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Social Capital as Cohesive Catalyst in Response to Children's Education in Emergencies: The Case of Two Host-IDP Communities in Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study explores what and how host communities utilize social capital to integrate internally displaced persons (IDPs) in conflict-prone situations. Focusing on Ginjo-Jimma-Oromia and Quiha-Mekele in Tigray, Ethiopia, the qualitative research involved key informants (parents, village leaders, school directors, teachers, and students) who were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. Field observations emphasized the collaborative efforts of host communities and IDPs in facilitating the reintegration of internally displaced children (IDCs) into education. The findings disclosed that host communities enhance their potential by transforming social assets into social capital through supportive networks and norms of reciprocity, crucial for IDC reintegration. Social capital emerged as a cohesive force for relief and recovery, despite challenges like limited resources and emotional strain. Resilience is demonstrated through collective action, with volunteerism and community networking playing vital roles in overcoming obstacles and promoting educational initiatives. This research highlights the importance of building social assets into social capital to foster cooperation and resilience, ultimately enhancing educational opportunities for conflict-affected children in Ethiopia. By exploring the relationship between social assets and community dynamics, the study offers valuable insights into effective strategies for supporting IDCs and rebuilding cohesive communities in crisis.

Keywords: Community engagement, cohesive catalyst, education in emergencies, social capital

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1. Introduction

In conflict-prone communities, women and children remain among the most victimized social groups against the right to survival and basic education. In emergency education response, where normalcy and functional local government weaken, villagers reactivate their local asset and networking into purposeful action, i.e., social capital which plays a fundamental role in facilitating recovery, access to education, and retention of students (Sharma et al, 2023). In this process, how the relationships, networks, and norms of reciprocity between the host communities and the IDPs are exercised seems pivotal to unleashing the vital resource in life-saving and sustenance (Iyengar, 2012). These days, several regions of Ethiopia host communities that absorb huge displaced populations and shoulder multiple responsibilities, including efforts of recovery and resilience (Ragassa & Lietaert, 2022).

Moreover, host communities, through their indigenous knowledge and skills, devote and restore peaceful interaction with IDPs to gain relief and recovery. Equally, reports indicated smooth internally displaced children reintegration and retentions. Amid such remarkable efforts, what made to such engagement and how assets and resources are built into social capital within multiethnic, multicultural communities is often of little attention. Furthermore, in Ethiopia, against economically poor situation, local communities, mobilize their social assets, stand up for and facilitate the effort to serve as a cohesive catalyst to improve social interaction between IDPs and host communities (Ahmad et al., 2024). Despite all these efforts of the communities, it remains with little evidence and recognition to step forward to integrated community

transformation. This study, therefore, aims to explore how community engagement applies and its cohesive catalyst role of social assets and capital in supporting conflict-affected children's reintegration and school attendance in districts hosting internally displaced persons (IDPs) in two selected locations of Ethiopia.

According to Ayenew (2023), a cohesive catalyst is an individual, organization, or resource that strengthens social bonds within groups of a community. This catalyst role fosters connections, trust, cooperation, and collaboration for intended purposes (Swindell et al., 2022). Depending on the context, it taps initiatives from within through volunteers, community leaders, social organizations, or focused initiatives to encourage engagement, participation, and networking (Purnaweni et al., 2024). By building a sense of belonging and collective identity, cohesive catalysts enhance the social ties between IDPs and the host community and contribute to emergency education response and a better social fabric (Drese & Marisennayya, 2023; Tyrer & Fazel, 2014). In so doing, host and IDP communities, withstanding the challenges, exercise optimized engagement among stakeholders, create inclusive environments, and support activities that promote dialogue and collaboration, leading to positive outcomes for individuals and the community (Tsegay & Gezahegne, 2023; Hanon, 2022).

In Ethiopia, since the mid-1990s, the impact of natural and manmade disasters has negatively impacted millions of parents from their homes and their children from accessing basic needs (UNICEF, 2023). Between 2018-2022, armed conflicts that escalated in many parts of the country have brought serious negative impacts on the right to basic education of over 4.3 million children and communities in seven regions of Ethiopia (MoE, 2021; UNESCO, 2022). Despite the huge concerns, attention given

to local community engagement practices to address children´s learning seems to be insubstantial. In this regard, there is insufficient understanding of the many ways in which host-IDPs mitigate conflict, which impacts children through, for example, malnutrition, disease, reduced educational opportunities, and heightened poverty (Bahgat etal., 2018; Birkeland, 2009). Moreover, within diversity, studies are lacking in answering the key common elements that serve in the nature and scope of community engagement practices on children´s learning, and the variations in mobilizing social assets and building cohesion between the host and displaced communities of various locations.

Community engagement in education, both at times of emergency and normalcy, is one of the long-standing policy pillars to many countries in the world including Ethiopia (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2015; 2021;2023). Several education leaders and educational institutions recognized the vital roles that 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 is crucial to mitigating the adverse influences following the crisis (Ali et al., 2022; Alter, 2017; Nicolai, 2003) . In recurrent crisis-affected locations, local communities in particular and parents' 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 (Bouvier,2024; Kagawa,2005; ; Russell, 2022; Swindell et al., 2022;UNESCO, 2015).

In the Ethiopian context, reports entail that community engagement coupled with school feeding programs improves academic performance (Assefa et al., 2020),

increase class attendance (Zenebe et al., 2018), decrease the dropout rate (Desalegn et al., 2023)and increase enrolment (Destaw et al., 2022). The majority of studies have reported favorable results on the importance of school feeding programs for educational outcomes (Mideksa et.al., 2024; Wall et al., 2022). Nevertheless, amid declining external resource support, studies lack evidence on how host and IDP communities exercise engagement practices to relief and emergency education responses using their social capital from within.

Rationale

Internally displaced people desperately seek safety and security in other host communities. While these host communities often bear significant social burdens, there is limited evidence of the state-of-the-art in this context. Burdy (2014) and Mutch (2023) discussed the significance and critical role of social capital as an essential resource in enhancing emergency education and maintaining school retention in areas affected by conflict. By utilizing existing social relationships, it facilitates educational access and encourages students to stay in school. Social capital provides emotional support, fosters community involvement, and nurtures trust and collaboration. These elements contribute to the long-term recovery and development of regions impacted by conflict (Cantor, 2024; Haybano, 2023).

