

APRIL 2020

# The Politics of Information and Analysis in Humanitarian Emergencies

## Evidence from Ethiopia

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A FEINSTEIN INTERNATIONAL CENTER PUBLICATION 

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RESEARCH FUND

Cover photo: Rose Shenk

Citation: Daniel Maxwell, Lindsay Spainhour Baker, and Peter Hailey. "The Politics of Information and Analysis in Humanitarian Emergencies: Evidence from Ethiopia." Boston: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2020.

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This study was funded by UK aid from the Department for International Development through the East Africa Research Fund.

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# Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the financial support of the DFID East Africa Research Fund (EARF) for this study, the Feinstein International Center and the Centre for Humanitarian Change for their logistical support, and the efforts of two external reviewers for their feedback. We are grateful to Joyce Maxwell for copy editing.

This document is an output from a project funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) through the Research for Evidence Division (RED) for the benefit of developing countries. However, the views expressed and information contained in it are not necessarily those of or endorsed by DFID, which can accept no responsibility for such views or information or for any reliance placed on them.

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April 2020



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# Acronyms

<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Corporation
<b>BRE</b>	Building Resilience in Ethiopia
<b>DPPC</b>	Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Commission
<b>DTM</b>	displacement tracking mechanism
<b>ENCU</b>	Emergency Nutrition Coordination Unit
<b>EPRDF</b>	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
<b>EW</b>	early warning
<b>EW/EA</b>	early warning/early action
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>FEWS NET</b>	Famine Early Warning Network
<b>FSNMS</b>	Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring Survey
<b>HANCI</b>	Hunger and Nutrition Commitment Index
<b>HEA</b>	household economy analysis
<b>HNO</b>	Humanitarian Needs Overview
<b>HRP</b>	Humanitarian Response Plan
<b>IDP</b>	internally displaced person
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization on Migration
<b>IPC</b>	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
<b>JEOP</b>	Joint Emergency Operation
<b>LEAP</b>	livelihoods, early assessment, and protection
<b>LIAS</b>	livelihoods impact analysis sheet
<b>NDRMC</b>	National Disaster Risk Management Commission
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>PHEM</b>	Public Health Emergency Management
<b>PRIME</b>	Pastoralist Areas Resilience Improvement and Market Expansion
<b>PSNP</b>	Productive Safety Net Programme
<b>RRC</b>	Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
<b>SMART</b>	Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions
<b>SNNPR</b>	Southern Nations and Nationalities People's Region
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNOCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>USAID</b>	US Agency for International Development
<b>WASH</b>	water, sanitation, and hygiene
<b>WRSI</b>	Water Requirement Satisfaction Index
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme

# 1. Introduction

This study examines the availability and quality of information and the complexities and constraints of analysis for food security and nutrition emergency information systems in Ethiopia. Four main questions drive the research: The first is about the availability and quality of data, chronic “gaps” in data, and *why* those gaps persist. The second is about the constraints or influences on information collection and analysis of humanitarian emergencies. The third is about the way in which missing or unreliable information is managed and the impact of missing information. And the fourth is about processes for information management, and how influences on collecting and analyzing information that predict severe humanitarian emergencies are managed, and documenting the good practices that emerge.

This report provides a brief summary of the recent history of famine/food-security crises in Ethiopia and how information impacted these different crises, followed by a review of the humanitarian information and analysis processes specific to Ethiopia. Thereafter, the responses from 37 key informants to the above research questions are analyzed and categorized with regard to data challenges, analytical challenges, or influences on humanitarian analysis in Ethiopia. Following the analysis, the report documents lessons learned and offers recommendations for ways to improve humanitarian food-security and nutrition data collection and analysis in Ethiopia.

## 2. Uses of information in recent food-security crises

In 1984–85, Ethiopia was famously the scene of a major famine that formed a generation’s view of what constituted famine and what famine looked like. A smaller famine hit eastern Ethiopia in 1999–2000, and substantial food-security crises were contained at a degree of severity short of famine in 2002–03, 2005–06, 2007–08, 2011 and 2015–16 and 2016–17 (Lautze and Maxwell 2007, Desportes et al. 2019, Diriba et al. 2019).

The famine of 1984–85 was largely kept out of view by the Derg<sup>1</sup> because it coincided with the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the overthrow of Haile Selassie (Desportes et al. 2019, Burg 2008). The reason for this was clearly political: the famine of 1972–74 was the triggering event (if not the underlying cause) for the overthrow of the Haile Selassie government. The Derg was very aware of the political consequences of failing to prevent famine, so kept it out of the public eye as much as possible. News of the 1984 famine only came to the attention of the world when a BBC team came across famine camps in Korem (Michael Buerk and Mohamed Amin were actually on a different assignment at the time, “discovering” the famine somewhat by accident).

While drought exacerbated by seasonal hunger is widely considered to be the primary drivers of widespread food insecurity, conflict and government policy played major roles in the 1984 famine. A retrospective analysis of the 1984 famine shows clear signs that some kinds of information were suppressed—particularly information about conflict (Vaux 2001), but also about forced migration and the extent of the crisis itself (Clay and Holcomb 1985). While drought was again a major driver, some of the more insecure areas of the country were affected in 2005–06, 2011, and 2015 (Desportes et al. 2019).

Ethiopia under the emperor was an authoritarian state and under the Derg was a dictatorship. Tight control over information was a given. Under the

<sup>1</sup> The Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia which ruled the country from 1974 to 1987.

EPRDF government, a self-avowedly “developmentalist” state (Dejene and Cochrane 2019), information systems opened up somewhat, but continue to be regulated. Former Prime Minister Meles Zenawi noted that a developmentalist state has several characteristics: it should make use of, but must be autonomous from, the private sector (highlighting the primacy of government-led development); it must “pursue accelerated economic growth as its absolute and overriding priority” (highlighting growth as survival); and development is the “hegemonic ideal.” The norms and values of society are based on growth—everything else is subjugated to economic growth, and economic growth will pull the population out of poverty (de Waal 2018, p. 2). Each of these has consequences for the independent analysis of famine and food-security crises: it is unlikely that such a perspective has space for a discussion of famine or extreme food insecurity, as admission of their existence would fundamentally undermine the dominant narrative of developmentalism.

