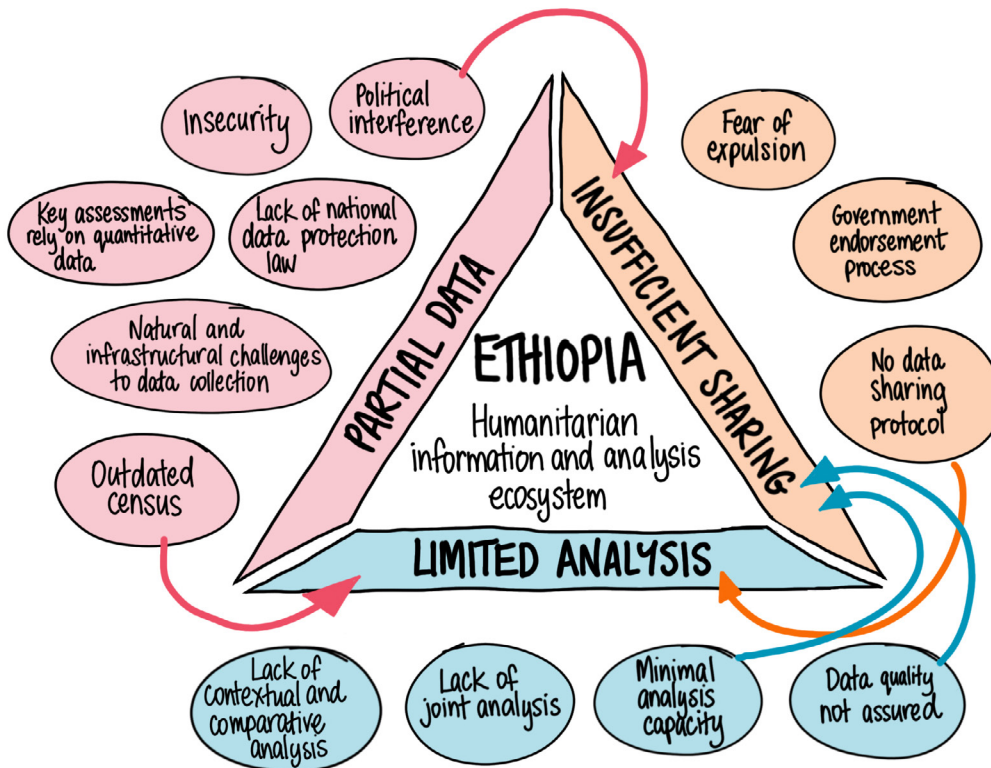


## The humanitarian information and analysis ecosystem

### OVERVIEW

The humanitarian information and analysis ecosystem in Ethiopia reflects the challenges of an operating environment characterised by the strong role of the Government of Ethiopia (GoE), a volatile and multifaceted crisis context, and humanitarian access constrained by insecurity and infrastructure. An effective and appropriate humanitarian response depends on the production of high-quality data and analyses, with organisations facing challenges related to data collection, analysis capacity, and information sharing between organisations.

Figure 1. Partial representation of the humanitarian and analysis ecosystem



Source: ACAPS

### About this report

**Aim:** assessments, information, and analyses are critically important for effective humanitarian action. This information and analysis ecosystem report looks at the information landscape in Ethiopia, assesses the quality, reliability, and sharing of available humanitarian data; and identifies opportunities to strengthen the information and analysis ecosystem. Humanitarians can better mitigate challenges by understanding these data elements, the key humanitarian information actors, and the sensitivities around data collection and information sharing to improve their ability to respond to Ethiopia's multiple crises. The report provides a starting point to understanding the information and analysis ecosystem more generally, though topics such as gender and anticipatory analysis warrant additional research.

**Methodology:** the report involved a desk review of publicly available literature, research, assessments, and documents linked to the information ecosystem in Ethiopia. Nine expert interviews with humanitarian staff from UN agencies, INGOs, and humanitarian clusters and two joint analysis sessions with participants from the Assessment and Analysis Working Group and INGOs complemented the secondary data review. These interviews and joint analysis sessions took place between 8 June and 14 September 2023.