Moreover, a study conducted by Tsegay and Gezahegne (2023) Alderman and Bundy (2012) underscored that social capital is instrumental in providing emotional support to students and families facing the trauma and strains of conflict. Strong community bonds and supportive relationships can alleviate the psychological effects of violence and displacement, foster resilience, and keep children engaged in their

studies despite the hardships they endure. When students feel a connection with their peers, teachers, and community members, they are more likely to establish a sense of belonging and purpose, which can help them navigate the challenges presented by conflict.

Consequently, social capital encourages community involvement and ownership in educational initiatives, improving the relevance and effectiveness of emergency education responses. Communities that exercise rich social capital are more inclined to engage in creating safe corners, healing the stress of the victims, which, amid heightened stress, allows creating smooth relations with social groups to initiate mutual interactions, collaborative decision-making processes, and advocate for their educational needs. This, in turn, helps to create locally applicable solutions to support conflict-affected children. Through such a process, community members apply their own ways in planning and executing educational programs, facilitating partners to ensure that the local initiatives align with local priorities, thereby enhancing recovery and children's retention (Lin, 2002; Putnam, 2000).

In the overall endeavor, as discussed by Ali et al., 2022; Girma, 2023; Komatsu, 2024 collective trust and cooperation are vital elements of social capital, facilitating collaboration among stakeholders engaged in emergency education efforts. Trustworthy relationships among community members, educators, NGOs, and government agencies enable efficient coordination, resource mobilization, and the execution of interventions aimed at enhancing school retention and educational outcomes in conflict-affected areas. When trust and cooperation are strong among stakeholders, mobilizing resources, sharing information, and devising effective

educational strategies in challenging environments becomes more manageable (Alter, 2017; Semegn et al., 2023).

2. Statement of the problem

Amid scaling conflict, internally displaced people are forced to move desperately to other host communities seeking safety and security. Although host communities typically shoulder substantial social responsibilities, the state of the art in this context is poorly documented and applied to further holistic community development.

Currently, according to the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC) of Ethiopia (2023), the magnitude of the emergency crisis is seriously affecting over nine million people in nine regions. Furthermore, reports indicated 55% of children and their parents are victims of rounds of displacements(IDMC, 2023). The emergency span is getting chronic and demanding huge resources, which are becoming burdens to the government and development partners. Despite the huge potential social assets to be applied, external solutions, including dependency on humanitarian aid, are increasing (Kebede, 2023; Mutch, 2023). This requires an urgent need to explore evidence-based insights on how to boost community engagement with available opportunities from within. This effort contributes to evidence-based responses to emergency programming strategies, and IDP communities' capacity-building initiatives to inform policy and practice. Equally, exploring the existing practices and setting improved pathways to build effective community engagement in Education in Emergencies EiE is critical to mitigate the escalating problem that the nation is facing in speedy community recovery and resilience during emergencies and beyond.

In the Ethiopian context, the role of social capital in fostering community engagement, particularly within emergency school feeding programs, is a critical yet underexplored area. While policy frameworks advocate robust community involvement in these initiatives, the integration of social capital into effective engagement strategies remains largely unexamined. Current literature lacks substantial evidence on how local social networks, trust, and collaborative practices can be leveraged to enhance the implementation and efficacy of school feeding pathways during emergencies. This oversight is concerning, as social capital significantly influences community resilience and children's learning outcomes in times of crisis. Neglecting to assess and incorporate social capital in these contexts limits opportunities to strengthen community support and improve educational initiatives. Consequently, addressing this gap is essential for optimizing emergency responses and ensuring that children receive the nutritional and educational resources necessary to thrive. This research agenda is crucial for developing strategies that harness community strengths, ultimately leading to more effective and sustainable interventions in emergency settings.

To this end, studies have highlighted the benefits of community participation in emergency school feeding programs, such as improved program effectiveness (Alegbeleye et al, 2019) Others have emphasized the need for clear guidelines and strengthened efforts of community engagement before and during emergencies (Sung & Chong-Sup, 2023). In addition, a few studies (Bray, 2003; Burde, 2004; Cantor & Woolley, 2020) have highlighted the need to strengthen community engagement efforts before and during emergencies to ensure that students have access to meals. Other studies have found that participation in emergency school meals is still low, meaning a large proportion of students may be at risk for food insecurity, and innovative

approaches are needed to mitigate increased food insecurity (Abdirahman, 2021). Little emphasis seems to have been given to what makes communities engage even in times of adversity.

Theoretically, Iyengar (2012) discussed that community engagement is a process both in normal and emergency situations; 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 (Sung & Chong-Sup, 2023).

Putnam (2000, 2001) discussed that community engagement is a social enterprise that constitutes social assets and networking into organized purpose-oriented actions-social capital. The author further underscored social capital as a replenishable resource characterized by creativity and innovation to address challenges and gain solutions from within. Based on shared views and goals, it signified networks of community groups, trust, and cooperation between and among the groups, both at times of emergency and normalcy. On the other hand, in view of Lin (2002) with similar perspectives to Coleman (1990), three forms, namely: bonding, bridging, and linking social capital, may overall and pertain within the context and period of engagement. While Coleman's theory highlighted the mechanisms of social capital in enhancing community engagement and individual development, Putnam (2000) emphasized the

societal implications of social capital, including the need for diverse connections to promote civic engagement and democracy. Both theories revealed the critical role of social relationships in fostering community resilience and societal well-being.

In the process, the bonding social capital emphasizes identifying common shared values from within and boost horizontal supportive relationships within communities. On the other hand, bridging social capital focuses on connecting and hosting different groups including IDPs or refugees through smooth cooperation, resource sharing and mutual support to normalcy. The third category, which is linking social capital mainly anchors on power relations and privileges to individuals and groups toward easy access to resources. In context of protracted emergencies when external support is a challenge, exploring opportunities from within and mobilize the social capital toward relief, recovery and resilience seem vital to Ethiopia and similar other countries. In its application, the theory emphasized the importance of creating trust and collaboration among individuals and organizations in enhancing emergency response efforts. According to Putnam (2001), high levels of trust and a willingness to cooperate can lead to more effective actions addressing the needs of affected populations. In this regard, taking note of huge displacement, addressing the right to affected children including school feeding programs serve as a critical mechanism for cultivating social capital, as they create opportunities for meaningful engagement and relationship building between host and IDPs.

