017), include teaching community members on how to prepare for a disaster on their own, devising a volunteer management strategy, recruiting and coordinating volunteers, and training volunteers. In addition to these broad concepts, particular systems for engaging communities in various sorts of emergencies exist. In the case of a drought, for example, community participation strategies may include water conservation education programs as well as community-led water and food management efforts. Community engagement techniques for floods may include early warning systems and evacuation preparation. Community participation techniques in crisis situations may include peace building programs and conflict resolution training (Sung & Chong-Sup, 2023). In the context of diminishing external aid and technical support from outside, this study would like to treat community strategies from inside out. During emergencies, engagement strategies are crucial for ensuring effective response and recovery. Considering an “inside-out” perspective implies and considers existing realities through

holistic approach. This emphasizes the strengths, capacities and resources that exist within the community rather than mainly depending on and relying on external aid.

Technically, community engagement from within or inside-out, as outlined by Corbin et al., (2017), gives more attention to exploring and refining community dynamics which serves as a base to enhancing local capabilities and capacities for effective emergency response. Key components of such focused inside-out exploration include recognizing social and cultural contexts, allowing opinions, empowering diverse community through peer learning and focused tailored training which contributes to boosting inclusive collaborative planning and execution. At the center such endeavor, effective communication among community members and trust building in due process remain vital. These strategies are emphasized to ensure feedback mechanisms regularly and adapt strategies timely. In due process, appreciating and upholding local indigenous knowledge and practices mark significant advantage in fostering talents. This approach not only fosters resilience but also strengthens social cohesion and sustainability. Overall, engaging communities in emergency planning and management cherishes safe access to all including vulnerable groups to culturally appropriate, socially sound and feasible solutions (Swindell, McCommons & Elliott, 2022). With this huge potential, the inside-out approach and its strategy seem a promising option for future research and practices to emergency education.

. 2.4.3 Significance of School Feedings in Emergency

Displacement results persons to emergency situations of the victims who looking for the provision of emergency feeding programs. Children and parents who face the pains of crisis including conflicts, natural disaster and pandemics deserve immediate nutritional needs to the minimum and holistic educational response to the desirable (WFP, 2023; UNICEF, 2023). The concept of feeding children to schools for better education accomplishments and socialization seems to have initiated in the late 19th century in Europe and was formalized in the USA with the National School Lunch Act of 1946. Following the national initiative and its advantages, internationally key actors including the World Food Program, national governments, NGOs and local communities and the private sector considered school feeding in various arrangements for diverse intentions. In its application, stakeholders collaborate and contribute depending on the context and purpose. In the case of emergency situation however, educational services and continuity of feeding happen

challenging due to scarce resources and demands to ensure humanitarian efforts (WFP, 2023; McGovern & Dole, 2023).

Various forms of emergency school programs are observed in many countries including Ethiopia. The main intention lies on addressing the significant demand posed by conflict, drought and food insecurity. These initiatives are essential for victimized children to respond to survival and next improving child nutrition (WFP, 2023). From the view stand of back to schooling, feeding plays pivotal role in boosting school attendance and alleviating painful pressure of parents looking for morning meals. In this regard, the government of Ethiopia reported to have strong focus to both community-based emergency response and home-grown feeding programs (MoE, 2022). Moreover, notable education sector partners including WFP and Plan International intensified various approaches including self-help groups and vouchers to mitigate contextual challenges and enhance educational outcomes. These programs not only provide critical nutrition to those enrolled but also avail options to attract parents, empower communities, stimulate local economies and foster social cohesion. However, challenges such as power relations, coordination, shared roles and accountability remain critical obstacles to success (MoE,2023; Plan International, 2023).

Effective emergency school feeding initiatives, as outlined by INEE (2020), are organized responsive intervention involving diverse actors and intermediaries to support children in crises. While situations necessitate immediate cross cutting responses at both acute and chronic emergencies, development partners often focus on specific vulnerable targeted groups in prolonged emergencies. In such situations, the burden on communities become huge and integrated strategies stands critical. In many immediate cases, the World Food Programme (WFP), for instance provides essential school meals to children in emergency contexts globally, yet little efforts are exerted to link with local community initiatives (Canton, 2021). Also, other programs related to either safety or aim to improve health and well-being in immediate response fail to consider options to engage the locale for longer term intervention which would have better contributed to emergency educational responses. In similar practices, experiences aimed at promoting gender equality by ensuring equal access to nutrition to boys and girls would be availed to retention. In such perspectives despite the established checklist, relying on local communities and emphasizing supporting them build their own system through interactions and talent boost is usually an area overlooked from many angels (Lele & Goswami, 2021).

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is also another key actor in children’s education. Beyond immediate aid, it offers emergency school feeding program. During emergencies, UNICEF’s school feeding program focus on feasible approaches such as peer group to reach the vulnerable target beneficiaries directed to learning and well-being (Hatløy & Sommerfelt, 2017). In addition to providing meals for children, UNICEF’s approach aims to support facilitators and parents to psychosocial and economical intervention where and when possible. Nevertheless, attentions to uphold local indigenous practices including local famers and business during emergencies is an untapped area which perhaps best serve both local communities displaced parents and children in feeding programs (Mashiko, Franz & Satoh, 2018).

Focusing to the objectives of the study, a deeper observation of the purpose and scope of intervention, actors seem to respond to situations through distinct feeding pathways. Literature also addresses essential features that underline principles and implications to the local community engagement practices.

Table One: Feeding Pathways and Underlying Principles in Action

Feeding Pathway	Perspective	Principles and practices	Implication to communities
Child centered (WFP, 2021)	The rights of the child Food and nutrition for healthy- quality learning	Child is the prime subject. Child nutrition, protection and educational access as a priority Mixed pathways, school or home. Improves children’s access, survival	Schoolchildren at a center Social safety networks and local development settings emphasized. Developed and developing communities can engage on purpose
School centered (Bray, 2000)	Equitable access to children	Equal chance for all enrolled. Attendance and survival of a child Efficiency in meager resource use	Attract communities to send children to school. School-community relationship Engage community creatively
Home centered (Nicolai, 2003)	Compromise on the cost of child	Flexibility and responsive to need. Contribute to family food intake. Adjustment to family context	Family gains benefit through a child through home take ration Motive to send more children.
Home Grown school feeding (WHO, 2021;Hatløy & Sommerfelt, 2017)	Child learning & Local economy	Serving child education and food and nutrition Boost value chain, local market	Small hold farmers, cooperatives School-community relations

Source: compiled by the researcher, July 2024

The pathways outlined above highlight critical dimensions impacting child and parent involvement both in emergencies and normalcy. Based on the situation and intended purpose, it also allows options to contextualize and count on available resources and potentials. A child-centered approach mainly seems to prioritize children's rights and basic needs to enhance better outcomes in food security, nutrition and protection. In this regard, while the child centered stands on the right based, it seems difficult to ensure emergencies of poor countries. Equitable access to all school feeding pathways seem to be intended to control equity and balance families benefit in school feeding. This approach potentially serves to boost enrollment and foster social cohesion while encouraging local economies. Nevertheless, in meager resource availability, in particular during emergencies, unless communities are supported the issue of equitable access may happen in challenge. The third pathway emphasizes immediate incentive negotiations, where take home rations are assumed to attract parents than children and their school learning. On the other side, the home-grown school feeding pathway focuses on local talent boost through focusing on sourcing ingredients locally, supporting intersectoral connectivity, for example agriculture, market education and health in providing nutritious meals at schools. This approach seems to have huge potential to foster public private partnerships including members of the communities. Further, it could boost youth self-employment and school community interaction in search of creative partnerships, feasible resource mobilization and use and effective feeding schemes at schools and children's homes. Additionally, it may allow opportunities to revitalize school resources, school staff and parents in various interactions toward goal-oriented tasks and resilience.

2.5 Policy Provisions in National School Feeding Program of Ethiopia

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), in its General Education Proclamation (No.1368/2025), clearly mandates the Ministry of Education to ensure the right to basic education of citizens and continuity of equitable quality education during emergencies. To be specific, Article 6, sub article 4 of the proclamation emphasizes the commitment of the government to safeguarding education in all contexts. This includes educational access to all students, even in face of crisis such as conflict, natural disaster, or public emergencies. The article also underscores the importance of engagement of actors and building educational resilience frameworks that can adapt and endure challenging circumstances. Thereby the government intends to promote not only academic continuity but also the overall well-being of children affected by such calamities (FDRE, 2025).

In 2020, the Ministry of Education officially designed and announced the Ethiopian National School feeding program (NSFP) with overarching goal to healthy child and related several essential objectives. Among the objectives (1) to improve school children's health and nutrition status, (2) increase access to educational attainment (including enrollment, attendance, retention and completion), (3) reduce gender social inequalities by targeting the most vulnerable groups, and (4) increase smallholder farmers' access to the school feeding market, thereby increasing their incomes (MoE, 2016).

In Ethiopia, reports indicate increased multiple and complex emergencies that children and their families face in daily lives. These life-threatening challenges include the conflict in substantial areas of Ethiopia affecting children in Oromia, Afar, Amhara and Tigray regions. Moreover, sporadic interethnic conflicts in Eastern Oromia, Benishangul Gumuz, Gambella and Southern Ethiopia Region; and the worst drought in forty years in Afar, Oromia, SNNP and Somali regions (UNICEF, 2023). The concerted efforts aimed to ensure that 15.7 million children receive education and protection through integrated humanitarian assistance. Of these, 12.8 million children required lifesaving support due to conflict and drought (UNICEF, 2022). According to MoE (2022), over 20 million people of whom 7 million children require urgent feeding response, of which communities in nine regions are in active problem of emergency. While current studies in Ethiopia maintain that school feeding has positive contribution to improved children's enrolment and health, there is no substantial evidence on how this situation is practiced in IDP context and how the local communities, both affected and IDP parents engage and help students learning using the available school feeding schemes. Moreover, strengthening community engagement in the emergency program would enhance nutritional outcomes and diminish educational inequalities (Tsegaye & Gezahegne, 2023). Nevertheless, in the IDP contexts, community engagement responses that equivalent to the magnitude of the problem and relevant to building learning recovery and resilience, for example using emergency feedings are not yet explored.

The National School Feeding Policy and Strategy of (MoE, 2021) discusses the policy pillars(vision, mission and values) socio-cultural, economic and educational relevance of the school feeding to children wellbeing. This specific policy is aligned with various sector policies, international, regional, and national strategies, contributing to the achievement of key developmental goals like the Growth and Transformation Plan II, Education Sector Strategic Plan, National School Nutrition and Health strategy, and Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 4. The

policy further aims to provide nutritious and safe food, complemented by health and nutritional interventions, to all school children. It emphasizes the importance of procuring locally available food from local farmers, thereby creating a stable market and enhancing local productivity. Additionally, the policy focuses on multi-sectoral collaboration and partnerships across various sectors, including education, agriculture, health, nutrition, and social affairs, to optimize the benefits of the school feeding program embedded with developing community monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the progress and impact of the programs. Taking note of the above, the policy outlines the four broad school feeding pathways which entail important implications to community engagement and empowerment.

Table Two: Summary of the National School Feeding Pathways of Ethiopia

Pathways	Description	Implications to community engagement
Centralized	School feeding all children uniformly through federal and regional government budget, purchase from center and distribute down echelon to schools. Central/regional Macro level; mainly food from factory.	Communities are expected to engage in daily distribution and safe use of resources. No mention on how local assets and social capital are unleashed.
Decentralized /Home Grown school Feeding	It intends to boost the local market and school meals. Local governments / farm unions/cooperatives supply to schools. Flexible Public private/cooperatives are encouraged to market value chain Messo-micro level produce and supply unprocessed food items.	High potential to local resource mobilization and community engagement through strengthening farmers and community capacities and increase their income options, ultimately improving livelihood opportunities and sustainable and inclusive development. Local communities have direct access to producing, selling, transporting, controlling, and cooking. IDPs can take part upon mutual support.
Community based model	School-community ownership and productivity on school meals. Parents contribute food or cash; Schools cultivate farm/garden. Micro level Produce contribute and prepare fresh hot meal	Committed partnership between community-school engagement. It assumes the school is a community asset. Social cohesion between host and IDPs could be an added value to creativity Success and sustainability for mutual benefit and recovery is high.
Outsourcing/ SHG Catering	Integrate local self-employment opportunities with school meal practices. Commercializing services	Local host communities can benefit from basic infrastructures and market chains. IDPs may have huge potential to engage through

services		their social assets/capital; yet lack the monetary capital start unless they collaborate with the host.
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Source: National School Feeding Policy (MoE, 2021)

Taking note of the above table, in Ethiopia, enhancing community engagement practices in the national School Feeding (NSF) stands critical to address the newly joining 2 million school aged children to the system each academic year. In line with the diverse context of the country, a close analysis of each one of the pathways is essential to addressing food insecurity and educational barriers, especially during emergencies. While the framework is appreciable to its emphasis to collective responsibility among community members, including parents, teachers and local leaders, detail strategies and actions seem to remain open on ensuring engagement of all actors in children's rights to educational outcomes. Moreover, ensuring participation and rewarding talents through identifying educational needs and allowing community assets to foster temporary learning spaces during crises, which is critical to relief and recovery seem area that deserve attention. Also the role of non-government organization's effort to not only provide relief response but create feasible strategies complement and collaborate with communities for long term development seem an are to be emphasized.

In this regard, it would be relevant to investigate how each approach integrates various pathways to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of school feeding programs, ultimately improving nutrition and educational outcomes during emergencies.

2.5.1 School Feeding Standards in Ethiopia

According to School Feeding Policy Framework and Strategy (2021), a school feeding service requires schools to have clean water, reliable food storage, cooking, bathing for cooks and toilet facilities and adequate feeding areas for children. These facilities are expected to be specified in the new school construction design. Moreover, based on the number of children and also teachers in some cases, schools or institutions that engage in feeding are expected to fulfil sufficient inputs and appropriate materials including Kitchen/cooking room, bowls, containers/buckets for water, plates, cups, store solid disposal systems, liquid disposal systems, school feeding management structure and women cooks.

Based on the student and teacher population, the policy also underscores the necessity to avail clean water, facilities and inputs for the school feeding including trained cooks. Regarding the

meal type and standard, based on context, it suggests wheat /maize flour (166 gm), rice (66 gm); pulses (10 gm), oil (10 gm), sugar (10 gm), salt (3 gm) to primary school children (MoE, 2021).

The policy emphasizes the crucial role of feeding for equitable quality learning outcomes, health improvements. It also underlines the requirements including proper infrastructure and resources in the success of school feeding programs. In line with this, looking at creative avenues about addressing basic school service challenges seem relevant through local communities, which may unleash their potential assets and mutual support options toward meaningful relief and recovery.

Based on the broader intentions of the policy it seems also critical to consider community engagement to address salient bottlenecks related to school feeding programs and better learning outcome both in normalcy and emergency.

Firstly, ensuring access to clean water in paramount. Nevertheless, in many schools . both urban and rural areas, schools lack safe water sources and rely on unhealthy water spots causing serious health risks to school population. The issue of reliable and safe food storage is another challenge where many schools suffer from lack of classrooms. Similarly, proper cooking facilities and hygienic sanitation items are equally important to mitigate food borne problems and maintain healthy learning environment throughout the academic calendar; yet far from the minimum standard in almost all schools (WFP, 2023).

Another point lies in the provision of adequate safe and suitable feeding areas. This is essential health and human service components to ensure that children stay safe and consume their portion meals without problems. This may include consideration of regularly clean , safe and comfortable space and waste management system which may count on local mother self-help groups. This is particularly relevant in crowded areas and schools constrained by limited spaces.

The policy also recognizes the need for sufficient input and suitable materials during work and services. This includes not only basic standard shelter, but also equipment like utensils and cooking items and well-defined school feeding management structure. The structure is assumed to consider projections of proper planning, procurement , preparation and distribution of meals to ensure alignment and attainment. The emphasis on employing trained cooks, preferably mothers, is also another relevant issue. Within Ethiopian households, many literature and field observations assert that women often play a significant role in food preparation and nutrition added value to mothers' employment and safe children learning.

In Ethiopia, while the above policy notions sound quite interesting, the realities on the ground are quite contrary to the aspirations. While most schools are within the communities and close to regular interactions, policy direction fails short of considering and applying such potentials fully. From the MoE reports in normal situation, nearly 90% of the schools in Ethiopia lack access to clean water to clean water (MoE, 2023). During the armed conflict and adverse situations facilities deteriorated and hence the requirements listed not only unattainable but lack government structure to be followed and supported. In this case communities may stand reliable agents of recovery and resilience. In contexts where such requirements are unattainable and lists are lacking, approaches to interventions community-based feeding were observed to bear multifold advantages. It contributes to improved and responsible child health care through neighborhood and mother self-help groups and allows safe girls education and reduce dropout. Equally, improve school community interactions including displaced parents to their children education.

Including the education policy, most other sectoral policies and strategies emphasize the critical role of community engagement in emergencies. The Ethiopian Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies (EiE, 2020), identify community participation and local resources mobilization as core components of effective response interventions. The standards require community members to be actively involved in the mapping, planning, implementation and evaluation of emergency responses. Such engagement according to most policy direction ensures that locale are represented and effectively develop age appropriate and participatory learning opportunities to diverse groups (INEE, 2013).

However, Ethiopia seems hardly enjoying from the fruits of the human rights policies. Currently due to frequently occurring calamities including ethnic based adversities, are resulting in population pressure, weak administrative capacities to manage policy stated rights. In this regard, Zewude (2011) highlights that the country has experienced recurring droughts roughly every decade since mid-1970s, leading to famine, displacement, and prolonged crises. Currently, ongoing armed conflicts and deadly consequences further exacerbated the challenges resulting to huge displacements (Tsegaye & Gezahegne, 2023). In reaction to these deep challenges, in particular to education of displaced children, the Ministry of Education (MoE,2020) tried to align with food security and social protection measures that opened opportunities to innovative interventions in regional states and city administrations.

Following the national school feeding program reports support its functions to be a notable contributor to vital safety net and social security encouraging school regular attendance and socialization skills (MoE, 2021). According to the cost benefit analysis of the National Bank of Ethiopia (2017), every dollar invested in school feeding generates an economic return of USD 3.1 for in-kind support and USD 6.7 for home-grown model. Furthermore, the World Bank's report on "Re-Imagining School Feeding" emphasizes the program's positive effects on education, nutrition, and local economies, in fragile localities (Hanmer et al., 2024).

Since its launch in 1994, large-scale school feeding in Ethiopia has evolved. Prior to this the ministry, through its regional support scheme, focused on lowland and pastoral areas prone to drought and unpredictable flooding in lower Awash and Shebele basins. In this front, while the efforts made by WFP have been instrumental the national coverage compared to huge demand remains only at 3 to 8 percent during a decade period (Tadesse & Gebrehiwot, 2021). Civil society has also been key players in the task of fostering cash and in-kind support to the ministry for education in emergencies. Moreover, since 2005, the Education Sector Development Programs have aimed to enhance coordinated efforts to educational access during emergencies by establishing temporary learning spaces, rehabilitating schools and providing essential learning inputs. In this regard, efforts to align the National School Health and Nutrition Strategy (MoE, 2016) reinforce the initiatives, highlighting the necessity of engagement of all actors in effective school feeding program marketing.

Despite a cross-cutting recognition to community engagement in emergency education response, practices are erratic and less focused to strategic areas (INEE & MoE, 2013). In addition, records of community efforts in responding to challenges and evidence on process demonstrating why and how the engagement records for particular issues are lacking (Mideksa et al., 2024). In this regard, it seems education in emergencies is predominantly short-term agenda and possibilities of bridging opportunities to the community development aspects remain with poor consideration.

Regarding nutritional status and academic performance, research conducted by Derese & Marisennayya (2023), indicate a positive correlation both at lower primary and secondary levels in selected locations. Moreover, inter-sectoral policies such as the National Nutrition Program (2016-2020) aim to improve children's health by providing safe water and sanitation facilities while strengthening school feeding initiatives (MoE, 2016). In due course, the productive safety net program (2016-2020) also complements school feeding through cash transfers and food

assistance. Nonetheless, in depth evidence on how context-based community practices entertain engagement to optimize educational, nutritional and livelihood issues is still lacking.

2.6 “Busa Gonofa” and “ Hyra” Local Initiatives in Oromia and Tigray Regions of Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, the regime changes in 1991, and adoption of an ethnic federal system, with the 1995 Constitution has resulted to the creation of several regional states, including Oromia and Tigray. Nevertheless, the “Busa Gonofa” in Oromia and “ Hyra” in Tigray local initiatives seem to have embedded into the indigenous community practices way before the federal state formation. According to the respective regional sources, during adversities, ethnic groups along with their language and cultural custom family lineage seek shelters and support each other to overcome the problems. This indigenous framework fosters a harmonized and inclusive communities to maintain their identities.

According to Oromia Education Bureau (2023), Oromia regional state anchoring on the Geda system, enriched and formalized "Busa Gonofa" by regional law number 244/2022 to serve both emergency and local community development response. Accordingly, the regional law aims to promote mutual cooperation for relief, recovery, and resilience. As discussed by the bureau report, Busa Gonofa initiative relies on the Geda System, which upholds cooperation and mutual assistance across generations to effectively respond to both natural and man-made emergencies.

The initiative ensures that recovery efforts are community driven and culturally relevant, fostering transparency and accountability. By mobilizing resources both monetary and in kind, the ideals of Busa Gonofa addresses systems to cherish essential needs like food and shelter for vulnerable population without interruption. This operational framework seems to strongly encourage community involvement in both immediate relief efforts and capacities to long term resilience.

Taking advantage of decentralized education administration, the regional government of Oromia entertained Busa Gonofa to promote social values of mutual support and aims to implant a culture of sharing and supporting humanitarian aid in continued manner. The initiative pulls together knowledge, skills and resources to protect most vulnerable groups, especially children in dangerous situations. Busa Gonofa, unlike the traditional efforts, introduces and offers a comprehensive framework for both normal and emergency needs. The rationale that it deeply rooted in the Oromo cultural traditions of cooperation may allow to voluntary engagement and

dedicated actions to effectively tackle educational challenges. Yet the actual fabrics in times of crisis require close investigation of the community practices.

In a comparable lens, the other report from Tigray, Queha administration refers the “Hayra” initiatives. The Hayra initiative has been dominantly religious based both in its teaching and focus. It upholds mutual support practices among peer groups during the new year days to those poor neighborhoods. According to Rossen et.al., (2023), the practices by the Tigrian communities during the armed conflict proven local communities’ wisdom to solution to life threatening challenges. Accordingly, due to the deadly war in Tigray regional leadership had been weakened, leaving people to rely on local elders and networks including mutual support during the crisis. The showcase in Tigray primarily aimed at managing the crisis through self-initiation ingenuities of local community members. In contrast to Oromia’s socio-cultural rooted and structured approach to community engagement was thin both in intention and scope of interaction. Moreover, Tigray community response to emergencies has been characterized by grassroots and more flexible community driven model. This informal framework seems to have demonstrated unique strengths of immediacy and non-bureaucratic chains in maximizing social networking. In this regard, youth volunteerism and residential networking structures seem to have a dominant and decisive role to cope with and cultivating opportunities during the crisis.

Available reports on region owned school feeding programs in Tigray have shown that such initiatives were strong during the last three decades. Nevertheless, the escalated conflict occurred between November 2021 to 2023 seem to have demolished such efforts to scratch. Thus, community initiatives have emerged from socio cultural interaction to relatively organized actions. Accordingly, beyond religious festivals focused response to the urgent needs of internally displaced children and their families. The strong ties within communities, driven by shared language and cultural homogeneity seem to have fostered a sense of obligation among members to support one another (Mokennen, 2022). These networks have been indicated to have proven relatively effective in interactions, communication, facilitating resource generating mechanisms without relying on either formal institutional frameworks or external donors.

Theoretically, the communal spirit and mutuality appear latent and revitalized during adversities. In this regard, the case in Tigray highlights the local dynamics and importance indigenous community wisdom in humanitarian responses. Amid the challenges instigated by deadly conflict, shared roles and identify to focused responsibilities seem to have played pivotal roles. Such

grassroots initiatives not only revitalized capabilities to reinforce bonds between groups toward elevated common agenda like organized emergency response. As such, understanding and exploring the motivation and dynamics of the hosts toward displaced persons can inform relevant knowledge for crafting responsive policies and performances in similar contexts.

2.7 Local Assets and Actors in Emergency School Feeding

In humanitarian crises, barriers to effective community engagement are often more pronounced than the limited enablers available (Swindell et al., 2022). External barriers categorized as immediate and intermediate, significantly influence host community involvement in supporting internal displaced persons (IDPs) and educational responses (Jein, et al., 2016; Ayenew, 2023). UNESCO (2020) identifies challenges such as limited resources, language issues, cultural differences and logistical difficulties like transportation. In some instances, a historical lack of trust between affected communities and local authorities further complicates engagement.

The European Commission (2019a) outlines five critical barriers: infrastructure, protection, social, institutional and financial which hinder effective mitigation responses. Similarly, UNICEF (2023) emphasizes the importance of community participation in emergency management, advocating for resilience -building through training to enhance connections with communities before , during and after disasters. The INEE (2024) handbook highlights that community involvement in emergency preparedness is influenced by the orientation and motivation of vulnerable local members, serving as a prerequisite for mutual engagement. However, policymakers often prioritize immediate relief over long-term community-based recovery.

Looking at the emergency situation in Ethiopian education system, consistent challenges impacted by conflicts and rounds of natural disasters, such as the 20152015 ELNino drought displacing over 7.1 million children from school (Moges et al., 2023). Conflict affected areas experience heightened food insecurity and reduced educational access, particularly for girls , who face increased risks for early marriage when education is compromised (Save the Children International, 2023). To combat these challenges, interventions like school feeding programs, psychosocial support and financial aid are vital (WFP, 2021; UNICEF, 2023).

In effort to the challenges, the Federal Ministry of Education (2023) reports a huge demand and sharp increase in emergency responses, with 20 million people affected, including 7 million children primarily due internal conflicts and drought (MoE,2022; MoE 2023). This population

urgently requires support and assistance for survival and resilience, emphasizing the need to explore how the local communities contribute and benefit as a result of engagement in the emergency response and recovery efforts. In line with this, despite the critical role the communities, ideas on creative localized school feedings, emergency education programs and evidence of practices at the grassroots are limited, which necessitates further research to guide and refine interventions (INEE, 2010; MoE, 2022). Amid the dynamics, engaging local communities in educational planning including school feeding programs is essential for ensuring culturally appropriate responses and equitable access to education (MoE, 2021; 2022). In such endeavor, community efforts in daily tasks, mainly for sourcing food for school meals, identifying the right target beneficiaries and tracking the learning against absenteeism are crucial (Education Cluster, 2021).

While thinking of local communities during emergencies, whether man-made or natural, the necessity of collaborative actions stands necessary to mitigate the occurrence in alarming scale and design effective recovery. Hence, appreciative inquiry of local assets and collaboration to maximize it through community dialogue and shared roles not only boosts innovation but is vital to ownership (UNESCO, 2021). It also underscores the significance of giving attention to diverse views and involving all stakeholders, particularly motivated change agents in planning and implementation to address unique needs and respond inclusively. In due building trust between and among all stakeholders, in particular the hosts and IDPs is essential for fostering positive relationships and facilitating collaboration throughout the period.

Considering all the key issues of engagement, INEE (2022), emphasizes that pay attention and timely responses to emergencies are most crucial for risk reduction and establishing a foundation for trust and equitable recovery including educational services. In this, the involvement of the focus on inclusive and feasible emergency management centering the locale seems to determine effectiveness of the emergency response in crisis.

2.7.1 Local Community Members' Key Assets in Emergency School Feeding Initiatives

Nicolai et al., (2016) emphasize that community members, representing both host and the IDPs, play a notable role as primary actors in overcoming humanitarian crisis. These individuals and families who established strong social ties among another engage in daily business to explore the complexities of conflict, disputes, recovery, sharing common experiences that foster resilience and

solidarity. Engaging local groups in vital form maximization and localizing resources for relief efforts and reintegration of displaced population. This localized approach not only ensures that interventions are contextually relevant but also empowers communities to take an active role in shaping their recovery.

Khan (2023), further highlights that during severe conflicts, local communities explore and maximize their unique strengths through a localization system that revitalizes traditional wisdom and mobilizes local resources. This process allows community members to set their own challenges during emergencies and move to development agenda and implement tailored solutions, enhancing their capacity for economic and social advancement. Localization reduces dependency on external aid from high income countries , thereby strengthening local resilience and improving project outcomes through community-led initiatives (Tickly, 2020). This shift towards local leadership is essential for advancing sound emergency responses and suitable community development.

Moreover, Komatsu (2024) underscores the dynamic nature of interactions within these groups, which promotes social cohesion among diverse communities. Peaceful interactions yield numerous benefits, including the exchange of new experiences and skills, the establishment of legitimacy through addressing local priorities, and enhanced effectiveness due to local knowledge. Quick decision-making processes are facilitated, ensuring that interventions are timely and relevant. UNICEF (2019) asserts that these collaborative efforts significantly contribute to sustainability by involving local actors in the decision-making process. Additionally, Burde (2014) argues that community participation enhances the relevance of educational governance, fostering trust and collaboration, which are essential for effective educational outcomes in times of crisis.

2.7.2 Local State Actors in Emergency School Feeding Initiatives

The African Union (2024) identifies government structures and their enforcement mechanisms at all levels as the primary accountable actors in crisis response and recovery. In conflict-affected situations, state actors encompass all stakeholders involved, including local, district, regional, and national authorities. These actors play a crucial role in addressing the educational needs of children during emergencies, a priority echoed in global initiatives like Education for All (EFA) and its subsequent frameworks, which urge member countries to prioritize education in crisis situations (UNESCO, 2021; INEE, 2010). The urgency of coordinated efforts among various government

levels is emphasized in these conventions, reflecting a collective commitment to ensuring access to education.

Despite this framework, local and national governments often struggle to effectively mitigate the impact of conflict on education (Burde, 2012). Challenges such as limited resources, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and inadequate training can hinder their ability to respond swiftly to the educational needs of affected populations. State actors are expected to align with global development agendas, demonstrating commitment through robust engagement and measurable performance indicators (Kinrz, 2011). However, research indicates that in many African conflict-prone regions, governmental responses are frequently slow and insufficient.

Consequently, there is a growing recognition of the importance of community engagement and the involvement of non-state actors in addressing urgent educational needs (UNICEF, 2023; Adeyinka, 2024; Ahmad & Saeed, 2024). These non-state actors can provide immediate support and innovative solutions, filling gaps left by state responses. Effective collaboration between state and non-state actors is essential for creating a comprehensive approach to educational recovery in conflict-affected areas. This partnership can enhance the resilience of education systems, ensuring that children receive the support they need during crises and facilitating their reintegration into formal education as conditions improve.

2.7.3 Partners in Emergency School Feeding Initiatives

Partners who usually are non-state actors play a pivotal role in shaping political, social, and economic landscapes, especially in conflict-affected regions of Africa (AU, 2024). Defined as individuals or organizations operating independently of government authority, these actors include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations, community-based groups, religious institutions, and media outlets. Their significance is particularly pronounced in humanitarian responses, advocacy, and service provision, especially where state capacity is limited or ineffective (Hettne, 2015).

During emergencies, non-state actors, such as local civil society organizations and community-based groups, are instrumental in fostering community engagement. They leverage social capital to build trust and partnerships, which are essential for driving positive change. In contexts where government structures are weak or absent, these actors often fill critical gaps in service delivery, providing essential support across all phases of crisis management from preparedness and response

to recovery (Longden, 2013; UNESCO, 2021). Their adaptability allows them to respond quickly to evolving community needs, ensuring that interventions remain relevant and effective.

Education emerges as a vital component in mitigating conflict and promoting peace. Non-state actors are particularly adept at ensuring neutrality in educational content, which is crucial in polarized environments. By integrating educational aid with broader humanitarian efforts, they help create inclusive learning environments that facilitate dialogue and reconciliation. Their role as intermediaries is essential; they not only provide educational resources but also engage communities in discussions about educational priorities and needs, fostering a sense of ownership and agency among local populations.

Furthermore, non-state actors contribute to rebuilding trust within communities by promoting transparency and accountability in service delivery. Their grassroots connections enable them to understand the specific challenges faced by different groups, allowing for tailored interventions that address local concerns. This engagement is crucial for long-term recovery and resilience, as it empowers communities to take an active role in their development.

In summary, non-state actors are vital in conflict-affected areas, serving as essential players in humanitarian responses and community engagement. Their ability to mobilize resources, foster partnerships, and adapt to changing needs contribute significantly to societal change and stability. By enhancing educational opportunities and promoting peace, they play a crucial role in rebuilding communities and fostering resilience in the face of adversity.

2.8. Theoretical Underpinning of the Study

Based on the research objectives and drawing lessons from the review of the related literature, social capital theory (Putnam, 1999, 2000) is considered as the main lens to the theoretical orientation of this study. Equally, the community organizing theory articulated by Christens & Speer (2015), is also used as complementary to refine the perspectives and frameworks of the study. The two theoretical orientations complementing to the context of the study stand appropriate to address this research in community engagement in emergency school feeding in selected conflict induced localities in Ethiopia.

2.8.1 The Social Capital Theory

Basically, social capital theory underscores the relevance of social networks and trust both within and between groups. Its central thesis asserts that strong social relationships enhance collective action, mutual assistance and community resilience, especially during crisis.

Social capital theory has also been utilized to examine community responses in crisis situations, showing that engaged communities are more effective in advocating for educational resources. In my research, applying this theory underscored significant levels in allowing perspectives and opinions of community participation in their own contexts. The theory also allows opportunities and indicates that building trust and collaboration can greatly improve the implementation and sustainability of school feeding initiatives, ensuring that effectively addresses immediate needs of affected families.

According to Putnam (2000), in essence, social capital theorizes that individuals and communities possess a valuable resource, often referred to as “social capital”. This collective asset could enhance collective efforts to achieve shared goals. This essential replenishable resource is derived from the networks of relationships, trust between and among the networks and cooperation within and between communities. The theory further discusses that within a context; social capital can be categorized into three main types/features.