**Limitations:** the secondary data review covered public and non-public assessments and analyses available to ACAPS at the time, meaning some non-public reports may not have been included. ACAPS mitigated this through expert interviews and joint analysis sessions for a better understanding of why information and analyses are not systematically shared or made public. Although the team contacted national NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) to request interviews, it was not possible to carry these out within the time frame. Interviews conducted for previous reports and publicly available information were used to bridge this gap.

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## KEY FINDINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN THE HUMANITARIAN INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM

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### Data availability

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- The lack of updated national census data affects the humanitarian response at different stages of the project cycle, especially assessment, design, and monitoring.

### Data collection

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- The humanitarian community is unable to assess parts of the population because of data collection challenges, such as security and access, network and internet connectivity issues, and limited infrastructure. Given these multiple constraints and challenges, humanitarians must allocate enough time for needs assessments and data collection exercises.

- In areas prone to conflict and natural hazards, investing in and rehabilitating road infrastructure and bridges would reduce the number of people left unassessed because of environmental barriers and increase humanitarian access.
- There is limited clarity on which data requires government endorsement and at which level, but it appears to be politically sensitive topics, such as nutrition, food security, disease outbreaks, and IDP figures.
- Some regularly published key assessments are quantitative. Mixed-method approaches, which combine qualitative and quantitative data collection, ensure a more nuanced and granular understanding of the context and the needs of the crisis-affected population.
- Greater participation and involvement of national staff in designing data collection tools and methods adapted to the context and regional specificities would increase data quality and strengthen conflict-sensitive programming.
- A lack of national data protection protocols is a challenge for organisations collecting personally identifiable data in Ethiopia.

### Data analysis

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- Being transparent about data quality limitations in assessments will improve the understanding of challenges and boost the credibility of findings.
- Restricted analysis and interpretation capacity limits organisations’ time and resources to analyse collected data in depth, and means it is not systematically done or prevents them from sharing it further because of perceived poor quality. When organisations do not have this capacity, they could consider partnering with humanitarian analysis providers. Joint analysis sessions within one organisation or among different organisations can also support analysis production and strengthen analysis capacities, also through utilising space for support such as the Assessment and Analysis Working Group.
- A lack of contextual analysis means that data is often only described and not sufficiently interpreted. This limits understanding of the more complex dynamics of a crisis and how it may evolve.
- Minimal collaboration between national and local CSOs and NGOs and international organisations limits the production of in-depth contextual understanding and conflict-sensitive programming. Increased collaboration would strengthen context understanding, research design, and the inclusion of variables, such as the norms and customs of crisis-affected populations.
- More engagement between humanitarian organisations and think tanks, research institutes, networks, associations, and universities would be beneficial. Academic research papers and studies can increase the depth and breadth of humanitarian organisations’ analyses. Engagement can contribute to academic studies following humanitarian methodological standards.

- A lack of comparative analysis limits analysis depth. Up-to-date information about who does what and where (3Ws) in the areas where organisations collect data, particularly with local NGOs and CSOs, would increase access to comparative data.
- More joint analysis could be undertaken as opportunities to enhance the analysis landscape, reduce sector-specific analysis, and understand crisis complexity and impact on different population groups.

### Publication, sharing, and dissemination

- There is currently no endorsed data-sharing protocol between humanitarian organisations, limiting data reach. An endorsed protocol would encourage organisations to share data nationally and regionally, increasing its reach and reducing the potential duplication of assessments and survey fatigue.

ACAPS recognises and encourages the efforts of the Information Management Working Group in aiming to establish an information-sharing protocol, as well as the Assessment and Analysis Working Group in providing coordination space for assessments and analysis. As part of this work, an assessment registry is being set up, which will contribute to improved awareness of existing data and information sources.