In the context of crisis, the significance of emergency responses is vital and require the engagement of communities is pivotal through mobilizing social assets and fostering social capital. Particularly, local community engagement through mobilizing

own intangible and tangible social resources remain crucial in the recovery of IDPs. This effort of host communities has been observed to have vital role in relief and recovery of parents and promote positive interventions in education displaced children. Despite the huge efforts of the host communities, however, little evidence is available on what and how local communities use to participate, interact, share roles and response to emergency education in adverse situations. Thus, it is timely and relevant to explore the role of social capital in the reintegration of internally displaced persons (IDPs), and how it contributed to access to educational services of displaced children across different communities of Ethiopia. Based on the above background, specifically, the research addresses the following basic questions:

1.How do host communities, specifically in Ginjo, Oromia, and Queha, Tigray exercise their social capital to the integration of internally displaced people?

2. What are the burdens of host and IDPs in facilitating the reintegration of internally displaced children (IDCs) back to schoolings?

3. What common social assets do the different host communities exhibited in the reintegration of IDCs children in Ginjo Oromia and Queha, Tigray, Ethiopia?

3. Method

The study accentuated social constructivist paradigm for two reasons. First, it emphasizes that communities have the wisdom to mobilize potential assets, generate their own context-specific knowledge to locally owned solutions. Secondly the social constructivist paradigm avails that communities embedded with immense capabilities, give meaning and value to their own practices in response to complex realities such as

conflict and displacement. The study emphasized a comparative case study design to explore the commonalities underlie engagement in two purposefully selected locations smoothly hosted IDPs for two years or more. Thus, the study was adopted to explore how internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities, despite differences in geographic locations, mobilize internal social assets into capital engaged in emergency education responses, particularly through back to schooling and school feeding programs in context.

The comparative study design focused on how host communities engage in creating harmony with internally displaced people, supported internally displaced children access to education, maintained emergency school feeding during IDPs remain settled for two or more years at the respective host communities. This design enabled an in-depth examination of real-life social dynamics and interactions between host and displaced community members, in line with established qualitative methodologies (Goodrick, 2020; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Mariam, 1988; Yin, 2009).

The design followed certain procedures to identify the cases. Available data on the number of forced displaced population within the country was obtained (CSA, 2023). Next, regions with the highest number of internally displaced populations during the study period were listed. Thirdly, locations that recorded smooth harmony between host- IDPs for two or more years in Oromia and Tigray—were selected on purpose as study sites. Within each region, those host communities embraced displaced people to settle for two years and more and facilitated IDCs education were identified. Accordingly, the locations of Ginjo (Jimma Zone, Oromia) and Queha (Mekele, Tigray) were purposively chosen. Specific to the basic research questions, selection criteria included:

- Evidence of peaceful coexistence between host and displaced populations.
- Presence of formal primary schools implementing school feeding programs;
- Approval of relevant local authorities for the harmony and school retention of internally displaced children (IDCs).

Following the identification of locations through criteria, respective district education offices were consulted to identify those government primary schools reintegrated IDCs for two or more years. Accordingly, four primary schools (Mendera and Hirmata primary schools in Ginjo-Jimma and Kiros Gessese and Queha primary schools from Queha-Mekele) were selected based on their years of experience in integrating IDP and host community children and supporting school retention. To ensure access to authentic information from the relevant source, the purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to identify key informants and participants from both IDP and host communities. Accordingly, a total of 84 (42 female and 42 male) informants constituting students, schoolteachers, school directors, representatives of parents of both host and IDPs, village leaders, woreda zonal and regional education experts, and federal level education authorities included in the study.

3.1. Tools and Procedures

A comparative case study utilized a qualitative approach to explore practices and identify similarities across multiple cases with a shared research agenda. Based on context, this endeavor produces experiential knowledge that is easier to appreciate and explore causal questions – how and why particular programs or policies work or fail to work (Goodrick, 2014). In the education system, comparative case studies can

potentially contribute to exploring actual practices and contribute to policy formulation (Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2002).

Considering the diverse informant groups, qualitative tools were designed to explore community engagement practices among IDPs and host communities. Qualitative interview protocols and observation items were developed to gather pilot data from key informants in both locations. This approach refined case study research by situating each case within a broader network of relationships (Cresswell, 2018). Additionally, the comparative case study aimed to address and adapt to the shifting contextual factors faced by both host and displaced communities.

Based on the rationale outlined above, a mixed-methods approach was employed to collect comprehensive data from the field. This involved a total of twelve key informant interviews (KIIs) with community leaders and stakeholders, six focus group discussions (FGDs) comprising diverse participants, and four field observations conducted over one week each in the case locations, guided by standardized checklists to ensure consistency and depth. Additionally, two local NGOs actively engaged in delivering basic humanitarian and educational services in these areas were included in the study to provide further insights into community dynamics and needs. This combination of qualitative methods allowed for a rich, nuanced understanding of community engagement practices among IDPs and host communities.

All data collection tools were developed, pilot-tested, and translated into local languages to ensure cultural relevance and comprehension. Interviews and discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data

analysis software. In addition, relevant federal and regional policy documents were reviewed to contextualize findings within institutional frameworks.

The analysis focused on how social capital—defined as assets, networks of trust, cooperation, and mutual support—was shaped to mobilize social assets, organized community involvement in school feeding programs during emergencies. The study, based on the field experiences, also triangulated existing comparative approaches, enhanced the validity and richness of the data, enabling the identification of best practices for strengthening community engagement in case locations included in the study.

3.2 Ethical Considerations

In the study, ethical clearance and due practices were applied throughout the rounds of the field work. Taking note of the distinct cultural and social values, including vulnerable conflict-affected IDPs, due considerations were made before, and after the conversations. This has been applied in the whole efforts of selecting informants and obtaining informed consent from everyone involved, through building trust and facilitating open communication. Additionally, audio and visual recording were only used with written permission. The research also stressed confidentiality and data validity, ensuring the accuracy and reliability of information collected through interviews and discussions. Finally, the researcher was careful to represent the data faithfully, striving to communicate the true meaning of the sources without bias, and all efforts were made to maintain integrity and direct to the purpose of the study.

3.3 Informants

The study engaged eighty- four participants through key informants and focus group members who represent all the local level stakeholders and partners. Based on scheduled timing, individual interviews and group discussions were employed with community leaders, school directors, host and displaced partners, district, regional, and federal level experts. In the research, both interview and focus group discussion (FGD) guides were utilized. These guides serve as structured frameworks for the expert interviewer and the FGD facilitator, ensuring that the discussions remain focused and relevant to the research objectives. By using these guides, the facilitators took advantage to have effectively facilitated the conversations, encouraging participants to share their experiences and insights. It's noteworthy that these interview and focus group discussion items were translated into two Afan Oromo and Tigrigna languages to effectively communicate parents/mother groups, students, and community leaders and elders. The process of taking note of the key glossary has contributed to assisting the trained professionals conducting the interviews and FGDs to ensure clear communication.