- **Bonding social capital** : it mainly refers to the strength of networks and level of relationships within a community that provide support and solidarity among members within defined scope.
- **Bridging social capital**: this involves connections and relationships across different groups or communities share common goals to foster cooperation and exchange of resources.
- **Linking social capital**: it deals with relationships between individuals and groups those in position of power or influence within and between communities, which can provide access to information, resources and opportunities.

Taking the above categories into account the question of the research, in particular to the context of emergency, community support to children enrollment and school feeding in crisis affected localities stands pivotal. As such, in each category mentioned above, social capital theory suggests that strong social networks and relationships can significantly enhance the effectiveness of these

initiatives. For example , communities with high levels of bonding social capital may be better equipped to mobilize resources and provide mutual support during adversities. Bridging social capital, in turn facilitates collaboration between different organizations and individuals involving in emergency response. Building on the two, the linking social capital helps and enhances proactive interconnections, alerts, to access and secure essential resources and maintain support from external actors and stakeholders.

In context of unpredictable external support, social capital theory seems to allow and highlight the importance of inward looking characterized by seeking from within, trusting each other and willingness to cooperate for common agenda. Thus, members are more likely to work together effectively to address the needs of their members and of affected communities. School feeding programs which are an essential part of enrollment and retention can be addressed crucially through fostering social capital by providing a common ground for community members to interact and build relationships. It also offers a valuable framework for understanding the roles of community-based initiatives in emergency response and recovery. The theory also suggests that fostering strong social networks, trust and cooperation in emergency responses enhances strong resilience both in immediate reaction and long-term development.

In view of Putnam (2000), communities have their own social assets developed into social capital. In this aspect the capital is to be exercised in times of emergency to speedy recovery and resilience to maintain normalcy. However, the author strongly argues that the treatment and cultivation of social capital is related to the treatment of civic participation in the regular process. Hence the level of involvement in local groups and creating opportunities by the actors , mainly the performance local entities and government play both roles in engagement practices and influence attainments. Overall, social capital theory has strong relevance to the research in hand. The theory with diversity in emphasis values that regardless of the level of community history, networks, relationships and trust elements within communities can be cultivated. In this regard the theory acknowledges that every human community has its own social capital, while recognizing differences in social capital features within and among communities and societies.

While Putnam's (2000) social capital theory appears sound to the case, it is not without comments. In this regard, Bourdieu (2006) argues the cultural capital need be at the center of the discourse as it explains overall community behavioral practices. Similarly, Ali and Loretta (2022),

comment and emphasize cultural quality and levels of relationships and trustworthiness between the groups and its networks influence the mutuality and social capital currency.

In relation to the above, the theoretical discussion of Coleman (1990) seems more inclusive in addressing the significance of social capital maturity from physical , which is primordial to human capital and then to purposefully organized social capital. The author explains as:

“...physical capital is created in making changes in materials to form tools that facilitate production; human capital is created by changing persons to give them skills and capabilities, but social capital is created when the relationships among persons change in ways that facilitate action. Physical capital is wholly tangible embedded in observable forms. Human capital is less tangible, embedded in skills and knowledge. But social capital is even less tangible since it is embedded in relations among persons” (Coleman, 1990, p., 304).

In essence, despite the varied thought embedded with the features of social capital, the theoretical position mentioned above, in common, underscore that social capital is like a living plant, mainly anchors with social activity, structures and actors. Thus, depending on the situation, during relief, recovery or intended plans to develop these elements of social capital need to first be initiated and mobilized. Moreover, the theory argues that unlike economic or human capital, social capital is situated within relationships, trust and networks embedded in daily livelihoods. Hence regardless of the levels of challenges, a social capital has the potential to use its assets, structures and actors to overcome the problems. In this regard, the theory seems to allow humans and open ways to test how both displaced and host communities use their social capital and engage in situations of emergencies, make opportunities and define mutual benefits for common good.

Nevertheless, the theoretical framework discussed so far seems to focus on strong social assets and networks assumed to be exhibited in normal context. In this regard, little literature is available about the differences in various social dynamics of rural locations including poor communities. Thus, it will be relevant to explore issues on how it serves those affected communities to survive, relief, recover and speed up resilience.

During emergencies, human communities suffer, resources damage and hopes shatter. In such context, social capital with all its promises could be a powerful asset to help the victims regain

hope , look inwards and plan for purpose. In line with this, exploring issues on how the theory fits to context through conditions of reciprocity, and shared norms in building effective partnerships between communities , state and non-state actors. In this vein, it will be vital to deeply dissect and comprehend how and why communities make use of their social assets. Equally, it seems important to see how local communities in challenging situations reactivate to use their available resources and opportunities during emergencies. This may add value to the theory on the state of the art of community engagement like emergency feedings get facilitated and accelerated to maximum so that communities maintain and cultivate social capital (Putnam, 2000; Russell & Reimers, 2009).

From observation, despite the difference in level of magnitude, local poor communities engage in their own social interactions and emergency responses. In a social environment where village administration or local government is under operation, social assets and social capital may be under influence both ways. Fox and Lazzati (2017) discuss that in conflict affected areas, where local normal administration face challenges, social interactions through its networks place in use to foster peace, cooperation and recovery of displaced families including opportunities of education. In this respect, Putnam (2000) describes levels of interactions and norms of cooperation during normal days influence levels of trust and cooperation promoted during the other days. This may indicate that strong social networks enhance community cooperation and responses amid challenges. Moreover, strong social capital characterized by strong social assets and networks, fosters the opportunities and capabilities to mitigate challenges of host and vulnerable groups. During conflicts. However, critics mention that the social capital theory simplifies social interaction and assets and overlooks power dynamics and structural inequalities, which are essential to understand the roles and engagement status of hosts and displaced people during emergencies. Hence, this study may look at the social capital from the view stand of poor rural communities where new knowledge may be obtained and complemented. In order to have a complete understanding, this study intends to address the community engagement practices which link to power relations. In this regard, the social capital theory may hardly stand on its own and complete to address the new dynamics of power relations in local communities of Ethiopia. This leads to a focus on how the local host communities host displacement of persons and initiate recognition and build up their assets to relief and recovery. Hence, in this study, the community organizing theory is found to be relevant to complement the gap observed on social capital theory.

2.8.2 Community Organizing Theory

Community organizing theory has evolved through several research works. Alinsky (1971), who believed to have strong contribution to the theory, emphasizes grassroots activism and local leadership. He also underscores the need to designing and mobilizing community efforts to define outcomes. Similarly, Gutierrez (1996), upholds community organizing as essential tool and emphasizes cultural competencies and consideration of diverse voices at the initial stage of planning to respond to challenges. Furthermore, McKnight (2022), refine the elements community organizing theory and advocate for asst based community development (ABCD), shifting the focus from deficits to existing strengths reinforcing the active role of locale in community empowerment.

Murphy and Cunningham (2003), strong advocates of community organizing theory, discussed a foundational framework for understanding how communities can address shared problems and enact social change. At its core, the theory emphasizes that collective action , fostered by existing capacity, ignites momentum and movement of interactions for better results. This seems essential for both marginalized and displaced groups to get out of hopelessness and control over their lives. According to Christens & Speer, (2015), appreciating what they have and empowering communities and starting from where they are and with what they have is the intellectual root of the theory. For educators and social workers including emergency workers and activists, this stands relevant to encouraging communities to unleash their potential from within. In practice the niche of the community organizing theory seems to anchor in listening to the people, appreciative inquiry, and identifying local social groups and actors within socio political structure.

The community organizing theory emphasizes the necessity of active participation from the viewpoint of community members in decision making, allowing them to appreciate and advocate of their own conditions and address their needs effectively. Empowering the communities and starting with what they have hand in context are the two important hinges of community organizing theory.

In communities affected by conflict, the principles of community organizing theory seem vital to help the victim get out of depression and initiating emergency responses particularly children

reintegration to schooling. The community organizing theory also allows local initiatives and culturally appropriate opportunities to network toward bottom-up ownership.

In this regard, the radical work of Paulo Freire (1970) introduced the political concept of "conscientization", a process of critical awareness through which people recognize their own capacity to transform their own realities. In both cases, the foundational ideas entertained in theories laid the groundwork for an "inside-out" approach where changes can originate and get cultivated from communities themselves and is driven by principles of empowerment, active engagement and community competence (Alter et al., 2017). The community organizing theory seems to have a strong implication to emergencies. In conflict induced situations, it offers a robust framework for understanding and rebuilding communities and fostering relief. It also helps as a powerful tool for psychosocial treatment recovery, moving beyond simply providing humanitarian aid to engaged interactions and seeking feasible solutions in the reconstruction of people's lives. In Africa including Ethiopia, both social capital and community organizing theories seem to hold essential elements and workable perspectives to tackling challenges faced by manmade and natural calamities. In particular it seems relevant to consider such theoretical orientations for problems posed by armed conflict and instability due to ethnic tensions.

2.8.3 Implications of the Theories to Community Engagement in Emergencies

Core elements of the social capital and community organizing theories have powerful complementary frameworks that offer strong approach to community engagement study. This is especially relevant to conflict affected regions/locations with weak governance and diverse population of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Community organizing, with the principle of start with what you have, is the process of helping people to look inside, not outside. Hence helps the locals solve local problems through collective actions and building power base from grassroots up. In the same manner, the process of building and revitalizing the social capital, which refers to the relationships and networks. And norms that facilitate social cooperation and mutual support (Christens & Speer, 2015; Odhiambo & Okello, 2020). The social capital, in turn, makes present and future organizing efforts more efficient by providing foundations for trust and shared responsibilities. The two theories seem mutually reinforcing: community organizing revitalizes social assets and capital; and social capital revamps and fuels further organizing toward greater solutions.

The attempt to integrate and synergize core assumptions of the two theories not only contributes to complete understanding of complicated situations of emergencies but also contributes to lasting solutions (Nkwana & Ndlovu, 2022).

The integration of the core theoretical assumption assumes to foster courage but also plays a critical role in addressing holistic responses to supporting displaced children and families during crisis. By fostering strong networks and local leadership, community initiatives can provide essential services like food , shelter and education, especially when basic needs are unmet (Kadariya et al., 2023). The communities' initiatives also work to protect children's rights, which are particularly sensitive during times of emergency and transition period from relief to recovery. Ultimately, community organizing and social capital provide robust framework of understanding how potential from the grassroots efforts stay vital and support emergency interventions and promote children learning and wellbeing in emergency situations (Turin et al., 2023).

2.9 Conceptual Framework of the Study

This research examines community engagement in emergency school feeding through the orientation of social capital and community organizing theories. It investigates how members and groups of typical local communities appreciate and use their assets and networks during crises to support reintegration and recovery. Focusing on two host communities embracing IDPs, the study emphasizes the construct of social capital including assets, networking, trust , relationships among local actors and partners.

The conceptual framework, rooted in the social constructivist stance, illustrates how the core elements at the policy and practice level interplay to enhance or deter social capital toward intended objectives. At the policy level the framework taps how local communities' initiatives are recognized and valued for education in emergencies. At the practice level, the framework emphasizes local assets and partnership of actors considers viability of social capital. In way to realize engagement practices, it also considers initiatives among hosts and IDPs in context of emergencies. It also explores whether voluntary self-motivated responses and effort for school feeding are exhibited withstanding challenges due to armed induced conflicts.

In a nutshell, at a policy level, a framework that upholds, recognizes and values local communities' initiatives for education in emergencies enhances their assets and social capital. At the local level, partnership of actors and viable social capital practices in action boosts engagement practices among host and IDP communities in context. Voluntary self-motivated initiatives for school feeding which enhances local assets in school feeding amid challenges. The interplay between the initiatives on the local assets with functional social capital results and improved emergency school feeding and post enrollment retention of internally displaced children within communities.

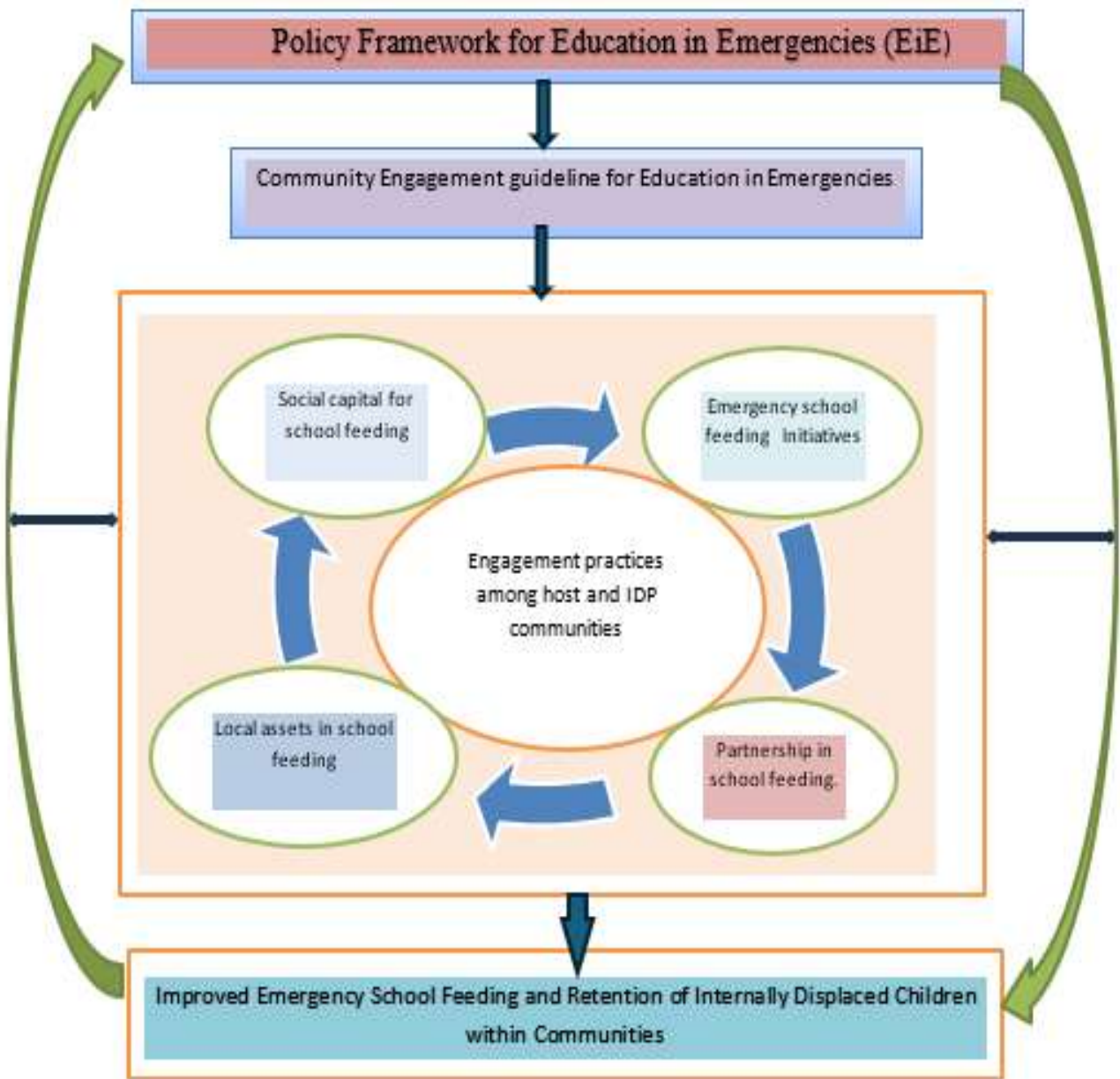


Figure One : Conceptual framework of the study by the Researcher

2.10 Description of the constructs and key variables

- a. Policy : policy framework in school feeding in emergencies refers to the principles that recognize and govern community engagement in emergency response objectives of internally displaced people. The recognition of collective local initiatives, the strategies and valuing in school feeding programs were the variables addressed in the study.

- b. Community Engagement guideline: Within the legal framework, the guideline includes provisions and engagements in the safety and adequacy of school food and nutrition education across the formal curriculum during emergencies. In the study whether the schools have it and how they applied it has been addressed. Moreover, its relations with local community initiatives and local assets to displaced children's post enrollment retention.
- c. Emergency school feeding initiatives : It refers to the personal and group self-motivated plans and practical contributions. It involves active participation and collaboration between community members, state actors and partners for the common purpose. Feeding pathways and link to community engagement practices , levels of initiatives and common challenges, were addressed in the study.
- d. Social capital for school feeding: Social capital in school feeding in emergencies refers to the networks, trust and mutual support that enable communities to work together to ensure children's access to education during crises. In the study networks, level of trust and mutual support in context of emergency school feeding both in Ginjo Oromia and Quea Tigray, were explored. Also, relationship between displaced families, and host community groups in daily lives and their children's interactions in schools were addressed.
- e. Local assets in school feeding: it refers to physical resources, indigenous knowledge and local practices in school feeding in emergency situations. In the study types of local resources and relationship between local assets/resources and social capital in action to displaced children's post enrollment retention were treated.
- f. Partnership in school feeding: it emphasizes the shared roles between community members, local state actors and partners toward emergency response, recovery and resilience. Specifically, it focused on local stakeholder's partnership, level of engagement and implications to existing emergency school feeding and post enrollment retention of displaced children in the contexts of Ginjo, Oromia and Queha Tigray regional states, Ethiopia.

CHAPTER THREE: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the fundamental elements that form the foundation of the research. It introduces the guiding paradigm, along with the ontological assumptions and epistemological frameworks that shape the study. The discussion extends to the axiological considerations and the methodology, detailing the design and approaches applied throughout the research process.

Furthermore, the chapter elaborates on the sample and sampling techniques used to define the target population, identifying key participants and relevant data sources. It provides a comprehensive explanation of the data collection procedures, ensuring compliance with established research ethics. In addition, the chapter outlines how the collected data was organized and analyzed using qualitative methods. In so doing, it emphasized the procedures and strategies employed in gathering, coding sorting and interpreting the information to generate meaningful insights. Finally, it discusses the thematic cases from the viewpoint comparative lens using feasible techniques. The chapter addresses the basic questions of the study offering a thorough understanding of the theoretical orientation and the research framework and the essence in implementing emergency responses in communities induced by armed conflict in selected locations of Ethiopia.

3.2 Study Settings

Since 1991, Ethiopia has introduced and implemented a federal that includes eleven regional states and two city administration. Despite continuous efforts to reduce poverty and mitigate ethnic based violences and armed conflicts, displacement due to such problems is imminent. Accordingly, during the last few years over ten million individuals dominantly in Oromia, Tigray and Amhara have been displaced and deprived from basic social services including the right to education of children (INEE, 2024). Moreover, in many displaced locations people find shelter in schools, which complicates educational access for host communities. In this scenario, the research setting concentrates on two areas, one in Oromia, another in Tigray Regional States that have shown typical cohesion in reintegrating internally displaced children into educational settings, examining the factors that contribute to their social cohesion and resilience efforts.

According to Central Statistical Agency (CSA, 2023) the Oromia Regional State, comprising 40% of the total population of the nation and covering one-third of the land mass, is situated in the

central part of Ethiopia. Geographically, Oromia links the nation in all directions with all regional administrations. Oromia is the home mainly for Oromo people, but all Ethiopian ethnic nationalities endowed with diverse socio-cultural fabrics, religious and economic activities inhabit the region. The region with all climatic and altitudinal landscapes, is the birthplace of the Coffee Arabica and known for its diverse resource landscapes, encompassing highlands, mountains, plateaus, and fertile wet and arable lands. Agriculture is the mainstay for millions of populations contributing to 65% of the GDP through cultivating coffee, fruits, Chat, cereals, legumes and cattle (MoE, 2023). Despite the potentials, in the region, the level of emergency crisis due to natural and man-made disasters is significant counting for 2.3 million people in 2022 (Oromia Regional State,2023).

The Jimma town administration, situated 350 km west of Addis Ababa, is made up of five sub-administrative units. Notably, the Ginjo local administration and its community have been accommodating around 50% of the displaced individuals for over two years. During the study period, over 25,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) were identified, with 40% being children under 18 who were displaced from western Oromia in 2021 and are currently recovering from crisis situations (Jimma University, 2023). The displaced parents receive self-help support facilitated by the local government and development partners, along with access to essential social services. This includes equitable access to emergency education and an accelerated learning program for out-of-school children aged 9 to 14 (Jimma Town Administration, 2024).

The Tigray Regional State, which consists of seven administrative zones and over 50 woredas, represent 6.5% of Ethiopia's overall population (CSA, 2021). Despite efforts to boost regional investment and encouraging advancements, the armed conflict in November 2021 and lasted for two years experienced a devastating impact resulting in over 2.5 million displaced population throughout the region (Tigray Regional State, 2024). The armed conflict further complicated lives of both adults and children from basic social services and schooling respectively (Mekele University, 2024). Amid the crisis, local administration of Queha one of the administrative sub cities of Mekele, showed exceptional courage to host over 12,000 displaced persons, whom 25% are school aged children who reintegrated to education, serve as one of the areas for the case study.

The selection of Ginjo in Oromia and Queha in Tigray, Ethiopia as research settings for a comparative case study on internally displaced persons (IDPs) is justified by its significance to typically represent the social contexts exemplary to courage and resilience. While both the regions have experienced extended conflicts and experiencing prolonged displacements, with IDPs heavily relying on local communities signify inquiry. In this regard, the reports mentioned that both Ginjo and Queha local communities, village administration and individuals have embraced IDPs and shown dedication of continued support since August 2022.

In view of the theoretical orientations, this collaboration emphasized relief and recovery efforts of the victims, particularly aftermath of armed conflict entails huge meaning to social capital. In this regard, Ginjo and Queha exemplify sound community collaboration and integration, allowing for research exploration of local initiatives and governance roles in responding to ongoing crises. The stability and courage to serve as safe host for IDPs provides an opportunity to assess the impacts of educational initiatives on displaced children's needs and community cohesion.

By studying these areas, this research gains insight into how such communities demonstrated courage and local approaches and responses to IDP situations. This endeavor allows us to extract valuable evidence to inform both practice and policy. Additionally, the socio cultural and social economic contexts reflected in the locations implicate interesting realities of homogeneity and diversity of the localities. These social assets allow to understand values and enhance new aspects of local community reactions to emergency responses. Thus, Ginjo and Queha serve as relevant case study locations to explore and comprehend the dynamics of engagement to reintegrate displaced children within their local contexts.

3.3. Research Paradigm

This study on conflict -induced internally displaced persons (IDPs) residing in two purposefully host communities underlies alignment with the framework of the study. The exploration of local communities' dynamic interactions results in pursuit of knowledge and the continuous creation of evidence and experiences within and among the local communities. The realities that emerge from daily interactions have significant implications for the constructivist philosophical underpinnings and assumptions that shape the research methodology. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), constructivist ontology asserts that individuals construct their own realities. However, in the context of the research settings, it is not just only individuals but mainly social groups and

collective efforts of networks of members play vital roles. The local social groups that exert greater influence and give meaning to social ties within both IDPs and host communities constitute the social constructivist paradigm.

Based on the research paradigm, the ontological perspective involves appreciation and recognition of the complex and multiple realities that these populations face in day-to-day lives. It further acknowledges that realities are socially constructed and may differ among various actors and stakeholders. Thus, not only the voices of each actor mainly the host communities, but actors and partners including IDPs contribute to the knowledge. In addition, the relations and interactions between the locals and authorities may matter a lot in accessing and generating and constructing knowledge. In this research, therefore, a close understanding of the local realities in which each one of the groups of participants engage in crucial for capturing the experiences and its meaning to the case affected by armed induced conflict.

The epistemology grounded in the social constructivist paradigm pays attention to appreciative inquiry of the groups engage in the process. The groups and members who take part and influence the course of action constitute the knowledge generation and knowledge cultivation. In this regard, efforts have been made to include participants and informants exposed to the realities and understand the context.

This research that focuses on engagement practices and understanding salient facts to build knowledge from IDPs and host communities explores the bonds within and among the communities. In this regard, Akpan, Mpamah, & Okoro (2020) further ascertain that reality generates and build on interactions among communities and stakeholders in which the qualitative aspects and grains of facts make sense and matters a lot. In line with this, the consideration of social capital and community organizing theories frame the core of the study and strongly supports how the case. Hence, in the case of this research qualitative features of social and community engagement allows and contributes to the construction, justification, and validation of knowledge. Additionally, it underscores the importance of interactions and narratives in the co-creating and cultivating meaning around the realities faced by participants. In due process it examines how the experiences of the host and IDPs shape their common realities in context.

Axiology that emanates from the epistemological view focuses on the appreciation and respect of the perspectives, opinions and views of all groups. In turn, each participants' opinions are valuable

and contribute to the generation and construction of knowledge through discussions, interactions and dialogue. Furthermore, the axiology resembles the paradigm and complements with the epistemology that knowledge is context -dependent and socially constructed (Iyengar, 2012; Meriyam, 1989).

The nature of the study taking note of the critical ethical implications of the research process, well considered and built on knowledge construction through appreciative inquiry and listening from the informants and build on experiences. It also underlined the significance of valuing participants' voices and ensuring their perspectives are accounted in the research work, mainly the analysis and findings which were considered throughout the research design and execution. Accordingly, significance of interactive, collaborative and interdependent approaches fostered in the exploration, organization and creation of kekulene and drawing of practical lessons along the community members and all informants in the study locations well considered (Ali, Ukwuaba, & Eze, 2022).

The research was shaped by the ontological and epistemological stance and axiological view counted on collective efforts to construct realities and appreciation of each member in operationalizing and contributing to the reality on the ground. The approach aligned with the essence of social capital notion, community engagement elements impacting emergency interventions and interactions between hosts and IDPs. On the field, this assumption served appropriate for exploring experiences and opinions on community engagement. Methodologically, a comparative case study and its qualitative approach is appropriate to better explore and comprehend views and perspectives (O'Mara-Eves et al., 2013). Thus, the design was focused to ensuring a coherent approach to capturing the complexities of displacement and relevance of social assets in courage to cohesion, which ultimately helped to pick out commonalities and differences that guiding effective interactions in contexts.

3.4 Research Design

A case study design is appropriate when a) the study aims to answer "how" and "why" questions, b) the researcher cannot control participants' behavior, c) contextual conditions relevant to the phenomenon need coverage, and d) the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are unclear (Yin, 2003). In line with the above, the research question logically falls under a case

study. Yet, it is relevant to define and refine among the strands of the case study to best attain the objectives of the research.

According to Patton (2002), the philosophical underpinning and methodological framework shall shape the design of the study. In line with the objective of the research, thus, comparative case study design is applied in the study to appropriately investigate community engagement practices in emergency education for internally displaced persons (IDPs). The design also allows responsive interactions for an in-depth investigation of complex, real world experiences of informants and stakeholders including displaced children and their parents, host community members and informants involving in emergency relief and recovery. By focusing on peculiar cases, the research takes advantage of triangulating and comprehending existing realities underlie common values of partnerships which contribute to concrete evidence to picture emergency school feeding within and among the locations included in the study.

This design aligned with the goal of the study found relevant in enabling access to information and analysis of the networks and local institutional practices and triangulate facts with available resources in schools and communities included in the study. The insights gained provided a rich understanding of how these factors influence community engagement, children reintegration, and retention in conflict-induced environments. In this context, comparative case studies were observed to be useful to carefully sorting and organizing complex interactions between actors and institutions influenced by socio cultural, political and economic ties (Nguyen et al., 2022).

The qualitative exploratory approach was adopted to mainly uncover the how parts, specifically the feelings and opinions that build to meaning attachment to the practices. Thus, opinions of various stakeholders, such as displaced parents, local villagers, including elders' schoolteachers and directors were included in the study. This approach was found essential to appreciate how different groups view the same reality and collaborate to mitigate and enhance children's retention and interpret the phenomenon (Kivunja, 2018).

The researcher's methodological lens, advancing analysis of processes along three axes: horizontal (across distinct research locations), vertical (across scales, such as local and regional, federal,) and transversal into the period IDPs accommodated (INEE, 2020). In this regard, the study design effectively allowed the researcher to take advantage of and gain deeper insight into communities. In so doing the researcher explored striking community engagement practices in a

real-life context without controlling participants' behaviors. The context gave way to also consider a multiple case response analysis on a range of similar and contrasting cases, thereby strengthening validity and reliability of the findings (Miles & Huberman, 2016).

Based on the basic questions, exploring engagement practices and salient features across specific cross sectional settings, involve identification, categorization, analysis and synthesis of similarities, differences and patterns across two or more cases with a common focus (Merriam, 2009). This design allows and broadens the scope of case study research by situating a case within the wider network of relationships (Miles, 2016). The specific case treatment followed by cross case analysis enhances our understanding of the situation from the viewpoint of the communities.

3.5 Sample Case Selection

The comparative case study primarily utilized qualitative data to examine how contextual factors happen and influence practices of communities in emergency school feeding program, aiming to explore and triangulate the experiences against challenges. Thus, informants that able to answer on how and why aspects of contextualized practices influence the depth of information and thereby the findings (Goodrick, 2020).

Keeping the objective of the study, Merriam (2009), emphasizes that case selection is a pivotal element in qualitative research, significantly impacting the study's depth and richness. The author further advocates for purposeful counting of the cases in line with their relevance to the research agenda. Ensuring that the case fully satisfies requirements, i.e. presence of IDPs and their children, and availability of quite sufficient information in active situations was considered to identify the case study locations. In this regard, Nyimbili and Nyimbili (2024) emphasize the importance of diversity of information which allow the researcher/s to capture a wide range experiences in contexts. This requires a conscious preparation and identification to meet the purpose through adaptive flexibility yet responsiveness to emerging realities (Coomb, 2022)..

The recent report from OCHA (2023), indicates that nearly nine out of twelve regions in Ethiopia face conflicts of various types including armed conflict, violence, drought, locust infections and heavy winds resulted to over 8 million internal displacements of persons (IDPs) across 234 locations. The displacement due to armed conflict in Oromia and Tigray and Amhara constitutes a significant portion. Notability, not all reported locations have registered active IDP spots resulting from armed conflict, particularly where children's education is supported through school feeding

programs. This study focuses on recognized IDPs due to conflict-induced displacement, specifically those who have been displaced for over two years and have access to schooling and feeding programs. Thus, the research considered four steps to decide the cases.

In the first stage of case selection, regions with significant IDP populations were identified. According to the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2022), Tigray and Oromia host 1.8 million and 1.4 million IDPs, respectively, with over 75% being victims of armed conflict. IDP locations that facilitate education in emergencies and are geographically accessible were then listed in collaboration with regional education bureaus.

In the second stage, specific criteria were applied to refine the selection. Three key criteria were established: (1) record of displaced people and children safely living with host communities for at least one year; (2) report on community participation in emergency school feeding programs and (3) one or more school feeding pathway actively in practice in schools.

Based on above, thirdly, one administrative location that fulfilled the listed criteria was spotted purposefully. Then showing the ethical clearance and the purpose of the study, the Ginjo and Queha local administrations in Jimma Zone, Oromia, and in Mekele, Tigray respectively were approached and communicated to first confirm the situation in official letter and support the field work through allowing documents and facilitating discussions. This selection process later in case analysis contributed that both cases are comparable, and representative of the challenges faced by IDPs in the regions.

Once the local administration cases were determined, identification and selection of the schools took place. The selection of the schools as well took three steps. First a list of public primary schools in Ginjo and Queha was obtained from respective education offices. Next, schools that were actively hosting internally displaced children (IDCs) since 2022 were sorted. Then two schools that have clear record of the displaced children in both formal grade 3 and 4; and accelerated learning program (for over aged children 10-14) were chosen from each one of the locations.

Once the case study location and entry points (i.e. the primary schools encompassing the local host communities) were decided, it was essential to determine whether the two cases were comparable. According to Patton (2002) in comparative study dominated by qualitative approach,

establishing comparability between cases is a fundamental task as it directly impacts the validity of the findings. To address this, the study carefully considered displacement due to armed conflict to be a common denominator to both cases so that responses underline similar causal characteristics. Moreover, as discussed by Ali, Ukwuaba & Eze 2022, the duration of the internally displaced persons' (IDPs) movement to the host communities, the nature of emergency response, and a period of relative stability since their arrival. These elements were found pivotal in establishing thematic areas allowing for a meaningful analysis of how differing local-level practices and engagement strategies influenced outcomes in each community. In due process the framing of comparability and its understanding served relevant to closely observing and exploring the actual experiences to learn more about how individuals and groups give meanings and experience a specific situation under study, which, in this case, is the community engagement practices in the IDPs (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).

Map of Selected Study Locations in Oromia and Tigray Regions of Ethiopia



3.6 Participants of the Study

In comparative case study where, qualitative approach is in dominance, involving the participant with reach exposure, exploring meaning and value to responsiveness on what makes sense, reporting fully on what was done, why it was done, and what the implications are vital for the findings (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, Guba & Lincoln (2020), state that a participant/s in a case study “is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (P.127). Equally, Creswell & Creswell, (2018) complement by defining the strong link between a participant and the case study as: “a participant in a case study is a critical element in defining specific instance that is frequently observed to illustrate a more general principle, which is the study of an instance in action” (p.204).

Based on the above, under the broad purposive sampling, availability and snowball sampling techniques were applied to select the participants who give valid and rich information on the basic questions. A diverse array of participants ranging from local villages to schools to the federal Ministry of Education were included in either availability and snowball techniques to gain comprehensive understanding of the experiences of IDPs and answer the established research questions. At regional and federal level in addition to availability, criteria on direct relevance and experience to the emergency school feeding and accelerated education program were applied

The school directors and schoolteachers were identified through availability sampling, taking notes of direct interaction and rich information on the displaced and host children at schools. From each of the study schools list of displaced children attending at grade three in each school in 2024 second semester were obtained from the school record. To ensure equivalence on grade and age level, (children aged 12 and at grade 4 were chosen purposefully. The age and grade were considered purposefully to take advantage of children’s ability to self-expression of the experiences during focus group discussion. Once the list of displaced children was obtained the list of parents of the children was obtained through snowball approach and displaced parents were approached to reflect their children's learning practices within these schools. Local elders and leaders and representatives of the village administration were participants selected through a purposive sampling strategy, emphasizing direct exposure, role and their relevance to the research focus. Additionally, local community members were consulted to share their experiences and perspectives regarding educational access for IDP children. Two local village leaders who have

experience in mobilizing groups for emergency school feedings were chosen through snowball techniques. This is particularly helpful in considering the involvement in planning and managing emergency feeding pathways. This approach provided insights into formal and informal interactions to community engagement at the grassroots level.