While the government was entirely responsible for attempting to conceal the 1984–85 famine, the tug of war over the interpretation (and public perception) of the 1999–2000 crisis, was largely between humanitarian analysts and agencies. For example, some humanitarian analysts reported clear indications of famine conditions prevailing in the immediate area around Gode, in Somali region, but extrapolated this evidence to areas that had not been assessed in as much depth (Salama et al. 2001), leading to a charge by others that they were exaggerating the situation to make it seem worse than it actually was (Lautze and Raven-Roberts 2004). At the same time, others saw strong indications that the Ethiopian government willfully allowed this crisis to “run its full course,” deliberately deciding not to intervene and therefore committing a serious violation of human rights (Khalif and Doornbos 2002).

These are a few examples of how the politics of famine influence both the international community and the Ethiopian government—and the responses of both can often be calibrated in political as well as hu-



manitarian terms. This was evident in the difference in international response between the 1999–2000 crisis and the 2002–03 crisis. In 1999, donors were unhappy with Ethiopia over the war with Eritrea, which they saw as drawing resources away from responding to famine at home. The timeliness and scale for the response were quicker and more effective in 2002–03 when Ethiopia was seen as a key ally to Western security concerns in the Horn of Africa (Lautze and Maxwell 2007).

# 3. Humanitarian information and analysis

Ethiopia has an established national food-security information system that provides data to construct the annual humanitarian response, and since 2006 the information system has been linked first and foremost to the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP).<sup>2</sup> The national food security information system—first led by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission under the Derg, then by the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Commission under the early EPRDF government, and now by the National Disaster Risk Management Commission (NDRMC)—has overall responsibility for information and action even though numerous other early warning systems exist, operated by NGOs or other actors (Dreschler and Soer 2016). The NDRMC oversees both the information system and the emergency response capacity; the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development operates the Productive Safety Net Program (Cochrane and Tamiru 2016). As such, the NDRMC houses both the analysis wing and emergency response wing of the Ethiopian government. This is not unusual for a national disaster management agency, but to some observers, it immediately raises questions about the separation between information and response as well as the independence of information and analysis (Cochrane and Tamiru 2016). The NDRMC has multiple partners in humanitarian information systems, including UNOCHA, FAO, FEWS NET, the World Bank Global Fund for Disaster Risk Reduction, WFP, Save the Children, and many more agencies.

Several systems exist for food-security, nutrition, and health information and analysis in Ethiopia. These include, but are not limited to, the Livelihoods, Early Assessment, and Protection (LEAP) tool, the Livelihood Impact Analysis Sheet (LIAS), and the Public Health Emergency Management

<sup>2</sup> Note: Parts of this section are abstracted from a separate report detailing the workings of the food security and nutrition information systems in East Africa (Maxwell and Hailey 2020).

(PHEM) system. LEAP is a combined index based on drought indicators, such as planting date, rainfall, and the Water Requirement Satisfaction Index (WRSI), and their impact on crop production. This index can calculate crop yield reduction in the event of drought, which is the dominant threat to food insecurity in Ethiopia. The LEAP data is used in combination with market and price information to calculate beneficiary numbers for food assistance programs under the national Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). However, a World Bank policy research paper noted that a limitation of LEAP is “in the use of subjective information in the calculation of beneficiary numbers” (Dreschler and Soer 2016, p. 12). The LIAS was developed in Ethiopia (Dreschler and Soer 2016) and serves as an input to HEA outcome analysis. This tool is used, as well, to calculate beneficiary requirements and numbers. The health sector in Ethiopia has the Public Health Emergency Management (PHEM) system, which regularly monitors non-epidemic morbidities and malnutrition but is primarily focused on epidemic information and the response system to those epidemics. The Emergency Nutrition Coordination Unit (ENCU) supervises SMART surveys, which add quantitative nutrition information. However, these nutrition surveys are only conducted in a limited number of *woredas* (districts), with the same areas re-surveyed year after year. The process of publishing the reports reportedly takes a very long time, making the information less useful when it finally comes out. Along with the major seasonal (*meher* and *belg*, the long and short rains) food-security assessments, the above-mentioned tools are the major cornerstones of what has become the early warning and current-assessment information system in Ethiopia.

A major partner in the Ethiopian humanitarian information system is FEWS NET, which uses an IPC-compatible process to classify the current and predicted food-security status in Ethiopia. Although the FEWS NET analysis is not immediately linked

to any early action mechanism, it informs USAID's response through the PSNP and Joint Emergency Operation (JEOP).<sup>3</sup>

A number of NGO-led local information systems operate ostensibly alongside the national system and feed into it. Much of the residual capacity for household economy analysis (HEA) is with Save the Children—although much of it was built up by USAID projects in the 2000s. JEOP also has its own information system, as does Oxfam and a number of other NGOs.

In 2018, the IPC system was introduced in addition to all the existing systems, and an IPC Technical Working Group was established in Ethiopia.<sup>4</sup> An FSNMS-style survey was conducted in Ethiopia in 2019 for the first nationwide IPC analysis (IPC Partners 2019a).

DFID invests in a Building Resilience in Ethiopia (BRE) program which seeks to deliver technical assistance to the government for delivery of a more effective response to climate and humanitarian shocks while delivering food and cash to people in humanitarian need.

## Discussion

Evidence indicates that the existing EW/EA systems in Ethiopia function adequately to activate life-saving responses (see below). The early warning system led by NDRMC activated interventions that avoided famine in both 2011 and 2016–17. For example, during the crisis in 2011 that affected Ethiopia and was one of the causes of famine in Somalia, the PSNP was able to scale up to meet the needs of three million additional recipients and avoid the fate of Somalis across the border (World Bank 2019). This safety net program has been documented as an effective and more efficient response to both chronic and transitory food insecurity in Ethiopia than the previous methods of treating

<sup>3</sup> A consortium of NGOs known as the Joint Emergency Operation (JEOP) operating a Food for Peace-funded emergency food-security program.