This approach seems to have not only facilitated accurate data collection but also contributed to the trust and respect to the cultural and linguistic contexts of the participants, enabling richer and more nuanced discussions On the other hand, teachers and school directors were approached through the focus group discussions, officers from the federal ad regional levels were approached through the language each preferred and conferrable most. Self-introduction and purpose of the interview were done before the main interview section. Audio recording was taken based on consent of the key informants. The actual field work took place between March and June 2024,

through two rounds of field stays for thirty working days at each location and followed by telephone communications with the key informants and the schools.

Table 1

Basic Characteristics of the Host and Displaced 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	315	275	8.45	9.5
Ginjo-Oromia	15+	16,625	14,768	3,201	2,940	20.4	19.9
Queha-Tigray	7-14	1,475	1,505	262	214	17.7	14.2
Queha-Tigray	15+	12,732	11,709	4,211	3,001	33.1	25.6

A total of 13,353 IDPs (8,422 females and 5,941 males) and 5,930 IDP families were recorded across the two study sites. Of these, 1,066 IDP children (577 girls and 489 boys) aged 7 to 14 were enrolled in either formal schooling (ages 7–9) or accelerated learning programs (ages 10–14) at the study locations. Ginjo and Queha

host communities embraced over 20% and 25% of additional persons respectively to the local livelihoods and resource share daily since June 2020.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents findings obtained from the field study data collection organized into twelve key informant interviews (KII 01 to 12) and six FGDs (FGDs 01 to 06) conducted with host community members and internally displaced persons (IDPs), the parents of both host and internally displaced children (IDC), school staff, and local leaders and the woreda, regional and federal level education authorities. Data drawn from interviews with parents, regional and local officials, and focus group discussions (FGDs) were harmonized with key records providing a multidimensional understanding of the research context. In alignment with the basic research questions, a rigorous triangulation on thematic areas was done to ensure both validity and analytical depth.

In order to answer the core research questions, qualitative data underwent systematic coding by informant groups and regions, followed by thematic grouping of community social assets and social capital in engagement practices and internally displaced child retention. This organized information was rigorously analyzed across two locations, with thematic analysis identifying key social asset themes further refined through a comparative analysis of the Ginjo-Jimma and Queha-Mekele case studies. Rich interview notes were transcribed into narratives, emphasizing informant perspectives along the coded themes. Moreover, regional and federal-level documents that inform policy for displaced children's education were analyzed.

4.1 Social Assets as Catalysts for Community Cohesion Amidst Adversity

The findings revealed that in both study locations, communities exercised their social assets—primarily networks, trust, and reciprocity—in distinct ways. Community interactions and interconnections enhanced these social assets, facilitating organized responses to IDPs. This dynamic acted as a cohesive catalyst for social capital, fostering trust and mutual support between host and displaced communities. As shown in Table Two below, key informant interviews (KIIs 01 to 06) and focus group discussions (FGDs 01 to 03) indicated that, despite geographic differences, common types and elements of social assets played a crucial role in promoting cohesion during the adversities faced by both communities.

The study's findings, aligned with Coleman's theory of community engagement, highlight the crucial role of social capital in community development. Despite conflicts and challenges, strong social networks, trust, and reciprocal relationships were identified as essential for fostering cooperation and collective action. Trust among community members facilitated collaboration, while reciprocity reinforced communal bonds. The influence of social institutions, such as families and schools, in cultivating social capital was evident, supporting effective community engagement. Additionally, the findings illustrate how supportive networks enhance individual educational and economic outcomes, emphasizing the interconnectedness of individual actions and community resilience in fostering engaged communities

Table 2

Features and Social Capital Types in Ginjo and Queha Communities

Social Feature & Social Capital Types	Ginjo, Oromia A diverse socio cultural and linguistic community	Queha, Tigray Homogeneous socio-cultural and linguistic community
Bonding	Strong bond within the host community	Strong bond within the host community
Birding	Welcoming and peaceful interaction with IDPs	Tensions followed by interactions IDPs Youth voluntary services
Linking	Strong traditional social power link	Strong socio-religious power link
Source: Extracted by the researcher from KIIs and FGDs, June 2024		

A comparative analysis of the research cases in context depicts essential insights on elements of tangible and assets that constitute social capital. While Ginjo-Oromia represents a diverse socio-linguistic, religious, and community, Queha-Tigray sets a relatively homogeneous community with a dominant Orthodox Christian 98%) Tigrayan community. Nevertheless, several contextual similarities and differences emerge that are essential for understanding their social dynamics. Ginjo, with an estimated population of around one hundred thousand, is characterized by its rich diversity in terms of religions, ethnic groups, and languages. This diversity is counterbalanced by a strong interconnectivity fostered through various avenues such as marriage, neighborhood ties, social interactions, and mutual reciprocity. Despite differences, the community's bond and ability to harmonize its diversity essentially growing of social capital for cooperation and collective action, which may serve as a critical resource both in emergency and normalcy. In this case against potential risks, making Ginjo a significant case for further studying how diverse populations can come

together for mutual benefit toward harmonized community transformation. In this regard, the response of the participants explains the case better:

"... we are elders and parents of many children and families. There are several ethnic and religious groups and families in Ginjo, Jimma. We lived together, and we continued the same until the last day cherished our creator. Our diversity has so far not restricted us and nothing harmful to help each other and assist the IDPs at our disposal (FGD 03, April 2024).

In Queha-Tigray, the dominant Orthodox Christian faith (with nearly 98% of both host and IDPs as followers) has significantly influenced community dynamics through its core values. Principles like compassion and charity have fostered a supportive culture where members care for one another, especially in times of crisis, thereby strengthening social bonds through communal activities. Religious groups play a crucial role in conflict resolution, promoting harmony between host and displaced populations. This moral responsibility enhances trust, ethical behavior, and civic engagement. Youth volunteers and motivated community members help navigate difficult times, reinforcing social cohesion and demonstrating how Orthodox Christianity enhances interconnectedness and resilience in Queha-Tigray.