## CONTEXT AND INFORMATION LANDSCAPE

Ethiopia is currently facing multiple humanitarian crises driven by conflict, disease outbreaks, and natural hazards, such as drought, flooding from seasonal rains (*Belg* and *Kiremt*), and landslides. As at February 2023, there were around 28 million people in need of humanitarian assistance across the country. As at June 2023, over 4 million of an estimated 126 million people were internally displaced (IOM 22/08/2023; OCHA 28/02/2023; UNFPA accessed 14/09/2023). Conflict in northern Ethiopia ended in November 2022, after the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, but the impact continues to be felt as public services and livelihoods were destroyed, thousands of people were displaced in Afar, Amhara, and Tigray, and human rights violations continue to be documented (OHCHR 18/09/2023; AWA/Africans for the Horn 10/07/2023; HRW 01/06/2023). The drought and the conflict in Amhara, Benishangul Gumuz, Gambela, and Oromia have also caused internal displacement. Disease outbreaks, such as cholera and measles, continue in eastern and southeastern Ethiopia. These crises have worsened severe child malnutrition and food insecurity in the affected areas (OCHA 14/06/2023; Health Cluster et al. 20/06/2023; FEWS NET 01/02/2023). Locust outbreaks remain a threat after damaging crops throughout the country in 2019 and 2020 (FAO 28/08/2023; OCHA 07/09/2023).

Information in Ethiopia is disseminated via various channels, including government-owned, private, and community media outlets. Independent media outlets are few and have less coverage capacity than government-owned ones. The most prevalent channels include radio, TV, and digital media. There is a small number of print media (Internews/USAID 06/2021; UNESCO

2022). Ethiopia has long seen attempts to control and limit information to control narratives around certain issues of governance and crises. This includes blocking communications (phone and internet) and restricting access to locations and populations (CARD/AFD 07/2023; Al Jazeera 16/02/2021).

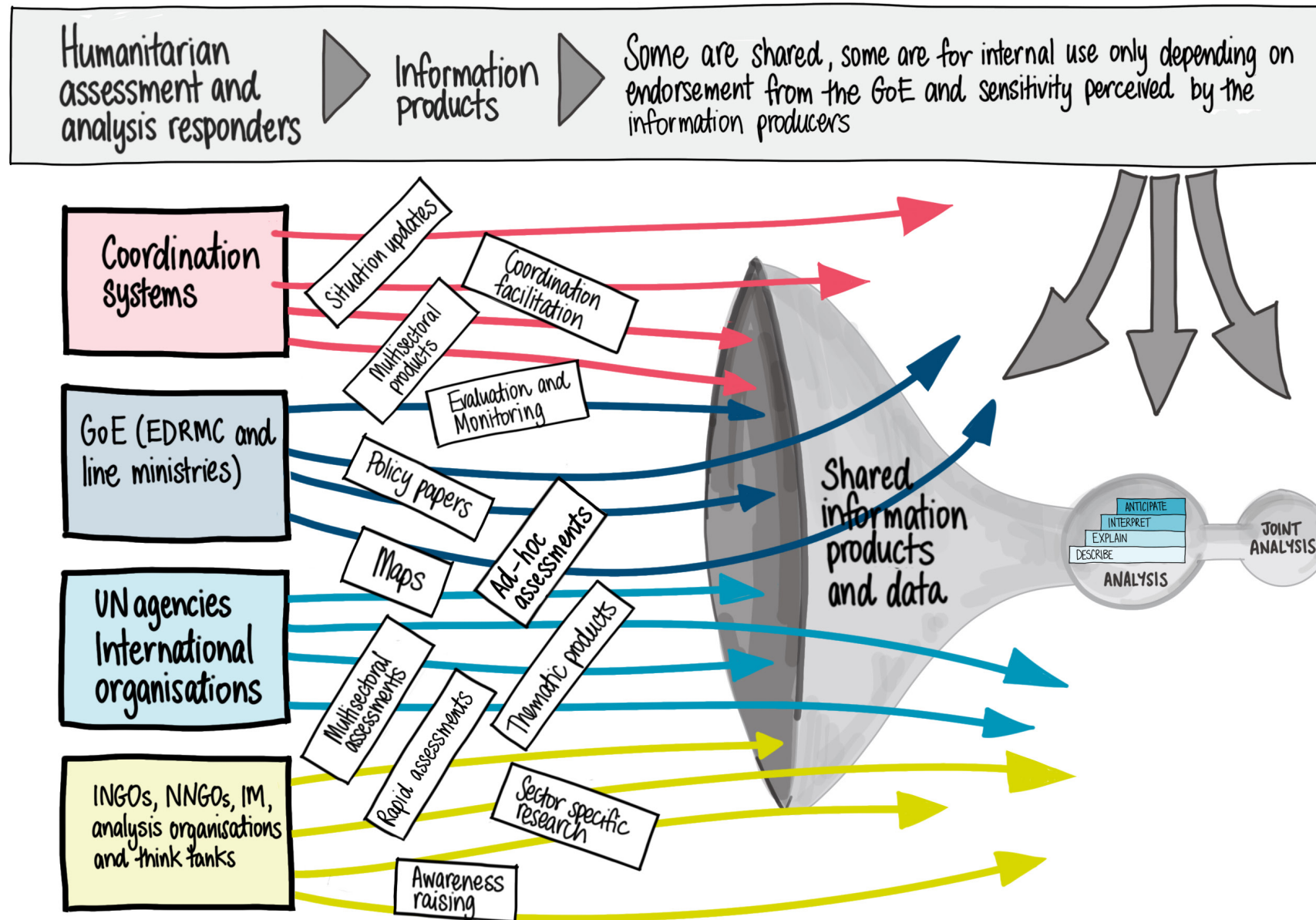
Policy, laws, and regulations have impacted freedom of press, as well as the work of INGOs, national NGOs, and CSOs, limiting the ability to collect and disseminate critical information. The 2009 law against association (more details on page 7) weakened the role of INGOs and national NGOs and CSOs, including in the humanitarian sector (RSF accessed 09/05/2023; ALNAP 01/02/2020). Ethiopia first adopted a controversial anti-terrorism law in 2009 and introduced an amended version in January 2020 (HRW 06/2012; VOA 03/01/2020). The anti-terrorism law has been used to limit reporting on critical and sensitive issues. Journalists have faced prosecution and imprisonment for criticising government policies and practices or reporting on political issues deemed sensitive, such as political repression, corruption, and social injustice. People are also criticising the March 2020 hate speech law for its vague definition, potentially suppressing free speech, especially for journalists and those critical of the GoE (RSF accessed 09/05/2023; CIPESA 21/07/2020; Al Jazeera 16/02/2021; Ayalew 18/03/2021).