Furthermore, the indicated number of district, regional and federal authorities responsible for the education in emergencies, participation and school feeding schemes were also chosen through an availability sampling technique at the corresponding levels to include views from diverse sources. This approach in applying availability and snowball sampling techniques helped to get the right informant and get rich information relevant to the study. This has contributed to obtaining a depth of information gathered during the field mission and throughout the study.

Table Three: Summary of the Participants of the Study

SN	Participants	Sample participants		Sampling Techniques	Tool/s	Remark on the size
		Ginjo /46/ (Oromia)	Queha/46/ (Tigray)			
1	Parents (Host)	5	5	Snowball	FGD	One FGD circle
	Parents (Displaced)	5	5	Snowball	FGD	One FGD circle
2	Community leaders	2	2	Snowball	Interview	Relevant for the study
3	IDP rep/leaders	2	2	Availability	Interview	Relevant for the study
4	PTSA (M/F)	4	4	Availability	FGD	Active during field study
5	School teachers	8	8	Availability	FGD	Teach grade 4 children
6	School directors	2	2	Availability	Interview	Lead the schools
7	Students (Host)	5	5	Availability	FGD	Learn in grade 4 in 2024
8	Students (Displaced)	5	5	Availability	FGD	Learn in grade 4 in 2024
9	NGOs work on ESF	3	3	Snowball	Interview	Tasked on the field
10	District Ed. officials	2	2	Availability	Interview	Experience on EiE
11	Regional Ed. officials	2	2	Availability	Interview	Experience on EiE
12	Federal MoE	1	1	Availability	Interview	In charge of EiE desk

Five Host and IDP parents who their children learn in the same grade 4 considered in the FGDs discussion circle

3.7 Instruments of Data Collection

In this study, four data collection tools were utilized to gain insights into the basic questions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with schoolteachers, directors, displaced parents and elders, village leaders, and partners. The interviews allowed for further probing and triangulation. Focus

group discussions were employed to gather information and perspectives from groups and community representatives, children from the host communities and IDPs faced the challenges and learning in schools. Observations focused on interactions taking place at the schools, the compound and around the villages provided firsthand insights into school dynamics. The document reviews relevant policy documents, directives and reports to help address the major issues, contextualize and refine the findings.

Key interviews: Twelve key interviews were conducted with key participants from the schools, regional and federal levels. The interviews aimed to deeply understand participants' realities and perspectives on the core issues of IDPs and their children's education. In particular, the interviews and probing focused on gaining insight into participants' feelings, experiences related to emergency education and responses. A general interview guide was prepared and enriched through probing techniques. At schools and within communities, procedures including building rapport and trust were considered to create a stage where participants openly express their opinions and views, which helped to establish strong findings. This proved a positive role for collecting high-quality data on the perceptions and experiences of community members, including parents/guardians, school staff, and other stakeholders regarding school feeding and community engagement in conflict-induced IDP situations. The researcher actively built rapport and trust with key participants, especially at the village level, which facilitated obtaining honest and detailed responses to the fundamental questions.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Six focus group discussions were conducted with participants primarily consisting of uniform members consisting including students and schoolteachers. These discussions were held in groups of five to seven individuals, allowing participants to express their views and perspectives. Broadly seven guiding questions were developed and translated for community members and district-level stakeholders to discuss community engagement and school feeding within the selected IDP communities. Before and during the discussions with key informant groups (e.g. teachers, mothers' self-help groups), clear information and effective communication were ensured to generate diverse perspectives and facilitate the triangulation of participants' viewpoints.

Observation: The researcher, through its field attachment and experience took advantage of onlooker observer and focused participant in the school and at the communities of the research

setting. In doing this, first, developed a focused and detailed observation protocol, gaining access, building rapport, conducting observations, reflecting and analyzing findings, interacting ethically with participants, and maintaining ethical considerations throughout the process. During the field work, as much as possible, as qualitative case research, the researcher tried to fulfill these roles effectively, so that a rich and insightful understanding of the phenomenon being studied could be obtained. In doing this, based on the basic questions, a key observation guide was prepared to complement thematic issues and credibility. During observations, upon communication with the participants, relevant photographs were captured through informed consent of the participants.

Document review : Available and officially authorized accessible documents at the federal and regions levels, focusing on community engagement and available emergency school feeding have been accessed and reviewed. These include relevant policy documents, reports, and guidelines, notably the Oromia regional State Bussa Gonofa Proclamation (2022), the national School Feeding Programme (2020) and related school feeding guides written materials related to community engagement and school feeding evolution- practices were examined and triangulated against the existing field practices. The recent General Education Act (Proc. No.1368/2025) of Ethiopia and other prominent directives and guidelines related to conflict were consulted. Furthermore, responses of concerned sectors prone to IDPs in the function at the federal and in the regions were emphasized and consulted. In doing so, thematic discussions on the practices and perspectives, challenges and recommendations for improved community engagement support systems and children's learning continuity were addressed.

3.8 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedure involved clear steps before the field work and appropriate procedures during and after the field work. First, data collection tools, including the interview outline and focus group discussion topics, were drafted, shared with supervisors, and approved. The tools were reached with key participant groups who were willing to take part, particularly school directors, teachers and students' mothers in one of the sample schools before the field work. This endeavor helped the researcher to have reviewed and assessed the clarity, conciseness, and appropriateness to the local socio-cultural context. After the review, the tools were finalized and translated into both Afan Oromo and Tigrigna working languages with the researcher's guidance.

Once the tools were refined and aligned with the fundamental research questions, a simple field guide was developed to outline how to conduct research at the grassroots level (Annexed) . This guide helped the researcher and Tigrigna language translator follow clear steps throughout the data collection process, which included sequences for interviews and focus group discussions while respecting ethical standards. The guide effectively helped the researcher in Tigray to carefully follow up and triangulate feelings and perspectives so that gap due to language difficulty was mitigated. As a result, honest discussions that expressed actual feelings and detailed information from participants were obtained through an oriented and carefully prepared Tigrigna language translator at Queha.

In each case study location, the researcher, in consultation with local administration and school directors, identified a suitable fieldwork schedule. Dates, times, and locations for interviews and focus group discussions were arranged either directly by the researcher or in consultation with participants, including school directors and local village administrators. During all interviews and focus group discussions, the researcher introduced themselves and clearly explained the objectives, obtained agreement for voice recording, conducted the interview, and concluded with reflections and appreciation.

Interviews with school directors and focus group discussions with students and teachers took place within the respective school compounds. Similarly, focus group discussions with parent circles, village leaders , elders and local NGO workers occurred in appropriate settings, such as school campuses, NGO workplaces, or village administration offices. Interviews with district , regional and federal authorities were conducted at their respective offices.

Throughout the work, the researcher engaged in insightful focused observations and informal discussions, triangulating information and ideas with primary school teachers, parents and religious leaders. These informal discussions enriched understandings of social capital in educational practices. After completing each interview session, the researcher and assistant took an additional 30 to 45 minutes to exchange key ideas on the procedure, evaluating what worked well and what could be improved. This comparison facilitated the identification of weaknesses and best practices in communities.

Upon concluding the overall field data collection, all data collected were sorted filtered and coded within each case location and then grouped by region. Interviews conducted in the local language

were carefully translated and transcribed. In so doing feelings and tones were given attention in thematizing topics and triangulate with the experiences of IDP parents and children and community's role in facilitating education. Indue process much attention was given to every record and rounds of listening to the interviews were applied to grasp the actual feeling and substantiate with field observation notes. The comprehensive approach ensured an in-depth understanding of the surroundings of both host and IDP children education in the study location of the regions. Overall, actual data collection took place from March 30 to July 15, 2024, conducted in two rounds, each lasting one month, encompassing transportation, planning , observations and filed interactions.

3.9 Case Analysis and Interpretation

The study applied multiple case analysis. In order to effectively address the case analysis, insights on specific thematic topics within specific case location and across the cases were addressed thoroughly. In doing so, following the data collection and analysis procedures, strict attention was given to organizing into comparable analysis. In line with this emphasis given by Guba & Lincoln (2005) that the qualitative analysis is more on the actual essence of the matter was duly considered. Thus, efforts and clear steps to convert field data and observation notes into a systematic category of analysis were found most relevant for the specific purpose of the study and applied duly. Furthermore, it was found that data collection and analysis are an integral part of the whole process of the study. As explained by Miles, M.& , Huberman, (2016) in this study, as much as possible, the collection and analysis of data were harmonized so that it allowed the development of comparable constructs alongside the increasing volume of data. In addition, an attempt was made to consider both a holistic analysis of the cases in focus and an embedded analysis of units of the case (see Yin, 2009). In so doing, the researcher tried to sort an appropriate analysis strategy in multiple case studies within each case analysis, followed by a cross-case analysis that helps to identify similar and contrasting findings across the cases in context (Yin, 2009; Coomb,2022).

The analytical framework was clearly outlined, along with the basic questions and key thematic topics appeared frequently in both cases. The analysis began with careful reading of transcribed interviews and focus groups, followed by open coding to capture initial ideas, which were organized into overarching themes based the frequency. This approach centered on participants' voices, highlighting themes like "community social capital" from shared support between host and displaced persons and parents. The initial categorization of major themes focused and assessed

internal homogeneity and external homogeneity among different informant groups. Responses were tagged for relevance, aligning the analysis with core research questions.

In specific cases, discussions and interviews noted that promoting transparency in the connections between components for richer interpretation were extracted and triangulated. In this regard, an inductive qualitative data analysis strategy was employed, aligning with and taking advantage of the researcher's actual sense of the participants' experiences which refined the analysis and shaped the findings. Efforts were made to triangulate findings across data sources, ensuring rigor and validity while aligning with social capital theory and bridging to the study's conceptual framework.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The Ethical Review Committee at the College of Education and Behavioral Studies of Addis Ababa University has reviewed and approved the research work. Accordingly, the institute has recognized the research project under Ref: CEBS_IRC_CCEPS 0014/03/2024.

Furthermore, in field research conducted at Ginjo, Jimma- Oromia and Queha, Mekele-Tigray, ethical considerations were emphasized before and during the study. Prior to data collection, communication with all stakeholders, including the regional authorities to school directors and village leaders, was done.

Based on the field schedule, confirmation of suitability of the dates with participants and group members was done through telephone and emails. Upon arrival, self-introduction and informed consent from participants, ensuring they understood the purpose of the study, procedures were done in each one of the study locations. This step helped the researcher to establish trust and allowed participants to make voluntary decisions about their involvement. In the rounds, clear communication was respected, emphasizing they one could withdraw at any time without repercussions. Ethical consideration facilitated an environment of respect and transparency, essential for successful research processes.

During data collection, including interview and focus group discussion schedules, the researcher maintained transparency about the roles, carefully managing their presentation to build rapport with participants and individual interviewees. Throughout the rounds of the data collection process, being attentive to participants' emotional status and responses, ensuring sensitivity is

maintained during interviews and focus group discussions were duly applied. This approach mitigated discomfort and reinforced the commitment of groups and their dignity.

After data collection, the researcher prioritized confidentiality and anonymity for the information obtained from all participants, ensuring identities were protected in reporting the findings. Voice records and data were securely arranged under each region/community/school, coded, organized and thematized along with the basic research questions. In areas where further information was required from me, telephone calls to school directors and other key informants were made and a voice recording was applied upon consent of the participants. In the meantime, the researcher provided feedback about the study's progress and salient findings, reinforcing and appreciating participants' contributions and promoting their sense of involvement in the process. Before publication, key findings were shared with the relevant participants and schools to ensure transparency and credibility, allowing for external validation of the major findings and overall results of the research.

3.11. Trustworthiness of the study

Ensuring trustworthiness in this case study was a critical step. Accordingly, key participants representing internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host community members, including partners, were approached and checked for consent. Moreover, coding was adopted to sort and refine information and mitigate biases. Data triangulation was a key strategy, involving the collection and alignment of data from multiple sources, including interviews, focus group discussions and direct observations related to the subject. This approach not only enriched the data quality but also allowed cross-verification of the findings. By comparing insights from various stakeholders, any exaggerated feelings or opinions that led to biases were checked and identified and addressed. This has enhanced the overall credibility of the research.

After the initial analysis, key participants, in particular the school directors and local community leaders and were communicated to review and comment on the findings and interpretations. This iterative process ensured that facts and their perspectives were accurately captured and represented. Furthermore, the researcher maintained continuous communication and contact with the locales throughout the study. These connections helped to continuously gauge their reelections on their own realities and assumptions in play. In addition, regular discussions among schools and key informants helped to identify and manage any subjective points and influences that could

distort the findings. Collectively, these strategies fostered a rigorous approach to ensuring the trustworthiness of the study, ultimately leading to a more understanding of community engagement practices in the context of emergency education.

3.12. Research Reporting

Tong and Craig (2007) emphasize that reporting qualitative exploratory research requires extra effort in capturing and maintaining focus and balance with thematizing research's basic questions. In this regard, the research reporting for the study followed a logical approach of detailed specific cases and cross-case analysis. The report was structured into two sections, with findings categorized by key themes and a discussion linking the results to existing literature. After drafting, the report was shared with peer reviewers for feedback on clarity and structural flow, which helped with revisions and enhanced the depth of arguments and coherence.

Data organization began post-field work, with information categorized by region and informant groups. This data was translated and transcribed, followed by rigorous cleaning and quality control. Major chapters with relevant topics and subtopics were sequenced, organized and thoroughly treated. Using a thematic outline, discussions along with qualitative data were systematically organized and treated. Meticulous attention was given to maintain concise and analytical reporting of the bulk data to the most relevant information aligned to the research questions. Throughout the process, balanced descriptions, explanations and interpretations with triangulations were prioritized, while creativity and style of writing enriched the analysis, ensuring a comprehensive and impactful report.

3.13. Positionality

In qualitative comparative research, the researcher's positionality and credibility are crucial. This is particularly true in studies involving emotions and sensitive contexts such as education in emergencies. This researcher possesses extensive experience and direct exposure to the subject matter, having served as a country director and Program director overseeing various local community development and emergency response programs in Ethiopia. With over four decades in the education system and in the sector as a teacher, school director and leader, the researcher has

played a significant role in planning and coordination and implementation of educational initiatives during emergencies.

The researcher's NGO work position and responsibilities with regional and federal levels have facilitated collaboration with numerous local and international NGOs dedicated to emergency education. This opportunity allowed the researcher to easily access data and foster exchanges of ideas with regional and federal authorities. Being multilingual and having substantial field work experiences in multicultural settings and multi-sociolinguistic communities for over two decades has further enhanced the researcher's ability to engage effectively with local social groups during that collection. This interaction allowed for a deeper understanding of the feelings, stresses and aspirations of both IDPs and host community members.

The researcher's personal engagement and passion for the subject matter enriched the study, making it more relevant and closer to people's lives. Such direct involvement ensures that the research captured the complexities of the lived experiences of the participants, contributing to a more concrete understanding of community dynamics in the context of education in emergencies. This approach reinforces the study's trustworthiness and validity, anchoring on a rich tapestry of real-world experiences.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: Presentation of Case Analysis and Results

4.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter presents a comprehensive presentation of the cases and cross case analysis of the research data, focusing on community engagement, emergency school feeding, and children's retention in the context of IDPs in the specific study locations. Using thematic approach, the analysis identified key themes and patterns within the data, linking them to the theoretical framework and research objectives. By examining the interconnectedness of these factors, the chapter offers insights into the challenges and opportunities for improving the well-being of IDPs children. The findings have implications for policy development and program implementation, and future research in the field of humanitarian aid.

4.2 Overview of the Study Locations /Cases/

This section briefly describes the basic information of the two case study locations visited in scheduled field engagements from the end of March to July 2024, aligning with the school calendar. Two rounds of field visits were conducted in each location. Each round lasted approximately fifteen days, during which the researcher addressed the key points of the research and followed up on basic issues related to community engagement practices and feeding pathways. The table below shows essential information that characterizes the participants who served the analysis of the chapter.

Table Four : Basic Characteristics of the Communities included in the Study

Study location	Age group	Host community		IDPs		% of IDP to Host community	
		Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Ginjo-Oromia	7-14	3,725	2,889	346	306	8.45	9.5
	15+	16,625	14,768	3,201	2,940	20.4	19.9
Queha-Tigray	7-14	1,475	1,505	294	246	17.7	14.2
	15+	12,732	11,709	4,211	3,001	33.1	25.6

The overall population reported as internally displaced persons (IDPs) of all age groups comprised 8,422 females and 5,941 males. According to the respective local administration, this group

accounts for an average of 11% in Ginjo and 13.5% in Queha of the total population in the respective administrative locations of host communities at the time of the fieldwork.

Regarding school-aged children, a total of 1,192 IDP children (640 girls and 552 boys) aged 7 to 14 were enrolled in formal and accelerated learning programs, representing over 8.5% of the host community children. In terms of age and program categories, the four public primary schools included in the study recorded a total of 978 students (532 girls and 446 boys) aged 7–9 enrolled in formal lower grades 1 to 4, along with 214 over-age children (108 girls and 106 boys) aged 10–14 participating in accelerated learning programs at the study locations. Since June 2022, the Ginjo and Queha host communities have absorbed over 10% and 12% additional individuals, respectively, impacting local livelihoods and resource sharing daily.

4.2.1 Queha-Tigray

Located at the outskirts of Mekelle city, Queha is one of the oldest towns in Ethiopia. The town has its own local administration under the Mekelle Municipality. Queha is also known for a military garrison that has been operating since 1240 AD (Tsegaye & Gezahegne, 2023). There have been military camps operating in the vicinity that have been used by different regimes that ruled Ethiopia at different times. In 2021, the town administration reported having 55,000 dwellers, excluding the military and their families in two camps, estimated to be 25,000 (Mekelle Municipality, 2024).

The existence of longstanding military camps enabled Queha to possess unique social fabrics in comparison to other cities in Tigray. By and large, the military personnel who were deployed and lived in the military camps had established social ties with the community. Thus, Queha stands as a place of inter-ethnic family fabrics with higher social interaction of persons whose fathers or ancestors are from different parts of the country. For instance, two of the research participants were born and grew up in the military camps from their military fathers, who originally came from central and southern Ethiopia as military staff during the Imperial regime (until 1974) and during the Military regime (1975 to 1991). The local communities reported having deep and strong trust to interact and solve problems.

According to key participants, Queha exhibited unique features in peaceful social interaction even at times of adversity. One of the displaced parents included in the interview reiterated “we breathe

clean air, have now peace and security, which is more than food and shelter”. Equally, the representative of the Queha local administration emphasized, “currently, we are in multiple challenges, but willing and happy to host our displaced fellow Tigrayans who trusted us to help save their lives.”

All the participants responded that the deep-rooted inter-ethnic interactions claimed to have resulted due to the existence of a military camp which prompted somewhat unique features during the instant war (Nov. 2021-2023). The interviewed members from the management of the Queha local administration and the director of Hyra association (TKII-04) reported the following:

Since November 2021, the deadly military confrontation between the Tigray defence force (fighters) and the federal military force took ethnic shape, thus the children and wives of the military at Queha who had been moved and living inside and outside of the military camps were to suffer as the war between the warring parties advanced. Luckily enough, in Queha these persons [children and wives of the military] constituted several ethnic groups that moved nowhere but lived with the host community. No attack and violence was observed throughout the years. All hosts and IDPs, including kids, mothers and elderly of the military shouldered the suffering equally. The host community supported a lot as their military fathers were moved to other places, or else, passed away during the military engagements (TKII-04, April 14. 2024).

On the other hand, practically, it seems that during active war, in locations like Queha, the existence of military camps seems to have resulted in casualties and escalated the number of people who needed emergency support. This situation, as discussed by one of the villagers in Queha, was primarily because military camps were targeted and this, in turn, caused family detachment, abandoned children both within and surrounding areas of the military camps. Queha exemplified a case where not only internally displaced persons but also those living in military camps faced automatic dependency, resulting in a state of stalemate. This situation highlighted the broader challenges of vulnerability and reliance on external aid , affecting the community’s ability to thrive independently.

The geographical location of Queha, being at the vintage plateau adjacent to the low land of Afar, attracted displaced persons from the nearer Afar areas such as Aba’ala, Shiket, Afdera, Berahle and many others. During the study period, over 5,000 persons who used to live in Afar for long

periods of time were reportedly displaced to Queha and were safely hosted during the intense military engagement in 2021. According to the community elders, despite the huge scarcity of basic social services even to the victimised host communities, the strong social asset was reported to have enhanced smooth interaction, respect and mutual support. The IDPs first set up in the church yards, then eventually absorbed into the community facilities and individual houses for free. Some who had skills for exchange of daily income, were also renting houses at a relatively affordable price.

From observation and focus group discussions, local economic opportunities seem to have saturated following the influx of displacement. Both the displaced and host community participants' responses indicated that initial capital to petty trade and other opportunities for generating income ought to have been supported by NGOs, which may support both the host and the displaced persons. From reports of the local administration, displaced mothers and their daughters were engaged as house workers while males used to work in the nonfarm tasks, including the small construction areas at any available labour work. In addition, the relatively affordable cost of living in Queha compared to Mekelle City was also stated as a factor for the IDPs to choose Queha as their temporary residence. One discussant argued, "[compared to Mekelle] living in Queha is safe and cheaper in terms of house rent and the price of food items" (TQFGD, 01 April 14, 2024).

According to the group of participants, during the first four weeks of the war, local government structure was completely absent, both the host and IDP communities were in desperation and in deep, shocking silence on how to survive; their future became dubious. The IDPs, largely women and children were freezing and confined to the church yards and concentration areas, completely helpless and waiting for small intermittent support from individual volunteers. Thus, the frequencies and volume of support, including food and non-food items were irregular until the five brave young volunteers from within the community organised themselves to support the displaced persons under the formerly established association named "Hayra¹" an association that got its name after the religious event celebrated at the beginning of June. The formation of a team affiliated to the Hayra then served as a historic point of departure to a complete change and boost

¹ Hayra is also known in other places of Ethiopia among adherents of the Orthodox Christian Church with the name 'Buhie'.

of social assets, recovery and back-to-school retention. Here is the case from the leader of the association.

We agreed to solicit resources and feed the mouths of children suffering from hunger. [Imagine] we had nothing by then. We did not even have money to feed a few children for at least one day. But thanks to our community, we managed and saved lives (TQKII -02 , March 30,2024).

The volunteers, who took the lead initiative, noticed that all community members needed to be involved. Hence, they defined their purpose and set principles toward relief, recovery and resilience. Then they started to knock on the doors of many organizations, including churches, NGOs, government organizations, philanthropists etc. The strategies included generating resources from the community by grouping among neighbors, motivating young volunteers to mobilize additional resources during public occasions such as church festivities; solicitating money by going into public recreation spaces, and asking resource persons in the diaspora community, which were also used as key strategies to enhance community engagement. The volunteer group, after mitigating the challenges, launched its first feeding program on the 29th of March 2022. Initially, its capacity was limited to only 60 school children screened from four primary schools located in the city. The schoolchildren were screened with the support of the schoolteachers and principals.

Attraction to the feeding program, thereby to school reintegration and retention, has shown rapid growth. However, the challenges were both in terms of the resources and the numbers of children eligible to get the feeding services, to the challenges were high because it required additional effort to accommodate. During the field study (April-May 2024), about 450 children were served daily morning meals, mainly breakfast. The majority (i.e., more than 350) got breakfast regularly while the remaining others (100 children got breakfast occasionally. Besides, a board of trustees composed of seven members was established to enhance accountability and transparency of the feeding program. The informant emphasized as “currently, the governance of the feeding program is fully operated under the ‘Hayra’” association. The board of trustees has drafted legislation to guide its activities, including recruitment and resource management. The same interviewee confirmed that “the resources collected from the community is registered and a receipt is issued by the accountants employed for the feeding program” (TQKII-03, April 2024). Most of the children who got access to the morning breakfast were displaced from the Shiket, Humera, Eritrea, Axum and other adjacent locations in Afar regional states.

From the discussions, interviews and observations, the networking and relationships at the grassroots seem to have boosted the volunteer-based resource mobilization from within. Amid the challenging situation that occurred after the conflict, deep-rooted trust, consistent social assets and usage of the social capital contributed to embracing the desperate IDPs and allowed relief and recovery. “... thanks to the Queha community, young boys and girls, at least we have the safety and relief by now,” TQKII-04 April 2024.

Moreover, in the absence of local government initiatives, the host community through voluntary based community feeding efforts, complemented with identification and back to school for IDPs. It has therefore complemented the effort to ensure the right to basic education of 120 IDP children, together with the children of the host community. This makes Queha to deserve an interesting point for community engagement research in conflict-induced setting.

4.2.2 Ginjo-Oromia

Jimma town, established in 1831 G.C. by Aba Jifar II through merging Jiren and Hirmata locations, is the hub of diversity of several religious and ethnic origins from Ethiopia and beyond. Many historians and traders witness Jimma is a good mark of social interaction and social harmony in urban civilization in western Ethiopia (Yonas and Zahorik, 2017). The author further discusses that, in the history of urbanization in western and southwestern Ethiopia, the history of Jimma town is somewhat different. It combines three elements that none of the other urban centers in southern Ethiopia exhibit. First, it was an urban center that was built on indigenous origins. Second, it emerged as a chief administrative center for the whole of southwestern Ethiopia. Third, its growth and internal character came to be closely intertwined with the development of coffee production and trade. In fact, only a few cities in Africa (Kano, in Northern Nigeria is one example) have had such a history of connectedness with both indigenous and external dynamics. Currently (2023), hosting a population of over half a million, Jimma town is run by a municipality organized into nine sub administrative sections comprised of several government institutions, including the famous Jimma University, Jimma Teachers Training College and Jimma Agriculture Research Institute. Jimma city is the home for diversified residents, dominantly Muslim Oromos and all ethnic groups peacefully including IDPs.

Ginjo -Guduru is one of the local administrative sections of Jimma town municipality. It is located at the center of the town, surrounded by public primary and secondary schools, government institutions, market and business spots and religious institutions. It also hosts IDPs under the study

since July 2022 in a camp under two big concrete block halls (each 16x25 mt and 4 mt high roof), originally constructed for a wholesale market during the military government period (1975-1991), located adjacent to the business campus of Jimma University.

During the study period, IDPs in Ginjo, after several travels, reported having settled and stayed for more than three years in harmony with the host communities. Originally, the IDPs under the study were evicted from Eastern Haraghe bordering Fafan Zone in the Somali Regional State. They were forcefully expelled from their village in March 2017 due to ethnic based conflict. Then, relocated to South Oromia (Bale) with the help of the government for one year; again, we moved to West Wollega, Oromia which was too far from our home village and new social culture to their experience. There in West Wollega they stayed for two major harvest periods (a year and a half), found it too challenging due to lack of sufficient arable land, social and cultural issues. Then, once more, they were displaced to Buno Bedelle -Didhessa in search of suitable farming land for cultivation, tried for another year. However, it was found unsuitable due to being a wetland and highly prone to malaria prone which caused the death of many children and adults. Finally, desperate IDPs, including surviving women and children (altogether, 1650 inhabitants; and 220 were overaged children) decided a foot walk for a continuous fifteen days and arrived at Jimma Town in August 2021, which the IDP's representatives say "... with the help of ALAH the Almighty, successfully managed lifesaving and life sustaining". Interview, May 2024, Jimma.

The IDPs in Ginjo underwent four tragic years and a non-stop journey to relief and were temporarily settled in Jimma. Since March 2017, they have used all means of transport, including walking, and covered over one thousand kilometers. As a result of their painful travels, they lost their beloved ones and all their property during the journey over the course of four years. Beyond the deep depression and trauma, they were unable to understand why they faced such immense suffering. The basic right to education for children was a luxury, remaining unthinkable until September 2022, when the local community and the local NGO, Illu Children and Women Development Association (ICWDA), facilitated 220 IDP children back to learning through two modalities, namely formal and accelerated education for overaged children. According to the reports, the NGO, together with two formal schools and local elders, arranged back to education and feeding. Therefore, while the normal age cohort joined the formal grade one, the overaged were invited to the Accelerated Education Program (AEP), which helped them cover the first three

lower grades (grades 1 to 3) in one year, allowing them to join formal grade 4 schooling in the next academic year. According to the participants, the four schools, the traditional local self-help group, mainly the “Idir”, the religious institutions and the elderly groups were reported so active in mobilizing resources and maintaining peaceful interactions between host communities and the IDPs in the first two years.

The IDPs' representatives consulted on the field strongly appreciate the host community's total support during relief and recovery; thankful to the municipality in creating avenues to engage in daily labor tasks to gain income and live together peacefully. Nevertheless, the IDPs request a clear answer about their destiny.

We are grateful to the host community. Yet, we do not wish to remain here forever looking for other persons' hands. We are skilled in farming, cattle rearing and trading. (IDP parent, May 2024)

From the interview with Jimma town municipality, the Jimma town management, through its urban work creation wing, demonstrated a strong sense of cooperation and sought daily labor activities by providing small shelter, wishing the IDPs to learn and assimilate into being urban persons gradually. Nevertheless, IDPs goal was not to settle in urban areas but to go back to their original destination. The interview with one of the IDP parents reads as follows “... we appreciate the sympathy and cooperation rendered to us, but we are hardly ready to duly accept”. Moreover, the IDP households seem to focus on regaining their social status and livelihoods. Rather, as farmers, they require a plot of land for farming, cattle raising, and other related activities. “...Our religious doctrine and the principle of Islam do not allow us to beg. We, therefore, wish to work and support the country, government, and family.” (FGD with IDP representatives, Jimma, June 2024).

4.2.3 Cross Case Analysis

The community fabrics and engagement practices of the two cases under study demonstrated interesting differences and commonalities. Being a host, while Ginjo-Jimma characterizes diversity in language, religion, ethnic background and economic status with strong composition from within, Queha, on the other hand, exhibited relatively homogeneous profile of host community. In the meantime, Ginjo hosted IDPs who are all Muslims and speaking Afan Oromo, the mother tongue. On the other side, the IDPs in Queha-Mekele came from various locations, yet speak Tigrigna in common. Moreover, displaced people in Queha exhibited diversity in source of livelihood and social makeup, including economic and diverse professional experience. In this case, both host

community members in Ginjo and Queha, who exhibited relative diversity and homogeneity in religion and sources of livelihood, were observed to have safely and peacefully hosted other groups beyond their own domain.

The interview conducted with the local administrators witnessed that during the adversity, despite the differences in geographic location and social makeup, both Queha and Ginjo share commonalities in their respective active community engagement efforts through welcoming and hosting IDPs to relief and recovery. In both cases, the IDPs leaders consulted through interviews unanimously reported three local community groups, namely: religious leaders, elders' group and youth volunteers who demonstrated commitment on daily basis to save the lives of the IDPs. As a result, “...beyond the food, the compassion from the hosts significantly helped to alleviate depression, stress, and helplessness, and deep trauma, fostering hope to return to life recovery, and facilitating our children's return to stay with other children in schools” (KII 04 and 05, June 2024).

The question of how the IDPs decided to move to the respective places and smoothly interacted with the host communities seems to provide important implications regarding social assets and social capital, even in economically poor conditions. In both contexts, trust and conversations with representatives of the IDPs indicated that technology assisted networks of passionate young groups, motivated by religious doctrine and built on voluntarism, took the lead in helping the IDPs to heal. In both contexts, the youth social groups took self-initiative and showed the courage to approach, consult, record, and regularly assist the IDPs in their daily routines. Following the elderly groups, religious institutions, social support groups, and business communities also provided help to the IDPs. Notably, in Ginjo-Jimma, despite the Muslim-dominated religious demographic situation, the Mekaneyesus Church received high praise for its consistent support of the Muslim IDPs, including vulnerable children and women. In the case of Queha, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is reported to have taken eventual yet consistent support. In contrast, in both study areas, local government administration was reported to have been late (on average six months after the IDPs settled) and provided little assistance compared to the other social groups. In this regard, the local government representatives discussed the competing security priorities, and the bureaucratic chains and practices that obstructed them from reacting on time (OGKII-01, May 2024).

From field-level observations and FGDs, IDPs in both contexts valued the establishment of a safe space as their top priority for relief, which was to be followed by fostering peaceful communication with surrounding host communities to initiate gainful social interactions in their daily routines. According to the IDP representatives, social interaction and harmony appeared to take place slowly and eventually through daily routine tasks, exchanging and learning experiences and building trust between individuals and groups of community members. In this regard, the size of the IDP population and security issues, including the decisions on space for shelter and responsiveness of local administrative authorities seem important factors.

In both contexts, several interviews with IDPs revealed that the IDPs first ensured a safe corner and to gain assurance for their relief, then started to build peaceful social interaction. In both study locations, the quest for their children's education was reported to have been raised either by the NGOs or religious, community leaders and schoolteachers/leaders. In both cases, to the majority of IDP parents, a strong aspiration to have a lasting solution, which is mainly back to the original destiny seems a core agenda persistent to their children's learning. For most IDPs, amid adversity, the idea of searching and creating opportunities for their children's education seems second priority which is taken by the courageous host community members and institutions.

4.3 Post Enrollment - Retention of Displaced Children

In the Ethiopian education system, children's post-enrollment status is a challenge. In the study location, however, the educational records of all four schools included in the study witnessed the pivotal role of school record keeping and contribution of compassionate engagement to ensure the right to access to basic education and continuity. In both cases, the interview with school directors, focus group discussions with mother groups and interviews with community leaders, coupled with field observations, revealed that compassion from the host resulted in trust between IDPs and host communities, which significantly facilitated safe access and retention for displaced children.