In both cases, the findings revealed that, regardless of religious and socio-linguistic diversity or homogeneity, commonality in trust and reciprocity is particularly observable and valuable capital in facilitating the support of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from various backgrounds seeking relief and recovery. According to the key informants (KII 04 and 05) both n Queha and Ginjo, amid the strong tensions during the adversities the praised doctrines underlie each religious domain was reported to

uphold the good practices not only in strengthen community bonds but also create a welcoming environment for the respective diverse IDP population. While Ginjo and Queha-Tigray differ in socioeconomic composition, both share strong elements of social interconnectedness, leveraging shared religious practices to foster cohesion and support for newcomers. This comparative analysis highlights how different forms of social capital, in particular strong existing bonds within the host, allow manifest positively to embrace diverse populations even at times of crisis. During the field study, groups of young volunteers and representatives of partner NGOs underscored, local villagers' creativity and ability to coexist and support one another in times of need. *"If communities get convinced, they have the power to generate resources. Despite the challenges, we are amazed by each household's 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 the people"* (KII 08, March 2024).

4.2. Host Communities': Burdens and responses in: Children's school retention

During a crisis, normal community social structures and assets are not only over utilized but also shoulder for an indefinite period. The host communities under the study also faced a similar experience, which is still in progress. The following table summarizes the key ones.

Table 3

Major burdens and responses in reintegrating IDCs into schooling

Burden/s	Key community engagement responses	
	Ginjo	Queha
Shelter for displaced families	Avail temporary space Allow religious compounds Allow private compounds	Absorbed into close family Take temporary shelter in open spaces
Work opportunity for IDPs	Facilitate daily labor work acknowledged by the local village admin	Arbitrary and occasional due to few economic activities
Relief and recovery	Build trust and mutual support Prayers of religious leaders	Build trust and mutual support Prayers of religious leaders
Learning space for IDCs	Reintegrate into public schools Alternative learning programs	Reintegrate into public schools Alternative learning programs
Children feeding	"Busa Gonofa"[4], charity NGOs, religious institutions	Youth lead initiatives "Hayra"[5] NGO, Diaspora support
Children safety	Both host and displaced families	Both host and displaced families
Children security	Both host and displaced families	Both host and displaced families

Source: compiled from KIIs (07-12) and FGDs (05 and 06), June 2024

As summarized in the table above, respective host communities faced notable burdens and equally played vital roles in responding to feasible community-owned solutions. In both Ginjo-Jimma and Queha-Mekele, the host communities have explored and actively created spaces for the relief and support of internally displaced persons (IDPs), particularly focusing on facilitating safe communication and planning for the reintegration and retention of children in educational settings. Through mobilizing local and institutions, both communities have demonstrated a strong commitment to to back-to-school of displaced children. Accordingly, organizing school linkages, resulting in the absorption of 1,066 (Ginjo 315 F/ 275 M; Queha 262 F/ 214

[4] *Bussa Gonofa is an indigenous socio-cultural practice of Oromos, initiated by the regional government, which literally mean mutual cooperation within the communities and actors to relief, recovery and resilience within Oromia.*

5 Hayra: an indigenous religious – socio-cultural ties of families and youth groups to celebrate religious days and support each other on social issues which usually happens on Saints days.

M) over-aged out-of-school children aged 9 to 14, highlights community-driven initiatives aimed at addressing educational gaps for internally displaced youth. In addition to facilitating their return to school, communities, in collaboration with partners, implemented flexible accelerated education programs tailored for these children. This reflects a strong commitment to ensuring the right to education, particularly for early adolescent girls and boys. Prioritizing education not only supports academic learning but also enhances stability within host communities by addressing essential needs such as feeding, safety, and security, thereby promoting resilience and social cohesion amidst challenges related to displacement.

In support to the above, the school leaders and surrounding community witnessed observable devotion and extra effort in the IDCs back to back-to-school and reintegration through community-based feeding (KII 11, April 2024).

The role of volunteers and social groups in both settings is noteworthy, as they have mobilized social assets characterized by strong relationships, collaborations, and mutual interactions with IDPs to enhance relief and recovery efforts. Individual, group, family, and neighborhood interactions have been pivotal in exchanging information and mobilizing necessary resources for IDPs. During the initial stages of these efforts, the volunteerism exhibited by young social groups facilitated regular interactions, helping to smooth relationships between the host community and IDPs. Collaboration with religious groups and schools has further bolstered efforts for children's reintegration and retention, particularly with the critical aspect of school feeding programs. Community groups, schools, and NGOs have collectively contributed to IDP children's re-enrollment in primary schools, guided by volunteerism, governmental directives, and humanitarian support, showcasing a model of community solidarity and resilience in

addressing the educational needs of displaced children … *with the help of Allah the Almighty, and thanks to the host community and all volunteers, we successfully implemented lifesaving and life-sustaining interventions."* FGD 02, May 2024).

4.2 Common Social assets to the successful reintegration and retention

The comparative analysis of the two local communities included in the study has also indicated an interesting communality on social assets and their practices.

Table 4

Core elements of social capital observed in practices at the different communities

Common elements of social capital	Ginjo- Diverse community	Queha-Homogeneous community)
Social groups' interaction practice	Frequent, peaceful	Occasional, peaceful
Mutual cooperation	Strong	Strong
Mobilize local resources	Very high	High
Voluntary contribution (cash in kind)	Very high	High
Resolve tensions with IDPs on spot	High	High
Support children schooling	High	High
Access external aid incl. diaspora	Low	High

Source: Extracted from KIIs and FGDs by the researcher's field study, March- June 2024

From the field study, despite the differences in social features and geographic environment, the findings of the study underscored that the community groups share common core elements of social capital. Depending on the context, smooth interaction, mutual support, and mitigating tensions on the spot seem critical determinants of a functioning social capital. During the four rounds of field observations, each lasting one week, and through triangulation with key informants, it was found that the magnitude of the response, primarily led by volunteers, religious leaders, and community elders,

played a critical role in providing support and facilitating the integration of internally displaced persons (IDPs). From the study, during the first arrival period, these grassroots organizations served as rescuers and intermediaries between host communities and IDPs, fostering understanding, empathy, and collaboration.