<sup>4</sup> IPC had been introduced earlier on a pilot basis in some regions, but was not successfully adopted. For details on IPC analysis see IPC Partners (2019b).

all food insecurity as a humanitarian case load (IFRC 2019). Another example is the Mercy Corps-led Pastoralist Areas Resilience Improvement and Market Expansion (PRIME) project operating in 54 *woredas* (districts) of the Oromia, Somali and Afar Regions that was able to introduce livelihoods-protecting interventions that enhanced household resilience to drought and mitigated the effects of the 2015–16 crisis (Smith et al. 2018). Choularton and Krishnamurthy (2019) analyzed the accuracy of FEWS NET forecasts for Ethiopia between 2011 and 2017 in terms of food-security outcomes by IPC classification. They found that 78 percent of the time, predictions matched subsequent assessment of food-security outcomes, with approximately half of the errors classified as “false pessimism” (actual outcomes are better than the predicted FEWS NET forecasts) and half classified as “false optimism” (actual outcomes are worse than predicted forecasts). More importantly, in some parts of the country, such as the pastoral lowlands, they found that the prediction of transitions from IPC Phase 2 to Phase 3 (indicative of the onset of a crisis) was highly accurate. But, only about half were predicted accurately in the more densely populated and highly vulnerable SNNPR Region, implying significant geographic variability in accuracy. Even though Choularton and Krishnamurthy did not judge whether avoiding false pessimism or avoiding false optimism is preferable, there are clear trade-offs to be made in trying to prevent one or the other.

Nevertheless, some major concerns and confusion surround the humanitarian information systems in Ethiopia. Ethiopia has over 800 *woredas* nationwide, and with the number of tools (HEA, LEAP, LIAS, IPC, SMART, and the seasonal assessments) and actors (NDRMC, WFP, FAO, UNICEF, ENCU, the cluster system, FEWS NET, Save the Children, and a number of other NGOs), the complexity of the information systems are reported as overwhelming. There are at least 20 major actors in the EW/EA space of Ethiopia, with many stakeholders starting their own system since about 2012 (019, 023).<sup>5</sup> The competition between actors and processes is still increasing. The World Bank is advocating for a major assessment and possible reconfiguration of EW/EA systems in

<sup>5</sup> Numbers in parentheses refer to key informant interviews, numbered sequentially.

Ethiopia, building on LEAP and LIAS but recognizing some of the shortcomings of the current system (World Bank 2019).<sup>6</sup>

The number of people in need of assistance is probably the most politically sensitive issue in humanitarian analysis in Ethiopia (Burg 2008) as demonstrated by a significant controversy over the number of people affected in both the 2000 and 2003 crises. This controversy continues in Ethiopia because the “population in need” numbers come out of a technical assessment process, so the results are deemed to be independent and obtained through rigorous methods: “The politics embedded in and enacted by famine early warning systems thus become masked as technical operations” (Burg 2008, p. 6). The interplay of the political and the technical and the way in which the former shapes the latter is a theme that emerges time and again in Ethiopia. “Thus, objectivity derives from several different conditions but generally has to do with how far removed the information source or methodology is from the possibility of political manipulation” (Burg 2008, p. 239).

The issues with calculating beneficiary numbers and the perception of the “subjective” nature of the calculation indicates an extensive problem with information systems in Ethiopia. Given the heavy dependence on extrapolation, human judgement, and consensus building to come up with needs and numbers, the process is subject to considerable political influence. Several key informants noted this issue as particularly noteworthy in Ethiopia, and it is discussed in some of the World Bank documentation (World Bank 2019). It is also highlighted in the evaluation of the Global Strategic Plan for IPC analysis (Buchanan-Smith et al. 2019). However, the “subjective” perception of these calculations cannot be attributed solely to political influence; it is also due to a deficiency of standardized and documented practices for incorporating qualitative information into systems that tend to be dominated by quantitative methods. The lack of validated methods for using qualitative information has contributed to the analytical judgment by human analysts, rather than analysis by machine algorithm to be labeled as “subjective.”

<sup>6</sup> The World Bank 2019 paper identifies mostly technical constraints as shortcomings in the current EW/EA systems, but also notes political influences within the existing systems.

Limited independence of information and analysis in Ethiopia is a challenge highlighted by Desportes et al. (2019). They note that a self-avowed developmental state, such as Ethiopia, relies heavily on the perception of a state-led response system, leaving little space for other humanitarian actors to justify the need for their presence, specifically regarding disaster management. As a result, information from other sources can be ignored or suppressed. They refer to Goffman’s (1959) metaphor of “front stage” and “back stage” to differentiate between the official (“front-stage”) version of information and action and a more nuanced, but hidden, version that remains privy only to the holder of the information but offers a more realistic version of the situation (the “back stage”). In addition to the constraints on independence faced by international and national non-governmental organizations, a key finding of their work was that “the main challenge identified by respondents in the backstage area was *not logistics but information*—the lack of it, its distortion and its political use” (Desportes et al. 2019, p. 49, emphasis added).

The implication for information bears out in several perspectives on information and analysis: There is an official version that includes production statistics, current status of populations, numbers in need, and projections for the immediate future. There is another that more accurately reflects reality, but which cannot be spoken about publicly (Haan et al. 2006). Darcy et al. (2013) note, “The reality of the situation in Ethiopia is that the final figures [for population in need] have as much to do with a political balancing act as they have to do with needs assessment.” Analyzing the response to the 2015 crisis that affected much of Eastern Ethiopia, Sethi (2018) notes that the EPRDF government was obliged to simultaneously announce that the situation was under control while also appealing for nearly \$1.4 billion of external assistance to feed nearly 10.4 million people.

An ECHO evaluation of the information systems and the response to the Horn of Africa drought in 2016–17 was critical of both the slowness of the response in Ethiopia and the extent to which the information system was politicized (Grunewald et al. 2019). Information was available, but control was exerted over when information could be released and what information could be shared. The information system in Ethiopia depended on too many trailing indicators (malnu-

trition or harvest data)<sup>7</sup> rather than forecasts or the onset of rains; the data processing system was slow; and the process was politicized—with different actors at different levels downplaying or inflating the figures (Grunewald et al. 2019). The report describes an “unofficial” early warning system in Ethiopia that keeps independent records, passes information by word of mouth, and keeps key actors (especially international donors) up to date with the “unofficial” figures.

An underlying theme in much of the literature on contemporary Ethiopia is that the major hazard to food insecurity—or the major driver of potential famine—is drought (Vaux 2001, Lautze and Maxwell 2007, Diriba et al. 2019). Ethiopia’s information systems are built on that understanding. There is certainly good reason for being concerned about drought in Ethiopia, but every major crisis in Ethiopia in recent times has had multiple causes, and indeed at the moment, while no militarized conflict is occurring at the national level, there is reason to be concerned about localized conflict as much as drought, in terms of driving displacement—and consequently food insecurity—with some 2.1 million people internally displaced (IDMC, 2020). Experience from other countries suggests that the analysis of famine or extreme food and nutrition insecurity is difficult under circumstances driven mostly by natural hazards; it becomes much more fraught when conflict is a major driver. The existing information systems in Ethiopia are ill-equipped to analyze conflict—and the government-led system is less able to address it.