Table Five : Post Enrollment of Children in Formal and Accelerated Education Programme /2024/

Study location	Public Primary school under study	Formal Education Grade 1-4 (7-9 Age) in 2024				Accelerated Ed. Programme (10-14 Age	
		Children from Host communities		Children from Displaced Families		Internally Displaced Children engaged the AEP to cover G1-3- 1440 hrs.	
		Enrolled	Retained	Enrolled	Retained	Enrolled	Retained at G-3

			F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	T	F	M	T
Ginjo-Oromia	Hermata	N	731	628	720	610	139	115	137	110	29	21	50	29	20	49
		%	100	100	98	97	100	100	99	96	100	100	100	100	96	98
	Mendera	N	807	815	788	810	132	102	130	100	28	32	60	27	31	58
		%	100	100	97	99	100	100	98	98	100	100	100	97	97	97
Queha-Tigray	Quiha	N	429	413	410	378	105	120	102	117	24	24	48	24	22	46
		%	100	100	96	92	100	100	97	98	100	100	100	100	92	96
	Niguss Gessese	N	391	375	377	361	116	149	112	145	27	29	56	26	26	52
		%	100	100	96	96	100	100	96	97	100	100	100	96	90	93

Source: Compiled from Schools' Enrolment Records and Roaster by the End of the academic year, July 2024

The table above demonstrates how the collective effort of local actors and school leadership allow equitable access to vulnerable displaced children to go back to a lifeline through education. The compiled school records indicated equitable educational access to both host and internally displaced children in the Ginjo and Queha maintained through community initiatives and mutual interaction to children's retention. The interview with the school directors and focus group discussion with schoolteachers in both cases displayed, amid challenges of resources, social interactions build mutual trust and strong hope to transform lives. On the other side, from the field study, one of the key observations is that access to displaced children's education is directly linked to the feeling of safety and security of displaced parents within host communities. According to the IDP Families, "... initially we had been strongly hesitant to enroll our children into schools with the host children, for we had been under stress and had no confidence in a safe and secure learning environment" (FGD, 06). The compassion and trust between host and IDPs seem to have contributed to relief and benefited those displaced children toward continued motivation to learn and retention in the available school level educational programmes. Notably, in both formal and accelerated learning programmes recorded in the respective schools, the minimum retention rate for IDP children post-enrolment is 92%. This retention record significantly exceeds national averages of 19% for Grade 1 and 13% for Grade 3 (MoE, EMIS, 2023). This underscores the effectiveness of targeted local interventions and strategies implemented in these locations which prioritized creating safe and supportive educational settings for IDPs.

Regarding the key factors, the school directors unanimously reacted that active community engagement characterized by safe and harmonized relations to be the vital element in ensuring equitable access to education of displaced children. Insights from the community leaders and schoolteachers indicate that self-motivated local initiatives play a crucial role in fostering inclusive learning environments, which in both cases seem to have enhanced the emotional well-being of IDP children. These initiatives, as reported by the schoolteachers, not only promoted equality but also helped cultivate a sense of belonging among displaced students including the five physically displaced children in the programmes. Sustained support from local communities and educational actors, mainly the host children and schoolteachers reported to be an essential factor for maintaining these high retention rates. Additionally, from the school programs tailored to the specific needs of overaged children that have demonstrated effectiveness in creating conducive learning conditions, illustrating the importance of safety, trust and community involvement in fostering academic and social success.

Holding different names, in both Ginjo and Queha, the local community members indicated a joint committee composed of religious leaders, elders and youth representatives that tracks and treats peaceful interaction and social cohesion. In view of the schoolteachers and NGO workers, the establishment of such a joint committee mitigated conflicts and maintained safe environments, which has been pivotal for girls' safe learning in enhancing educational access and retention. In this regard, nearly all the four schools included in the study have achieved female retention rates near 100% against enrollment, a remarkable contrast to the national dropout rate. This success can be attributed to community initiatives that prioritize secure and supportive learning.

School directors emphasize a collective commitment to inclusiveness, adhering to a "leave no one behind" philosophy, which reassures families about their children's safety in educational settings. Protection measures and lifesaving actions further motivate schooling. Triangulated data indicated that community initiatives, which allowed displaced parents to heal from trauma, foster hope, created supportive and encouraging learning environments. This experience promoted well-being and a sense of belongingness, ensuring equitable access and retention for children in both case study locations in 2024.

Additionally, the local NGO representatives/workers included in the study stated that community-owned, well defined and planned school feeding programs seem to have contributed significantly

to this success. The program's focus on weekly contributions in kind and cash from community members, providing nutritional support during religious holidays to poor parents of both host and IDPs, seems to be a motivation beyond enrollment. In this regard, as discussed in the national school feeding framework, addressing food insecurity not only improves attendance but also enhances cognitive abilities, making children more receptive to learning.

The field research work underscores a significant facet of community dynamics: the strong dedication of local communities to support displaced families, which has fostered positive interactions and engagement between host and displaced children in both educational settings and broader social environments. From the study, this commitment is driven by several key factors identified through the interviews, focus group discussions and informal conversations with local elders and leaders, grouped into four major categories.

Social-Historical Context : The historical backdrop of these communities significantly influences their responses to displacement. Many have faced their own adversities, which cultivated empathy and solidarity with displaced individuals. This shared history often couples community members to assist those encountering similar hardships, thereby reinforcing social bonds.

Role Models : Elders within the communities act as vital role models, exemplifying values such as support, resilience and cooperation. Their experiences and actions motivated the younger generation to contribute positively to the integration of displaced families, fostering a culture of assistance and companionship.

Religious beliefs: Strong religious convictions among the community members provided both moral and spiritual incentives for aiding displaced families. Many informants, including those in the study and interact view helping those in need as a virtuous act that offers spiritual rewards. This belief system encourages collective efforts to support IDPs, creating an inclusive environment.

Moral and Spiritual Incentives : The quest for moral and spiritual rewards drives individuals to participate in community support initiatives. The community's commitment seems not merely based on practical personal concerns but seems deeply rooted in a desire for ethical living and promotion of communal harmony.

While these motivating factors were observed to be prevalent among the informants and members across both case studies, it is important to acknowledge the specific contextual differences in each location. The level of historical trauma can vary, affecting how communities engage with displaced families. In some instances, past conflicts may foster a stronger sense of solidarity, whereas in others, a lack of recent adversity might lead to a more indifferent response. Furthermore, the nature of role models and their impact can differ depending on the cultural practices and local leadership dynamics. In one community, a prominent elder might take the lead in integrating displaced families through educational programs, while in another, religious leaders might focus on spiritual support initiatives.

4.3.1 Ginjo

According to the interviews from the school directors and leaders, the initiative for IDPs children's schooling was first raised by the host community leaders and school directors. However, on the start, IDP parents showed reluctance, first demanding assurance of educational inputs, safe interaction and trust building between the host communities and children. The discussions through the IDP representatives were reported to have taken nine months. According to the representatives of IDPs, community leaders, schoolteachers and directors were vital in ensuring reduced tensions and a supportive social environment, including school feeding schemes, which were prerequisites to enrollment of IDP children. The primary schools together with local NGOs arranged an age cohort of children which allowed enrollment in formal classes and to alternative education program for out-of-school children aged 10 to 14. The following words from one of the child interviewees, age 13 reveal how access to school and school feeding is vital to the IDPs

.... Life is miserable after we are displaced from our home village, Gursum, Eastern Haragie. We suffered a lot. I lost my mom and my younger sister because of the conflict. Education was not possible until we came here to Jimma. Now I am happy and hopeful to thrive. (OGKII-02, May 2024).

Both the displaced children and the schoolteachers included in the focus group discussions agreed that in the first three months displaced children were highly reserved and reluctant to play with host children. Eventually, through the support of the schoolteachers and peer interactions enhanced through morning meals and classroom activities, which enhanced the confidence of the displaced children to improved engagement and learning.

4.3.2 Queha

All IDP parents and key participants consulted during the field study witnessed that, in Queha, lifesaving and getting something to survive were the top priorities for both parents and children. Accordingly, sending children to school was not a serious agenda item during the first six months of displacement. Local NGO's efforts demonstrated by Hayra (HA) reactivated youth volunteerism and networking. As responded by the local NGO coordinator, amid challenges, the inside out courage to support each other coupled with care and support to IDPs from the host community and the possibility of morning meals eventually seem to have convinced IDP parents to send their children to get advantage and learn with host communities. For instance, one IDP parent stated, "the staff working in the HA collect evidence from the four schools to check if the children receiving morning meals are enrolled or not. As parents, we also believe that the morning meals are provided to encourage the children to go to school and continue their education without any disruptions" (Female, parent IDP FGD, April 20, 2024). In this case, the parents believed that the emergency feeding program was provided on the condition that the children attend school. While strict measures are not yet in place, the HA is also planning to consider school enrollment and academic performance as prerequisites for entering the feeding program. According to the IDP parents, beyond the emergency feeding program, sending their children to school is a mark of lifeline and cohesion.

The emergency feeding program, as witnessed by the school directors and teachers, serves as a strong motivator to eagerly arrive in class on time regularly. It is beyond the right to education, seems to have a positive influence on offering relief to parents and justification to send their children to regular attendance. Furthermore, the schoolteachers emphasize the morning meal contributes to smiling face, better attention and establishing active-healthy interaction among IDP and host children's learning at academic and co-curricular activities. In absence of morning meals, as witnessed by the schoolteachers, many of these indicators of motivation to learn are weak.

In the same vein, during the discussion with month groups, a discussant shared specific examples from her own experience with her two children. One of her children receives a morning meal while the other does not. One of the mothers who participated in the FGD explained,

...my oldest daughter, who is in grade seven, does not come to the morning meal. Most of the time, she goes to school without having breakfast and I worry about how she spends her day with an empty stomach. However, when I see the child who does have breakfast, I can

tell that he is learning better. He concentrates on his lessons throughout the day because he has breakfast. I have also noticed a difference in the motivation of my two children. The child who has the morning meal has improved significantly. However, the attention to schooling of my older daughter, who does not take the morning meal, is not as satisfactory as my son, who receives the morning meal (OGFGD-03, April 20, 2024).

According to the school directors and schoolteachers, regardless of the amount, morning meals play a crucial role in enhancing the health and well-being of the children, which is a vital factor in their academic success. A parent also expressed her thoughts as “... despite all these challenges, I am amazed by the staff’s dedication to providing food for the children... it’s truly surprising. I believe that the meals also contribute to their regular attendance and (probably academic performance), as it’s challenging to learn on an empty stomach” (Female, parent IDP FGD, April 20, 2024). Similar attestation was reflected by the students. For example, one grade 4 female student aged 12 stated that she could have reached grade eight or nine by now, but she did not have the opportunity to go to school due to the war in Tigray. She found the feeding program given to her and others very supportive. She replied that “the feeding program is interesting and is supporting many that don’t have the capacity to afford their daily meals” (OGFGD-04, April 8, 2024). She remembered as: “Before I was admitted to the feeding program, I had an experience of going to school without taking breakfast. I used to be hungry, but I make myself strong as it was a fasting period” (Student, Female, FGD, April 8, 2024). This implies that the effect of going to school without breakfast has a negative influence on children’s motivation and probably their healthy engagement in school activities. However, the children used to convince themselves that going to school without having breakfast is acceptable during the fasting periods. In other words, they know that breakfast is important, but in its absence, they justify it in terms of socially acceptable religious mythologies, such as staying without breakfast is acceptable to the heavenly bodies.

IDP students also praise the school's interaction with their age mates and the advantage of morning meals. One of the female students included in the interview witnessed, before the displacement, she was spending a day without a meal, which had been a common experience to her and her family. She said, “we don’t get food regularly. We only eat whenever we get rations from the NGOs” (OGKII-03, April, 2024).

In the newly displaced situation, to many, the morning meal (a cup (120ml) of wheat flour juice and 100g bread) is highly supportive of children's life and academic achievements. One of the IDP girls said "...the breakfast is essential to my life. At least, I spend my school day without thinking about food. I don't even think about lunch "(student, Female, FGD, April 8, 2024). This reveals the impact of morning meals on students' attention in school and their retention in the past two academic years. The same student iterated that "...we get here what we don't even think to get from our family. We get macaroni, tea, bread and 'Beso' - a local inhabited shake made up of Barley flour" (Female students, FGD, April 8, 2024). Barley is known for its high nutritional value, containing essential nutrients like fiber, vitamins, and minerals. It can be processed into various forms, including whole grains, flour, and malt. Additionally, barley is valued for its resilience in diverse climates and soil conditions, making it an important crop in many regions around the world. The community initiatives seem to have added value and creativity. The food items included in the morning meals are (first) among the commonly used food items in the areas; thus, children don't hesitate to take the meals regularly. Second, some of them, especially the "Besso" and bread, besides their accessibility in the market, are easy to prepare and get ready for the morning meals.

4.3.3 Cross Case Analysis

In both cases, the mutual respect and networking between local community members to elders and traditional social and religious leaders seem to have enhanced self-motivated volunteerism, shared roles and responsibilities. The initiatives seem to have fostered harmonized and peaceful social interaction within communities, seemingly reflected in the positive relationship between host and IDP children. According to the children of both groups, a peaceful learning environment prevails in classrooms, within the school compound, and outside the school premises. School teachers and directors also reiterated that, although challenges were encountered in the initial stages, smooth interaction and peer support gradually developed among the children, likely because of the exemplary social capital demonstrated by the parents and the community members at large.

From the field observations and discussions, against the adversities, the potential social assets which were translated into daily practical networks, trust and reciprocity, seem to positively influence the nutrition and economics of feedings. For instance, in Queha, where there has been direct community-based engagement, community members and schools were observed to have

strong and substantial roles and added value in defining and justifying the menu for the school feeding programs. The interviewee went on and asserted that “it is difficult to prepare one menu for all school contexts. After all, the food items included in the school feeding programs should be harmonized with the availability of items that existed in the community related to the harvest period and other seasons” (TQKII-06April, 2024). In this regard, the community members seem to nurture community-based pathways strongly and positively. From the field level observation, the mothers using their long-standing indigenous knowledge and social capital were observed to argue and decide regarding what type of food items need to be included and with what amounts and compositions. One of the mother interviewees explained her argument using the following example:

If you go to Mekoni- low land district located at the southern Tigray, the persons can contribute maize and Tef- abundant cereal crops in the district, including their usages; if you go to Alla’ge- high land district located in the southern zone of Tigray, the community can contribute beans, including its benefits to health (TREB, female, April 8, 2024)

In the context of Queha-Tigray, amid the recent aftermath of the war, the community engagement process seems to have also provided a strong opportunity for the bondage of “Hayra,” the voluntary groups and the local communities and diaspora, to utilize elements of social capital to build trust and develop into a viable association.

From the discussions and triangulations, in both contexts, withstanding the challenges, the commitment of local communities to support displaced families arises from a complex interplay of social, historical, and spiritual factors. The positive interactions observed between host and displaced children highlight the potential for community resilience and social cohesion. Recognizing the unique contextual differences in each location is essential for understanding community engagement dynamics and formulating targeted interventions to enhance support for displaced families.

4.4 Categories of Community Initiatives for Emergency School Feeding

The responses from participants and the triangulation of data reveal a rich landscape of voluntary initiatives within communities that support displaced families. These initiatives can be broadly categorized into regular and seasonal- occasional efforts, each playing a vital role in enhancing the well-being of both internally displaced persons and host families. From the study, major types of voluntary community initiatives are grouped into various forms, including labor, cash

contributions, material donations, technical inputs, and other services. These efforts occur within school compounds, IDP shelters, and broader community spaces, demonstrating a multifaceted approach to support (KII 05; FGD 03 and 04).

In both cases , regular involvement consists of participation from community members, particularly both displaced and host mothers, who play crucial roles and tasks. For example, directly the mothers organize meal services, which involve planning menus , collecting firewood, cooking meals and maintaining the cleanliness of cooking items and areas. The commitment not only addresses the immediate nutritional needs of children but also fosters a sense of community as mothers collaborate and share responsibilities. Moreover, these mothers were observed to have engaged in networking around children's safety and security, ensuring all children , especially girls, are cared for and protected. They may even participate in mutual hairdressing activities of elderly mothers and girls , which served both practical needs and social bonding -bridging opportunities.

From the study, religious leaders, regardless of the religious domain, reported to contributing significantly to cohesion by inviting and allowing displaced persons to prayer places, help through prayers and healing services, providing spiritual support that strengthens community morale. Elders and traditional leaders offer wisdom and guidance through storytelling and networking, bridging gaps between different community members and fostering a cohesive environment. In the study, in both cases, the youth group volunteers of both sexes reported (also observed) to have played an essential role, using technology to mobilize local assets, resource and labor, which, of course substantial amount if calculated. Voluntary youth leaders, through peer networking and the networks, often facilitate cash contributions, manage communications, and organize resource exchanges. The skilled youth members also reported rendering free services in activities like boys' hair dressing and transporting meal items. This further illustrates the dynamic nature of youth lead community support.

In addition to regular efforts, seasons or occasional initiatives were also observed and reported in response to specific needs or events. These initiatives, mainly led by the local administrative authorities included local fundraising from businessmen/women, awareness campaigns on health and security measures on weekends or holidays. In this effort, NGOs were reported to collaborate in both regular and occasional initiatives through providing cash supplies, technical support, and capacity building programs that enhance the skills of community members

The landscape of voluntary initiatives in these communities demonstrates a robust network of collaboration among various actors, significantly linking to post enrollment retention. Regular initiatives reflect a deep commitment to supporting displaced families through ongoing efforts in meal preparation, safety and social cohesion. Seasonal initiatives further address specific needs and leverage external resources, enhancing overall support. This interplay of voluntary initiatives creates a resilient support system that not only meets the immediate needs of IDPs but also fosters community solidarity and cooperation. Engaging all community members in these collective efforts is crucial for uplifting those affected by displacement.

Participants across both contexts unanimously indicated and discussed that the feeding scheme, regales of the type or quantity of morning meals, plays a crucial role in promoting attendance and hunger and post-enrollment retention of all children. School teachers noted that daily attendance and participation are strongly linked to meal service. In the schools covered by the study, attendance records for grades 3 and 4 in both formal and alternative education programs showed only a 3% dropout rate, with over 85% roster retention for both boys and girls in both cases².

In spite of the relentless voluntary efforts, however, teachers reported that children from IDP backgrounds often exhibit nervousness, emotional instability, and a tendency towards conflict. Despite the potential benefits of organized psychological support services designed to help IDPs parents and children cope with the trauma of displacement, and such services were found to be nonexistent in both contexts. As a coping mechanism, many IDPs seemed to choose to “forget the past,” avoiding the deep pain associated with their experiences.

Given the importance of psychosocial and mental health and well-being for emotional recovery and academic success, support in this area would have been crucial for both children and adults. In response to this pressing need, local NGOs have reported organizing weak mentorship programs that pair local students with displaced children, fostering friendship and providing both academic and emotional support. These initiatives have been shown to enhance school retention rates. Additionally, NGOs reported to have introduced small scale art and sports festivals, along with play-based learning games on a semester basis. These activities not only promote social interactions but also contribute to a positive school environment. Overall, the study revealed that the integration of voluntary community initiatives with a focus on meal provision and psychosocial

² The researcher compiled the roster of the students taking morning meals and has computed the aggregated score of the students in different subjects.

support is vital for sustaining enrollment and retention rates among displaced and host children. This integrated and comprehensive approach seems to play important role in community involvement and fostering inclusive and supportive educational landscape.

4.5 Existing School Feeding Pathways in Case Study Locations

In both cases, host communities together with IDPs and stakeholders including local administrations experienced at least four pathways : community based, school based, home based and NGO based in response to immediate emergency relief and recovery. Those continued organized feeding practices for the victims, including parents and displaced children observed to link enrollment to schooling. From the KIIs and FGDs each one of the pathways links to community engagement features and various engagement characteristics.

4.5.1 Community-Based School Feeding Pathway

Community -based feeding pathways refer to community driven initiatives aim to address emergency food responses and nutritional needs, especially among the vulnerable groups. By involving local stakeholders, these pathways support sustainable practices, improve food security, and build resilience. They enable communities to take charge of their nutritional initiatives, ensuring that food distribution is culturally appropriate and effectively addresses varied needs.

4.5.1.1 Ginjo

The KIIs and FGDs revealed that local indigenous social groups, the religious institutions and community self-help groups (Idir) coupled with volunteers, played a vital role in the relief and response to children going back to school and feedings. The community members organized village groups and contributed by generating money, materials, contributing cooking utensils and arranging feeding corners or spots. Individual households and families were also reported to supply cooked food, including local bread, which was occasionally served in holidays by those affluent families to the IDPs in mass. According to the IDPs, there is no restriction to attending religious prayers with host communities and at times religious leaders visit IDP camps appraised in engaging spiritual advice, which is most helpful to relief and recovery. Voluntary mother groups, together with IDP mothers, were also engaged in cleaning and washing dishes and cooking during major holidays.

From the KIIs, FGDs and observations, community based, and school-based initiatives are overlapping, giving morning meals to a child commonly a loaf of bread (100g) and a cup of tea, or occasionally boiled rice. In specific to community-based children feeding to schooling, availability of resources seems to determine the quality and standard of the meal. From the FGDs with parents and schoolteachers, the type of meal in service varies from loaf of bread with tea or injera with stew which depends on the availability of food items and financial resources. IDP parents were also reported to engage in labor and money contribution occasionally. Nevertheless, in Ginjo, although local government interventions are in favor of IDPs to local daily labor work, competitive employment of IDPs on available meager business spaces seem to have been a challenge.

In the case of Ginjo- Jimma, the summary from the FGDs with IDPs read as follows.

...we, the IDPs were affluent some years ago. Now we are desperate to have any job that helps us get coins. In this regard, the local administration, in negligence or knowing the consequences, hired many young adults from us and demolished “illegal” houses in Jimma, without providing us any information. That incident seriously affected our healthy interactions, spoiled and turned them into conflict with the host communities. Finally, we resolved through “Jarsuma”, the traditional conflict resolution mechanism. FGD with IDPs, April 2024.

From the FGDs, some of the local elders are highly courageous and committed to serving the IDPs. In this regard, linked to spiritual and moral obligation, the community based mainly seem to feature self-courage and motivations to serve humanity rather than organized and intentional interventions well recorded to recognize value and appraise the efforts.

4.5.1.2 Queha

Unlike Ginjo, Queha has been one of the areas under siege and seriously affected by the conflict before hosting the IDPs. In the case of Queha, youth social groups and veterans and community leaders, together with local members established self-initiated committee and mobilized volunteers that constituted resource mobilisers, advocates and labor contributors. The voluntary mother groups, beyond the physical labor and skills contribution engaged in creative analysis and decision of “better meal” to children. Hence, according to the KIIs, the mothers unlike the traditional “dry biscuit given by government or NGOs” insightfully identified culturally appropriate and cost-efficient meals. Accordingly, mothers are convinced to prepare the morning meals to serve a cup

of wheat flour juice (“*Besso*”) often coupled with a home prepared loaf of bread rather than rice and other fortified food items. According to the community volunteers and mothers, the choice of barely flour juice (“*Besso*”) with a loaf of bread (100g) was highly beneficial due to three critical issues. First, it is culturally appropriate and familiar to the children. The children received morning meals that they were accustomed to the bread and *Besso* rather than other food items, for example rice. Secondly, these food items are easily accessible from the local market. Third, compared to others (example, preparing tea requires sugar that is imported from outside the local market), *Besso* is reported to be nutritious and suitable, economic and has better health benefits. In view of mothers and elders, community wisdom seems to have been applied with reasoning. “Initially the mothers were providing rice and macaroni to the children” but they learned that the children feel bored in absence of tea which we observed from the fear of being addicted to tea addiction; now sugar is too scarce; we also consulted health professionals, who advised better to use “*Besso*” in place of cup of tea” FGD, April 2024. The volunteer mother groups, and community members exerted effort in labor and skills in a scheduled timetable. During the festivals and special meal preparation, the youth groups, through coordinated effort, reported to have engaged in additional resource mobilization and collected firewood for children’s meal preparation.

4.5.1.3 Cross Case Analysis

Both Queha and Ginjo, although living in different geographic locations, share similarities. In both cases, local initiatives led by community members, in particular young volunteers, religious leaders, elders and businessmen and women were observed to have taken strong engagement. In both contexts, the community-based pathway was characterized by self-initiative, voluntary based and dedicated financial and material contributions. From the various focus group discussions and key participants, three major common enabling factors were identified:

- Grassroots level involvement was observed to be strong. The local villagers, including the volunteers, demonstrated strong engagement in both cases. Also, a sense of ownership and accountability from within was observed high amid poor economies and little support from outside/external sources.
- Building social capital – fostered through voluntary-based social networks, trust among community members, and a shared commitment to the common good – proved crucial in supporting IDPs. These intangible assets facilitated the mobilization of local resources,

optimized the utilization of communal spaces and institutions, and strengthened the cohesion and social capital of both host and IDPs. Importantly, these social interactions demonstrated the power to heal and instill within and among the IDP population.

In both contexts, three comparable constraining factors were recorded against community-based engagement practices. The first one is the pressure on host communities due to limited resources. This was found more critical in Queha-Tigray than Ginjo -Oromia, due to the relatively escalated security challenges, disruption of access to major economic zones. The second constraint observed was the role of local administration. While in Queha, the local administration failed or was too slow to respond to IDPs which resulted in large-scale and protracted conflict in the northern part of the country, communities were forced to bear the challenge. In the case of Ginjo, which is in a peaceful condition, however, was observed to be sympathetic but with little concrete contributions. The third challenge observed was the huge and diverse demand and ambition of the IDPs which also created unintended tensions between IDPs and host communities. In both cases, local conflict resolution mechanisms including elders' discussions, spiritual prayers, and coffee ceremonies were mentioned to have served to normalize the situations.

4.5.2 School-based feeding pathway

School-based emergency school feeding in Ginjo and Queha refers to school managed delivery of a minimum of one meal to both host and displaced children on school days. The specific case analysis indicated the talents of respective communities.

4.5.2.1 Ginjo

The KII results from school directors and FGDs from teachers revealed that school-based feeding programs are highly relevant because many children come to school hungry. These programs often rely on the support of a few courageous teachers who contribute from their own pockets. According to the directors, school-based feeding programs are crucial for ensuring regular attendance, equity between poor and rich students, and active student participation.

According to the two school directors, since mid-2022, following the regional government initiatives, the school-based feeding pathway was found to have been an emerging organized intervention in schools' planning. The directive from zone-regional government encourages linking the school feeding with the traditional social welfare practices. Thus, the school directors together with the school-based parent teacher-student association (PTSA) are expected to work closely with the nearby "Busa Gonofa" initiatives mandated and administered by the zone

“Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission” to support the school feeding practices. From the field study, the office, based on the number of students in the schools, works on the distribution of available food items, facilitates the transportation through volunteer transporters and avails training on proper storage, safe handling and proper cooking procedure which of course, is not applicable in the schools.

The PTSA representatives (OJ KGD 04) also appreciate the underlying principle, that each child, including IDPs is eligible for school-based feeding once a day during the suitable time of the five learning days. Further KIIs with the school directors (OJ KII 05), indicated that the key feature of Bussa Gonofa supports the host-IDP children inclusion, smooth interaction and , parents’ mutual actions to community services. The key participants also acknowledged that the Busa Gonofa is looking inwards, seeking and mobilizing all available resources in kind or in cash or both from within during harvest peak seasons.

During the field study, the school directors, teachers and the parents committee were observed in preparing spaces for storage of raw items and spaces for cooked food items. According to the directors, the female schoolteachers, in addition to their professional responsibilities, play role in coordinating and monitoring proper management of food handling. The mothers, including PTSA members also reported being active in communicating timely and accurate information to businessmen to support, sending messages on school efforts to feed the student population, arranging the space, managing the food preparation, or distribution. The school director, among others, discussed with the researcher that a school director is expected to organize the information, reporting on a daily or the minimum weekly basis back to the branch “Bussa Gonofa” office, the newly emerging structure. In addition to collecting and distributing food items to school feeding, it also assumes the disaster preparedness response activities in the region. It also encourages and allows one meal for schoolteachers during their stay at the schools. With this, the study has identified three key enabling factors of the school-based pathway: being organized by the political leadership, structured by a dedicated office and communication channel and accountability mechanisms. The community engagement practices are active through the PTSA, elders and local leaders and schoolteachers.

4.5.2.2 Queha

In January 2024, however, the Queha sub-city administration announced the implementation of a school-based feeding program, which came as a surprise to the communities and schools. According to school directors, this initiative appeared politically motivated, inadequately planned, and overly ambitious. The Queha local administration, with support from Mekele municipality, claimed to have initiated a program providing one meal (cooked rice and a cup of tea) to all primary school children for five days a week. However, this program reportedly lasted only for two weeks.

According to the school directors and participants from the Parent Teachers Student Association (PTSA) at Queha, a successful school-based feeding program requires careful preparation, sufficient resource backup and a conducive environment. In their case, the implementation process was characterized by emotional and political motivations rather than well-defined plan (TQ FGD, 05).

The situation in Queha presents significant challenges to the initiatives and implementation of school-based feeding programs. School directors believe that such program requires considerable attention, substantial financial resources , and adequate human staff and resources. However, in the current context of regional crisis and lack of proper educational administration, schools in Queha face numerous challenges, including shortage of water, inadequate furniture (benches and blackboards) and lack of basic resources.

Furthermore, limited school-level income generation and significant delays in teacher salaries (often exceeding three months) exacerbate the challenges. From the perspective of the PTSA, the scarcity and high cost of firewood and water in Queha would make the implementation of a sustainable school feeding program extremely difficult and expensive. Despite these challenges, during the interviews in both Ginjo and Queha, both the PTSA members appreciated and recognized the benefits of school feeding programs, particularly for children from poor yet conservative families, “...who were ordered by family to be reluctant or deny to seeking food outside the home, even when hungry!” OGFGD-04, May 2024.

4.5.2.3 Cross Case Analysis

In both cases, the basic principles and intentions of school feeding and its contribution to quality learning are appraised by both school directors and teachers. According to the school directors and

PTSA members, the initiative is valuable yet requires strong resource mobilization and serious discipline in the administration of the feeding process.

In Oromia, where the political will and administrative support seem observable, the practices between the primary schools were not uniform. During the field study, the researcher checked and triangulated that school-based feeding, unlike the intentions, lacks uniformity in schools both in the amount of meals and days of feeding. For example, in the Mendera primary school the host to the IDPs, the local NGOs and religious affiliated groups feed the children once a day including the weekend and report to the local Busa Gonofa office through the school director. Moreover, the researcher confirmed that each schoolteacher at Mendera primary school staff (altogether 65) are obliged to contribute a minimum of 1% of his/her monthly salary to the aims of school feeding which the teachers complained about because the overall deduction accounted for over 30% of the monthly gross salary.

In both Queha and Ginjo, the school-based pathway seems to allow strong community involvement both in mobilizing and administering feeding. The schoolteachers and directors witness a significant contribution of morning meals to enrollment and learning engagement during the feeding days. According to the schoolteachers, it increased school actual time, attendance and performance as children are more likely to participate in all subjects when meals are provided the school-based pathway seems to allow strong community involvement both in mobilizing and administering feeding. The schoolteachers and directors witness a significant contribution of morning meals to enrollment and learning engagement during the feeding days. According to the schoolteachers, it increased school actual time, attendance and performance as children are more likely to participate in all subjects when meals are provided the school-based pathway seems to allow strong community involvement both in mobilizing and administering feeding. The schoolteachers and directors witness a significant contribution of morning meals on enrollment and learning engagement during the feeding days. According to the schoolteachers, it increased school actual time, attendance and performance as children are more likely to participate in all subjects when meals are provided. On the other hand, some of the schools, including those under the study, were observed to extend the mealtime to the last hours so that children stay in schools. In the case of Oromia, according to the IDPs and host communities, the feeding was also observed to have increased school attendance and relevance to educational services.

In the study, the school-based feeding pathway, in Ginjo-Oromia, is considered a government-owned and fully financed endeavor. Thus, the community, unlike the community based voluntary service, seems to demand and require expense for both the food and non-food services, facilities and related costs, including unloading food items. In this regard, the same food item at the school-based feeding reported to have high unit cost (300%) when compared to the community-based pathway. According to the school directors, and exploration done by the researcher with community volunteers, a similar school meal for a child costs 78 ETB in school-based feeding, while it is only 25 ETB in community-based pathway (observation at morning meals of two schools in May 2023). The second challenge lies on the timely reaching of food items (despite the amount) to even the urban schools due to reporting, administration, distribution and transportation of food items from “Busa Gonofa offices”. In this regard, representatives of the Busa Gonofa offices acknowledge the challenge count is becoming serious due to unpredictable agricultural products, fuel cost and security situations. The third challenge is related to logistical space. Both at the Bussa Gonofa offices which anticipated having suitable space to store industrial and farm crops during the harvest period are non-existent. Similarly, most of the schools, including those under the study, have the spaces and manpower to do the case. Moreover, most schools in Queha and Ginjo seem not only deteriorated but also to lack water, safe and secure space and human staff to store food items for a longer period and to utilize them properly.

From the study, both the school leaders and community elders underscore, the need to recognize and value community engagement, if possible, fostering home-grown feeding schemes and outsourcing to voluntary groups; and creating balanced mechanisms between voluntary community interventions and local outsourcing through local mother self-help groups.

4.5.3 NGO based emergency school pathways

In the Ethiopian context, a non-government organization operating under the national civil service agency charter and established for nonprofit making and aimed to humanitarian emergency support and operating a pathway during the study was included in the study. The NGO pathways referred to the resource allocation, purchase of food and non-food items, transporting, storage and distribution of items to target beneficiaries and reporting back to the original donor through written and human stories.