In both locations, despite the meager economic resources and tensions, the findings of the study witnessed that intangible and tangible social assets build up to a cohesive catalyst role to social capital. Despite the difference in geographic locations, in both locations voluntary social group compositions played exemplary roles in taking the courage to creating smooth interactions, healthy communications and responsive reactions that enable the respective IDP communities feel secure and to come together in times of crisis. … *Amid the stressful situation, had it not been for the relentless effort and altruism of the host community members, we would not be here today, let alone discussing our children's education".* FGD 06, April 2024,

In both study locations, young volunteers were found to have been the first initiatives indispensable in supporting internally displaced persons (IDPs). Composed of individuals who volunteer their time and skills, volunteers reported to have offered service provision and promoted grassroots initiatives, with religious institutions, families and elders. The schools, through directors and teachers created safe spaces for learning, creativity, and self-expression, empowering IDP youth to thrive academically and socially. Moreover, the youth social groups encouraged technology assisted networks of solidarity, empathy, and civic engagement. They also encouraged the religious institutions to take collective action, motivating individuals to contribute their time and resources towards common goals. *"We local communities including religious institutions have been motivated to take collective action, collaborating with youth*

groups on relief initiatives of IDPs. Courageous youth and local individuals were highly sacrificed their time and resources towards common goals, resulting in tangible achievements that enhance host community- IDP recovery and welfare." KII 08, May 2024

In both Ginjo and Queha host communities concrete mutual support and solidarity increased during the stressful period of initial displacement by allowing space and basic survival needs through organized local volunteers and elder groups. The respective host communities, revitalizing their own social assets, played a crucial role in the IDPs recovery and psychosocial support through regular visiting and supplying of basic needs until NGOs come into play. Both the host community members based on self-initiatives, pooled available resources, shared information, and coordinated local efforts to address the educational needs of children who were affected by conflict.

In both study areas, the traditional and technology assisted social networks within the community served as channels for disseminating information about available educational opportunities, support programs, and feeding resources. Through these networks, in both study areas IDP families obtained easy access to vital information about school enrollment procedures, and assistance programs, and eventually ensuring that their children can feed and reschooling despite the challenges posed by conflict.

The findings of the study indicated that the response of host communities took common elements of social capital explained by maturity and devotion to helping IDPs relief and recovery. In effect, the following key actions that characterize the cohesive catalyst role of social capital were demonstrated:

a. Social Networks: In both cases, during the first three months of IDP arrivals, members of the host communities, youth elders, religious leaders, and families volunteered through social networks and responded to basic facilities in IDP communities. These networks facilitated the exchange of information for support and collecting food and clothes to support. The villagers also revitalized their social connections to quickly disseminate information to others and coordinate rescue efforts. Once the relief is settled, host community members in both cases supported children to go back to schooling.

b. Mutual Trust and Support continued in both cases, social groups revitalized and fostered their networks for a common purpose of saving others' lives. Youth groups, together with the religious institutions and the elderly, took initiatives and continuously provided emotional and psychological support during arrivals and times of deep stress. The sense of solidarity and belonging fostered by strong social ties seems to have helped to alleviate stress, anxiety, and trauma experienced by individuals affected by the conflict and consequential crises.

c. Resource mobilization: Both communities, following their own strategies, have mobilized resources and supported the IDPs, including child retention. In this regard, while the Ginjo community heavily relied on local resources and indigenous traditional mechanisms, Queha focused on evidence, preparing compelling reports to access extra aid and communicating with the diaspora regularly to support the home.

Despite the difference in strategies, in both cases, the local communities took the courage to help IDPs with relief and recovery. While in Queha, youth groups to the

lead role, in Ginjo, the traditional social structures devoted to harmonizing relationships, strengthen mutual cooperation and support of children's retentions. The KIIs (08 and 09) and FGDs (05 and 06) triangulated with observations and document analysis, witnessed the following summary on local community capabilities to social cohesion.

a. Collaboration to reintegrate displaced children to school: the host and IDP communities shared collective norms to articulate their needs foster collaboration and inclusiveness in joint planning processes. The shared values and mutual trust among community members enhanced the willingness to engage with IDPs and work towards mutually beneficial outcomes of their children learning

b. Local resource mobilization: social networks encouraged nearly all community groups and enabled IDPs to smoothly absorbed and engage in daily work and mobilize local resources for their livelihoods and self-reliance. The host communities have played crucial roles in harnessing community solidarity and resourcefulness, IDP households were allowed to generate income, access basic services, and address their immediate needs.

c. Seeking resourcing from outside: local village leaders and resource persons sought NGOs and stakeholders to get informed and support the IDPs. Mutual trust and collaboration have strongly helped to further mobilize social assets like solidarity and collective action to place IDP communities to work and generate for their needs. By mobilizing social networks and community organizations, IDPs were also witnessed to have access to religious payers, financial, material, and human resources to support their rehabilitation. In this regard, in Ginjo,

Jimma host communities facilitated the allocation of resources for the integration of IDPs.

d. Fostering partnerships with other stakeholders: both IDPs and host communities were also observed to have exercised advocacy networks and community-based organizations enabled IDPs to engage with NGOs, local government agencies, and international organizations. By strengthening partnerships, IDP communities were also availed opportunities to amplify their voices to the zonal and regional governments on the future of their destiny.

In the study, the consolidated responses from key informants, focus group discussions, interviews, and field observations in both communities highlighted three key challenges that they faced, both internally and externally.

a. Resource constraints: both host communities encountered significant limitations in resources, which affected their capacity to assist internally displaced persons (IDPs). Informants reported that access to vital services like healthcare, education, and shelter was severely restricted. One community leader noted, "We want to help, but we simply don’t have the resources," underlining the critical shortages. Additionally, the obligation to contribute to standard government services without sufficient external support hampered their mobilization efforts.

b. Weak local institutional capacity: In both cases, local administrations struggled with competing priorities and limited capabilities, hindering effective emergency response coordination. Informants indicated that a "lack of accountability in local government has eroded our trust," making community

engagement more difficult. This sentiment was shared by many who expressed frustration with local institutions' inefficiencies.

c. Inadequate communication**:** Both communities faced challenges due to insufficient information regarding IDP needs and destinations. The lack of timely updates created confusion, impacting their ability to plan and engage effectively.

This study reveals a critical finding regarding the role of local government during the initial arrival and stay of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in host communities. In both cases, local governments were perceived as slow to respond and had a minimal impact, often prioritizing control over nurturing or facilitating community efforts. This controlling approach undermined the potential for effective support and integration of IDPs, highlighting a significant area for improvement in local governance during humanitarian crises. The following words of volunteers make the case strong:

"... it is sad that local village administrators, knowing us well, were hesitating and repeatedly inquired of the voluntary association members why we do all this sacrifice?" KII 04, May 2024.