Ethiopia's 2018 change in leadership was initially promising for independent media. Previously banned online media outlets were unblocked, detained journalists released, and legal reforms made to media regulation. Most of these gains were lost following the November 2020 outbreak of conflict in northern Ethiopia and continued countrywide enactments of states of emergency, with an upward trend in journalist and activist detention (CARD/AFD 07/2023; UNESCO 2022; RSF accessed 09/05/2023; Reuters 28/05/2021).

The Government significantly blocked information during the northern Ethiopia conflict from November 2020 to November 2022. Phone (both mobile and landline) and internet were shut down, and journalists were unable to access affected areas. Some journalists who reported on the conflict were imprisoned on accusations of breaching the country's state of emergency and anti-terrorism laws (BBC 05/12/2020; Al Jazeera 16/02/2021; CPJ 15/12/2021). At least 11 journalists were arrested between March–August 2023 for reporting on tension and unrest in Amhara region and the Government's demolition of houses in the newly formed Sheger city (RSF 18/08/2023; CPJ 12/05/2023 and 14/04/2023). To avoid repercussions, many journalists engaged in self-censorship or avoided reporting on sensitive topics, resulting in a lack of available and accurate information (Moges 10/2021; RSF accessed 09/05/2023).

More recently on 3 August 2023, the Government shut down internet across Amhara region, where clashes between local militia and Federal military forces are still taking place (Access Now 12/09/2023; Reuters 03/08/2023). Such communication blackouts reduce access to up-to-date information, affecting media reporting. They also hinder humanitarian organisations from accessing affected populations and carrying out assessments in certain locations (OCHA 09/08/2022).

FIGURE 2. TYPES OF STAKEHOLDERS CONTRIBUTING TO ETHIOPIA'S INFORMATION LANDSCAPE



Source: ACAPS



## MAPPING OF ACTORS IN ETHIOPIA'S HUMANITARIAN INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM

The humanitarian system in Ethiopia includes international and national responders, with the GoE at the centre of the humanitarian response. The GoE, UN agencies, INGOs, national NGOs, CSOs, and universities all collect and analyse data on the humanitarian situation, often focusing on specific sectors or regions.

### Humanitarian architecture and information management

The Ethiopian Humanitarian Country Team is the main humanitarian policy, decision-making, and strategic body that guides the international humanitarian response in Ethiopia. The Humanitarian Coordinator leads the team, while OCHA is responsible for coordinating the international humanitarian response (EHCT/OCHA 13/03/2019; GMI 06/2018; Sida 03/2022).