Interviews with local NGOs operating in Ginjo and Queha reveal a comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of displaced communities through the establishment of a joint committee

composed of both displaced and host community members. This collaborative model not only fosters a sense of unity but also ensures that the voices of these affected are heard in decision-making process. Nevertheless, the practices were reported otherwise. By identifying local purchase options , these NGOs attempted to empower families to support themselves, thereby promoting economic resilience. Additionally, the formation of self-help groups primarily composed of displaced individuals is a critical feature of this model. These groups opt to serve as platforms for mutual support, allowing members to share resources and strategies for overcoming challenges. The focus on vulnerable populations, such as individuals with disabilities and orphans, underscores the commitment of organizations like Mekaneyessus to inclusivity and social equity, addressing the unique needs of the most marginalized within these communities.

In Ginjo, the implementation of self-help groups , coupled with initiatives like school gardening , represents a proactive step towards sustainable food security. While these efforts are currently on a small scale, they provide a foundation for empowering displaced families to take charge of their nutrition and livelihoods. However, the limited scale of these initiatives and minimal linkage with local markets highlight a significant gap. Many displaced families observed to have continued to suffer with such circumstances, and due to the meager support they receive; yet valuable to survive, remains a complicated challenge to fully think of children's education or next movements. From the field study , the NGOs' list showed that efforts to provide some cash assistance, particularly to families and their children enrolled and identified within local schools. Still, the scale of support is not commensurate with the depth of the challenge faced by these families. This discrepancy raises concerns about the sustainability and long-term impact of these interventions, necessitating a more robust strategy to address the urgent needs of displaced people.

Despite these challenges, the intent to achieve operational flexibility and responsiveness of the NGOs allow for a dynamic approach that evolves alongside the community needs. The collaboration between displaced and hosts fosters a sense of shared responsibility, enabling a more cohesive response to the crisis. This model not only addresses immediate survival needs but also lays the groundwork for future recovery and development. As the situation evolves, it will be crucial for NGOs to scale up their efforts, strengthen local market linkages and expand the scope of self-help initiatives. Ultimately, the success of these pathways depends on the ability to adapt to

the changing landscape of needs while ensuring that all community members, especially the most vulnerable, are included in the recovery process.

4.5.3.1 Ginjo

During the field study, four registered local NGOs were operating in the education, health and environmental sectors in Ginjo. To the particular purpose of the study, the role of the two local NGOs (ILLU and DEC), who mainly aligned their local plans with existing school feeding initiatives, was considered. The response to the IDP needs and alignment to local community demands seems to take note of the options which either lie on preparing hot meals at school compounds or purchasing industrial biscuits. In this regard, the role of NGOs seems overlapping and cross-cutting “... we are trying to respond end to end, not only feeding but also educational materials, safety/dignity kits and facilities to the disabilities and referral systems” (OGKII-05, April 2024).

From focus group discussions and KIIs, flexibility and responsiveness seem to be two of the qualities of NGOs in the context. In this regard, the interview and FGD results (OG FGD 06) indicated that both NGOs reported having adjusted their work plan and office structure to prioritize the IDPs. Indeed, they reported having attempted to fill gaps with the local government plans. The NGOs working on the education sector reported to have supported schools with logistics and facilities, including preparation of feeding space, supply of items and transportation of food to schools. Once the food reached the school, the NGOs interviewed also reported having engaged in awareness creation on safe handling, health and nutrition education to school community, parents and concerned personnel. The NGOs reported having cluster forums to complement efforts and alleviate duplications. Nevertheless, this was reported to be slow and weaker than expected due to individual work guidelines and procedures. According to the NGO focal persons, there are monthly progress reports with schools to complement the feeding programs, ensuring children and parents understand the importance of going back to school (GO KII 07).

The reports from the monthly partners meeting minutes show that NGOs participated in helping the schoolteachers’ capacity building trainings and education officers monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of school feeding programs, ensuring that they meet their objectives. In response the stakeholders, together with community members and mothers made necessary meal service adjustments mainly during school holidays and sport/art festivals. From the study, the two NGOs

reported to have been involved in the home-based feeding one month ahead of the beginning of the academic year to motivate parents and attract children to school, so that the service continued . This support included:

- i. Food and medical distribution: 500g dry biscuits and 500g soap supplied to 150 displaced families to motivate and ensure that children get attracted to have registered access to (nutritious) meals at home and at school.
- ii. Render support Services: organize weekly community support services for groups of displaced families, such as psychosocial support and educational materials, to help families cope with the challenges of displacement.
- iii. Facilitate community engagement: NGOs facilitated and engaged with community leaders and members to ensure that feeding programs are culturally appropriate and meet the needs of the community. (Field level Record of the local NGO, ILU, 2024)

4.5.3.2 Queha

In Queha, following the armed conflict aftermath in 2023, Ethiopian Mekaneyesus Church, Operation Rescue Ethiopia (ORE) and Tigray Youth Empowerment Solution (TYES) mobilized close to 3 million USD (both in cash and in kind) and struggled to set up their settlement and respond to the huge demand of the 85,000 population including host villagers and displaced families.(TQ KII, 08). Moreover, “Hayra” the indigenous CSO evolved from desperate need to respond to the crisis, seems to have taken the crucial role of life-saving during the deep grief of the villagers. From the interviews, conversations and triangulations, it is important to acknowledge “Hayra” the involvement is not without its challenges. While high expectations, limited shared roles and responsibilities were observed on the side of the government, incapability to direct implementation and potential dependency on NGOs were observed from the side of schools and IDPs. This seems to have posed risks to the long-term sustainability of programs. Additionally, coordinating efforts among multiple NGOs and government agencies was also observed to be challenging which led to inefficiencies and duplication of services.

The community based voluntary association also boosted and used its network as an opportunity to expand its resources and address similar problems. It collaborated with local and international NGOs to support the feeding program. For instance, one of the interviewees shared her experience, saying,

I had concerns about my child's health and discussed it with the HA staff. Fortunately, the HA communicated with partner organizations like Moms for Moms—a local organization operating in Tigray, and one member of the feeding program informed me that the organization decided to provide me with about 1500 birr for my child's medication. If the HA wasn't there, I might not have received this benefit” (TQKII-06, April 20, 2024)

According to the participants, to maximize the benefits of NGOs involvement while mitigating potential challenges, it seems crucial to promote collaboration, coordination, and local ownership. By fostering partnerships, building capacity, and ensuring programs are aligned with government priorities. Aligning available aid with community champions, NGOs suggested they can make a significant contribution to improving the wellbeing of vulnerable populations through fostering integrated community school feeding initiatives.

4.5.3.3 Cross Case Analysis

Although the geographic locations and social contexts of the cases differ, quick local solutions provided by NGOs when compared to respective local government were notably reported as effective across both situations. In each case, local NGOs quickly engaged with the community and facilitated temporary home based and school feeding programs, responding well to the needs of vulnerable groups. However, these initiatives proved to be relatively costly compared to community-based alternatives. Consequently, the planned feeding program was interrupted after eight months, highlighting that standalone efforts would struggle without community support. During the ongoing conflict in Tigray, the lack of local government structures compelled non-state actors, particularly local NGOs, to heavily step in and assist communities facing acute emergencies. Community members reported that both local and international NGOs made significant contributions to lifesaving and sustaining efforts, including supplying food and non-food items, transporting firewood, and managing water distribution. School directors, village

officers, and IDP representatives noted that these organizations adjusted their work plans to ensure the availability of essential supplies like soap and dignity pads for women and girls.

From the standpoint of the goals of engagement, the initial plans and actual implementations of consulted NGOs in fostering community engagement reveal both strengths and challenges in supporting school-based and community-based feeding programs. While the intentions of these organizations have been pivotal in establishing these initiatives, their effectiveness often hinges on technical, financial, and programmatic roles. NGOs have made significant contributions to the sustainability of these programs by initiating partnerships and building local capacity. However, the implementation process has faced obstacles, including frequent staff turnovers, inadequate capacities, and strict donor preconditions, which hinder their ability to fully address the needs of vulnerable populations.

One notable challenge identified is the NGOs' relative ineffectiveness in mobilizing local resources and fostering social-religious harmony compared to voluntary youth groups and community elders. In Queha, youth volunteers have played a crucial role in engaging the community, while in Ginjo, local leaders have successfully facilitated support for displaced families. This grassroots mobilization often outpaces the more formal approaches of NGOs, highlighting a gap in the NGOs' ability to adapt and integrate local knowledge and networks into their programs. The reliance on external frameworks can limit the potential for community-driven solutions, which are essential for long-term sustainability.

To enhance their impact, NGOs should shift from a transactional approach to a transformational model that emphasizes capacity building and revitalizes local actors. By empowering community members and aligning their efforts with existing government plans, NGOs can promote a more collaborative environment. This shift would not only improve program effectiveness but also foster a sense of ownership within the community, ensuring that initiatives are better tailored to meet the specific needs of vulnerable populations. In doing so, NGOs can play a more instrumental role in creating resilient communities capable of sustaining their own development in the long term.

4.5.3.4 Vitals in the Choice of Emergency School Feeding Pathways

The choice of emergency school feeding pathways is influenced by various factors, including context, resource availability, and the timing of emergency response decisions. In both Qucha and Ginjo, local authorities, school directors, and NGO representatives highlighted the essential characteristics of each pathway. Community-based feeding programs, for instance, saw NGOs primarily initiating partnerships, providing alternative options, and supporting capacity building. This approach emphasized resource mobilization, with NGOs collaborating with local administrations to establish thematic clusters. By encouraging farmers and suppliers to utilize school farm areas for food, these initiatives not only stimulated the local economy but also ensured that the food provided was culturally appropriate. Additionally, tailored training on food preparation, hygiene, and nutrition contributed to the community's ability to sustain these programs independently, fostering resilience and self-sufficiency.

In Ginjo, NGOs played a pivotal role in linking community-based initiatives with religious organizations, enhancing social-religious harmony. This collaboration was manifested in joint food distribution events and community gatherings that brought together diverse groups, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose. Such engagement also contributed to the overall acceptance and effectiveness of the feeding programs, as community members felt a collective responsibility towards the well-being of their children. Conversely, in Queha, while the involvement of NGOs was significant, the focus was more on direct support to schools and IDPs, with moderate engagement in community mobilization. This difference underscores the varying dynamics between the two contexts, where Ginjo's approach highlights the importance of social cohesion in enhancing program effectiveness.

The community-based home-linked school feeding pathway emerged as a practical solution to logistical challenges and the high costs associated with food preparation. However, this model poses challenges in monitoring whether the food is utilized for its intended educational purposes. Additionally, the reliance on home-based feeding may inadvertently exacerbate inequalities among households, as disparities in resources can lead to unequal access to food. Such inequalities can create conflicts of interest and hinder the overall objectives of improving learning outcomes. The comparative analysis of engagement levels across Ginjo and Queha reveals that community-based pathways often result in stronger direct engagement among IDP families, while school-based approaches may yield less direct involvement, particularly in Queha.

The study explored the importance of creative and positive engagement among local community members, non-state actors, and state actors in emergency school feeding programs. This engagement not only enhances children's retention but also contributes to social capital and overall well-being. However, a more comprehensive comparative analysis between children receiving and not receiving morning meals is warranted. This should include standardized testing, teacher assessments, and longitudinal studies to establish a causal link between school feeding and academic performance, thereby advocating for increased investment in these programs and informing effective policy decisions.

At the federal level, the Ministry of Education's 2023 report highlights a centralized school feeding approach where the government provides standardized meals to all children. This top-down system, relying heavily on factory-produced food, lacks flexibility and struggles to integrate local resources and community involvement. From the study, this pathway, beyond policy intentions, seems still to be an infant.

In contrast, in both cases, decentralized approaches, particularly community-led initiatives, have shown greater promise in addressing the IDP challenges. These approaches seem to have strong potential to encourage home-grown food production, boosting local economies and involving communities in decision-making. Nevertheless, home growth linked to home business initiatives was not observed in both Gnjo and Queha.

The study identified NGO-based pathways as a standalone approach, which should instead be integral and strategic in supporting community development, strengthening local economies, and fostering inclusive participation, including the involvement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to unleash the local potential of both IDPs and host communities.

From the study, in both contexts, due to escalating living conditions, pressure on the host communities was reported to increase. Despite strong resource limitations, community-based approaches, characterized by strong community ownership and dedication to local resource utilization, have proven effective in providing morning meals for the academic period without interruption. In both cases, local community members observed that fostering social cohesion and improving networking within the village also improved interactions with IDPs. This approach emphasizes the importance of local partnerships utilizing school gardens and community resources to produce and prepare fresh meals. To ensure sustainability, in both contexts, local NGOs and

non-state actors, while acceptable to engage directly to avoid bureaucratic chains, should strategically avoid embarking on a standalone pathway. From a policy and practice perspective, for better and lasting results, NGOs might provide immediate responses, but they should avoid acting as sole providers and instead focus on supporting existing community-led initiatives, such as home-grown and community-based feeding programs. This involves fostering local employment opportunities and collaborating with local governments to strengthen local markets and improve infrastructure. IDPs in areas like Ginjo Jimma possess valuable skills and resources that can significantly contribute to the success of these initiatives.

4.6 Local State Actors in Supporting Host and IDP Engagement

At the field level, the local state actors referred to the village and district administrative authorities and personnel who closely followed, reported and were also in charge of the disaster preparedness activities during acute and chronic emergencies to victimized host communities and or displaced persons.

4.6.1. Ginjo

The Ginjo Guduru local administration, commonly known as the village council, consists of seven members who manage the overall administration of the village, including the peace and security of the villagers. The executive secretary, often entitled as the “manager,” is responsible for the day-to-day services provided to the community.

The study included the manager and one council member in discussions about handling internally displaced people (IDPs) and their children's return to education. According to the manager, both the Jimma municipality and the Ginjo local administration hosted IDPs with respect and equality to access all services, including health and income-generating activities. According to the village manager, IDPs are treated with mutual respect and are provided with equal services comparable to those of the host villagers. The village administration has reported working collaboratively with various sectors, particularly agriculture and disaster preparedness offices, to ensure basic services and benefits for the IDPs. “In consultation with the town administration (municipality), IDPs were allowed to participate in town cleaning and garbage collection for recycling; however, this initiative did not continue due to resource limitations,” according to KII, May 2024. A member of the village council praised IDP women for their creativity, communication skills, and efforts in

building healthy relationships with the host communities. Additionally, during the key informant interview (KII), the village administration representative noted, "The IDPs possess strong skills in trading, are capable in daily labor, and excel in social interactions." (OGKII 07). The homogeneity in the religious domain between the host communities and IDPs has reportedly contributed to social cohesion and capital, enabling the community to better manage the challenges posed by the presence of IDPs. Both groups demonstrate mutual respect and trust towards one another. On the other hand, IDP members, during a focus group discussion (FGD), expressed concerns that the local administration lacks uniform treatment and support regarding the basic needs of the IDPs.

4.6.2. Queha

The Queha local administration operates under the Mekele Municipality. During the field study, it was observed that the local administration remains fragile and has not yet recovered from the devastating effects of the civil war, which severely impacted basic administrative services.

The local village administrator explained that stable administrative services are still lacking due to political, administrative, and resource-related challenges. In a key informant interview the representative (TQKII-05), says

Before the war, the local village administration was very effective in managing day-to-day activities, supporting local development initiatives, engaging in campaigns to encourage children to return to school, and facilitating health and peace activities. Now, all of these initiatives have ceased. We are still in a stressful situation, although we are relieved that the war has ended," (TQ KII-05 June 2024).

4.6.3 Cross Case Analysis

Since 1991, Ethiopia has adopted a federal administrative arrangement, designating villages as the foundation of local government. These village councils and local administration bodies engage with communities daily, encapsulating the social fabric and interactions within their areas. In terms of government organization, following the decentralization of administration, regional governments have the power to manage local affairs, including the work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community groups to implement programs in education, including school feeding programs.

While this collaborative approach fosters a sense of ownership among local communities and ensures their inputs are considered in the development and execution of these programs, this was not strong in both cases due to the conflict aftermath in Queha and competing priorities in Ginjo.

Thus, local communities, through their social assets and capital, seem to have the players who bear the huge responsibilities of IDP recovery and children's retention. In place of the local administrations, in both cases, community-based organizations (CBOs) were reported to have played a critical role in filling the administrative gaps and complementing these efforts. Local CBOs and women's groups are often instrumental in mobilizing resources and volunteers for school feeding initiatives. Their involvement not only enhances community buy-in but also promotes the sustainability of these programs.

Additionally, partnerships with NGOs during emergencies (WFP, UNICEF, GGE) have proven to be beneficial. Numerous NGOs operate in Ethiopia, providing technical support and funding for school feeding initiatives. These organizations work closely with local communities to design programs that are responsive to the specific contexts and nutritional needs of the populations they serve.

In summary, the integrated approach involving local administrations, community-based organizations, and NGOs is essential for addressing educational and nutritional needs in Ethiopia. By fostering collaboration and community ownership, these initiatives can significantly contribute to the overall well-being of children and the support of local education systems

4.7 Policy provisions and engagement practices in emergency school feeding

In the study, the exposure and awareness of the respective schools included in the study to emergency policy and guidelines and its application was examined, triangulated and addressed.

4.7.1 Ginjo

Oromia Regional State policy in school feeding which has been endorsed since 2021, seems to have enhanced community engagement practices in emergency school feedings with overlapping roles of community institutions, including leaders and elders. In Ginjo the KIIs and FGDs indicated, the emergency school feeding relies heavily on traditional governance structures, such as indigenous self-help groups, local elders and community leaders. These bodies often play a

pivotal role in mobilizing community support and resources. Since 2021, the regional government's introduction of the "Busa Gonofa" initiative seems to have shaped the legal status mainly to serve the community support system, including school feeding practices. In this regard, community members, schools and local NGOs are observed to have a double role and responsibilities to mobilize resources and employ participatory approaches, involving community members in the planning and implementation phases. As per the regional initiatives, communities have a role, among others, seeking and gathering input on food types, allocation of resources, and volunteer mobilization for food preparation.

From field observations and FGDs, while the initiatives are highly relevant for reactivating social responsibilities, the plans are overly ambitious, and the implementation practices are not yet robust. According to the school director, for example, food items and food supplies to schools are not only insufficient but also often arrive late. In this regard, due to delays in food item delivery from Busa Gonofa offices, local contributions, although not formally recognized or costed, seem to place an undue burden on communities, even as they struggle to retain children in school. For example, communities in Ginjo-Oromia reported frequently supplementing school feeding initiatives with local contributions, such as food items or labor. This grassroots involvement not only enhances the sustainability of the programs but also fosters a sense of community ownership.

4.7.2 Queha

From field-level discussions and triangulation of data, local community member engagement practices in Queha emerged primarily because of a lack of external alternatives and a desperate response to the aftermath of the civil war that stayed for two years (Nov 2020-2022). During the study period, the location was virtually inaccessible to the outside world, necessitating an inward focus on home-grown solutions with a sense of urgency and desperate action.

While the overall emergency response policy in Tigray was largely anchored to externally driven advocacy and support linked to international political attention and humanitarian aid flow, in Qucha, during the study period, external aid in response to the emergency was minimal, with limited exceptions. Instead, local voluntary frameworks established by humanitarian agencies, particularly during the acute phase of the conflict, integrated with diaspora assistance, proved critical. As one Key Informant Interview (KII) participant stated in June 2024, "We would have

not survived had it not been for the zealous effort of the young volunteers and the continuous support of those who live in Europe and North America."

In this regard, despite the crisis, community collaboration from the grassroots with those operating local NGOs seem to have played a significant role in Tigray, with facilitating feedback mechanisms where community members can voice their needs and concerns regarding school feeding. This collaboration ensures that the programs are responsive to the specific challenges faced by displaced families. The context in Tigray, which is characterized by complicated humanitarian and civil war crisis and its implications, has forced the local communities, youth groups and local NGOs to address holistic approach in a more responsive and comprehensive intervention. In Tigray, provided the huge number of out of school children, integrated school feeding with psychosocial support and educational supplies was found critical. Community engagement in Queha, thus encompasses various aspects of recovery and resilience building throughout the process. Apart from the initiatives, participants also listed challenges in the engagement practices. First, severe disruption of social structures due to the conflict presents obstacles in mobilizing community participation. Moreover, the deep trauma and mistrust resulting from the conflict also happened an important impeding factor against engagement efforts.

4.7.3 Cross Case Analysis

From the study the existing legal-policy provisions and organizational design about community engagement in emergency school feeding seem to anchor and influenced by the respective regional contexts. The existing comparative community engagement practices in Oromia seem to have been favored and facilitated by regional policy directions that encourage the community pathways in more formalized and organized manner. On the other hand, in Tigray the existing loose regional government's control over school feedings and children retention seem to constrain its role to foster the resilient effort demonstrated by the local community members. Furthermore, community engagement in emergency school feeding programs in both Queha (Tigray) and Ginjo (Oromia) exhibited interesting features and facts. In both cases, engagement practices of the various social groups and community members illustrate the roles and importance of local resources in addressing critical social and humanitarian problems emerging during the war and conflict. In this regard, the intent of the community engagement in emergency school feeding tends to reflect in terms of purpose and actors participating in the program. Moreover, there appears to

be some subtle differences emanating from the background IDPs, severity of the conflict and community composition and social fabrics. The table below highlights the summary of the comparative engagement analysis of the two study locations/regions.

Table Six: Aspects of Engagement implications in Children's Post Enrollment Retention

Aspect of engagement	Ginjo/Oromia	Queha/Tigray	Implications to enhance community Engagement in children's motivation to learn
Engagement structures	In traditional social structures, leaders and elders are in action	Emergency response with strong volunteers and local NGO facilitation	Formal and non-formal structures can be in action in context
Level of Participation	Formal, high levels of local material and physical contributions	Flexible high collaboration and commitment with local actors to solve problems	Many local actors play roles in various forms, physical , material, technical skills, local spaces and feedback
Approach	Participatory, community-driven	Holistic, integrating various support services	Context marked commitment beyond participation to continuity
Ownership	Strong sense of /school government ownership	Strong sense of community, Ownership often mediated through local NGO/CSO	Structured and unstructured ownership in play in context
Adaptability	Programs may be flexible based on seasonal input	Responses are emergent and dictated by needs	Responsiveness and creativity to emerging problems contributed to the courage to perform amid adversities

Source: Summary of the FGDs in Queha and Ginjo in two rounds, March - June 2024

The findings of the study indicated that community engagement practices in emergency school feeding programs in Oromia and Tigray reflect the unique challenges and dynamics of each context. While Oromia benefits from evolving initiatives anchored to traditional structures and community contributions, Tigray works within an emergency framework heavily supported by NGOs. While Tigray is still in a state of recovery, to build its government operations. The political will and support from the Oromia Regional State Education Bureau seem to have been a springboard for the initiative and difference in practices. The effectiveness of these approaches in addressing food insecurity and educational continuity often depends on the local context, the

strength of community ties, and the ongoing impacts of conflict. A nuanced understanding of these practices can lead to more tailored and effective emergency responses in each region.

4.8 Catalyst Role of Social Capital in Fostering Children's Post Enrollment Retention

In the study, social capital was found to be instrumental in fostering the success of emergency school feeding programs and facilitating the reintegration of children. These intangible resources seem to have played a multifaceted role in strengthening community cohesion, expanding social networks, mobilizing resources, and stimulating engagement of IDPs in the local economy. By fostering a more supportive and inclusive environment, assets and capital were observed to have a strong ability to mitigate the challenges faced by internally displaced persons (IDPs) and enhance their access to education.

4.8.1 Ginjo

In Ginjo, despite social diversity and pressure from outside that encountered limited local resources, the host community together with IDPs effectively used its social assets (spaces, facilities, [physical resources and inputs) and social capital (networks, interaction, connections, mutual relationships and reciprocity) for the recovery and emergency school feeding program. The program utilizes community assets, such as public spaces that are owned by the community. This means that the emergency feeding program unleashed assets that are owned by the community.

The intangible social capital, such as altruism and interaction, has also been utilized for the emergency school feeding program. Another discussant opined as “life would have been more difficult than it is now without the long-standing generosity of the persons “(OGFGD 06, April 20, 2024). From the field, responses from community members, schools, and NGOs revealed that effective networking, smooth relationships, and collaboration among stakeholders are crucial for successful emergency responses. However, interviews and focus group discussions highlight that these elements and aspirations are contextual and interconnected, reflecting and depending on collective commitment toward a common goal.

Deep-rooted with social diversity, in Ginjo, the religious institutions and indigenous traditional social groups fostered the community to maximize its social networks (both formal and informal) in the feeding programs. The interviewee confirmed as “we obliged every member of the

community to make our objective their agenda in any of their social networks, including the religious and non-religious festivities” (TQKII, 08 March 30,2024). The attempt to embed the emergency school feeding in the social networks of the community helped expand the local NGO and voluntary community based organizational resource bases eventually increased the number of children benefiting from the morning meals. The field-level information and responses from all groups included in the study indicated that, amid resource challenges, the host community demonstrated remarkable courage through compassion and respect. Trust-building between the host and displaced families emerged as a pivotal community behavior essential for sustaining life. One elder from the displaced families reported:

“...despite our deep stress and nervousness, we believe that Allah, the Almighty, helped the host communities embrace us, giving us the courage to survive and see the next morning sun!” (OGKII 09, May 2024,).

4.8.2 Queha

In Queha, local assets and social capital were beyond question serving critical elements to the survival of the villagers including the IDPs. In a context where no external support was available and local administration totally failed, mobilizing the available little resources, harmonizing the local community in the IDP location effectively used its social capital for the emergency school feeding program. The efforts by the local NGOs and the volunteers and the elderly seem to have unleashed community assets, such as public spaces that are owned by the community. This means that the emergency feeding program utilizes assets that are owned by the community.

Additionally, in the case of Queha, the voluntary based association (HA) , which is responsible for initiating and implementing the feeding program, is seen as an asset of the local community. The volunteer groups beyond the intention of preserving the unique cultural traditions of the Enderta community celebrated at the beginning of June happened to have played a historic role in supporting the needy. IDPs due to the war (the historical development of the feeding program and HA is discussed in the summary of the first interview).

The situation also enhanced the leadership and coordination role managed by volunteers who are part of the hosting community at Queha. This has instilled courage in both the association members and the community. The community largely shares the responsibility and goals of the HA, resulting in positive responses to the urgent needs of children. Furthermore, based on the

FGDs conducted with teachers and principals, it was evident that certain philanthropists eventually developed trust in the voluntary association (HA) more than government offices responsible for social welfare. Because HA is part of the community, it is not far from the community living at Queha. The intangible social capital such as altruism and interaction has also been utilized for the emergency school feeding program. One discussant opined as “life would have been more difficult than it is now without the long-standing generosity of the persons “(TQ FGD 08, April 20, 2024).

Keeping this into account, additional measures that promote social capital have also been sought by the volunteers. The feeding program is given in open spaces and walkways. This has allowed the community to build trust in what is happening. The informant claimed that “the community developed trust in what we do as it has the opportunity to see children eating their breakfast every morning in an open space” (OG KII 10 March 30,2024).

Moreover, despite tensions, inclusiveness has also fostered trust in feeding programs. The informant claimed that “despite their ethnic based conflict and animosity, the association has been supporting wives of the Ethiopian defense force who were left in the military camps” (OG KII 11, March 30,2024). Therefore, the long-standing co-existence of the persons, irrespective of their political views and ethnicity, is further built in the feeding program by giving chances to all segments of society. The interviewee added saying “Politics is not our issue” (OG KII 11 March 30,2024). There are also attempts to include children with disabilities. “Currently, there are seven children who receive support in their homes. The association gives 500 birr per month so that their parents can get them food in their homes” (OGKII 10, March 30,2024)

Key informant interviews (KIIs) in Queha highlighted that the local community associates emergency support with mutual aid, strong social bonds, and spiritual benefits. Respondents frequently mentioned sharing resources like food and shelter, which fosters solidarity among displaced families and enhances community ties. This support encourages collaboration in initiatives, such as joint food distribution, and provides a sense of safety and stability, reducing anxiety and promoting resilience. One informant remarked, "Those who contribute do really get mental satisfaction and are praised spiritually" (TQ KII, March 30, 2024). Additionally, the Queha community remains relatively intact in terms of religion, politics, and economy, facilitating the dissemination of information and enhancing social bonds among members. This interconnectedness supports participation in feeding programs, with community members actively

engaging in food preparation activities. As noted by another informant, “Many come to help us—washing dishes, cooking, and mixing. We believe the social network helps them understand our objectives” (TQ KII, March 30, 2024). These findings underscore the essential role of community support systems in fostering mutual aid and resilience among both the host community and internally displaced persons.

The youth-led collective engagement practice seems to have challenged established traditions of the community positively. Although subjected to a wide range of criticism, the community has a culture of organizing different religious events (for example, during baptizing, wedding, ‘Zikir’- a religious practice undertaken to commemorate deceased ones). Hence, the members of the community are convinced to utilize the money they were to spend on such events to the internally displaced children. The interviewee reiterated as

many brought the food they prepared for their wedding, birthday, ‘zikir’ and many others to the internally displaced children... [the HA] publicize such practices both to the children, religious leaders and the community so that others could follow, making donations to the morning meals” (TQ KII 12 March 30,2024).

From the documents of Hayra, nearly 25% of the resources (in cash and in kind) to feed 350 children did come from such a positive community attitude.

4.8.3 Cross case Analysis

During the study period (2023/24), unlike the protracted and scaling ethnic based conflicts across many regions of Ethiopia, the two locations were found valuable in leveraging social capital. Despite the differences in geographic locations and social diversity, the two communities created a more inclusive and supportive environment that benefits both IDPs and host community members, ultimately leading to better educational outcomes and stronger social cohesion.

In Ginjo and Queha, local NGOs found that building trust with community members enhanced their ability to mobilize resources for school feeding programs. Notably, 75% of community leaders in Ginjo reported that strong relationships with NGOs led to quicker decision-making and resource allocation, allowing for immediate food distribution during critical times. Moreover, 80% of participants in Queha believed that joint planning sessions between NGOs and local authorities resulted in more culturally appropriate feeding initiatives, fostering a sense of ownership among community members, essential for sustainability. Additionally, 60% of NGO staff in Ginjo noted that partnerships with local farmers increased locally sourced food by 40%. Thus, the evidence

emphasizes that networking and collaboration are vital for effective emergency responses and improved community resilience

In both Queha and Ginjo, despite tensions and limited local resources, the local community in the IDP location effectively used its social capital for the emergency school feeding program. The program utilizes community assets, such as public spaces that are owned by the community, to implement the school feeding programs. The situation also enhanced local leadership and coordination role managed by volunteers who are part of the hosting communities. This has instilled courage, resulting in positive responses to the urgent needs of children. Furthermore, based on the FGDs conducted with teachers and principals, it was evident that certain philanthropists eventually developed trust in the voluntary support and continued assistance that reactivated the potential to actual resource mobilization and utilization.

In both contexts, community members have shown huge commitment through volunteering their time and resources to support displaced families. Interviews reveal that individuals engaged in activities like food distribution often feel a strong sense of responsibility toward their community. Regular interactions through meetings and informal gatherings enable the sharing of information and enhance collective problem-solving. This interconnectedness not only addresses immediate needs but also seems to foster long-term solidarity and collaboration within the community, improving program effectiveness. In this regard, IDPs in both locations also share that: *"Life would have been more difficult than it is now without the long-standing generosity of the persons "*(TQ FGD 07 April 20, 2024).

In both study locations, the field level observations, key informant interviews (KIIS) and focus group discussions (FGDs) entailed that local networking, smooth relationships and collaboration, enhanced trust building toward commitment to emergency response. This social process, according to Putnam (2000) seems contextual, eventual and interconnected. The summary of the interviews and focus group discussions witnesses the case.

- **Trust:** In the context of Queha, Tigray, Hayra observed to have given due emphasis to building a quality relationship and trust with the community. It strives to enhance transparency and accountability in its operations. To improve its transparency and accountability, the association is now led by a board of trustees. Keeping this into account, additional measures that promote social capital have been taken. The feeding program is

given in open spaces and walkways. This has allowed the community to build trust in what is happening. The informant claimed that “the community developed trust in what we do as it has the opportunity to see children eating their breakfast every morning in an open space”

- **Social networks:** both communities applied their social networks (both formal and informal) in feeding programs. The interviewee confirmed as “*we obliged every member of the community to make our objective their agenda in any of their social networks, including the religious and non-religious festivities*” The attempt to embed the emergency school feeding in the social networks of the community helped expand the HA resource bases and eventually increase the number of children benefiting from the morning meals.
- **Mutual support:** making contributions to the internally displaced is believed to contribute to mutual support to the community and, at the same time, to the internally displaced children. All participants reported those who contribute do really get mental satisfaction and, even, will be praised spiritually

In both contexts, emotions of sympathy and the courage to contribute, characterized by genuine hospitality from members of the respective host communities, were observed to be strong. This hospitality manifested in emotional support, facilitating shelter, and providing meals. As a result, in both locations, host communities played a crucial role in relief and healing efforts in response to the adversities and calamities experienced by the IDPs. Furthermore, smooth daily routines and effective networking within the community were reported to have played a key role in supporting recovery efforts. These interactions helped to build trust, mutual respect, and cohesion between host communities and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Overall, while limited resources, vulnerability, and ongoing conflict pose significant risks, the presence of strong social assets and capital was observed to mitigate these challenges and create a more resilient community. By harnessing the power of social networks, communities can foster trust, cooperation, and mutual support, which are essential for the successful implementation of emergency school feeding programs and the well-being of IDP children.

4.9 Actors in Emergency School Feeding and Post Enrollment Retention at the Regions

The regional-level actors in emergency school feeding and retention are local governments, NGOs, community groups, and educational institutions that work together to establish effective feeding programs and retention strategies. Their active participation was vital for addressing the needs of affected communities during crises, providing both immediate assistance and fostering long-term educational stability.

4.9.1 Emergency School Feeding and Post-Enrollment Retention in Oromia

In Oromia, the regional technical committee, comprising representatives from key sectors like health, water, agriculture, and cooperatives, confirmed that the core functions of the school feeding committee are clearly outlined in the guidelines, encompassing coordination, planning, implementation, and monitoring of the School Feeding Program (SFP). The guidelines also explicitly define the core functions of school feeding committees at zonal and woreda city administration levels. Roles and responsibilities for school-level committees and school feeding work units are likewise specified.