This study anchors its deep insight and discussions on how tangible and intangible social assets the two different communities mobilized and applied for relief and recovery. These contextualized efforts refer to and are embedded within local social networks, such as trust, reciprocity, and norms of cooperation, although one community differs from the other in diversity. In this regard, despite the differences in social makeups, the value-adding benefits derived from these assets and networks prove social capital rewards during crisis. The results underpin and entail, even in poor and

challenging economic situations, how social assets and social capital play a crucial role in shaping the engagement of IDPs and host communities in joint planning, resourcing, partnerships with stakeholders, and local resource mobilization. By leveraging these social dynamics not only during emergencies, it can also serve hugely in promoting inclusivity, collaboration, and sustainability in responses to displacement crises, ultimately enhancing the resilience and cohesion of affected communities. Amid weak local government response, in emergency and crisis situations, social capital was found to have served as a vital cohesive catalyst in life-saving and life-sustaining efforts. Regardless of the economic capacities, villagers' interactions, relationships, networking, and trust with IDPs were observed as critical factors for harmony and social cohesion. "You *wouldn't have found the IDPs and their children without our social assets and voluntary interactions,* "schoolteachers, Queha, May 2024. This finding echoes the true nature of Ethiopian culture. For example, the culture of collaboration and mutual support within Ethiopian communities has long been rooted in the country's traditions. These practices, which emphasize collective responsibility and mutual aid, form the backbone of social cohesion and community resilience in Ethiopia (Girma, 2014; Tsegay & Gezahagn, 2023).

In both study locations, shared culture and language that allowed to increased trust seems to be the basis for brave reciprocity. The social networks and associations which otherwise were lost were reactivated to realize the mutual interests of IDP groups. In this regard, one of the village volunteers defined voluntary association as "we, regardless of our professional or economic background, are socially organized groups based on mutual trust between the members for lifesaving and sustaining during a crisis period" FGD 06, Queha, May 2024. In reference to notable social capital

theories and research endeavors including, Hatloy, et.al, 2017; Henery, 2017; Putman, 2000; Ryan, et.al., 2020 this field research also has explored the cross-cutting key theoretical argument underlying conditions of the tangible and intangible assets in 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 have 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 contexts of Ethiopia, smooth networks, relationships and mutual reciprocity were found enhanced between host communities and IDPs and critical elements to restore peace and social cohesion, including school retention and striving for resilience. Amid community development challenges, these relevant social assets need to be the central idea for new community policy and practices.

One of the most significant contributions of community groups is their role in reschooling IDP children. By establishing informal schools, providing tutoring services, and advocating for inclusive educational policies, these groups ensure that displaced children have access to education. This not only helps to maintain educational continuity but also contributes to the long-term well-being and resilience of IDPs. Furthermore, community groups play a vital role in strengthening social capital within and between communities. By building trust, solidarity, and reciprocity, these groups foster a sense of belonging and collective identity. This, in turn, enhances social cohesion and resilience, enabling communities to better cope with the challenges associated with displacement.

However, it's important to recognize that social assets and social capital are not evenly distributed within all communities. Vulnerable populations, such as marginalized groups or those living in poverty, may have limited access to social networks and resources, exacerbating their vulnerability during emergencies. Addressing social inequalities and strengthening community resilience should be integral components of emergency preparedness and response efforts. The engagement of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and Host communities (HCs) joint planning to reschooling, partnership with stakeholders and local resource mobilization is influenced by social assets and social capital. Community, religious, and volunteer social groups play pivotal roles in facilitating harmonized engagement between host communities and internally displaced people (IDPs), particularly in the context of smooth reschooling of IDP children and the enhancement of social capital.

The key actors within community, religious, and volunteer social groups seem to have played instrumental roles in facilitating harmonized engagement between host communities and IDPs, particularly in the context of reschooling initiatives and the enhancement of social capital. By leveraging their networks, resources, and values, these groups contribute to inclusive, resilient, and thriving communities amidst displacement and adversity. Social assets and social capital are indispensable in emergencies and crisis situations, serving as the foundation for effective response, resilience, and community well-being. Investing in the cultivation of these assets can enhance the ability of individuals and communities to cope with and recover from adversity, ultimately saving lives and promoting social cohesion.

Despite the economic limitations and tensions, the question of how multifaceted the nature of social capital, encompassing both tangible and intangible assets applied to uphold cohesion within economically poor communities, seems critical. While economic and physical resources are significant, social capital's true value lies in its facilitation of relationships, networking, and mutual reciprocity, particularly evident in times of adversity. Intangible assets such as moral duty, altruism, and indigenous bonds emerge as crucial in maintaining tangible resources, such as financial support, space, and technical knowledge, for effective community engagement practices. The proper use of social capital was observed to be instrumental in mitigating conflict between host and IDP communities, fostering social harmony. However, formal government policies and practices appear less effective in leveraging social capital to sustain mutual responsibility between these groups. In line with this perspective, the regional level initiatives emphasize the importance of community cohesion in enhancing the well-being of IDPs, despite the challenges faced by economically disadvantaged communities such as those in study location, Ethiopia.

Several social capital theories, dominated with Western orientation, posited by researchers share political stability and economic affluence to be critical conditions to functional social capital (Bourdieu, 1987; Coleman, 2001; Martinnelli & Martinnelli, 2024; Putnam, 1998; 2000 ;). Nevertheless, contrary to Western orientation, local communities seem to have significantly and successfully responded to the emergency education during adversity and crisis. In poor communities including Ethiopia, the response to education in emergency focuses on external aid including monetary and economic aspects than local social resources. In this regard, despite the economic problems, the term “social capital” seems to have its importance in the functioning of

local communities to look inward for solutions from within. On the other angle, Putnam's social capital theory which consists of the networks, norms, and trust seem a common essence that enable individuals to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives in more stable situations**.** In the locations where the study took place, a similar value for social capital and social assets upholds true to build lifesaving and life sustaining of IDP communities. The findings emphasized that in times of emergency and crisis, social assets and social capital play a crucial role in ensuring the survival and well-being of individuals and communities.

Similar to the works of Dynes (2002) and Mashiko, et.al, (2018), this study also shows that social assets are integral parts of social capital. The resources embedded within social networks, such as trust, reciprocity, and norms of cooperation, constitute social capital which represents the benefits derived from these networks. Despite poor economic situation, social capital, beyond children reschooling and retentions, was observed to have huge potential to anchor on the long-standing significance, which is observed from the following angles. First the voluntary based networks to save life through allowing space and security observed the top priority. In times of crisis, social networks allow lifeline for individuals and communities. Second, these networks facilitated the exchange of critical information, resources, and support. For instance, villagers reactivated their social connections to quickly disseminate about newly arrived IDPs to coordinate rescue efforts. Equally, opportunities for equitable resources access have been found critical even when formal institutions may be overwhelmed or inaccessible.