During emergencies, multi-agency coordination structures are initiated. These include technical and strategic multi-agency coordination (MAC) groups with the framework of the National Incident Management System, which facilitates an Emergency Operation Center that monitors and collects information across the country. The group members include ministries, UN agencies, and NGOs. The Ethiopian Disaster and Risk Management Commission (EDRMC) performs key roles in the coordination and is the main body for arranging meetings and notifying members (Wako and Shen 02/2021; NDRMC 05/2019; EDRMC accessed 12/05/2023).

The **Inter-Cluster Coordination Group** convenes active humanitarian clusters and working groups to ensure a coordinated humanitarian response to Ethiopia's many crises. It consists of cluster coordinators, information management officers, and technical advisers (IASC 20/02/2023). Respective clusters lead coordination with humanitarian responders at the federal, regional, and woreda levels. Most clusters are chaired by the EDRMC or the line ministry and are co-chaired by a UN agency and/or an INGO. As at September 2023, an exception to this is the Protection cluster, which is not chaired by a government entity but by the UNHCR, although the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs co-chairs the areas of responsibility under the cluster. Clusters at the subnational level carry out intercluster or joint needs assessments and joint sectoral analyses (OCHA 11/01/2018). Information gathered via the clusters feeds into the annual Humanitarian Needs Overview, which in turn shapes the annual Humanitarian Response Plan that guides humanitarian assistance (WASH Cluster 31/03/2022; KII 26/06/2023). The Refugee Response Plan is separate from this (UNHCR 24/02/2023).

The **Disaster Risk Management Technical Working Group** is chaired by the EDRMC and co-chaired by OCHA. It coordinates and monitors disaster risk management in Ethiopia. This working group hosts specialised task forces that work with humanitarian clusters and across sectors. It encourages joint engagement and supports the implementation of

multisectoral and multihazard disaster risk management approaches with government and non-government stakeholders (Wako and Shen 02/2021; EDRMC 25/10/22 and 10/2021; ENN 12/2017; GMI 06/2018).

The **Assessment and Analysis Working Group** is a multisectoral, multistakeholder group set up in April 2023 to facilitate and coordinate needs assessments and multisectoral analysis among humanitarian responders, ensure that information is collected and disseminated in a timely manner to inform decision-making and the wider humanitarian response, and support the humanitarian country team and the GoE in understanding the humanitarian situation (OCHA 28/02/2023).

The **Information Management Working Group** supports humanitarian organisations' rollout of activity information that integrates who does what, where, when, and for whom (5Ws). It also ensures that adequate monitoring systems are in place to confirm an appropriate and measured response under each cluster (OCHA 28/02/2023; iMMAP 2020).

Other working groups function under the cluster system and are convened to address specific issues. They are generally line-managed by one or more clusters, depending on the issue, and support the data collection process and information management. Working groups currently active in Ethiopia include but are not limited to the Ethiopia Cash Working Group; the Housing, Land, and Property Working Group; and the Inter-Agency Accountability Working Group (ECWG accessed 27/06/2023; OCHA 28/02/2023).

### Government institutions

The GoE is responsible for coordinating humanitarian efforts and providing access to information, including census data, health, and education statistics. The GoE oversees the information system, analysis, and overall emergency response through the EDRMC. There is overall strong government involvement, capacity, and oversight, as the EDRMC coordinates both the information flow and the humanitarian response. This has implications for the access, use, and politicisation of information in the country (EDRMC 25/10/2022; Tufts University 04/2020; HERE-Geneva 23/01/2020).