A number of NGO-led, localized EW systems operate alongside the national system and are intended to feed into it. In addition, information is fed up through the system of local government from the *kebele* to the *woreda*, the zone and the region, but whether that information is fed back to the local level is not always clear, through either NGO or government-led systems, leading to a lack of good information at the local level. Building up this capacity—and building the two-way flow of information—remains a challenge.

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<sup>7</sup> While many observers, such as Grunewald et al. (2019) label prevalence of malnutrition as a trailing indicator, many nutritionists disagree, noting that an increase in the prevalence of malnutrition is the trigger for many programs and, in addition, is picked up before other EW signals.

While much has changed over time in Ethiopia, much has remained the same. In 2016, Dugo and Eisen wrote about control over the media in times of famine, noting that “Mengistu did not wish to acknowledge the existence of a very embarrassing famine that would show, in this case, the failure of a decade of Marxist ideology” (p. 336). They go on to suggest that 30 years on, their research shows “why Ethiopian media have been so tightly controlled. As time passed, the elites learned to lend an aura of legality to justify media blackouts” in the pursuit of controlling information and public perceptions of crises (p. 346). In this case, they are talking about the public media, not specifically humanitarian information systems. But the point they make is that the same political interests are applicable to both: famine in the time of the Derg was a failure of Marxist ideology; famine in the twenty-first century is a failure of developmental ideology. Vaux (2001) makes the same point with regard to international agencies’ ideology in the run-up to the 1984–85 famine: agencies had developmental objectives and the advent of famine completely undermined them—and obvious information about the famine was ignored for far too long into the crisis.

A comprehensive review of Ethiopian agriculture and food security by a group of senior, independent Ethiopian analysts concludes that “the numbers for emergency beneficiaries and food and non-food requirements are decided on the basis of seasonal emergency food and non-food needs assessments, and mainly finalized in discussions between government and multi-agency assessment teams, drawn from government sector offices and development partners. This situation is open to wide-ranging bias and inflated humanitarian requirements at all administrative levels” (Diriba et al. 2019). The report concludes, much like earlier reviews, that the system works well enough to keep the safety net and emergency food programs supplied with sufficient information to operate, but it does not operate independently and is influenced by politics at many levels.

With shifting demands on the system—and new drivers of food insecurity, particularly localized or even inter-regional political conflict—pressure builds for consolidation and improvements to the humanitarian information system as well as stronger government leadership. In addition, capacity needs to be built to restore some of what has been lost over the years.

# 4. Methodological note

This study is one in a series of comparative case studies examining the availability and quality of information and the complexities and constraints of analysis. Case studies already completed include four currently famine-affected or at-risk countries: Somalia, South Sudan, Nigeria, and Yemen.<sup>8</sup> The current study expands the cases to include Ethiopia and Kenya.

This report synthesizes information from a comprehensive desk review and key-informant interviews. First, a Tufts team conducted a review of the literature on crisis in Ethiopia. Second, a team from the Feinstein International Center and the Centre for Humanitarian Change conducted interviews, mostly via Skype, with respondents who oversee or are directly involved in the humanitarian information and analysis system, including from the donor community, UN agencies, international and local non-governmental organizations, and former officials of the Government of Ethiopia. A limitation of the study is that, despite multiple attempts, and even a letter from DFID saying that they had commissioned the study, no current government officials responded to our requests for interviews.<sup>9</sup> Instead the research team resorted to interviewing former government officials.

During the interviews, inquiries were made regarding the technical aspects of the data collection and analysis process to attempt to identify potential gaps in data or analysis as well as key influences on the process. These key informant interviews were conducted in November and December 2019.

For all key informant interviews, respondents were identified purposively, either on the basis of their

<sup>8</sup> Reports from the already completed case studies (Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen) can be found on the Feinstein International Center website: <http://fic.tufts.edu/research-item/the-constraints-and-complexities-of-information-and-analysis/>.

<sup>9</sup> It is, of course, the right of all potential respondents to a research study to decline to be interviewed. After three attempts, and confirming that we had the preferred respondents correct email address, we did not pursue prospective interviewees any further.

positions and engagements with the data collection or analysis processes, or via snowball sampling based on earlier interviews. In person and by Skype or telephone, the team conducted 28 interviews with a total of 37 individuals. During each interview, detailed field notes were taken, noting phrases and terminology used by respondents to capture their narrative. Questions were open-ended to avoid leading respondents to particular responses.

Interview notes were coded with an iterative coding approach that was developed both deductively from study instruments and inductively from interview transcripts themselves. Emergent themes were then used to draft the initial outline of this report, with coded information categorized and synthesized accordingly. The Tufts University Social, Behavioral, and Educational Research Institutional Review Board granted clearance for the overall research program on May 31, 2017, renewed on May 25, 2018, and again on May 24, 2019.

Sources in the analysis below are noted by reference to an interview number in parentheses. All interviews were conducted on the basis of anonymity of respondents, and no interview respondents or their respective agencies are identified in the report.

This study is not (and was not intended to be) an evaluation of the humanitarian information system in Ethiopia, the NDRMC, the attempts currently underway to reform or reconstitute the system, or the application of IPC protocols to Ethiopia. It is a specific study based on the questions outlined above and motivated by the need for humanitarian response to be based on the most rigorous and most independent analysis possible. In addition, in all of the country case studies about the political influences on data collection and analysis conducted to date, the finding has been that the influences are greatest where technical processes and capacities are weakest. So this study investigates these weaknesses as carefully as possible.

# 5. Data challenges

Issues arose with both the collection of data and the analysis of that data. The two are organized in different sections below. In terms of data, issues were raised about quality and timeliness, missing or limited data, the loss of technical capacity in some of the long-standing information systems, and the high degree of competition and overlap in the food-security information systems in Ethiopia.

## Data quality and timeliness

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There are multiple different data collection and analysis systems in Ethiopia, meaning that a lot of information exists about food security—both in terms of current status and early warning. The information generated by different systems sometimes has rather different implications. And concerns were raised about the timeliness (007, 011, 017, 019, 020) and quality (08, 011, 017, 018, 020) of some of the information. The availability of data is often delayed, meaning that resource allocation decisions are made on the basis of outdated information or “best estimates” (007, 017).