According to Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with relevant Oromia Region staff, Busa Gonofa (the Regional Disaster Risk Management Commission) utilizes its existing structure, reaching from the regional to the woreda level, to mobilize resources. In areas lacking a Busa Gonofa structure, a committee called Gadisa Busa Gonofa designates the Kebele/Village Chairperson or Village Manager to oversee resource mobilization at the grassroots. All entities involved utilize Busa Gonofa receipts for collecting cash and in-kind provisions. Delegated individuals deposit cash in Busa Gonofa accounts and store in-kind provisions in Kebele warehouses. Schools submit requests for food and cash to the Kebele based on student enrollment.

In Oromia, the regional-level school feeding coordination body is chaired by the Deputy President responsible for social affairs. The Oromia Regional School Feeding Committee comprises heads of eleven relevant bureaus. In addition to the main school feeding committee, technical committees drawn from these bureaus provide follow-up and support programs. According to FGD participants representing Oromia sectors, major stakeholders at the regional level include the World Food Program, INGOs, local NGOs, universities, companies, and private entities. At the woreda level, key stakeholders encompass the private sector, cooperatives, smallholder farmers, and local NGOs, responsible for resource mobilization and monitoring of program implementation.

In Queha, communities play a pivotal role in resource mobilization and support for school feeding programs. Local involvement is crucial for sustaining these initiatives, as community members contribute not only food but also time and labor. Interviews with key participants revealed that parents and guardians regularly participate in food preparation and distribution, demonstrating their commitment to their children's well-being and the broader community.

Community meetings serve as platforms for discussing needs and coordinating efforts, enabling effective resource pooling. Local organizations and religious groups also enhance program implementation by donating food supplies and facilitating logistics.

This sense of collective responsibility fosters a culture of support, motivating families to engage in volunteer activities. As one community member noted, "We come together to ensure our children are fed because we believe in supporting each other." This collaborative spirit strengthens community ties and helps meet students' nutritional needs, improving attendance and educational outcomes.

However, key participants indicated that very few schools initiated feeding programs in 2022/23, and those that did often discontinued them due to a lack of government support. This situation resulted from heavy reliance on community contributions, despite the significant financial investment required. Additionally, the absence of evidence-based advocacy mechanisms to promote the benefits of school feeding may have further hindered these efforts.

The interview notes with regional bureau authorities indicate that in Oromia, the school feeding program (SFP) in highland woredas heavily relies on community contributions. In contrast, pastoralist woredas implement the program through government-allocated budgets and support from the World Food Programme (WFP), which reported food support to nearly 100,000 children in 34 pastoral and semi-agrarian woredas of the region.

In pastoralist areas, the education structure operates collaboratively at the zone and woreda levels, engaging local communities in overseeing SFP implementation. The Cooperative Bureau is responsible for directly supplying food materials, while the Finance Bureau plays a crucial role in budget allocation and resource mobilization. Additionally, the Health Bureau conducts analyses of food content and nutrition levels, sharing the results with decision-makers to inform program adjustments.

The Education Bureau acts as both the chair and secretary of this collaborative effort, ensuring effective coordination among various stakeholders. This structured approach allows for more robust support in pastoralist areas, contrasting with the community-dependent model seen in highland woredas

4.9.2 Emergency School Feeding and Retention in Tigray

According to Tigray Education Bureau, Tigray has a long history of providing school feeding. The region had been one of the leading regional states that started school feeding in Ethiopia. However, the pathways used to provide meals to school children lack adequate documentation. One interviewee from the region education bureau argued that “it is hard to trace the pathways that have been implemented so far. Often than not, the school feeding approaches were given either directly through the NGOs; or else through volunteer CSOs. In both cases, the roles of the government and the community are haphazardly defined” (TREB KII 02 April 8, 2024). Currently, the Interim Regional Administration is calling NGOs or other CSOs with an interest in intervening in school feeding.

The actors supporting school feeding programs in Tigray are diverse, including government bodies, civil society organizations (CSOs), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Since the cessation of hostilities agreement, there has been a notable increase in the number of organizations willing to provide both monetary and non-monetary support for these initiatives. This trend indicates a growing recognition of the importance of school feeding in ensuring child nutrition and educational success.

Participants from the education bureau noted that, following the conflict, many development and rehabilitation actors have been drawn to the region. As one informant stated, "Post-war events and initiatives are likely to attract potential development actors" (TREB KII, April 8, 2024). This influx of support can enhance the introduction and sustainability of various school feeding programs, whether through direct meal delivery to schools or by providing food rations to families.

However, for these opportunities to be fully realized, the government must create an enabling environment that fosters collaboration among stakeholders. Accountability and transparency are crucial; implementing measures in these areas can significantly enhance the engagement of NGOs and CSOs in school feeding programs. By ensuring that resources are managed effectively and

stakeholders are held accountable, the government can attract further support and make a lasting impact on child nutrition and education in Tigray.

Amidst, one of the impediments lies in the lack of institutionalized school feeding policy. In this regard, Tigray is a regional state that urgently requires a comprehensive policy on school feeding. Numerous national and international reports have highlighted the high prevalence of stunting in the region, which is a consequence of inadequate nutrition during childhood. Additionally, the region has experienced frequent periods of war, drought, and famine, leading to widespread displacement and hunger. Despite some sporadic efforts, there has been a lack of substantial action to develop and implement a policy that addresses the pressing need for school feeding in Tigray. The interviewee from the regional education bureau claimed as :

I participated in one of the trainings that discuss about the Seqota agreement—a pact launched to protect stunting in the region and beyond by the FDRE, and I was touched by the number of stunted children in Tigray, including the long-term effect of stunting on children’s physical and cognitive developments. It is a pity, however, that the response of the regional government to reverse such problems is low. In fact, there has been an interest in developing and institutionalizing school feeding in the education apparatus of the region. However, nothing has been done so far. For example, school feeding is currently dropped under the School Improvement Program-SIP (TREB KII 03 , April 8, 2024).

Failure to institutionalize adequate policy initiatives constrained the school feeding approaches in three primary ways. First, in the absence of regional policy initiatives, the scalability/ sustainability of the school feeding approaches that have been implemented in different districts of the regional state are likely to be constrained. Second, the development of organizational structures relevant to running school feeding initiatives is difficult to establish at different echelons of the apparatus. In most cases, the organizational structures of government bureaus are preceded by relevant government policies and strategies. Third, but with the most important effect, is related to the community engagement, which in the absence of regional policy, local government units face difficulties in mobilizing community resources for school feeding programs.

In this regard, it is important to note some of the challenges that the school feeding initiatives in Tigray are facing. Unlike other initiatives, school feeding programs demand intensive human and material resources. The interviewee from TREB, for example, asserted that school feeding has a lengthy chain of processes and intersectoral connectivity. It is not like other learning inputs including the production and distribution of textbooks. In school feeding, you need a multitude of human resources ranging from health practitioners to professional or local caterers; physical/material resources ranging from the smallest thing –example, the spoon to the most expensive meal halls connected to electric grids (TREB, male, April 8, 2024). These resources are not readily available to run the school feeding programs. The interviewee expounded as “the value- chain processes for the school feeding programs are lengthy and by far beyond the capacity of the region to effectuate when these resources are limited” (TREB KII 02 April 8, 2024).

4.10 Education Sector Policy Provisions in Emergencies in Ethiopia

The recent Education Act (Proc.1368/2025) of the Government of Ethiopia emphasizes and safeguards the fundamental right to education for all children, including during emergencies. This legislation ensures that educational access is maintained and prioritized, even in challenging circumstances, reinforcing the commitment to uphold the rights of every child to receive education. According to the MoE sources, in recent decades, a collaborative effort between the Ethiopian Ministry of Education and the World Food Program (WFP) initiated a national school feeding program in 1994. According to WFP, this program has demonstrated significant positive impacts on student outcomes in low land and pastoral communities.

Notably, enrollment rates increased by 8 and 6 percentage points for boys and girls, respectively. Attendance levels improved by 3 percentage points for boys, while no significant change was observed for girls. Dropout rates declined by 5 and 6 percentages points for boys and girls, respectively (MoE, 2021; 2023).

According to officials from the Ministry of Education (MoE), school feeding programs have significantly improved school retention rates, with a reported 10% increase in the Afar and Somali regions. These programs have been particularly effective in boosting girls' enrollment and maintaining overall school attendance, while also contributing to a reduction in dropout rates.

Evidence shows that school feeding initiatives have narrowed the gender gap in education. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) in schools with feeding programs stands at 0.90 in the Somali Region and 0.88 in the Afar Region. In contrast, non-school feeding schools in these regions have lower GPIs of 0.69 and 0.78, respectively (MoE, 2023). This data highlights that school feeding not only encourages school attendance but also promotes gender equity in education, making it a crucial intervention for enhancing educational outcomes in these regional locations included in the study.

The Ministry of Education's 2023 Annual Abstract reveals a significant gap in school feeding coverage in Ethiopia, reaching only 32% of the 23,331,273 total student population. This low coverage is attributed to a multifaceted set of challenges. These include insufficient funding, exacerbated by high student enrollment and the absence of a robust legal framework for resource mobilization. Furthermore, limited multi-sectoral support, a poorly defined management structure, and a lack of costed plans hinder effective program implementation. Rising food prices, inadequate infrastructure, and weak inter-sectoral collaboration further compound these challenges. Finally, low public awareness, limited awareness campaigns, and a weak monitoring and evaluation framework impede program effectiveness and hinder the identification of areas for improvement.

In Ethiopia, the Ministry of Education serves as the lead sector for the School Feeding Program, responsible for policy guidance, resource mobilization, planning, implementation, monitoring, and coordination. Recognizing the multi-sectoral nature of school feeding, the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Cooperatives, Women and Children, and Water and Energy are crucial partners, particularly at the policy level.

Regional education bureaus are accountable for budget allocation, planning, implementation, and monitoring of the program within their respective jurisdictions, in collaboration with other relevant sectors. The School Feeding Policy Framework and Strategy emphasizes the active participation of all sectors at federal and regional levels in various aspects of the program, including policy formulation, strategy development, guideline creation, establishment of school feeding and facility standards, budget allocation formula development, and capacity building support.

CHAPTER FIVE : Discussion on Major Findings

5.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter discusses the major findings along thematic areas in relation to the practices and literature on emergency school feeding to improved response to emergencies. Overall, the researcher learned that engagement fosters community cohesion, improves access to resources, increases school attendance and builds resilience among IDPs. These findings highlight the importance of community-based approaches for supporting IDP children's well-being as may be related to their schooling.

5.2 Community Initiatives in Emergency School Feeding and Post Enrollment Retention

The study underscores the critical role of community engagement and social capital in supporting school feeding programs, particularly in contexts of displacement. Self-initiated community-based practices, such as labor financial contributions and moral support-facilitate educational continuity of IDPs and their children. This aligns with the theory of engagement, which emphasizes active communities' involvement in addressing local challenges and fostering responsibility. Findings indicate that community members' contributions reflect a strong belief in the importance of education and child welfare, significantly impacting student retentions through morning meals, regardless of the nutritional values. Additionally, communities demonstrated creativity in problem solving , enhancing resilience during crisis. Notably, children from IDP backgrounds achieved better retention rates compared to those from host communities, highlighting how social capital can mitigate the disadvantages as result of displacement.

In this study too, the findings were also supported by researchers Bary (2000), and Burde & Linden, (2013) who suggest a positive relationship between the community, school feeding and students' academic retention. Hence the present study further strengthens the evidence that students who received morning meals in the form of emergency school feeding experienced better motivation to learn. Beyond creating motivation, creating motivation on students the program attracts the utilization of social assets where members of the host and displaced communities interact to support each other. Therefore, the application of the social capital theory that has been exercised in most social science disciplines other than education to explore the emergency school feeding program could be taken as contribution of the present research.

In the study, nevertheless, what actually encouraged both communities to have demonstrated such exemplary dedication and resilience for a continued period seem to anchor to Coleman's (1990) theory of social maturity. The theory addresses the significance of social capital maturity from physical, which is primordial to human capital and then purposefully organized social capital. In the context of both locations, despite adversities and resource limitations, strong religious ties, social cohesion and respect within members, which are key elements of social capital that have served as strong leverage points.

However, the researcher noticed that the recognition, documentation, valuation and costing of local community engagement practices in contributing to both social cohesion and child retention were found to be hardly practiced but also unaware by the key local actors. In both cases this seems to have been visible due to the difficulty in quantifying and reporting community engagement within emergency school feeding programs(ESF). This seems to have emanated from primarily the nature of its operating core practices which rely heavily on generous, often undocumented contributions. Individuals provided with support may do so informally, without recording their efforts.

Furthermore, researchers may encounter challenges in accessing comprehensive data and possess varying levels of experience in quantifying such complex, context specific engagement. Consequently, accurately measuring and reporting the full extent of community involvement proves difficult. This situation may be because the operating core of such community engagement lies in generosity contributions, meaning individuals engaged in emergency school feeding may not be reported or documented; or else, researchers failed to get access to adequate data and experience to quantify and report. This significant contribution should be given due appreciation within legal and policy frameworks and integrated into plans for resilient local social and educational development.

In this study, engagement seems to anchor commitment to substantive concrete delivery; on the other hand, participation seems to focus on the casual procedural attendance and voices to information. From the field study and discussions, in both cases, the level of dedication of community members experiences beyond the traditional community participation rhetoric. In light of this, this study seems to complement on the qualitative differences which were observed to have been associated with or equated with the community engagements.

Overall, this seems to strengthen the previous researchers Bray, (2003); Kinrz, (2011);WFP, (2013) who discuss the differences between the earlier mentioned authors as subtle. While it is important to note that engagement and participation are two important overlapping concepts , in the context of the local community development agenda, the research study noted the significance of delineating the two concepts in emergency education response. Particularly this seems relevant in Africa including Ethiopia, where communities often face contextual social economic and political challenges. This search for better mechanisms of community engagement seems pivotal. In this study too, community members exhibited beyond and above the conventional participation which is usually explained by attendances and temporary and seasons contributions. In contrast, amid conflict induced situations and influx of IDPs, in both study locations, community members and nonstate actors committed continued actions to unleash the hidden social assets and social capital toward effective lifesaving and life sustaining including IDP children learning seems to be of a critical value to both contexts.

In every day educational discourse, ensuring participation of students and teachers in education is topical. At the community level also the term “community participation” usually refers to the active involvement of community members in decision making, implementation and evaluation of development projects or initiatives. From the study, in both contexts, as witnessed by the school directors, schoolteachers and PTSA members, passive physical attendance in community meetings is considered as either participation or engagement, which seems misleading. The phenomena at the study locations revealed, despite the resource limitations, local communities , were found exemplary in unleashing their social assets for longer periods to ensure local resource mobilization , interact and engage IDPs in harmonized social actions, partnerships with stakeholders. This includes the wise use of resources toward planned purposeful goals. For example, ensuring community-based school feeding cannot be realized through usual passive traditions of participation.

The engagement refers to the process of exploring potential, ensuring commitment, connecting within community members to build relationships and foster trust. It involves creating an environment where individuals feel valued, heard, and involved in the emergency and development process. In its scope, engagement seems broader and more strategic than participating in specific events. From the study, it involves self-initiatives, peer dialogue, awareness raising, and

efforts to motivate individuals and groups to take part in community issues seriously. From the experience of both Queha and Ginjo communities, the engagement process is continual which includes deep sympathy , volunteerism , selflessness, followed by small group and community meetings , forums and informal gatherings.

In due process it unleashes the hidden potential, social assets and social capital, builds on trust and emphasizes listening to community voices, understanding their needs, and co-developing strategies. In line with children back to school and learning continuity, engagement is about building relationships and trust to encourage community involvement, while participation is the active involvement of individuals in specific community development activities. These issues are well aligned to the previous research findings of (Bray, 2003;Kinrz, 2011) on emergency school feeding initiatives.

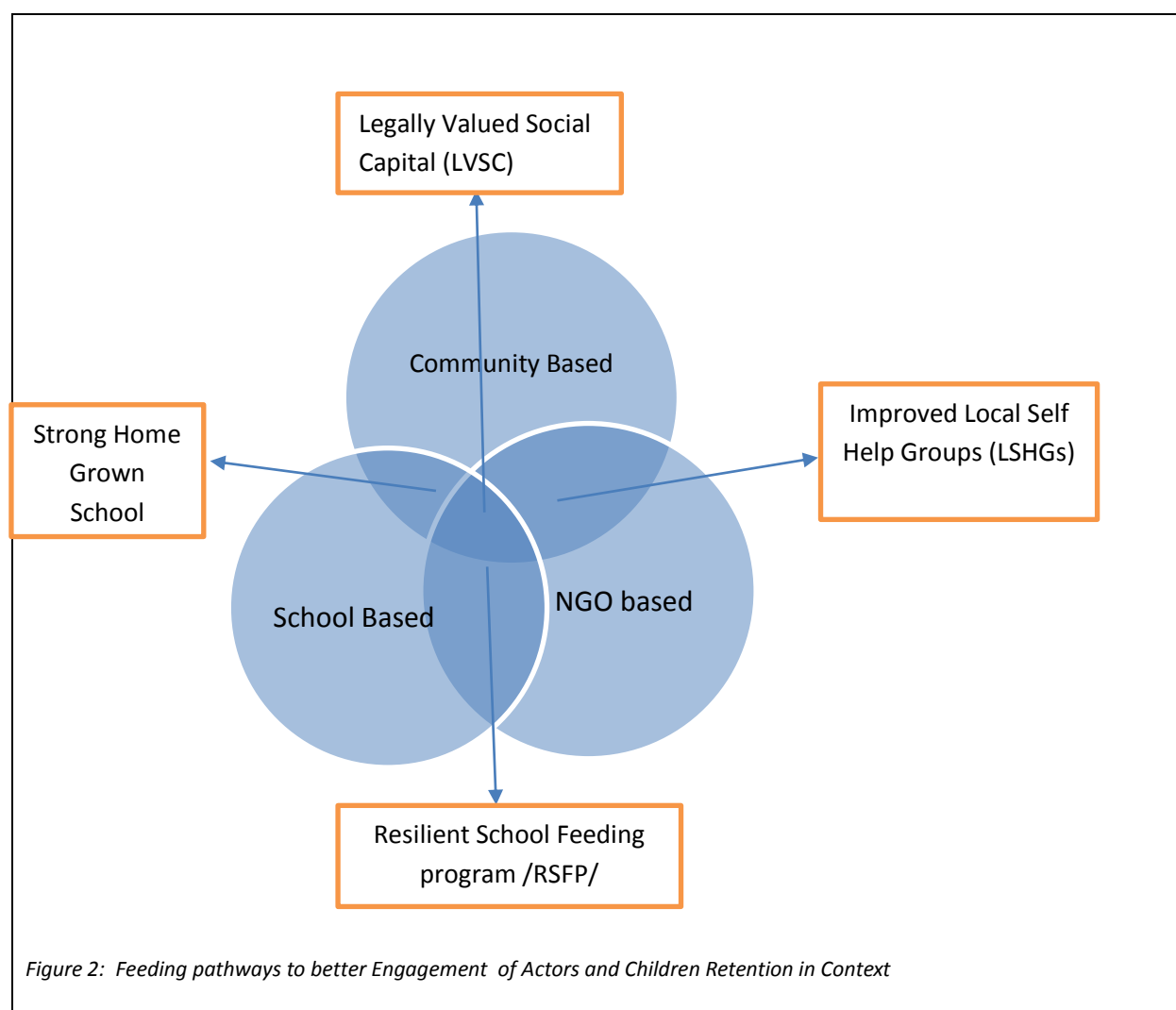
Nearly all the respondents from IDP reacted that smooth engagement contributed to generating relief and lead to increased social cohesion, ownership and commitment among community members. It observed to have revitalized existing social capital toward greater collective action including children back to school and retention even in poor economies in rural communities included in the study. Community engagement in emergency school feeding is beyond attendance where the communities practice mutual responsive strategies in life saving and life sustaining through inbuilt support systems. In essence, despite differences between the cases, the relative zeal to host IDPs in both cases complements with the community organizing theory that upholds strong social fabrics of the communities, inward looking to feasible solutions and revitalizing potential resources into coordinated actions (Alter et al., 2017; Turin, Kazi, M., Rumana, N., & Lasker , 2023).

5.3. Complementing Emergency School Feeding Pathway in Children's Motivation to Learn

The study identified a combination of different school feeding pathways : community based, school based and NGO based. For the purpose of this discussion, the researcher focused on exploring the three dominant pathways where NGOs, local community members and community-based associations and religious institutions were observed to have played significant roles in shaping the scope and essence of each pathway.

Field study findings revealed that the school feeding pathways and initiatives extended beyond relief and provision of morning meals. As discussed by earlier researchers (Burde, 2012; Bray, 2000; UNICEF, 2022) and reports (UNICEF, 2020; 2021; UNHCR, 2022; INEE 2010a; 2024), these pathways serve multiple purposes and play a crucial role in supporting children's lifesaving and , education and wellbeing during emergencies. In the study location where international support was observed weak or limited , community engagement proved essential for sustaining educational initiatives , particularly in post enrollment scenarios. These local stakeholders actively mobilized resources , conducted rapid awareness campaigns, sourced food locally, and built capacity within community, demonstrating a strong motivation to learn across seasons. This aligns with the theory of social engagement, which emphasizes the importance of active participation and collaboration in addressing local challenges. The interconnectedness among the local actors, including NGOs was critical to forming and sustaining active feeding systems.

The researcher conceptualized this dynamic through a diagram illustrating the pathways and interactions among the local actors, highlighting the significance of community engagement in creating feasible emergency school feeding strategies. This framework will guide further discussions on maximizing community involvement and optimizing emergency feeding pathways to improve educational outcomes in vulnerable contexts.



As presented in the above diagram, the study examined and came up with an interconnected role of the three key pathways identified in the study. Each is characterized by varying lengths of services and scope of influence on engagement. The overlapping nature of the three pathways suggests that each are not mutually exclusive but rather an interconnected approaches that can enhance overall engagement and retention in feeding programs. This interconnectedness allows for the comprehensive strategy that leverages the strengths of each pathway to create a more effective solution for feeding programs.

School based pathways for feeding programs are crucial for providing nutritional support to students. These pathways leverage the stability of regular school attendance, fostering longer service durations and consistent engagement. Schools serve as community hubs, extending their

influence on families and local services. By building connections within community, school-based pathways enhance participation and sustained involvement in feeding programs, aligning with the theory of community engagement, which emphasizes institutions' role in building social capital.

In contrast, community-based pathways utilize local resources, such as NGOs and religious institutions, to address community needs through collaborative efforts. The effectiveness and sustainability of these pathways depend on the active participation of local community-based organizations and community members. Evidence indicated that engaged local actors create supportive environments that improve long term outcomes related to food security and health. Studies have shown that communities with strong local partnerships achieve better food access and health outcomes.

One of the major findings and the overall response in the study denotes that both community, national and international levels, feeding pathways, in particular in conflict-affected localities, require systemic treatment through which food assistance is delivered to vulnerable populations for a purpose. Nevertheless, the rationale for choosing the pathways and systematic alignment between the elements of each one of the pathways were hardly addressed and thinly treated in the cases.

Despite the challenging community situations, community-based feeding pathways characterized by volunteerism, networking, and commitment seem most timely, valuable and culturally appropriate. The community-based school feeding rooted in the grassroots and leverages existing social networks. The pathway also noticed its own contextual variation with specific locations providing immediate relief, supporting recovery efforts, and contributing to building community resilience. The pathways also identified to allow efficiency and efficacy coupled with creativity and collective commitment of all volunteers. This finding seems to align and is consistent with the research done by Sullivan-Owomoyela & Brannelly (2009) on risk appetite and promoting participation of communities in conflict situations.

The school-based feeding pathways, while lined up under government structure observed to have taken alternatives of hot meal preparation or distribution of industrial biscuits. The alternatives imply cost, timing and administrative organization and additional responsibilities on schools. From

the study, thus far, the policy to motivate local farmers and farm productivity seems to be at the initial stage. On the other hand, the initiatives underway by the Regional State of Oromia, “the Bussa Gonofa” initiative which aims to unleash traditional social assets seem to have strong potential to link community and the schools to increase availability of local resources and effectively reach vulnerable children and promote quality education. Nevertheless, institutionalizing the initiatives through provision of safe and structured environment, encouraging schools and local farm production and value chain with support of children's nutritional and educational needs and contribute to building human capital seem the remaining assignment.

The home-based feeding pathway, while less prominent in this study, provides essential food assistance to vulnerable families during crises (Bray, 2000). It emphasizes family involvement and allows for culturally appropriate and personalized dietary choices. However, it may have limited impact on broader community engagement and child participation compared to school-based approaches.

In Ethiopia, where home-based feedings have been common in pastoral and conflict-prone areas, their effectiveness in improving child learning and building resilience is debated. While communities show eagerness to participate, education leaders express concerns about increasing dependency on external aid and a lack of focus on addressing food insecurity and long-term educational commitment. The comparative roles of the NGOs and government structures in addressing food insecurity and educational support in conflict-affected areas reveal significant distinctions, particularly regarding responsiveness and operational flexibility.

NGOs possess a remarkable capacity to act swiftly, adapting their organizational frameworks to meet urgent community needs. This agility allows them to mobilize resources rapidly, filling critical gaps that government initiatives may overlook, especially during acute crises such as influx of IDPs.

In contrast, government institutions often operate within rigid bureaucracies that can hinder timely response due to procedural delays and an extensive approval process. This inflexibility can prove determined when immediate interventions are necessary, emphasizing the importance of NGOs as pivotal players in humanitarian responses.

NGOs actively enhance educational facilities , not only by providing logistical support but also by ensuring that children understand the importance of nutrition alongside their education. Their direct involvement includes preparing feeding spaces and transporting food supplies to schools, creating synergies between feeding programs and educational outcomes. The hand-on approach reflects a holistic methodology that addresses both health and learning needs, something often lacking in governmental actions, which may focus predominantly on policy development and oversight without the same level of direct engagement. Consequently, while the governmental frameworks are essential, NGOs fill the practical gaps in educational support, ensuring that vulnerable populations receive the comprehensive assistance they require. Apart from food distribution, NGOs are dedicated to offering multifaceted support services that encompass food, medical supplies, psychosocial support and educational resources. This commitment addresses the complex interconnections among food security, health and education, providing a broader safety net for displaced individuals and families. By engaging community members and leaders, NGOs ensure that their initiatives are culturally sensitive and aligned with local needs, fostering a sense of ownership among affected populations. This approach not only enhances resilience but also promotes community participation, making interventions more effective in achieving long-term outcomes.

Monitoring and evaluation are critical components of NGO operations, especially regarding school feeding programs. NGOs collaborated with local education authorities to assess the effectiveness of interventions and adapt strategies as needed based on community feedback. This adaptive approach contrasts with government methodologies, which can often be less responsive to evolving needs due to their static nature within governmental structures, which were explained during the field observations.

Grassroots level decentralized approaches, particularly those driven by community initiatives, have demonstrated greater effectiveness in addressing the challenges faced by IDPs in both cases. These approaches , which could potentially stimulate homegrown food production and local business , were not observed in either Ginjo or Queha. Recognizing the strong community potential, it is critical for local administrations to actively support community efforts by fostering market linkages and revitalizing local capacities. The study highlighted the need for a more integrated role of NGOs , moving beyond standalone interventions and instead strategically supporting community development, strengthening local economies, and fostering inclusive participation, including the meaningful involvement of IDPs.

The study revealed increased pressure on host communities due to escalating living conditions. Despite resource constraints, community-based approaches, characterized by strong community ownership and local resource utilization, have successfully ensured uninterrupted provisions of morning meals during the academic period. The approaches have also fostered social cohesion and improved interaction between host communities and IDPs. Ensuring active and collaborative effort and fostering engagement towards the sustainability of actors, including local communities, NGOs and non-state actors, is a critical agenda that was observed in the study. In this regard, isolated efforts were found key impediments in operations that should be mitigated and avoided through transparent, joint planning and performance.

The study's findings reveal that effective feeding pathways encompass essential elements of purpose, principles, planning and performance, all crucial for success and sustainability. Each identified pathway exhibited unique dynamics, advantages and disadvantages, indicating that no single approach is applicable. The most appropriate pathway is context-dependent, particularly in conflict-affected areas. For instance, the Busa Gonofa' initiative in Oromia illustrates the significance of understanding the actual needs of the population, maximizing available local resources, and leveraging the capacity of local institutions when selecting or choosing feeding pathways. This aligns with the theory of community engagement, which posits that local involvement and context awareness are key to creating effective and sustainable programs. Engaging local communities allows for the identification of specific needs and resources, ultimately leading to tailored solutions that enhance participation and ownership.

Moreover, the findings align with the hybrid approach suggested in the literature, which advocates for combining various feeding pathways to address and complement the complexities of emergency school feeding and children's retention. This perspective is consistent with the theories of community organizing and social capital, which emphasize the importance of flexibility and responsiveness to changing circumstances. Additionally, it concurs with the research findings of Sung and Chung-Sup (2023) on community engagement in nonformal education, where local loose structure strengthens the integration of social elements from different practices, allowing commitments to address diverse challenges more effectively and sustainably.

In Ethiopian context, centering local communities and leveraging their assets not only promotes a sense of ownership but also enhances the overall effectiveness of the feeding initiative. The integration of local knowledge and resources into the design and implementation of programs fosters greater trust and collaboration, essential for long term success. Thus, the study supports the

notion that hybrid, community centered approach is the most effective strategy for navigating through the multifaceted challenges of emergency school feeding and ensuring children retention in conflict-affected areas.

5.4 Challenges of Community Engagement in the Study Locations

In crisis-affected areas, the rapid and effective implementation of emergency school feeding is paramount. While logistical and financial hurdles often dominate discussions, the social and cultural landscape holds crucial enablers that can be leveraged for success. Here's an explanation and argument for why long-standing religious ties, culture and social cohesion, and the existence of philanthropies are vital.

In relation to the study, previous literature (INEE, 2024; UNICEF 2020; 2021; UNHCR, 2020) discussed that during adversities and crises, constraints outweigh and the burden on local communities appears huge. The findings of this study highlight both the potential enablers and significant challenges to community engagement in emergency school feeding programs for internally displaced persons (IDPs). In both Ginjo and Queha, the initial stages were marked by uncertainties among the host and IDP communities and, strikingly, the initiations of such activities lack adequate government support. In the study, despite the obstacles, long standing religious ties, culture and social cohesion, the existence of philanthropies (both in-side and outside of Ethiopia) is among the potential enablers to launch emergency school feeding programs.

Ongoing conflict exacerbated these issues, with limited government response and insufficient NGO capacity to meet the overwhelming demand. Weak coordination among stakeholders further hindered effective implementation.

At the community level, resource scarcity , social tensions and protection concerns posed major obstacles to active engagement. The study also identified common constraints that hinder smooth engagement and feeding pathways. Resource limitations due to emergencies pose a significant challenge, often leading to over-reliance on external aid. Damaged infrastructure increased socioeconomic barriers, and the need to address diverse cultural needs further complicates program implementation. Political instability can also disrupt program continuity. To ensure the success of the vital programs, community engagement, sustainable funding and adaptable approaches are essential.

The enablers and constraints also bear unique features. In Queha -Tigray , despite a long history of regional-level school feeding programs, the lack of clear and sustainable war time response and

frameworks left the community to be the sole bearer of challenges. The study found that during displacement, the roles of the government and communities are often lost, with programs often implemented by non-government organizations or volunteers. While the Tigray Interim regional government administration sought to increase the involvement of NGOs the effects were not as such okay due to security challenges.

In the Tigray region, the study identified an exceptional case of an NGO based feeding pathway. NGOs played a pivotal role in providing emergency relief and supporting long-term development during the two-year conflict. Utilizing their expertise and resources, NGOs established thematic clusters, prepared spot feeding areas, and effectively implemented large-scale feeding programs in collaboration with the communities. According to the local NGO representatives in both study locations, this effectively addressed the gap left by the government's limited capacity

The study also identified key constraints to community engagement in both regions. These include:

- Inadequate institutional arrangements: lack of clear policies, coordination mechanisms and harmonized practices limited opportunities for community participation.
- Resource limitations: school feeding programs require significant human and material resources, which are often difficult to secure and sustain
- Safety and security concerns : ongoing conflict and instability in both regions pose significant risks of program personnel and beneficiaries.

These challenges underscore the critical need for improved coordination, increased government support and the development of sustainable and community led approaches to ensure the successful implementation of emergency school feeding programs for IDPs in Ethiopia. However, it is important to acknowledge that NGOs cannot replace the government's role, particularly in addressing the complex challenges of education retention and food insecurity.

5.5 Recognizing Community Engagement Practices in Emergency School Feedings

One of the interesting findings that leads to discussion lies in the recognition and valuing of community engagement. This study explores the sensitive dynamics of resource scarcity stemming from armed conflict in various regions, highlighting the critical role that host communities play in the recognition and support of internally displaced persons (IDPs). As displaced populations increase, the ability of local communities to foster social capital becomes imperative for both educational planners and development institutes. An effective and sustainable response to food

insecurity necessitates valuing community engagement and understanding the diverse needs of local populations.

Despite national efforts to tackle food insecurity through various feeding pathways, the realities faced by local communities often reveal stark contrasts. Resource limitations, bureaucratic obstacles, and restricted access tend to result in local populations shouldering the burden of hosting and supporting IDPs. This scenario underscores the need for nuanced responses that consider the unique contexts of these communities. Recognizing the urgency to enhance community engagement not only facilitates a sense of belonging for IDPs but also revitalizes local capacities for sustainable development.

The study emphasizes the essential shift from traditional top-down approaches to participatory models in implementing feeding pathways. This transition is crucial as it highlights the importance of local knowledge, skills, and resources in creating effective interventions. Theories of participatory development and community empowerment support this shift, asserting that local involvement is key to achieving relevant and sustainable outcomes.