Historically, the Government has heavily influenced information in Ethiopia at many levels. At the zone and woreda levels, it has artificially increased figures of the projected population in need of humanitarian assistance to attract resources and humanitarian aid; at the regional and national levels, it has lowered these figures to demonstrate success in poverty and vulnerability reduction (Tufts University 04/2020; Maxwell and Hailey 08/07/2021). This manipulation at various levels casts doubt on the collection, independence, and use of information, as well as on how it shapes the humanitarian response and subsequent programmes. A 2016–2017 European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations response evaluation criticised the response rate in Ethiopia, where systems for collecting, processing, and releasing

information were slow and politicised, with state institutions at different levels downplaying signs of crisis. Although information remained available, its release was controlled, affecting humanitarian programming (Tufts University 01/2020 and 04/2020; Groupe URD/ODI 03/2019). In other cases, independent assessments have been disallowed, such as in South Omo (in Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's or SNNP region) and Somali region (Groupe URD/ODI 03/2019). More recently, in May and June 2023, WFP and USAID respectively suspended food distribution in Tigray and the rest of the country, naming cases of aid diversion, food not reaching intended recipients, and aid being sold for profit in local markets. Reports of local officials creating inflated beneficiary lists were also cited as one factor of the suspension (TWP 08/06/2023; WFP 09/06/2023; The Guardian 29/06/2023).

The **EDRMC** was re-established in 2015 under the regulation of the Council of Ministers. The commission determines the disaster risk management framework in Ethiopia and is accountable to the Disaster Risk Management Council chaired by the Prime Minister. Since late 2021, it has been reporting directly to the Prime Minister's office (Federal Negarit Gazette 14/12/2015; EDRMC 25/10/2022; Tufts University 04/2020). The EDRMC is responsible for overseeing response activities for both disaster prevention and disaster risk management and reduction, including humanitarian aid delivery and coordination. This includes an early warning and response system across all government levels (Tufts University 04/2020). The commission is decentralised and operates both at the federal and regional levels in collaboration with federal ministries, regional authorities, and national and international humanitarian organisations. It is also responsible for collecting and analysing humanitarian data, collaborating with disaster responders, and providing technical support and training to humanitarians involved in disaster risk management (OCHA 28/02/2023). Other functions include emergency response and recovery, as well as disaster aftermath rehabilitation, such as the restoration of infrastructure and basic services (EDRMC accessed 14/09/2023).

## International humanitarian analysis and products providers

UN agencies, international networks, and other international analysis providers work closely together and provide information and data to understand the needs of various population groups across the country. Some of these include (non-comprehensive):

**FAO** together with the Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture, has developed several web-based tools to facilitate widespread data access and analysis on food security and agriculture. The organisation regularly updates the country's brief on the food security situation, seasonal weather and its impacts, and cereal prices across the country. FAO also produces regular situation reports on desert locust infestations. Ethiopia is one of the countries covered in the quarterly Crop Prospects and Food Situation global report (FAO accessed 29/08/2023; FAO 28/08/2023 and 07/2023).

The **IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix** monitors human mobility within Ethiopia and provides breakdowns by location, vulnerability, demographics, and IDP needs. It applies an overall view of the different trends and needs of IDPs through household-level surveys, site assessments, village assessment surveys, events tracking, flow monitoring, thematic analyses, mobility data, and epidemiological outbreak reports analyses. It produces site assessments and village assessment surveys quarterly to monitor the number of IDPs and their needs across the country (IOM 15/05/2022).

**OCHA** manages critical information and coordinates data collection and analysis with humanitarian responders, particularly within the Information Management Working Group and Assessment and Analysis Working Group. OCHA, with humanitarian responders, produces Ethiopia's annual Humanitarian Needs Overview, the Humanitarian Response Plan, reports and maps on the humanitarian access situation, and a countrywide biweekly situation report covering humanitarian needs, responses, and gaps (OCHA accessed 24/08/2023; OCHA 07/09/2023).

**UNDP** produces publications on development issues in Ethiopia, including quarterly economic profiles and a series of working papers to provide analysis and ideas about critical development issues in the country (UNDP accessed 24/08/2023).

**UNFPA** plays a key role in supporting censuses, demographic and health surveys, and other large-scale data-gathering exercise, provides technical support for information analysis and dissemination. It also produces monthly humanitarian response situation reports in Ethiopia (UNFPA 11/08/2023; UNFPA accessed 24/08/2023).

The **UNHCR** regularly produces dashboard data on refugees, IDPs, returnees, and host communities in Ethiopia. It produces regular situation reports on events affecting IDPs and refugees (UNHCR accessed 24/08/2023 a; UNHCR 24/08/2023; UNHCR accessed 24/08/2023 b).