Deadlines for data collection and reporting are caught between the logical seasonality of food-security status in Ethiopia and donor deadlines for funding or appeals (005, 007, 020). Given the nature of the way in which information is compiled and amalgamated at different levels, early warning information often only becomes available rather late (010).

A number of observations were made about the length of time it took for the Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) information to come out in 2019 (013, 022). This is probably an unfair judgment since it was the first time that such a large IPC-type survey was run at scale in Ethiopia and the first time this type of analysis was conducted. A related timing concern with regard to a major standardized survey like the IPC is that it has to take into account multiple fasting seasons depending on the religious community (Islamic or Orthodox Christian) being surveyed,

as such timing can skew food-security findings (013, 016). This has been noted by the IPC team.

Other issues relate to data quality concerns. Many indicators are not standardized (006, 007). Ethiopia has used a different standard for severe acute malnutrition as measured by mid-upper arm circumference or MUAC (002, 020) although this was under review at the time of writing and may change in 2020. The quality of data received differs according to area, with one respondent stating specifically that the lowland pastoral areas have extremely limited capacity with regards to data collection (021). It is not always clear how the quality of datasets received are taken into consideration in comparative analysis.

## Missing or limited data

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Many key informants worried about the extent to which some information was either missing or very limited in its coverage (005, 008, 009, 011, 020). While screening data is widely available for nutritional status, information on nutrition status that meets international standards is extremely limited—only 20 SMART surveys are conducted each year in a country of over 100 million people (008, 011, 020). SMART surveys serve as the backbone of nutritional analysis in other countries facing high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition, so this is a significant gap. Nutrition information was gathered by the IPC survey but was deemed unreliable and not used in the analysis (012).

As noted earlier, no food-security outcome indicators were collected at scale in Ethiopia until the IPC survey in 2019 (006, 012). The IPC survey collected MUAC data but the quality of the data was so poor that it was not used. Information on other sectors (WASH, health) is not well developed, and existing information is sometimes not used (005, 028). Other gaps include updated information on population (007, 008, 013, 018, 026) and livestock and milk production (006, 017), with the exception of specialized surveys. The lack of updated popula-

tion information is especially problematic because assessment data is turned into actual numbers of people in need by applying prevalence estimates to total population figures—if the latter is contested or in doubt, very different estimates emerge for population in need. The lack of good information on livestock and milk production makes food-security estimation in pastoral areas more difficult, underlining the point above about the differing quality of data received from the highlands as compared to the pastoral lowlands.

In addition to questions about population figures, those for population movement—especially internally displaced people (IDPs)—have been a major constraint (005, 007, 022, 025). Displacement levels were estimated to be 2.1 million people as of early 2020, meaning Ethiopia has one of the largest numbers of IDPs in the world (IFRC 2019). While overall estimates of the total number of displaced are available, detailed information on who has been displaced, where, and when is often not available to actors on the ground, although the Displacement Tracking Mechanism (DTM) of the IOM is now able to visit some, but not all, IDP sites (005). The NDRMC has the mandate to respond to all humanitarian needs, and the institutional arrangement of putting the NDRMC in the Ministry of Peace (rather than Agriculture and Rural Development where it had previously been) should have enabled it to respond to the displacement crisis more nimbly, but views were mixed as to whether it had.

The lack of population displacement figures is linked to the fact that good information on local conflict is often not available—either in terms of systematic monitoring or early warning information (005, 011, 025). This is partly the legacy of the fact that drought and crop failure have long been perceived as the major threats to food security in Ethiopia, hence the heavy emphasis on indicators of rainfall and pest infestations as the major hazards to be monitored. Other hazards, such as flooding and conflict, are not nearly as well monitored as drought. The Stakeholders Workshop Proceedings (Kimetrica 2019)<sup>10</sup> lists

<sup>10</sup> Kimetrica undertook an evaluation of the early warning and food security information system in Ethiopia in 2019. Their report is not yet out, but the proceedings of the workshop held in Addis Ababa on October 9–10, 2019, give a fair sense of its findings.

data categories that need to be improved—including poverty and food security, climate and weather, crop production, livestock, prices and nutrition—but doesn't mention information (either current status or early warning) regarding mortality, conflict, or internal displacement.

## Technical capacity

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A number of key informants noted that much of the technical capacity within the food-security and nutrition information systems of Ethiopia—particularly the government-led system—has been lost (001, 002, 006, 008, 016, 024). Many senior analysts or administrators within the system that metamorphosed from the RRC to the DPPC to the NDRMC have now retired, and many of the younger generation that might have replaced them have instead joined the ranks of international organizations and now work outside the country. Technical capacity now tends to be at the sub-national (regional) level, and may be somewhat more locally biased (014). Scope exists for the greater usage of remote sensing data or other forms of publicly available information, but often not the technical capacity.

## Competition and data sharing

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By far the most common observation from nearly all respondents is that too much competition exists in the information systems (001, 002, 003, 004, 007, 009, 010, 013, 014, 018, 022, 023). Some observers noted at least 20 different systems or approaches to food-security information in Ethiopia (004, Kimetrica 2019), some suggested even more. Competition exists within government departments, between government and external actors, and even between donors (001, 003). Each new actor entering the field perceives this problem and believes that their system can address the issue, but in many ways instead adds to the problem (003, 004, 016, 019). Recent efforts have been made by the World Bank to consolidate information systems, reduce competition, and consolidate information and practices, but this is very much a work in progress (010, 017).



The IPC was introduced in Ethiopia on a pilot basis in 2018, and a large-scale survey provided the basis for the analysis. The survey was not nationwide, but it covered all the chronically vulnerable areas of the country (012, 016). Most observers welcomed this, as for the first time, standard food-consumption-outcome indicators were available—which had been lacking under prevailing information collection practices in Ethiopia. At face value, one reason for introducing IPC was to allow competing information systems to contribute to an analysis process. However, to some stakeholders, the introduction of IPC compounded the competition problem, particularly vis-à-vis the well-established systems in Ethiopia, including HEA (003, 016, 019, 022). The IPC process disallowed some NGO data because it did not meet IPC-specified requirements (013).

While the introduction of IPC was at the invitation of NDRMC, many stakeholders observed this had

as much to do with budgetary resources as with attempts to resolve the question of food-security data (013, 015, 017). Whether those interpretations were correct or not, they underline the observation that the “competition problem” remains unresolved and the community of practice divided over the best approaches and how to collaborate. And where disagreements arose over the data or its interpretation, the process for resolving disagreements was not clear to some donors—leaving them once again in the position of making decisions on their own best estimates of the problem (007).