The two cases that were observed to have relatively strong social ties within their communities were able to mobilize resources such as food, shelter, and medical

supplies more effectively, thus ensuring the survival of vulnerable populations like internally displaced persons (IDPs). Furthermore, social networks provided emotional and psychological support during times of distress. The sense of solidarity and belonging fostered by strong social ties helped to mitigate stress, anxiety, and trauma experienced by individuals affected by crises.

In both cases, shared socio cultural and language factors between respective hot and IDP communities, seem to have contributed to increased trust and cooperation among community members to facilitate coordinated responses, leading to recovery and reintegration. Furthermore, the study seems to have explored improved social cohesion and harmony arising because of the new challenge**.** The host communities of both cases seem to have been convinced to maintain social cohesion which is essential for rebuilding communities and restoring normalcy. In this regard, host communities were found to be visible in fostering trust, empathy, and cooperation among IDP groups, promoting harmony and unity in the face of adversity.

It's also important to recognize that social assets and social capital are not evenly distributed within all communities equally. The level of vulnerability, the scale of conflict on the IDP populations, as well as the scale of poverty, seem to have an influence on access to social networks and resources, exacerbating their vulnerability during emergencies of the respective communities. In this regard, addressing social inequalities and strengthening community resilience should be integral components of emergency preparedness and response efforts. Moreover, social assets and social capital are indispensable in emergencies and crisis situations, serving as the foundation for effective response, resilience, and community well-being. Investing in the cultivation

of these assets seems to be an important strategy to enhance the ability of individuals and communities to cope with and recover from adversity, ultimately saving lives and promoting social cohesion.

The IDPs who were affected by conflict-prone situations, were also observed to have shared their own social assets that played a vital role in cultivating solidarity among community members experiencing poverty. Despite financial hardships, the collective experience of their struggles to restore harmony through mutual cooperation, is exemplary even in tense environments. Such networks typically involve neighbors helping one another by sharing resources, or providing emotional support, which reinforces social bonds and enhances trust, essential for resilience in times of stress due to conflict. In the study, formal support systems, such as local government aid or social services, were slow, unreliable, or absent. In this regard, these communities together seem to have relied on social capital to survive and sustain.

Furthermore, despite the adversities, conflict and its consequential effects seem to have played a positive role in revitalizing community identity in both contexts. Individual volunteers seem to have developed a deeper connection to their neighbors or cultural groups, reinforcing a sense of belonging and unity amid external pressures. This strong community identity can lead to heightened collaboration and mutual support, empowering residents to effectively navigate challenges posed by both poverty and conflict. Overall, the results of the study seem to indicate that while poverty and conflict present significant obstacles, they can also foster strong community bonds and identities that enable individuals to collaborate, support one another, and work toward resilience and recovery in the face of adversity.

The study also identified the interconnectedness of the elements of social assets in action to constitute a functional social capital. Both the social capital theory and literature primarily consider social assets to focus on the tangible resources and infrastructure available within the host community. On the other hand, in this study, it seems that social capital is the sum of social relationships, networks, and norms that facilitate cooperation and mutual support. In particular, to children's schooling retention, while social assets changing emotions into empathy provided the necessary spiritual, physical, and material resources for education, social capital seems to have enhanced the utilization and effectiveness of these resources by fostering community engagement, trust, and collaboration. Hence, both social assets and social capital are interlinked and complementary in both communities. The social assets that were essential for initiating access to education and the social capital have played a critical role in promoting retention and academic success by addressing the rights to education of IDP children.

5. Conclusion

The research, conducted through a qualitative exploratory case study in Ginjo and Queha, involved a diverse range of participants, including local leaders, education experts, community representatives, partners and from both IDP and host communities.

While Ginjo represents a socio linguistic religious and cultural community Queha retains a relatively homogeneous dominantly Orthodox Christian community. Despite the differences in geographic location and social features, both host demonstrated exemplary hospitality to IDPs and children retention for two years and more. In doing this, share strong core social capital elements in common, namely:

strong social interaction, mutual cooperation, resolving tensions, and networking for life-saving and life sustaining. In due process, the study revealed both communities have had assets (both invisible and visible ones) reactivated into organized and purposeful interventions relieve and recover. Depending on the specific social context, differences were also observed in strategies and priorities in accessing, mobilizing leveraging resources.

Exploration has evident that social capital serves as a cohesive catalyst to engage internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities to resolve tensions, mitigate adversity, and support children's school retention. The study sheds light on vital local community potentials, the significance of reactivating intangible and tangible social assets. Furthermore, it witnessed a critical resource and the pivotal role of social capital emergency efforts toward community-owned relief and recovery responses.

6. Recommendations

The findings, analysis of results, and discussion made on the study draw the following recommendations for policy and practice:

i. **Leverage Social Capital for community engagement practices:** recognizing and valuing the assets within social capital, such as indigenous bonds, as vital components for sustaining tangible assets and fostering community resilience. Encourage and support community-led initiatives that leverage social capital for reschooling and student retention efforts in conflict-affected areas. This includes facilitating partnerships between stakeholders and promoting collaboration among IDPs, host communities, and relevant organizations.

ii. **Support indigenous networks and voluntary groups**: Invest in indigenous networks, religious attachments, and voluntary groups within communities to strengthen social capital and enhance their capacity to address educational challenges and promote social harmony.

iii. **Mitigate conflict through social capital**: Recognize the role of social capital in mitigating conflict between host and IDP communities. Promote dialogue, reconciliation, and mutual understanding to harness social capital as a tool for conflict resolution and peace building.

iv. **Align government policies with Indigenous community assets**: Ensure that government policies and practices align with the realities and needs of conflict-affected communities. Prioritize strategies that empower communities to mobilize their social capital effectively for sustainable development and education initiatives.

v. **Invest in community assets and social capital research:** Support further research and documentation efforts to deepen understanding of social capital dynamics in emergency education response and school retention. This includes ongoing monitoring and evaluation of community-based interventions to inform evidence-based policy and practice.

7. Limitations of the study

This study adopted a comparative exploratory qualitative case study approach to investigate localized dynamic experiences. While valuable, this method presented limitations in post-conflict host and displaced communities, including potential researcher bias and limited generalizability due to purposive and snowball sampling.

To mitigate these, the researchers employed rigorous fieldwork and triangulated data from interviews, focus groups, and field notes, also conducting multiple visits with key informants. Logistical challenges such as transportation issues and security threats hindered data collection, requiring strategies like networking with school leaders and building rapport with local and IDP leaders to maintain communication, secure access, and obtain informed consent. Official letters were used for communication and security clearances, and telephone interviews supplemented data collection to enhance reliability and validity.

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