A significant finding is that community-led resource mobilization enables residents to utilize existing resources, such as local food production and traditional practices. This ensures interventions are aligned with community realities, fostering ownership among residents. The study found that communities engaged in resource mobilization reported higher satisfaction and improved outcomes in feeding programs, supporting the theory of community empowerment. Furthermore, community engagement enhances the effectiveness of feeding pathways by leveraging local knowledge regarding food systems and nutritional needs. Programs that integrated local dietary preferences were more successful in promoting participation and improving children's nutritional status, aligning with culturally responsive pedagogy.

The study also highlights that participatory models strengthen relationships among community members and local organizations, building trust and enhancing collective capacity to address food security challenges. This aligns with the theory of social capital, which posits that strong networks facilitate resource mobilization. In context of diminishing international aid transitioning to participatory models is vital for ensuring relevant and sustainable feeding interventions. Empowering communities to leverage local resources and knowledge leads to more effective and resilient feeding programs, ultimately addressing complex issues of food security and child health.

Secondly, decentralizing procurement and distribution also emerge as pivotal factors. By involving community members in decision-making related to food procurement, the specific needs of vulnerable populations can be met more effectively. Thirdly, community-based monitoring and evaluation mechanisms create a framework for accountability, ensuring that feeding programs respond dynamically to local needs and circumstances. These elements collectively contribute to building resilience within communities, supporting initiatives that enhance food security through improved agricultural practices and disaster risk reduction strategies.

The study further underscores how different feeding pathways can uniquely contribute to child education and retention rates. However, there is a noticeable gap in articulating the extraordinary creativity and agency of local communities in leveraging their capabilities for lasting solutions. To cultivate these community-based feeding pathways, regional and national governments must recognize their efficiency and cultural appropriateness, rooted deeply within local contexts and social networks.

Overall, the findings of the study indicated that compassionate community engagement practices in emergency school feeding programs in Oromia and Tigray reflect remarkable lessons withstanding the unique challenges and dynamics of each context. While Oromia benefits from evolving initiatives anchored to traditional structures and community contributions, Tigray works within an emergency framework heavily supported by NGOs. The effectiveness of these approaches in addressing food insecurity and educational continuity often depends on the local context, the strength of community ties, and the ongoing impacts of conflict. A nuanced understanding of these practices can lead to more tailored and effective emergency responses in each region. Combining school-based feeding pathways can effectively reach vulnerable children while promoting education by creating a supportive environment for their nutritional and educational needs. Meanwhile, home-based feeding pathways may provide essential assistance but require careful management to avoid fostering dependency and to address the root causes of food insecurity.

This aspect emphasizes the potential for unlocking and utilizing local resources to mitigate challenges. In Ethiopia, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are crucial to the education sector, providing essential financial and technical support, although specific data on their GDP contribution for 2023 is not easily accessible. Their role in supporting school feeding programs is significant, yet their contributions often go unrecognized. NGOs facilitate community-led

initiatives by offering expertise, logistical assistance, and financial resources, working closely with local communities to implement school feeding programs that involve sourcing food, building kitchens, and delivering necessary training. They also offer direct support to students through scholarships and educational materials. This collaborative approach aligns with the Ethiopian government's broader educational and social protection strategies, including the School Feeding Policy Framework, as NGOs frequently partner with the government and organizations like the World Food Programme to effectively implement these crucial initiatives.

The path toward effectively addressing food insecurity in conflict-prone areas often necessitates a hybrid model that leverages the strengths of various actors, including governments, NGOs, and local communities. This approach includes creating policy frameworks, offering financial support, and providing oversight, alongside empowering communities to spearhead the design, implementation, and monitoring of feeding programs. Moreover, NGOs can enhance their contributions by focusing on capacity building and technical support for communities and government agencies.

Fostering strong partnerships between these entities is crucial in creating equitable and resilient food security systems that empower communities to confront the challenges posed by conflict. Such collaboration not only facilitates immediate responses to food insecurity but also cultivates a sustainable landscape where communities can thrive despite adverse conditions.

This study underscores the vital role of community engagement in tackling food insecurity in conflict-affected areas. The findings highlight the effectiveness of leveraging local knowledge and cultural nuances through community-led initiatives, aligning with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of context-specific interventions for sustained success. Active involvement of communities in decision-making enhances both the relevance of solutions and their commitment to initiatives, reflecting the principles of participatory development. Additionally, the study advocates strengthening collaboration among governments, NGOs, and community members, supported by literature on social capital, which suggests that robust partnerships improve resource mobilization and implementation effectiveness. By fostering these collaborations, stakeholders can create a more secure and prosperous future for all, addressing food insecurity holistically. The findings contribute valuable insights to the literature and offer a practical framework for developing effective interventions tailored to local realities.

5.6 Displaced Children's Motivation to Learn and their Parents' Aspirations

This study reveals that in socially cohesive situations, displaced children sense security and safety and learn in harmonious way with their counterparts and aspire to thrive. On the other hand, despite the situation of the children, their parents were observed to have vividly recalled and remembered the dates they were evicted from their homes, yet they struggle with uncertainty about their future destinations including their children's education. This juxtaposition highlights a complex interplay of pain and aspiration, reflecting the deep emotional and psychological effects of displacement.

From the notes triangulated at the field study, the pain-aspiration framework provides a theoretical lens to understand this phenomenon, illustrating how individuals cope with loss while yearning for a better future. The acute pain of losing a home and stability is often accompanied by feelings of trauma and insecurity, as IDPs grapple with grief over their disrupted lives and identities.

Simultaneously, the aspiration for a secure future drives IDPs to seek new opportunities despite the uncertainty surrounding them. This desire can foster resilience and adaptive coping strategies, enabling them to envision a hopeful future. Therefore, the ability to recall eviction dates while feeling lost about what lies ahead underscores the necessity for interventions that address both the immediate trauma of displacement and the long-term aspirations for stability and belonging. In both contexts, the IDPs were in a relatively supportive environment that facilitate healing and future planning. Stakeholders can better assist IDPs in navigating their challenges and rebuilding their lives, which brings huge hope to displaced children's education.

In both cases, the balance between existing mutual support to IDPs and its gains, which mainly referred to the level of social acceptance, support, and opportunities available at their current location seem an important value. Positive interactions with the host community, access to essential services, and livelihood opportunities seem to have encouraged IDPs in both cases to consider staying in their current location. The impact of past pain and the loss of physical assets, including the trauma experienced during displacement, the loss of property, and the disruption of livelihoods in their original homes, strongly influences their desire to return. IDPs may feel a deep attachment to their original homes and a strong desire to reclaim their lost possessions and livelihoods. On the other hand, the conduciveness of the existing situation for fulfilling their aspirations seems to serve as a pull factor to remain where they are now: This considers whether

the current location provides an environment that can support their aspirations for safety, security, and a better future. From the field observation and analysis, beyond relief, immediate factors such as access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities played a crucial role in this assessment. Yet, while all IDPs in Ginjo-Jimma aspire to return to their original destiny, the case in Queha-Mekele seems mixed.

Unlike Ginjo- Jimma, the aspirations among the IDPs in the context of Queha seem varied depending on the origin and history of the events. For instance, IDPs from Afar and other eastern zones demonstrated a strong preference for remaining at their new destination and potentially integrating into the local community. This suggests that they may have found some level of acceptance and opportunity in their new environment. Conversely, IDPs from western, central, and northwestern Tigray, particularly those who claim they were relatively well-off before displacement, expressed a strong desire to return to their original homes. This likely reflects a deep attachment to their homeland and a desire to reclaim their lost assets and livelihoods.

The situation in both case study areas further illustrates that IDP choices and decisions are not uniform. This highlights the individualized nature of these decisions, with factors such as personal experiences, cultural background, and social networks playing a significant role. From the conversations with IDPs, it became apparent that the core reasons for displacement and the social treatment experienced by IDPs may significantly contribute to these varying aspirations. This crucial aspect warrants further in-depth research to fully understand its impact on IDP decision-making processes.

5.7 Local Community Assets in Emergency School Feeding Pathways and Practices

In the study, community engagement emerges as a central theme across various pathways for addressing emergency school feeding to children's post-enrollment and retention. In both cases the community-based approach allowed various voluntary groups local members to leverage their local assets and capital, effectively enhancing available resources. This is supported by social capital and community organizing theories which emphasize the importance of community involvement and ownership in fostering resilience and sustainable solutions.

In the school-based pathway, typically involving hot meal distribution or industrial biscuit provision, the community assumes monitoring and follow-up roles. While industrial biscuit distribution offers limited engagement opportunities, the preparation of hot meals allows some

mothers both from host and internally displaced populations, to participate, albeit often without monetary compensation. This participation aligns with theories of participatory development, which advocate for inclusive involvement in food programs to ensure they meet local needs. Although the home-based approach was not observed in the study locations, it is anticipated to enhance parental motivation and attention to children's retention in education. However, the lack of observed implementation raises questions about its effectiveness compared to the other pathways.

The study indicates that the choice of pathway is influenced by the specific socio-political context, where stakeholder influence often overshadows the actual needs of vulnerable IDPs. Factors such as resource availability, security, and the capacity for local engagement play significant roles in determining the effectiveness of each approach. Overall, integrating elements from all three pathways could provide a balanced strategy to maximize community engagement and program effectiveness, addressing the complexities of food insecurity in these contexts

From the field, it was found relevant to communicate and build clarity on emergency response to feeding and the associated pathways. Moreover, the focus group discussions and interviews conducted for this study indicated that it is imperative to clearly define the concept of 'pathways' and their constituent elements. From the information gathered at the grassroots level, there is still some ambiguity surrounding "pathways," "approaches," and "practices." Based on the literature, a pathway denotes a sequential progression of actions or stages, originating at the community level,

incorporating local stakeholders, and eventually involving national, international NGOs, and government entities. This incremental approach, characterized by a gradual expansion of initiatives, represents one potential pathway. However, an alternative option could be a synoptic or centralized approach, where external actors take the lead and may even supplant local units or community members in providing school feeding programs.

The choice of a feeding pathway is influenced by various factors, including the priorities of stakeholders such as NGOs and school administrators, as well as the capacity of community members, teachers, and parents. Resource availability, encompassing transportation, storage, and essential supplies, plays a critical role in successful implementation. Economic considerations are also vital, with a focus on cost-effectiveness per child, as these programs often aim to attract and retain economically disadvantaged students, aligning with theories of educational engagement.

While parents may prefer home-based feeding during crises, its reliability in providing consistent nutrition is often uncertain. In contrast, the school-based pathway ensures equitable access to meals for all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, thereby mitigating dropout rates and improving overall student well-being. Despite facing challenges like firewood collection and food preparation, the structured nature of school-based feeding reinforces community involvement and strengthens local social capital.

From the study, the NGO-led pathways were found to provide instant response during times of need and upon limited capacities of local administration, yet reported uncertainty due to external aid. In this regard, it seems critical to reorient the parallel pathways to complement these community and school engagement processes, bridging gaps and enhancing program efficacy. Ultimately, a tailored approach that combines elements from both community-based and school-based pathways may offer the most effective solution, addressing the community's unique needs and available resources. By leveraging local involvement and fostering collaboration among stakeholders, the relevance and impact of school feeding programs can be significantly enhanced in these vulnerable contexts.

In both cases, community engagement is considered crucial for the success of school feeding programs (SFPs), whether it is alone or in collaboration with the school. Nevertheless, close observation and analysis demonstrated that Ginjo-Jimma is experiencing a newly organized initiative set with a modern administrative structure embedded with indigenous socio-cultural assets. The results from the key participants and focus group discussions (FGDs) revealed that SFPs are largely expected to be supported by community involvement. The Busa Gonofa Office, a regional disaster risk management commission, plays a pivotal role in mobilizing community resources. This includes promoting a culture of mutual support, encouraging the utilization of local resources and knowledge, and engaging communities in early warning and disaster response. The Oromia government leverages the Busa Gonofa structure to collect in-kind and cash contributions from residents, allocating 25% of these resources towards SFPs. While food donations are prioritized, cash contributions are used to purchase supplementary ingredients to enhance the taste and nutritional value of school meals. In areas lacking a formal Busa Gonofa structure, alternative mechanisms, such as designating a Kebele Chairperson or Manager as a collection point, are implemented. Schools also actively participate by collecting in-kind and cash donations from private sources.

The emphasis on community ownership and participation in school feeding programs aligns with global practices, as highlighted in the 2019 World Food Programme (WFP) report on Home-Grown School Feeding Programs. Locally owned initiatives foster accountability and sustainability by actively involving communities and addressing specific local needs. Research shows that community engagement enhances nutritional outcomes and improves educational performance, positively impacting student attendance and achievement. Theories of social capital underscore the importance of community networks in facilitating cooperation and effective participation. However, community involvement must be carefully planned through feasibility studies to avoid overwhelming local members, which can lead to disengagement. Striking a balance between ownership and manageable responsibilities is crucial. By providing training and resources, programs can empower communities and enhance effectiveness. Ultimately, integrating community participation is vital for creating sustainable and responsive school feeding programs that meet local needs.

5.8 Social Capital in the Context of Emergencies

Social capital theory and community organizing theories emphasize the crucial role of local communities in addressing their challenges. These approaches advocate for leveraging existing strengths and maximizing social assets through bonding, bridging, and linking to enhance overall social capital. According to social capital theory, as articulated by Putnam (1993), robust community networks foster cooperation and collective action, leading to improved outcomes.

Communities with higher social capital can effectively mobilize resources, promoting resilience and sustainable development, as seen in the cases of Ginjo and Queha. In Ginjo, located in Oromia, community members engage in school feeding programs, utilizing traditional structures and local contributions to enhance participation and resource mobilization.

This fosters strong social bonds and holistic development. Conversely, Queha in Tigray operates within an emergency framework supported by NGOs. While this assistance is vital for immediate needs, it may create dependency and limit local agency. However, NGOs can also connect Queha to broader resources. These contrasting contexts highlight the need for balancing local initiatives with external support. By tailoring interventions to the specific realities of each community.

In the researcher's triangulation, this directly links to legal, policy, and contextual issues. While both communities in both locations (Oromos and Tigrayan) share a culture of long-standing

traditions of cooperation, the consecutive wars in Tigray and the weakened local governance in the region appear to have decelerated the economic capacity of the people to contribute to others, which has had significant consequences for the communities of Queha, leading to a heavier reliance on external sources.

As observed from the field and complimented by participants, in the day-to-day community engagement, elements of mutuality and reciprocity, central to social capital theories, play a significant role in the context of emergency and humanitarian development. Social capital refers to the networks, norms, and trust that facilitate cooperation within a community. The research findings reflect these principles, highlighting the varying effects of social capital on community engagement and support in Oromia and Tigray, particularly in humanitarian contexts. In Oromia, initiatives are often rooted in traditional structures, leveraging the longstanding cultural practices that emphasize community contribution, trust, and shared responsibility. This cultural heritage reinforces mutual support, allowing community members to assist one another effectively during crises.

In contrast, Tigray operates within an emergency framework constrained by ongoing conflict and humanitarian challenges. Despite a historical culture of cooperation and solidarity, the repeated impacts of war have significantly weakened social capital. The economic dislocation and displacement caused by conflict have not only diminished individual capacity but have also disrupted traditional networks of support. As a result, the ability of community members in Tigray to engage in mutual aid and reciprocity has been severely impacted, leading to a reliance on external NGO support rather than local initiatives. This situation underscores the importance of strengthening social capital in times of crisis to facilitate resilience and recovery.

The findings illustrate that while Oromia benefits from a robust system of mutual support embedded in its cultural practices, Tigray faces structural challenges that hinder the establishment of similar reciprocal relationships. The emphasis on restoring social capital in Tigray is critical for enhancing community resilience and fostering cooperation among individuals. Encouragingly, humanitarian efforts can focus on rebuilding these networks by engaging local leaders and community members in a participatory manner. This approach can help to re-establish trust and reciprocity, ultimately facilitating a more sustainable response to emergencies and contributing to long-term community development. Thus, the interplay between social capital and community

resilience is pivotal in understanding and addressing the distinct needs of these regions in the context of emergency and humanitarian development

The above discussion has important implications to the social capital theory in context. Research on social capital theory often cites Pierre Bourdieu (1987), Coleman (2001), and Putnam (1999). Bourdieu's perspective anchors on the social structuralist paradigm, mainly focusing on the connection between class and power functions in social capital. Similarly, Coleman emphasizes the importance of social structures that facilitate certain actions in how social classes can benefit and accrue from a network of relationships. On the contrary, Putnam (1999), taking the social constructivist paradigm, discusses the role of civic engagement and participation in democratic societies, which is an interesting discussion point to this research work where democracy is far away from the daily lives of the local communities of Ethiopia

Putnam's (2000) concept of social capital seems to pertain to economic affluency and well-functioning democratization among and within society. Hence, it seems to include the following key elements to function:

- Economic affluence and social democracy: regenerated economic activities and democratic space to functioning social capital.
- Networks of civic engagement: These are the relationships and associations that bind people together in society.
- Norms of mutual support and reciprocity: The mutual expectations that persons will help each other and cooperate.
- Trustworthiness: The belief that others will act in a reliable and honest manner.

Putnam's theory argues that social capital plays a vital role in various outcomes, including economic development, political participation, and overall social well-being. He treated social capital as public good, emphasizing that it is not just beneficial for individuals but also for the collective functioning of cities, states, or nations. His work has led to extensive research and debate, exploring the implications of social capital for education, public health, economic development, and political participation. Putnam's research shows that social capital is more important for the stability and effectiveness of governments and economic development than physical and human capital.

In reference to Putman's theory perspectives, the research has explored the key theoretical argument that underlies the context. In this regard, the findings of the study concurred that social assets and social capital are more valuable and viable than both economic and physical capital. Regardless of the level of economic affluence and democratic space for poor local communities successfully demonstrated their social assets and capital. In both local communities, despite the meager natural and human resources, social facilities, host communities embraced the IDPs and ensured relief, recovery, and resilience. In both context of Ethiopia, smooth networks and mutual relationships were found enhanced between host communities and IDPs and critical elements to restore peace and social cohesion including school retention and thrive. Nevertheless, economic and democratization, elements indicated in Putman's theory seem to have hardly strong signature in factoring the existing community engagement practices in Ethiopian context.

In the literature, the term "social capital" generally refers to the networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives. This research also considered Putman's social capital theory where it stands on the pragmatic and social constructivist paradigm. Nevertheless, there seems to be bias about the western orientation of social assets and social capital, which is strongly linked with social stability and economic affluence. The present study attempts to challenge the western centric thinking considering role and utilization of social capital in relatively poor communities who entangle with armed conflict. In relation to the theoretical perspectives indicated above, the findings, in both Queha and Ginjo, both IDPs and HCS witnessed that the wealth of the community is utilized for IDPs to enhance peaceful co-existence, mobilize resources, restore interactions and foster social cohesion which includes children back to school learning.

In the study, the social assets reactivated the social capital thus playing significant roles in influencing community engagement and children's learning, particularly in poor communities in Ethiopia. From the findings it holds different forms in context. These include the resources and networks within a community that leveraged individual and group support in a sustainable manner. It also includes peer relationships, community interactions, trust between local organizations, and committed local leadership. Against the poor economies and insecurity, strong social assets, such as supportive networks and active traditional -local organizations were observed to be more likely viable to build trust with each other and engage with community initiatives. Moreover, in both contexts, the local communities demonstrated robust social assets to explore and mobilize variety

of resources, including funding, knowledge, and skills, enhancing their ability to engage in the humanitarian emergency response and education development activities. As a result of the strong social assets, both Queha and Ginjo communities created a supportive environment for IDP children's education, including parental involvement, mentorship and community programs that enhance learning opportunities.

In the study, amid the challenges on meager resources and scarcity of social facilities, the social assets seem to reactivate and boost the social capital. The social capital which is mainly explained by the smooth networks, relationships, and norms that facilitate cooperation within a community have encompassed increased trust, reciprocity, and mutual support among the IDP community members.

In Ginjo-Jimma, conflicts emerged between internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities (HCs), often worsened by ineffective local administration interventions. However, the community's social capital proved vital in fostering negotiation and dialogue. Strong social networks facilitated effective communication, enabling residents to engage in constructive discussions essential for conflict resolution. This cooperative spirit alleviated tensions between IDPs and HC's and mobilized collective efforts for community development. Evidence shows that by leveraging their social connections, community members organized initiatives to improve local resources and address shared challenges. This collaborative approach resulted in successful projects, demonstrating that social capital is a powerful tool for promoting unity and driving collective action, even amid external pressures. The resilience of Ginjo-Jimma underscores the importance of social capital in overcoming divisive challenges and enhancing community well-being.

In summary, amid the scaling armed and ethnic based devastating conflicts, the social assets and social capital demonstrated in the two study locations, seem to have played crucial role in life saving and life sustaining of victimized social groups. It was found evident that social assets are embedded within the social capital and revitalized for fostering community engagement, ensuring cohesion and enhancing children's learning in the communities under the study in Ethiopia. By building strong networks and fostering trust among community members, these elements create supportive environments that not only encourage active participation in community initiatives but

also significantly impact educational outcomes for children. Strengthening social assets and capital can help break the cycle of poverty and improve the overall well-being of these communities.

5.9 Local Communities’ Reactivated Responses to Education in Emergencies

Both social capital theory and community organizing principles converge on the idea that local communities possess the inherent capacity to drive solutions. This approach emphasizes a bottom-up strategy, starting with existing community assets and empowering them to effectively leverage their social capital through internal bonding, external bridging, and connecting with influential actors. This framework is evident in the exemplary practices observed in both Ginjo and Queha communities, where they have successfully tapped into their social capital to achieve desired outcomes. However, significant contextual differences emerge. While Ginjo, located in Oromia, benefits from a supportive environment nurtured by evolving initiatives rooted in traditional community structures, Queha, situated in Tigray, operates within an emergency context heavily reliant on external NGO support. This disparity can be attributed to several factors, including the impact of prolonged conflicts in Tigray, which have weakened local governance structures and eroded the economic capacity of the community, thereby hindering their ability to contribute to their own development and increasing their dependence on external aid.

The above seem to have direct and strong influence on School Feeding Programs (SFPs), which have proven to be a vital tool in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by children in Ginjo/Oromia and Queha/Tigray, including hunger, malnutrition, and poverty. These programs, both conventional and emergency, have been implemented by a diverse range of actors to improve school attendance, academic performance, and overall child well-being.

To maximize the impact of SFPs, several key strategies can be employed. Community engagement is crucial, involving local communities in the design, implementation, and monitoring of SFPs. This includes sourcing food locally, empowering Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), and involving community members in monitoring and evaluation. Strong inter-agency coordination and collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, and UN agencies are essential to optimize resource allocation and avoid duplication of efforts. Public-Private Partnerships can leverage additional resources and expertise.

Data-driven decision-making is vital, with regular monitoring and evaluation, coupled with rigorous impact assessments, informing evidence-based decision-making. Policy advocacy,

including lobbying for increased funding and supporting policies that promote school feeding and nutrition, can create a supportive environment for program success. To ensure the long-term impact of community-based school feeding programs (SFPs), three key components are essential: knowledge sharing, policy advocacy, and capacity building.

The overall finding resonates with the research conducted by Purnaweni et al.,(2024) on how communities and local government advance knowledge and accountability. In this regard, knowledge generation and sharing involve applying, collective reflections, documenting and disseminating best practices, which encourage replication and enhance program effectiveness. This aligns with social learning theory, emphasizing the value of learning through shared experiences

Policy advocacy is critical for creating a supportive environment for community initiatives. By influencing policymakers to prioritize community-driven solutions, advocacy ensures effective allocation of resources. Theories of policy entrepreneurship highlight how strategic advocacy can reshape policy frameworks to support community efforts. Capacity Building focuses on providing training and technical assistance to empower community members. Theories of adult learning stress the importance of participatory and context-specific approaches, enhancing community ownership and resilience. Integrating these elements creates a robust framework that fosters engagement, sustainable practices, and improved educational and nutritional outcomes for vulnerable populations, enhancing the effectiveness of community initiatives. By implementing these strategies, it is possible to harness the potential of community-based SFPs to improve the lives of children in Oromia and Tigray, contributing to the broader goals of education, health, and poverty reduction. Amidst escalating man-made and natural disasters, there is an increasing demand for community engagement not only in emergency school feeding but also in broader efforts to improve education and children's overall well-being. As indicated in the study, there are significant potential and ongoing attempts to harness community assets and social capital in this context.

Since 1994, the government of Ethiopia together with development partners, notably WFO and USAID has given due attention to various forms of school feeding aiming at attracting rural and pastoral children to schooling, educational equity, retention and promotion. In the study, related to crisis affected communities, under the broad school feeding domain, concepts like "survival meal", "meal", "nutritional diet" and "children feeding schema" were listed in practice interchangeably.

Nevertheless, the researcher has observed each one of the concepts has different meaning and purpose.

From the literature and field observation and triangulations, school feeding refers to programs that provide meals to children at schools. The meals, whether they followed by any of the pathways either aim to improve educational equity, gender parity, address nutrition, increase school attendance, and enhance academic performance. In conflict affected communities, school feeding was observed to have vital role in a) lifesaving and educational benefits through encouraging back to school, regular school attendance and improved educational outcomes; b) social cohesion and community stability. For the IDPs the feeding programs were found like safe havens and centers of stability in fostering a sense of normalcy for children; and c) community contributions. The school feeding programs, in Oromia were allowed to take innovative shape and feature "Bussa Gonoffa" and involved local communities in food contributions, preparation and distribution, promoting local engagement and ownership. However, there are also observed practical and logistical challenges including security risks which include drought and infrastructural limitations to deliver food to schools.

In reference to crisis affected and conflict-induced communities, the local NGOs implementing at the study locations discuss that survival meals are mainly emergency food rations provided to individuals in crisis situations to prevent starvation. These meals are designed to be nutritionally dense and easy to distribute and consume. The survival meals aim to provide immediate relief to displaced populations, ensuring that basic nutritional needs are met during emergencies. The survival meals, while they are crucial for immediate survival, to pregnant and sick ones, are not a sustainable long-term solution and do not address broader nutritional needs. The focus is on rapid distribution rather than community involvement, which can limit the development of local capacities and resilience. Overall, with three major features, immediacy, relief focus, and targeted intervention, the survival meals are expensive and short term and encourage minimal actual community engagement. In the study locations, both Queha and Ginjo survival meals were hardly practiced.

5.10 Community Engagement Policy for Cohesive Reintegration and Resilience

Ethiopia made a significant stride in July 2021 with the development of a National School Feeding Policy Framework and Strategy (MoE, 2021). This ambitious framework outlines a vision of

providing at least one nutritious meal per day to all pre-primary and primary school children by 2030. Recognizing the fundamental right of children to healthy nutrition and education, the policy aims to ensure that hunger does not impede their access to quality education. The framework clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of all key stakeholders.

Developed under the umbrella of the 2030 Education and Training Road Map, the policy was a collaborative effort involving the Ministry of Education, key sector ministries (Agriculture, Health, Cooperative Commission), and critical development partners such as the World Food Program (WFP), Save the Children International (SCI), and the Ethiopian School Meal Initiative (ESMI).

While the national policy provides a robust framework, regional variations exist. Some regions, such as Oromia and Addis Ababa City Administration, have developed their own regional guidelines for school feeding, adapting the national policy to their specific needs and contexts. These regional guidelines often involve input from regional sectors and partners. Save the Children, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, has also developed a simple operational guideline to assist in the effective implementation of school feeding projects.

This multifaceted approach demonstrates a collaborative spirit. NGOs, in particular, are recognized as valuable contributors, providing crucial input through evidence-based advocacy, technical expertise, operational support, and financial contributions. The study and its findings have indicated quite relevant points on the policies and practices of School Feeding Programs (SFPs) and community engagement in a conflict-prone country.

During the study, despite the socio economic and political crisis including ethnic based conflicts in Ethiopia, both Queha and Ginjo communities peacefully hosted victims of armed conflict of varied background, embraced harmoniously and demonstrated effective community engagement practices to humanist and holistic responses. The comparative responsive social assets and capital were found exemplary to have facilitated experiential learning to live together and thrive. Specific to children learning, in the study, community engagement has played a crucial role in reducing learning loss and contributing to learning gains for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in crisis-affected communities.

The findings of the study underscore engagement of local communities from inside out that are owned and led by the local communities bear essential value additions worth to educational policy and practice in context: The summary underlines the engagement policy to improved practices:

- Engagement was witnessed beyond and above casual participation. During adversities, they created and fostered lifesaving and safe learning environments: local host communities were found active in creating and maintaining safe spaces for learning. As a result, helped and ensured that children have a secure environment to continue their education. Equally, the social interaction between IDPs and HCs was also found to have contributed to safe protection and security. In this regard, all community members helped monitor and protect these spaces, reducing the risk of violence and ensuring that children feel safe in relative terms.
- Engagement has contributed to leveraging local knowledge and resources. Amid the meager financial and physical resources in both regions, the two communities under the study exhibited record on utilizing local resources and expertise. In both contexts, all community members included in the study witnessed to have exercised valuable knowledge and skills that are used to support educational activities, such as community conversations, support schools teaching, mentoring, and support IPDs. Moreover, creative efforts in mobilizing local resources were also found highly encouraging.
- Engagement promoted inclusive and active participation: in both community's social groups including young volunteers, parents and other community members actively participated in emergency response activities and decision-making processes. The self-initiated physical, technical and financial contributions fostered a sense of ownership and commitment, helped to reach the educational needs of all children, including those with disabilities or from IDP groups.
- Engagement strengthened social networks and revitalized social capital: Community engagement reactivated ties and helped to strengthen relationships and networks among community members, which leveraged to support smooth social interactions and cohesion. Equally, it fostered peer support networks that provided emotional and practical assistance, helping them cope with the challenges of displacement. In due process, innovative solutions to overcome security and social service barriers to include flexible alternative

learning programs (e.g. Accelerated Education Program) practiced. Moreover, it allowed communities to be more resilient and better able to adapt to changing circumstances, ensuring that education can continue even in the face of ongoing crises.

- Effective engagement ensures success and retention. From the study, engagement emanates from clarity, courage to contribute and long-term commitment. In the study, both host and IDPs responded they were clear about the purpose of community engagement. Furthermore, their deep commitment, i.e. passion to engage, was observed in momentum even in period of insecurity. In this regard, it contributed to ownership and accountability, where communities actively involved, they are more likely to take ownership of educational initiatives and hold themselves accountable for their success. In general, clarifying the purpose, creating a supportive and sustainable environment to engage in which as a result effectively contributes to mitigating the impact of crises on learning and promotes the educational development of IDP children.

Nevertheless, investing in efficient logistics and distribution systems is crucial to ensure the timely delivery of food and other resources to schools in emergencies. Moreover, establishing robust monitoring and evaluation systems specific to emergencies will enable the tracking of program impact and the identification of areas for improvement. Finally, promoting sustainable agriculture practices and disaster risk reduction measures can enhance the resilience of communities, reducing their vulnerability to emergencies and conflicts. Emergency SFPs have emerged as a powerful tool for addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by communities affected by conflict in Ethiopia.

Beyond providing immediate relief from hunger, these programs have far-reaching implications for community engagement, recovery efforts, and the educational outcomes of internally displaced persons (IDPs). By involving local communities in the procurement, preparation, and distribution of meals, SFPs foster a sense of ownership and responsibility. This strengthens community bonds and social cohesion. and empowers local economies through the creation of employment opportunities for smallholder farmers. Additionally, community engagement provides an avenue for disseminating vital information about health, nutrition, and hygiene, leading to improved dietary practices and reduced rates of malnutrition.

For IDP students, SFPs serve as a crucial incentive for enrollment, particularly for girls who may face significant barriers to education due to displacement and security concerns. Providing a safe and supportive learning environment, coupled with nutritious meals, helps IDP students cope with the psychological trauma associated with displacement and conflict. Integrating psychosocial support services into these programs further addresses the mental health needs of IDP children and improves their overall well-being. The impact of SFPs on learning outcomes is substantial. By providing nutritious meals, these programs increase school attendance rates, as children are more likely to attend school if they know they will receive a meal. Adequate nutrition is essential for cognitive development and learning (Ashlee et al., 2020), and SFPs can improve students' concentration, memory, and academic performance. Moreover, by addressing the immediate needs of IDP students, such as hunger and malnutrition, these programs can help reduce dropout rates and ensure that children complete their education.

CHAPTER SIX: Summary Conclusion & Implications to Policy and Practice in EiE

6.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This study has undertaken and investigated the critical role of community engagement in enhancing student post enrollment retention among internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities in Ethiopia, particularly through emergency school feeding programs (SFPs). By addressing key areas such as policy provision, community engagement practices, emergency school pathways, and strategies for post-enrollment retention, the research highlights the interconnectedness of these elements. The findings emphasize the importance of collaborative efforts among stakeholders to create sustainable educational access for vulnerable children in crisis-affected areas. Based on the key findings the following conclusion is drawn and implications for policy and practice were suggested.

6.2 Summary

The research on community engagement in education in emergencies(EiE) among displaced persons in conflict-induced situations emphasizes exploring actual community practices related to emergency school feeding programs in the Oromia and Tigray regions of Ethiopia. It seeks to address key questions about how host communities leverage their assets and enhance social capital to meet the educational needs of children of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and support parents.

Utilizing a qualitative exploratory case study approach, this study aims to identify community engagement practices, existing policies, and organizational frameworks. It also examines how communities activate social capital to improve educational retention for displaced children. Employing purposive sampling techniques, data collection included focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and observations, leading to comprehensive qualitative analysis.

The findings indicate that host communities face significant challenges in ensuring the right to education amid ongoing crises. However, they demonstrate resilience through strong social bonds, effectively leveraging local resources to support IDPs. The research reveals that community-based pathways, rooted in community owned practices, are more effective for student retention than NGO or public owned institutional programs.

The study also highlights that emergency education policies alone often fail to address the needs of disadvantaged groups, including parents. These policies must be supplemented by directives and guidelines that foster mutuality their impact on community involvement supplemented by accountability. Furthermore, the research indicated how trust, local assets, and mutual support can be mobilized to strengthen educational initiatives for IDP children. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of integrating local community practices and indigenous assets into educational response policies. Activating community engagement and resources represents a significant opportunity to create robust support systems that enhance educational outcomes and social cohesion during emergencies.