In the meantime, data sharing is problematic. Sharing reports or conclusions is routine practice, but data sharing is considered “too sensitive” by many actors (010, 021). Issues related to the sharing of raw data arose in nearly every case undertaken in this study.

# 6. Analytical challenges

Several challenges relate more to the analysis of the data rather than simply its collection. Some major analytical procedures have recently been changed to address some issues that had been recurrent in recent years. All of these are outlined below.

The loss of technical capacity affects analysis as well—that is, it is not just a data collection concern. All the issues mentioned above under data concerns apply to analytical capacity as well.

## Two sets of books

A large proportion of key informants interviewed indicated a deep level of mistrust with the outputs of analysis and acknowledge that they effectively have to work not only with the official analysis—the estimated crop production, the number of people in need, the “hotspots” etc.—but they also maintain their own estimates of the same information, a phenomenon frequently labeled by informants of having “two sets of books” (005, 006, 007, 010, 011, 013, 014, 018, 027, 028). This is compounded by the multiple sources of information, but it is not just a technical problem—it relates at least as much to fears that the outputs of analysis are being manipulated for one reason or another (and the reasons vary—see below). In any case, each decision-maker is making choices on the basis of information that he or she may be collecting, but consensus does not necessarily drive all decision-making. Again, attempts are being made to address this, but the level of mistrust of “official” information is such that the practice of “two sets of books” is unlikely to end any time soon.

## Consensus-driven process

Related to the “two sets of books” issue is the lack of a clear, consensus-driven process. In other case studies, this has been termed “the loudest voice in the room” in which one or two dominant actors

control the analytical process, including the conclusions (006). This problem is not unique to Ethiopia (Maxwell et al. 2018, Buchanan-Smith et al. 2019). However, in Ethiopia this is compounded by the fact that some of the analysis processes are not linked up with each other. So there is both the “loudest voice” problem and the problem of multiple analyses. The introduction of the IPC was in part intended to address this (012, 016), but unfortunately in some ways it compounded the problem, because of conflicting outputs and timelines with HEA (006, 012, 014, 017). IPC and FEWS NET use the same classification protocols but don’t necessarily come to the same analytical outputs (006). This all reinforces the tendencies of many users of information and analysis to keep their own information, cross check their sources independently, and base their decisions on their own conclusions.

## Analytical outputs

Just as there is some mistrust of the data, there is some mistrust and confusion over the outputs of analysis. One component of this confusion is understanding clearly the difference between the current-status numbers, the expected (projected) numbers, and the outputs of early warning that are not projected numbers (002, 003, 006, 017). As noted above, many times early warning of developing hazards is downplayed in favor of simply estimating the expected number of people who will need assistance (the latter of course is subject to change based on the former!). The formal output of the government-led early warning system is “hotspot classification,” but some observers complained that the identification of hotspots was not systematic, and the information is not available in a timely enough manner to allow for mitigation activities (010). Others suggested that an informal “quota” of hotspot *woredas* exists in order to distribute them “fairly” among different regions.

A second concern is around targeting—specifically, who is targeted and why (003, 015). Some observers

have noted that the numbers targeted don't seem to change in the event of a major acknowledged shock, leading to worries of either inclusion errors in the pre-shock period, or exclusion errors in the post-shock period—it isn't clear which. Part of the issue is that the controversy over the question of transitory versus chronic food insecurity is still not resolved (005, 016). It would be expected that in a post-shock period, the number of people in transitory food insecurity would rise, but the number of chronically food insecure would remain about the same. But the numbers don't necessarily reflect this.

Analysis and reporting are driven more by bureaucratic deadlines than by need or drivers such as seasonality or outbreak of localized conflict (006, 007). Pressure for figures to be released before analysis is complete is driven by global deadlines like the global Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNO). IPC analysis dated July 2019 was not actually released until November, but again, this was at least partly due to teething problems with the first large-scale IPC analysis undertaken. This process will speed up in future

analyses. The answer to both this problem and the lateness problem is the same—more timely collection and analysis of the data—but some observers argue that more flexibility regarding deadlines is needed as well, particularly around year-end when the main seasonal assessment is not completed but HNO figures are needed.

Finally, some confusion exists about hotspot classification and, specifically, about how hotspot *woredas* are identified. On the basis of what criteria are they identified? Several observers described the process as a “black box analysis” (004, 008, 011, 018, 020). The analytical process relies heavily on expert judgment, but how the judgments are made is often very unclear (020). Unfortunately the IPC analysis didn't address this problem: most of the *woredas* in the areas analyzed were classified the same (IPC Phase 3—see IPC Partners 2019a) meaning that it is impossible to see where the “hotspot” *woredas* are. But the basic problem is the lack of clarity of criteria and transparency in the analysis.

# 7. Influences on analysis

Issues about data in turn led to several issues with the analysis in Ethiopia, particularly regarding the extent to which the analysis was independent of any influences on the process.

Famine is a very sensitive word in Ethiopia—it is widely perceived to be linked the image of Ethiopia in the 1980s, which is both out of date and paternalistic. However, as a result, nearly all respondents noted that food-security and nutrition analysts have to be very careful about the politics. Portrayals of severe food insecurity that appear even slightly critical can lead to accusations against the agency issuing them (002). There are no truly independent actors in the information and analysis sector in Ethiopia—all have to work with the government system to one degree or another (003, 007, 024).

## Influences on the numbers

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Both under-reporting and over-reporting of the prevalence of food insecurity for political reasons was mentioned (003, 005, 006, 007, 014, 016, 017, 021). Stakeholders noted a “massively complex political economy” of food security—and the information on which food insecurity is analyzed—in Ethiopia. Different actors have different incentives to adjust the numbers at different levels. At zonal and woreda levels, figures are widely perceived to be inflated to attract resources (006, 007, 010, 014); at regional and national levels, figures may be reduced for other reasons, such as to present a picture of reductions in poverty or vulnerability (006, 007, 014).

Given the likelihood that numbers are changed at different levels, field-data-collection teams have been known to try to counteract these changes by adjusting their data based on how they perceive officials may increase or reduce the numbers (006, 007, 014). Because the response is often delayed, increasing the numbers in one cycle means that resources might be available at the beginning of the following cycle, even if the analysis—and the response—is late (007). But of course, much of this is speculation

by observers—it is very difficult to document such processes.

## Influences on the actors

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The consensus is that the national level actually has less power in this political economy of food security than do the regions, but the regions don’t necessarily all act the same way (024, 027). Saying anything different from the official (government) line is very difficult (005, 016, 020), and restrictions on NGOs—both national and international—are tight (020). The combination of the subjective calculation of numbers and the political influences in determining such numbers has resulted in substantial pressure to reconfigure the early warning/humanitarian information system in Ethiopia. However, the primary function of providing the requirements and number of projected beneficiaries has led to confusion about the role of assessments and early warning.

High-level political changes have proceeded apace in recent years, since the rise of Ahmed Abiy as prime minister. Information is less politicized now, but the “rules” are less certain. The upcoming elections (intended for August 2020, but now delayed) also makes things uncertain (007, 015). Systems still seem to be very “upward-facing”—towards the state—not “downwards-facing”—towards affected communities (019).

Quite apart from the national politics, several observers noted that “humanitarian actors are just as political as government” (015, 018). Many observers in 2019 saw the issue of relying on IPC data or relying on LEAP and LIAS data as a “very unnecessary conflict” (007, 012, 014, 015, 016, 017, 018). Most would see them as complementary forms of information, but observed that each system wants to incorporate the other. On the one hand, some observers fear that, with long-standing analytical tools like LIAS or outcome analysis, officials are sufficiently skilled that they know how to change the inputs to analysis (crop estimates, prices) to achieve

the outcomes they want (006, 015, 022). On the other, the fear is that recipients of assistance have been interviewed so many times that they also know how to “game” the system (019). However, this difference—reflective as it is of very different methods and assumptions—could be helpful in cross-checking and triangulating findings, but that was not the case reported in 2019.

Conflict displacement—at least on its current scale—is a relatively new factor. Analysis systems remain heavily oriented towards drought as the single most important shock. Government in many cases does not openly recognize the IDP problem (020). Thus

IDPs are downplayed or even ignored in some of the analysis. Those who try to bring up information about the IDP situation, particularly when their information is at odds with government information, have found themselves in very difficult circumstances—both with regard to their standing with government, and with principled responses to displaced communities (025). Conflict is mentioned as a contributing factor in the IPC report, but there is little analysis of the conflict in food-security analysis. Conflict information is not mentioned in the Stakeholders Workshop Proceedings at all.

# 8. Conclusions, lessons learned, and recommendations

## Conclusions

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All of this adds up to a couple of conclusions about the politics of information and analysis in Ethiopia. First, any information bearing a narrative of crisis—and especially of famine—is at odds with the ideology of a developmental state (and, to be fair, most other states). This creates an obstacle for independent information and analysis by a system that is deeply enmeshed with the political objectives of the state, and especially the government of the day. On the other hand, donors are supportive of the developmental objectives of the state and want information systems to be government-led. The literature review notes that under the EPRDF government, Ethiopia has been something of a “donor darling,” meaning that it has received preferential treatment, largely for political reasons (Teshome and Hoebink 2018). But key informants noted that this also means donors have been reluctant to openly challenge the Ethiopian government’s official version of statistics or events on the ground, which effectively leads to a fair amount of self-censorship on the part of donors and humanitarian agencies—both international and national (Desportes et al. 2019). The means of squaring this circle has been to double down on the “two sets of books” approach. But, while it may make data purists cringe, that approach seems to be working—in the sense of getting enough information to decision makers in time to enable an adequate response. However this works better in “normal” times than in times of severe crisis. External agencies have stepped up independent assessment in crisis times (FEWS NET 2017).

Second, the single piece of information most subject to substantial political influence is the number

of people in need. But the influences are heterogeneous: sometimes numbers are inflated and sometimes they are shrunk, and this depends entirely on local priorities and circumstances. There is no “formula” for taking official numbers and laundering them. This is not only for population-in-need figures, but for many other kinds of information—both developmental (production, markets) and humanitarian (needs, locations, duration, etc.). Given the lack of a formula, keeping “two sets of books” on this kind of information is more difficult.

Third, missing information can also be a major constraint, and this is particularly the case with regard to mortality, nutrition, and very often figures about population. For example, the Hunger and Nutrition Commitment Index (HANCI) compares some 45 chronically food insecure countries on 22 different indicators of their political commitment to reducing hunger and malnutrition. On this index, Ethiopia ranks thirty-second out of 45. It ranks much higher on most indicators but is dead last on its “civil registration system”—the system that keeps track of births, deaths, and therefore population (HANCI n.d.). Information about targeting is also highly political, but also often difficult to obtain. In an article aptly titled, “Development without Freedom,” Human Rights Watch (2010) noted that targeting—particularly of food aid—is much more a function of party membership than it is of need. While not all observers would make such a strong statement, the question of who gets assistance and who doesn’t, which is intended to be informed by information and evidence, is clearly subject to substantial political influence.

Finally, two issues frequently get conflated in Ethiopia: political influences on the one hand and the use of qualitative information and human analytical

judgement on the other.<sup>11</sup> The two overlap in this case, but should be separated. First, politics certainly influences quantitative processes too (Maxwell et al. 2018, Hailey et al. 2018). Second, irrespective of political influences, the use of qualitative information and human analytical judgment require better guidance. Differentiating political influence from the role of human analytical judgment is critical in these systems: the former is damaging; the latter is not only valuable, it is absolutely necessary. Ironically, the response is usually to ramp up (expensive!) quantitative data collection. To date little effort has been made to systematize the process of human analytical judgment—or the use of qualitative data or its incorporation into quantitative analysis-led processes.

## Lessons learned

Lessons learned that have to be acknowledged and dealt with can be broken down in terms of data concerns, analytical processes, and political influences.

*Data concerns.* Data concerns are mainly technical, but with implications for political influences. Technical capacity—for both data collection and analysis—is widely perceived to have declined in the government system in recent years as very senior leaders have retired and younger experts have left. Key informants expressed doubts about the quality and timeliness of the data, which open doors to the results being undermined or changed in some way. Quality issues lead to mistrust of the evidence or incomparable outcomes. Data that comes out too late means that decisions—especially resource-allocation decisions—have to be made on some other basis. This may be out-of-date information, or the “two sets of books” method. But they may also be made on the basis of political preference.