6.3 Conclusion

This study devoted and gained substantial points on community engagement practices in emergencies and how enhancing student retention among internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities in Ethiopia, specifically through emergency school feeding programs (SFPs). The research addresses four pivotal questions: the adequacy of policy provision, the effectiveness of community engagement practices, the impact of emergency school pathways, and strategies for ensuring post-enrollment retention. Each of these elements is interconnected, contributing to the overarching goal of improving educational access for vulnerable children. Regarding policy provision, while Ethiopia has established legal frameworks to support school feeding initiatives, there remains an urgent need for policies that truly incorporate community-driven efforts. Current policies often do not align with local realities, which can hinder effective implementation. Involving communities in the policy formulation process is essential, as it allows for tailored approaches that resonate with local needs and cultural contexts, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability among stakeholders.

The study also highlights effective community engagement practices characterized by trust, collaboration, and active participation. Initiatives such as "Busa Gonofa" demonstrate how leveraging local knowledge and resources can significantly enhance program effectiveness. Community-based approaches not only mobilize resources but also build social capital, strengthening networks that facilitate educational access. Engaging parents, local leaders, and community organizations ensures that educational initiatives are well-received and effectively implemented, maximizing their impact.

Furthermore, the findings illustrate that community-based SFPs have emerged as effective pathways for engaging both IDPs and host communities. These programs not only provide nutritional support but also create a conducive learning environment that encourages attendance and retention. However, the sustainability of these initiatives hinges on ongoing commitment from all stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, and community members. Continuous engagement is crucial for adapting to changing circumstances and ensuring that programs meet the evolving needs of the communities they serve.

In conclusion, fostering robust community engagement and resilience is vital for addressing the educational needs of vulnerable children in crisis-affected areas. This study emphasizes that long-term commitment and collaboration among with lead role of local communities, local government and stakeholders, including NGOs, and volunteers are essential for ensuring sustainable educational access. By prioritizing community-driven initiatives and policies that align with local practices, stakeholders can create an educational ecosystem that not only meets immediate needs but also supports the long-term development and well-being of displaced children.

6.4 Implications for Policy and Practice to Education in Emergencies (EiE)

In regions grappling with escalating natural and manmade adversities, including armed conflicts. Effective community engagement is found vital for successful relief efforts, recovery processes, fostering social cohesion, and sustaining inclusive local development. Recognizing, valuing, and effectively utilizing existing local assets and social capital within communities seem the most critical strategies to replenish resources and effectively mitigate crisis and promote positive change among local communities.

In the Ethiopian context, prioritizing the exploration and utilization of local social assets to drive community transformation appears to be a crucial strategic direction for both the education and other development sectors. The evolving social dynamics and challenges within the Ethiopian education sector necessitate a renewed focus on value-added community engagement practices. This focus is critical for revitalizing educational policies and practices, effectively mobilizing local resources, and ultimately enhancing the holistic learning outcomes of communities, aligning them with the broader goals of education for development

The findings of the study, the discussions thereof and the conclusion drawn witnessed that the area has huge relevance and potential to solve the challenges that Ethiopia is now facing. This study therefore recommends the following action points to levels and actors:

6.4.1 Policy Implications

Drawing from the study's analysis and findings, few policy implications are suggested for shifting towards inclusive community initiatives and developing plans for post-enrollment retention interventions. These implications highlight the importance of actively involving communities to make educational programs accessible and supportive for every student. Strategies must be formulated to improve retention rates by tackling educational barriers, encouraging inclusive practices, and fostering collaboration among various stakeholders.

6.4.1.1 Appreciate and invest in local community initiatives

Recognizing and valuing community engagement during both normalcy and adversity is essential. In emergencies, when governmental structures weaken, it is critical to implement policies that prioritize, recognize, and value support from community-based organizations and initiatives. Such policies should bridge emergency response and recovery, ensuring that interventions are culturally relevant and effectively address the unique challenges faced by internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities. This can be achieved by promoting social cohesion, resilience, and engagement in local, regional, and national policy actions and strategies. Additionally, the focus should be on appreciative inquiry regarding localization and contextualization to leverage local assets and capital for the most suitable school feeding programs and decision-making processes.

6.4.1.2 Strengthen Legal Frameworks for Community-Driven Initiatives:

Strengthen the current regional legal frameworks to explicitly support community-driven educational initiatives, especially National School Feeding Programs (SFPs). Policies should empower local organizations, allowing them to take a central role in managing SFPs and related programs, which foster community ownership and accountability for effective implementation. Furthermore, initiatives should prioritize mutual support, capacity-building, and tailored training and mentorship programs. It's essential to develop policies that actively engage community members in both the creation and execution of these programs. Establishing inclusive forums for

local stakeholders will enable them to express their needs, enhancing program relevance while strengthening social cohesion and ensuring sustainability.

6.4.1.3 Consider Inclusive Post Enrollment -Retention Plan in Emergencies

Post enrollment retention is a critical concern in conflict-affected and emergency situations, significantly influencing the educational outcomes of vulnerable populations. Policymakers must recognize that merely enrolling students is not enough; sustaining their engagement is vital for fostering resilience and facilitating long-term recovery. In emergencies, factors such as violence, displacement, and resource scarcity create unique challenges that hinder students' ability to remain engaged in their education.

Policies and practices must therefore be adaptive and responsive, incorporating strategies that address these challenges. This includes creating safe learning environments, providing psychosocial support, and ensuring access to essential resources such as food and shelter through initiatives like National School Feeding Programs. Furthermore, engaging communities in decision-making can enhance program relevance and effectiveness, ensuring that educational interventions are culturally appropriate and sustainable. By prioritizing retention alongside enrollment, we can better support the educational journeys of children in crisis, ultimately paving the way for a more resilient future.

6.3.1.4 Ensure supportive and Sustained Engagement System

To enhance humanitarian response during emergencies and recovery, it is crucial to establish a supportive and sustained engagement system. Policies should prioritize community involvement in local asset mobilization and social capital development to ensure sustainability. Essential elements of this approach include participatory interventions, continuous monitoring, evaluation, and inclusive decision-making processes. Emergency school feeding programs should involve clearly defined roles for stakeholders, with a strong emphasis on community engagement. This will help identify areas for improvement and ensure that the needs of all children, particularly internally displaced persons (IDPs), are addressed. By developing effective and sustainable school feeding initiatives, we can improve the well-being and educational opportunities for IDP children and their families. This collaborative strategy not only meets immediate needs but also fortifies community resilience and support networks, facilitating long-term recovery and stability in affected regions.

6.5 Implication to Better Community Engagement Practices in Emergencies

The study and concluding remarks revealed that improved practices are the results of strong social bonds, networks trust and interactions. The following need to be addressed in order to continuously and sustainably ensure community engagement practices in emergency and normalcy.

6.5.1 Foster Collaborative Engagement Practices among all Actors

Encourage collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations to create a network of support for educational initiatives. This can include sharing resources, knowledge, and expertise to improve the effectiveness of SFPs and other educational programs. The interaction between the I/NGO and local community-based associations such as Hayra, need to be strengthened to foster humanitarian responses to children and elderly people in conflict affected areas. In so doing, the collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and community-based organizations during emergencies seeks better definition and re-structuring. Given contextual understanding, communities need to be taken to the center of interaction between the local and other NGOs, including the interaction with the government. Promote and institutionalized school-community account where local social capital fosters social cohesion and inclusion, such as community events, sports, and cultural activities and awards are given based on mutual merit.

6.5.2 Strengthen Community Owned Capacity-Building Programs:

Develop training programs for community members to enhance their own talents, skills in mobilizing local assets, managing and implementing SFPs. These programs should focus on best practices in nutrition, education management, and community mobilization, thereby empowering locals to take charge of educational initiatives. Establish Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation: Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness of SFPs and community engagement practices. Regular assessments will help identify areas for improvement and ensure that programs remain responsive to the changing needs of IDPs and host communities.

6.5.3 Encourage community based mutual psychosocial support

During emergencies education is both critical element of life saving and life sustaining components. Prioritizing education is a key component of emergency response and recovery efforts; thus, ensuring children and their parents have access to quality education and learning opportunities is essential to build the future of the children. In this regard, realign and local development response plans encourage and support community-led initiatives that address the specific needs and priorities of IDP populations and host communities. Promote Inclusive Educational Practices:

Develop and implement educational programs that are inclusive of all children, particularly those from IDP backgrounds. This includes adapting teaching methodologies and curricula to accommodate diverse learning needs, ensuring that all children have equal opportunities to succeed in their education. Furthermore, children are highly vulnerable to various war related challenges. The study witnessed that the children in the cases considered for the present research passed through challenges of hunger, death and long-distance trekking on foot. For most children this happens with the advancement in war between the conflicting parties. Hence, prioritizing intervention approaches on mental health and psychosocial support is important.

6.5.4 Revitalize Local Assets and Social Capital for Inclusive Engagement:

Planning and implementing inclusive and sustainable engagement in educational programs requires purposeful engagement. In this regard, the study underscores the vitality to explore indigenous practices, revitalize local assets, and social capital. It is also essential to allocate sufficient resources for continuous community involvement. This includes dedicated engagement plan funding for training and capacity-building initiatives that empower local members, leaders and organizations. Facilitating regular community meetings will further encourage dialogue, share best practices, and collaboratively address emerging challenges.

Creating sustainable funding mechanisms is essential for ensuring long-term community participation in education. These mechanisms can include public-private partnerships, grants, and community investment funds that motivate local contributions. Additionally, policies should focus on integrating local assets, such as cultural knowledge and social networks, into educational initiatives. This comprehensive approach enhances community ownership and accountability while

strengthening social cohesion and resilience, ensuring that educational programs remain relevant and effective for all stakeholders.

6.6 Areas for Further Research Work

The research on community engagement in emergency school feeding offers valuable insights into innovative approaches to further explore community involvement and ensure educational continuity in crisis-affected regions. Given the diminishing external aid for school feeding programs in Africa, fostering community-based solutions is crucial. A study on the contribution of emergency school feeding on inclusion and motivation to school of children from diverse groups seems a relevant area to deal with so that the synergy between actors and motivation to school is exercised on evidence.

In the due process of the study, the researcher identified some areas for further research. These include how to strengthen local food production systems to support school feeding, integrating nutrition and health services into educational programs, empowering communities through leadership development and community-led initiatives, analyzing and improving relevant policies and institutional frameworks, and conducting rigorous monitoring and evaluation. By focusing on these aspects, researchers can contribute to the development of sustainable and effective community-based school feeding programs that not only address immediate needs but also promote long-term educational sustainability and community resilience in crisis-affected regions of Africa.

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Annexes:

Annex A

Addis Ababa University

College of Education and Language Studies

Department of Curriculum and Comparative Education

Focus group discussion protocol

Study title: Community Engagement Practices in Emergency School Feedings: The Case of IDPs of Oromia and Tigray National Regional States, Ethiopia

Objective: The general objective of the research is to explore local community engagement practices in emergency school feeding referring to selective active IDPs in Oromia and Tigray Regional States, Ethiopia.

Target population: Parents/Guardians and school leaders

1. *Determining the number and duration of the focus group discussions (FGDs)*
 - a. Six FGDs at two IDP sites will be conducted.
 - b. Focus groups run between 60 and 90 minutes.
2. *Identifying FGD participants*
 - a. Five up to eight participants will participate in each group.
 - b. The participants of the FGDs will be homogenous groups so that they feel comfortable speaking in the group.
 - c. Participants with CE experience of at least two years and volunteers to discuss their experience will be selected.
 - d. Names and contact information of potential participants will be secured.
 - e. Place and time of the FGD will be determined in consultation with the participants.
 - f. An invitation will be sent to the participants.

3. *Introducing the FGD*

The facilitator will

- a. Be the principal researcher of the study
- b. Arrive before the participants.
- c. Begin the focus group discussion (FGD) with providing introductory comments.
- d. Welcome and acknowledge everyone for volunteering to participate.
- e. Introduce him and let the participants introduce themselves to each other.
- f. Distribute a consent form (the consent form mainly addresses the purpose of the FGD, the role of participants and ethical considerations) to all participants.
- g. Ask the participants to review, ask any questions, and then sign consent form.
- h. Make a very brief overview of the study in general and the FGD in particular (the purpose is stated in the consent form as well).
- i. Distributes name tags for focus groups or community meetings (Number tags will be given for the participants to keep anonymity).
- j. Provide basic guidelines/ground rules for the FGD (confidentiality, respect others idea, only one Speaker at a time, open discussion and active participation is important).
- k. Ensure that the participants are ready for the discussion.

4. *Conducting the FGD*

- a. The discussion questions will be presented in the sequence they appear in the FGD guide.
- b. The discussions will be audio recorded.
- c. The facilitator will take note of the discussion setting (date, place and time) and key points.
- d. The participants will be probed when needed.
- e. All participants will be encouraged to reflect on the discussion and it will be attempted to control dominance by few.
- f. Participants will not be argued whatever the idea they reflected.
- g. The FGDs will not be interrupted.

5. *Closing the discussion*

The facilitator will close the discussion by thanking the participants once again for participation and providing them with his contact information in case the participants have any additional thoughts or comments that they would like to share.

6. *Ethical considerations*

- a. The participants will have the right to refuse participation at any time
- b. The FGDs will be conducted at a time and in manner that is comfortable for all participants and permitted by the respective universities
- c. No identifying information will be kept in the notes or final report

Annex B

Addis Ababa University

College of Education and Language Studies

Department of Curriculum and Comparative Education

Interview protocol

Study title: Community Engagement Practices in Emergency School Feedings: The Case of IDPs of Oromia and Tigray National Regional States, Ethiopia

Objective: The general objective of the research is to explore local community engagement practices in emergency school feeding referring to selective active IDPs in Oromia and Tigray Regional States, Ethiopia.

Target population: Parents/Guardians and school leaders

7. *Determining the number and duration of the interviews*

- c. 12 FGDs at two IDP sites will be conducted.
- d. The interview runs between 60 and 90 minutes.

8. *Identifying interview participants*

- g. Interviewees with CE experience of at least two years and volunteers to discuss their experience will be selected.
- h. Names and contact information of potential interviewees will be secured.
- i. Place and time of the interview will be determined in consultation with the interviewees
- j. An invitation will be sent to the interviewees

9. *Introducing the FGD*

The facilitator will

- l. Be the principal researcher of the study
- m. Arrive before the participants.
- n. Begin the interview with providing introductory comments.
- o. Welcome and acknowledge the interviewee for volunteering to participate.

- p. Introduce him and let the interviewee introduce him/herself.
- q. Give a consent form (the consent form mainly addresses the purpose of the interview, the role of participants and ethical considerations) to all participants.
- r. Ask the interviewee to review, ask any questions, and then sign consent form.
- s. Make a very brief overview of the study in general and the interview in particular (the purpose is stated in the consent form as well).
- t. Provide basic guidelines/ground rules for the interview (e.g., confidentiality)
- u. Ensure that the participants are ready for the discussion.

10. Conducting the FGD

- h. The interview questions will be presented in the sequence they appear in the interview guide.
- i. The interview will be audio recorded.
- j. The facilitator will take note of the discussion setting (date, place and time) and key points.
- k. The interviewees will be probed when needed.
- l. All participants will be encouraged to reflect on the interview questions.
- m. Participants will not be argued whatever the idea they reflected.
- n. The interview will not be interrupted.

11. Closing the discussion

The facilitator will close the interview by thanking the interviewees once again for participation and providing them with his contact information in case the participants have any additional thoughts or comments that they would like to share.

12. Ethical considerations

- d. The interviewees will have the right to refuse participation at any time
- e. The interviewees will be conducted at a time and in manner that is comfortable for all participants and permitted by the respective universities
- f. No identifying information will be kept in the notes or final report

Respondents	Interview questions
MOE, REB, WEB	1. What are the policies or legal provisions that inform community engagement in emergencies or post-emergency conditions? a. What is the overarching goal or objective of the policy or legal framework regarding community engagement in emergency or post-emergency conditions? b. What is the specific problem(s) or issue(s) that this policy or legal framework aims to address? c. What are the intended outcomes or impacts of this policy or legal framework? d. What are the potential strengths and weaknesses of the policy or legal framework? e. What are the existing challenges or barriers to implementing this policy or legal framework in your locality? 2. Could you provide an overview of the organizational structure and roles in relation to school feeding programs during emergency situations? a. Which government office is responsible for coordinating school feeding in emergency? b. How is the office staffed? c. What is the source of funding of this office? 3. Can you provide an overview of the legal arrangements that govern community engagement in planning and decision-making processes? 4. How do legal arrangements ensure that marginalized or underrepresented communities have equal opportunities for meaningful participation in the planning and decision-making processes? 5. What are the existing emergency school feeding pathways in the IDP locations? a. How are the pathways chosen? b. Could you provide an overview of the effectiveness and limitations of

	the pathways? 6. What strategies are used to ensure that the local community is involved and engaged in emergency school feeding and learning programs? 7. Can you share examples of successful community engagement initiatives that have positively impacted emergency school feeding in your locality? 8. What do you think as the gain for the local community because of engagement in ESF? (this may include skills development, empowering of disadvantaged group of the community, reduced unemployability, entrepreneurship and innovation skills, knowledge exchange and collaboration skills etc.) 9. What factors do you consider as enablers of CE in emergency school feeding? (example, availability of policy, donors support, social asset etc.) 10. What constraints/challenges did you encounter in the engagement practices? What are the sources of these challenges? 11. Can you describe the emergency school feeding program in your community? 12. How often do these feedings occur and what kind of food is provided? 13. Are you aware of any other displaced communities that have similar or different school feeding programs? 14. How does your community's program compare to theirs in terms of effectiveness and impact? 15. Do you have any suggestions for how the program could be improved?
Host community	1. Can you describe the emergency school feeding program in your community? 2. How often do these feedings occur and what kind of food is provided? 3. What are the existing emergency school feeding pathways in the IDP locations? a. How are the pathways chosen? b. Could you provide an overview of the effectiveness and

	limitations of the pathways? 4. What strategies are used to ensure that the local community is involved and engaged in emergency school feeding and learning programs? 5. Can you share examples of successful community engagement initiatives that have positively impacted emergency school feeding in your locality? 6. What were/are your role and the role of host communities and non-state actors in ESF? 7. What do you think as the gain for the local community because of engagement in ESF? (this may include skills development, empowering of disadvantaged group of the community, reduced unemployability, entrepreneurship and innovation skills, knowledge exchange and collaboration skills etc.) 8. What did you benefit from your engagement in the emergency school feeding taking place in your location? 9. What factors do you consider as enablers of CE in emergency school feeding? (example, availability of policy, donors support, social asset etc.) 10. What constraints/challenges did you encounter in the engagement practices? What are the sources of these challenges? 11. Do you have any suggestions for how the program could be improved?
Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)	1. Can you describe the emergency school feeding program in your community? 2. How often do these feedings occur and what kind of food is provided? 3. Can you describe the community you come from? 4. How long have you been displaced and what caused it? 5. What are the existing emergency school feeding pathways in the IDP locations? a. How are the pathways chosen? b. Could you provide an overview of the effectiveness and limitations of the pathways?

	6. What strategies are used to ensure that the local community is involved and engaged in emergency school feeding and learning programs? 7. Can you share examples of successful community engagement initiatives that have positively impacted emergency school feeding in your locality? 8. How are your social interactions and networking with the host community? a. What is your involvement in community gatherings such as cultural festivals, religious ceremonies, or simply informal gatherings where the local persons socialize, share stories, and support one another. b. What is your relationship with various support groups such as Busa Gonofa, Idir, Iqub groups etc.? c. What benefits have you gained from such social interaction? - d. 9. What do you think as the gain for the local community because of engagement in ESF? (this may include skills development, empowering of disadvantaged group of the community, reduced unemployability, entrepreneurship and innovation skills, knowledge exchange and collaboration skills etc.) 10. What methods and mechanisms did you exercised to improve your engagement with local communities and stakeholders? 11. What factors do you consider as enablers of CE in emergency school feeding? (example, availability of policy, donors support, social asset 12. What constraints/challenges did you encounter in the engagement practices? What are the sources of these challenges? 13. What is your observation regarding your children gain in terms of recovery and continuation of their education? 14. How do you perceive the process of your reintegration? (faster than expected; slower than we expected) 15. How do you perceive the process of your children return to school?
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	(faster than we expected, slower than we expected) - What were the major challenges in the process of the children return and reintegration to school? - What is your observation of the influence of ESF program on children interest and hope to continue their education in the future? - What would be the fate of the children education without the existing ESF program? - How has the emergency school feeding program affected school attendance and performance? - Have you noticed any changes in the children's health or behavior since the program started? - Are you aware of any other displaced communities that have similar or different school feeding programs? - How does your community's program compare to theirs in terms of effectiveness and impact? - Do you have any suggestions for how the program could be improved?
School principals and teachers	- What is your observation regarding the children gain in terms of recovery and continuation of their education? - How do you perceive the process of the children's reintegration? (faster than expected; slower than we expected) - How do you perceive the process of the children's return to school? (faster than we expected, slower than we expected) - What were the major challenges in the process of the children return and reintegration to school? - What is your observation of the influence of ESF program on children interest and hope to continue their education in the future? - What would be the fate of the children education without the existing ESF program? - How has the emergency school feeding program affected school attendance and performance?

	8. Have you noticed any changes in the children's health or behavior since the program started? 9. Are you aware of any other displaced communities that have similar or different school feeding programs? 10. How does your community's program compare to theirs in terms of effectiveness and impact? 11. Do you have any suggestions for how the program could be improved?
Local NGOs/Ilu	1. What is your observation regarding the children gain in terms of recovery and continuation of their education? 2. How do you perceive the process of the children's reintegration? (faster than expected; slower than we expected) 3. How do you perceive the process of the children's return to school? (faster than we expected, slower than we expected) 4. What were the major challenges in the process of the children return and reintegration to school? 5. What is your observation of the influence of ESF program on children interest and hope to continue their education in the future? 6. What would be the fate of the children education without the existing ESF program? 7. What are the existing emergency school feeding pathways in the IDP locations? a. How are the pathways chosen? b. Could you provide an overview of the effectiveness and limitations of the pathways? 8. What strategies are used to ensure that the local community is involved and engaged in emergency school feeding and learning programs? 9. Can you share examples of successful community engagement initiatives that have positively impacted emergency school feeding in your locality? 10. What were/are your role and the role of host communities and non-state actors in ESF?

	11. What do you think as the gain for the local community because of engagement in ESF? (This may include skills development, empowering of disadvantaged group of the community, reduced unemployability, entrepreneurship and innovation skills, knowledge exchange and collaboration skills etc.) 12. What factors do you consider as enablers of CE in emergency school feeding? (example, availability of policy, donors support, social asset etc.) 13. What constraints/challenges did you encounter in the engagement practices? What are the sources of these challenges? 14. How has the emergency school feeding program affected school attendance and performance? 15. Have you noticed any changes in the children's health or behavior since the program started? 16. Are you aware of any other displaced communities that have similar or different school feeding programs? 17. How does your community's program compare to theirs in terms of effectiveness and impact? 18. Do you have any suggestions for how the program could be improved?
Students (host and IDP groups)	1. What is your observation regarding your educational gains in terms of recovery and continuation of their education? 2. How do you perceive the process of your reintegration? (faster than expected; slower than you expected) 3. How do you perceive the process of your return to school? (faster than you expected, slower than you expected) 4. What were the major challenges in the process of your return and reintegration to school? 5. What is your observation of the influence of school feeding on your interest and hope to continue their education in the future? 6. What would be your educational fate without the existing ESF program?

	7. How has the emergency school feeding program affected your school attendance and performance? 8. Have you noticed any changes in your health or behavior since the program started? 9. Do you have any suggestions for how the program could be improved?
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Annex C :

Addis Ababa University

College of Education and Language Studies

Department of Curriculum and Comparative Education

Simple Field Guide for Qualitative Comparative Case Study

Title: Community Engagement in Emergency School Feedings Among Displaced Persons in Oromia and Tigray Regional States of Ethiopia

Introduction

This field guide provides a structured outline and steps for conducting a qualitative comparative case study focused on community engagement in emergency school feeding programs among internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Oromia and Tigray Regional States of Ethiopia. Considering the value of establishing rapport and trust with all persons involved in the respective locations, it outlines essential procedures, communication protocols, listening strategies, and translation methods, particularly in the context of the Afan Oromo and Tigrinya languages.

1. Procedures

Following ethical approval and field schedule, it is essential that the following procedures are respected by the researcher and language translator in the field.

1.1 Planning

- **Define Research Questions and clear understanding:** Both the researcher and translator shall be clear with the objectives and steps of the field work. Thus, articulate specific objectives and the scope of the study, focusing on community engagement in emergency

school feeding. It is also critical to be clear with terms and concepts commonly and frequently appear in the field work.

- **Familiarity of the Cases:** Both the researcher and translators and assistants shall be familiar with the context and location. In this regard, Ginjo and Queha, having basic information and unique features (if any) of the study cases within the Oromia and Tigray regions reflect diverse experiences and contexts of IDPs and host communities.
- **Obtain Approvals:** Based on the requirements and notes within the ethical clearance, it is essential that all groups including language translators and other assistants are respecting it. Thus, secure necessary ethical clearances from local authorities and institutional review boards to ensure compliance with ethical research standards.

1.2 Data collection procedures

- **Preparations:** Based on the prior approval of the schedule, the researcher and his assistant/translator/s shall arrive at least 15 minutes earlier than the fixed or agreed time at the spot. Materials and devices necessary for the interviews of focus d group discussions need to be set and checked. All steps in qualitative data gathering including clear introductions of who the lead and the team are, the purpose and obtaining consent shall be noted and kept intact.
- **Interviews:** Conduct interviews with the participants/s, including IDPs, host community members, educators, and local officials. The procedures and follow-ups need to be kept as per the agreed date and time. Also consider adjustments for another round schedule, if changes are made to the interviewee.
- **Focus Groups:** Organize focus group discussions to capture collective views and experiences regarding the school feeding programs.
- **Observations:** Engage in participant observation during school feeding activities to gain firsthand insights into community dynamics and engagement practices.

1.3 Documentation

- **Field Notes:** Maintain comprehensive field notes during all data collection activities to document observations and reflections.

- **Audio/Video Recording:** With participant consent, record interviews and focus groups to ensure accurate data capture for later analysis.

2. Communication Protocols

2.1 Engaging Participants

- **Build Rapport:** Initiate conversations with informal topics to establish comfort and trust with participants.
- **Informed Consent:** Clearly explain the study's purpose and procedures, ensuring participants understand their rights before obtaining consent.

2.2 During Interviews

- **Open-Ended Questions:** Utilize open-ended questions to promote elaborate responses and in-depth discussions.
- **Clarification:** Ask follow-up questions for clarification if participants' responses are ambiguous or unclear.

3.0 Listening Protocol

3.1 Active Listening

- **Focus on the Speaker/interview:** Maintain eye contact and minimize distractions to demonstrate attentiveness. Avoid disruptions and interruptions.
- **Paraphrasing:** Summarize and repeat key points made by participants to confirm understanding and encourage further elaboration.
- **Acknowledge Emotions:** Validate participants' feelings and experiences to foster an environment of trust and openness.

3.2 Non-Verbal Cues

- **Observe Body Language:** Pay attention to participants' non-verbal signals, such as posture and facial expressions, to gauge comfort and engagement levels.
- **Use Nods and Affirmations:** Provide non-verbal affirmations to signal understanding and encouragement throughout discussions.

4. Translation Procedures

4.1 Pre-Translation

- **Translator's personality:** Choose qualified bilingual translators fluent in the source language in Tigrinya.
- **Brief the Translator:** Provide a thorough briefing on the study's objectives and key terminology to ensure clarity and consistency.

4.2 During Translation

- **Contextual Accuracy:** Ensure that translators are familiar with the context and nuances of the questions and responses to maintain fidelity.
- **Real-Time Translation:** For interviews conducted in Afan Oromo or Tigrinya, facilitate simultaneous translation or organized turn-taking to ensure smooth communication.

4.3 post-translation

- **Review Translations:** Have a second translator or language expert review translations to ensure accuracy and coherence.
- **Member Checking:** Allow participants to review translated materials to confirm that their perspectives are accurately represented.

5. Concluding the field work

The simple field guide outlined above can be enriched at the field level to improve effectiveness of qualitative comparative case studies. This outline hinges on diligent procedures, clear communication, and accurate translation practices. By adhering to this field guide, the researcher engages before and during the field work respectfully and meaningfully with participants, leading to richer and more reliable data. This guide serves as a foundational resource for the researcher and language translator working in Ginjo and Queha case locations with linguistic and cultural contexts, ensuring that the complexities of participants' experiences are faithfully captured and understood.

Developed by the Researcher

March 2024

Annex D:

Addis Ababa University

College of Education and Language Studies

Department of Curriculum and Comparative Education

Focused Observation Checklist

I. General Information

1.1. Date of Observation (D/M/Y) : _____

1.2. Location : _____

1.3. Observer's Name _____

1.4. Time of Observation _____

1.5. Observation round _____

1.6. Observed community/ group name _____

1.7. Demographics of hosting population _____

1.8. Demographics of IDP/refugee population _____

1.9. Duration and presence of IDP/Refugee with host _____

1.10. GPS of the observed location _____

II. Population Category and Content of Observation

Population Category observed	Content of Observation	Remark /Additional note
Community leaders	Level of engagement in community dialogue to bring IDP children to school	
	Participation in conflict resolution restoring mutuality	
	Interactions with IDP reps (positive/negative/neural)	
	Evidence of personal relationships (social bonding)	
	Established connections with outside group (bonding)	
Parents (Host community)	Interaction with IDP families	
	Support mechanisms for IDP children's schooling	
	Involvement in IDP children feeding	
	Involvement on house/community-based initiatives	
	Relationships with IDP mothers/fathers in daily basis	

	Mutual interaction in regular and school festivals	
School directors and Teachers	Directors/Teaching practices adapted for IDP students	
	Inclusion of IDPs in co-curricular activities	
	Facilitating host-idp student interaction	
	Participation in school feeding pathways	
	Relationships with children parents (both host and IDP)	
Students	Host students interaction among displaced students	
	Mutual participation and support in school and outside	
	Key emotional areas of IDPs and responses by host	Check/copy records
	Friendship established and continued in schools	
	Support networks among students and parents	
NGO Representatives	Degree of collaboration with local leaders	
	Approaches to support IDPs (education, health, etc.)	
	Perception of community response to aid initiatives	
	Partnerships with local organizations to enhance support for IDPs	
	Engagement in multi-stakeholder collaborations	
District/zone officials	Engagement with community on EiE	
	Practices addressed on EiE and community actions	
	Reactions to IDP questions /claims on education	
	Connection with agencies addressing IDP issues	
Social cohesion For education	Evidence of inter-community relationships	
	Formal/informal gatherings or dialogues	
	Shared community resources or initiatives	
	Community solidarity actions for EiE	
	Community collaboration with NGOs and other groups	Copy records
Conflict dynamics	Signs of tension or conflict by host or IDPs children	
	Signs of tensions by host or IDP parents on schooling	
	Educational agreements reached social groups	
	Records in addressing occurred conflicts among groups	
Support System	Mutual support and use of available resources	
	Schools Feeding practices and pathways for IDP children	

	Networks of support for IDPs (community groups, NGOs)	
	Participation of community members in support activities	
	Social practices in enhancing social capital among groups	
Challenges	Observed barriers to integration of IDPs	
	Community responses to perceived grievances (from both IDPs and local populations)	
	External influences on local governance (NGOs, government policies)	
	Efforts on mobilize resources for school feeding pathways	
Additional Notes	Emotional status and future plan of IDPs and hosts	
	Saturation and tensions on meager resources	
	General mood of participants (optimistic, indifferent)	
	Expressions of hope or frustration regarding the future	
Unexpected Findings	Insights that diverged from the expected practices	
	New directions that influenced the objectives of study	
	Conditions observed influencing to change the study	
Conclusion		

Name _____ Date _____ Signature _____

Annex 4 : Ethical Clearance

Date: March 14, 2024

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES
ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
CEBS-4 INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)
 Template of Ethical Approval Certificate
 Graduate programs students

Form: CEBS_IRB_CCEPS_Template_Form_001

IRB Approval Reference No. CEBS_IRB_CCEPS_0014/03/2024

To: Samuel Asseke Wolla
 Principal Investigator, Community Engagement in Emergency School Feeding: A Comparative Study of IDPS in Oromia and Tigray

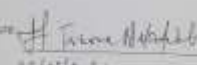
From: Teshome Hekaldeb (PhD), Chair, Center for Comparative Education and Policy Studies
 Re: Approval of Research - Community Engagement in Emergency School Feeding: A Comparative Study of IDPS in Oromia and Tigray

Protocol Title	PhD Dissertation Project (Community Engagement in Emergency School Feeding: A Comparative Study of IDPS in Oromia and Tigray)
Protocol Number	CEBS_IRB-CCEPS_0014/03/2024
Principal Investigator	Samuel Asseke Wolla
Institute	Center for Comparative Education and Policy Studies
Study Site(s)	Jimma (Oromia) and Mekele (Tigray)
Decision	All ethical standards are found to be met, hence, the Center Ethical Review Committee has approved this research project.
Date the approval was issued	March 20, 2024
Expiry of this approved certificate (Not exceeding 2 years)	Valid for two years

Additional notes (if any) to the PI:
 CCEPS has established that this research fulfills all ethical requirements to be conducted in the selected sites.

Remark: (Information on what has to be followed after approval)

- Data collection will be conducted following the approval.
- As the study is in an affected area and involves vulnerable people as IDPs and children, data explicit means should be taken than those generally practiced in the standard.

Signature:  Signature: 
 Date: 3/20/2024 Date: _____
 For Academic Unit Head/Graduate program coordinator For CEBS-IRB

Map of the Study Location in Tigray and Oromia, Ethiopia