Missing or limited information is also an issue. Nutrition information is a critical component of the analysis, but nutrition information systems are outdated

<sup>11</sup> Note that “subjective data” (e.g., perceptions or preferences, which get used quantitatively all the time) is different from “subjective analysis” (e.g., humans figuring out how to weigh complicated bits of data that can’t be fed into an algorithm-driven model)—the latter is referred to here as “analytical judgement.”

and a very limited number of SMART surveys are conducted annually. Data on population, displacement, and conflict are all very sensitive or sometimes not available, and to bring up such information (or the lack of it) is a highly sensitive topic that some humanitarian analysts and agencies simply prefer to avoid.

But the major concern about data is the lack of cooperation and coordination among the many actors engaged in data collection and analysis. This situation is recognized, and some are attempting to address it, but there is still a long way to go. It is by no means clear that the issue can be resolved in the short-term.

*Analytical concerns.* Several concerns were also raised by this study with regard to the analysis of the data. The biggest of these is the so-called “two sets of books” issue, with one set being the “official” analysis (largely, but not entirely, summarized by the numbers of people and hotspots projected to be in need, currently and in the future) and the other set being the perceived “real” numbers (based on multiple sources and with some attempt to triangulate results). Not only does this reflect widespread mistrust in the “official” numbers, it also creates a situation in which there is disagreement and confusion about “real” figures.

Other issues noted relating to analysis include concerns about specific information products or outcomes. One is some confusion over what is specifically current status information, what are projections (forecasts of future-status numbers), and what is early warning (warning of impending hazards or risks and how those may affect needs). Another issue is concern about targeting information that results from seasonal assessments and early warning—and the fact that targeting seems to remain static even in the face of a major shock. Yet another issue is about deadline-driven analysis, or deadlines for resource allocation decisions that pass before analysis is completed. And a final issue is about the mechanism for identifying “hotspots.”

The “two sets of books” issue is both an indication of a problem and a sort-of solution. On the one hand, this phenomenon is a clear indication of mistrust of the information; on the other hand, it is the coping mechanism that everyone has come up with to coun-

terbalance the politicization of the official version of the numbers, and as such is enabling the system to continue functioning. The introduction of the IPC was an attempt to deal with this issue—it is too early to tell the results. This is related to the issue of (or the lack of) a consensus-driven process, which in turn is related to the issue noted above of multiple actors that don't cooperate or coordinate.

*Political influences.* All of these factors potentially open the door to, or reinforce, the tendency for information to be politicized. Food insecurity and malnutrition are very sensitive issues in Ethiopia, even though there has not been a confirmed case of famine for nearly 20 years. There are limits on the independence of data collection and analysis in Ethiopia, and a complex political economy of food results in information being tinkered with in different ways at different points in the system. Information and analysis agencies face difficulties in saying anything that differs from the official (government) line—even on relatively technical matters like drought or crop production, with issues of conflict and displacement being even more sensitive. When these tendencies are combined with declining technical capacity and a lot of competition among actors, the prospects for evidence-driven decision making in humanitarian response seem severely constrained.

However, high-level political changes in recent years portend the possibility of change in the humanitarian information sector, even if the current moment may not be the most propitious due to the upcoming elections. Examples remain of information being changed for political purposes, and the humanitarian community itself is divided on the best way to resolve not only the issue of political influences but indeed some of the more basic technical issues as well.

## Recommendations

Several recommendations grow out of the conclusions and lessons-learned analysis:

1. **Assess current capacity across the boards and rebuild capacity where required.** Most observers agree that technical capacity has declined, particularly at the national level, at a time when many different systems are competing

for attention. Rebuilding that capacity should be a government and donor priority. An additional priority should be to strengthen information-management groups and build a Nutrition Information Working Group.

2. **Come to grips with the “two sets of books” issue.** This was developed as a means of coping with unreliable or politicized information, but it is now a source of confusion. This can be partially addressed by better and less-politicized information, but its existence also has to be acknowledged by all actors. Donor coordination can make this more than a paper demand.
3. **Reduce complexity and competition.** Numerous systems compete for priority in the overall eco-system of humanitarian information in Ethiopia. Consolidating around a single analysis risks amplifying the “loudest voice in the room” problem, but an uncoordinated system with multiple actors competing for the ear of donors clearly causes problems as well. A completely independent information and analysis unit is probably not possible, so the following questions will have to be addressed by the humanitarian community, including government (at various levels), the UN, national and international NGOs, and specialized information systems now operating:
  - a. Can a joint effort by many parties produce an analysis that provides an accurate picture that is simpler and has checks on reliability and validity?
  - b. Do multiple actors (rather than a unified system) operate as a set of checks and balances or simply as multiple sources of “noise”? Can better use be made of existing information systems (LIAS, HEA) by IPC?
  - c. What kind of a balance is optimal?
  - d. Can a data-sharing protocol be developed?

The evidence suggests that all these questions can be addressed, but it will require a much more collaborative approach on the part of all partners.



4. **Ensure transparency of evidence.** Greater efforts need to be made to ensure that the evidence itself (not just the numbers that emerge from the process) are made available for public review. This includes making data sources public. Transparency and timeliness of information should be the hallmarks of a redesigned system.
5. **Incorporate lessons-learned exercises into every joint analysis effort.** Experience has shown that deliberate exercises to reflect on the quality of the data and the process of analysis have improved both the transparency and the accuracy of analyses.
6. **Verify data before analysis.** Ensuring the quality of data prior to analysis processes will ensure more reliable results. Again, the introduction of the IPC was an attempt to do this.
7. **Separate early warning from current status assessment.** Early warning information is needed on a continuous and very timely basis. Data from large-scale surveys require lengthy data-cleaning processes, but EW data should be simpler and more readily available. Much greater use of qualitative data would help.
8. **Broaden the data set and the analysis.** Food-security and nutrition information is clearly important, but so is information on WASH, health, population movement, and displacement status. Incorporate an actual analysis of conflict dynamics (i.e., go beyond simply mentioning it as a “contributing factor”).
9. **Clarify roles and leadership status.** Everyone agrees that government should lead, but many agencies are currently perceived to be jostling for the position of leader. Ensure that all levels of government are represented and in agreement with newly proposed updated systems. Such systems may require more decentralization.
10. **Build in community participation.** Local leaders should be engaged to both verify local conditions and to ensure that communities are forewarned about predicted events.
11. **Explore technological improvements.** Real possibilities exist for greater incorporation of remote sensing and machine learning, but also beware of the limitations.
12. **Ensure better linkages between information and action.** This includes not only the proverbial EW/EA equation, but also better use of information for targeting, for response analysis, for program transitions, etc. (but ensure that information collection/analysis is independent of program budgets).

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