**UNICEF** produces monthly humanitarian situation reports that provide updates on the situation and needs of children in and/or across the country and SMART surveys through the Emergency Nutrition Coordination Unit (GoE et al 31/01/2021; Nutrition Cluster, UNICEF 09/03/2023; UNICEF accessed 24/08/2023).

The **WFP** through the Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping unit and with the Government, conducts emergency food security assessments and price market monitoring. It also produces regular drought response situation updates across affected areas (WFP 21/03/2023; WFP accessed 02/06/2023).

The **WHO** shares weekly bulletins on disease outbreaks and other emergencies in Ethiopia using data from the Ethiopia Public Health Institute (WHO 21/05/2023; WHO accessed 26/09/2023).

The **Famine Early Warning System Network** gathers data and monitors trends in staple food prices across selected urban centres in Ethiopia to produce the monthly Price Bulletin. This contains charts showing monthly prices in the last five years, allowing a comparison of data over time (FEWS NET accessed 02/06/2023). The network also projects food insecurity by developing at least three scenarios per year (OCHA 05/03/2021).

The **IPC** is a set of analytical tools and processes that analyse and classify the severity of a food security situation as per scientific international standards (IPC accessed 15/09/2023 a). The last IPC in Ethiopia was conducted in September 2021 (IPC accessed 15/09/2023 b).

The **Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project Ethiopian Peace Observatory** is a platform that pulls together news from various sources and presents analyses about political violence and unrest across the country (ACLED accessed 08/06/2023).

**REACH** tracks the prices of goods through the monthly Ethiopian Joint Market Monitoring Initiative. REACH also conducts emergency needs assessments in hard-to-reach areas across selected regions across Ethiopia, as well as other ad hoc assessments (REACH accessed 02/06/2023).

**iMMAP** provides technical support to OCHA, clusters, NGOs, and the Government by providing national information management officers and capacity building. It also produces information products and services, including reports, databases, and infographics. iMMAP also does some data coordination (iMMAP accessed 05/09/2023).

**ACAPS** produces analyses on selected humanitarian crises. This includes the analysis of situational developments across the country and their impacts on the affected population, as well as in-depth thematic analyses, responding to the situation and the humanitarian community's analysis needs (ACAPS accessed 05/09/2023).

## Local NGOs and civil society organizations

The 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation widely affected national CSOs and NGOs (as well as research institutes and forums) by restricting funding and limiting their areas of work. This has weakened the influence, impact, and contribution of national and local NGOs and CSOs (ALNAP 01/02/2020; PRIF 07/2017; ActionAid 23/10/2017). It has also limited their ability to collect data and affected overall information availability. As a result, the focus of most national and local NGOs and CSOs has shifted from humanitarian activities to development (CAFOD et al. 03/2017). As the 2019 CSO proclamation gave more freedom in funding and for the activities of national and local NGOs and CSOs, they have gradually become more active and numerous. Regardless, there remains a long way to go regarding their engagement in the humanitarian response (Sida 03/2022; The Reporter 08/10/2022; HERE-Geneva 23/01/2020).

## The 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation

The 2009 CSO law limited freedom of association, including through the following restrictive clauses.

**The 90/10 rule** prohibited Ethiopian charities or societies from getting more than 10% of funding or resources from foreign sources, meaning they had to raise 90% of their funds from domestic sources.

**The 70/30 rule** required charities or societies to allocate 70% of their expenses to operational costs and not more than 30% to administrative activities. It had a vague definition of administrative costs that included commissioning research, capacity building, participatory monitoring, evaluation, and networking.

The **Charities and Societies Agency** was created as per the proclamation to oversee the activities of CSOs. It had the authority to register CSOs, refuse or grant an application for license registration and renewal, and cancel or revoke the registration of CSOs without a court order.

Sources: Broeckhoven et al. (30/07/2020); ALNAP (01/02/2020); EDP (19/09/2019); PRIF (07/2017); CCRDA (accessed 05/09/2023); CDA (01/2016); Federal Negarit Gazette (13/02/2009)

## The 2019 Civil Societies Proclamation

The 2019 CSO law reversed most of the restrictive measures under the 2009 proclamation.

It **abolished the 90/10 rule**, enabling CSOs to raise funds from any lawful sources and allowing all organisations to engage in any lawful activity to accomplish their objectives.

It **defined administrative costs**, excluding those from training, research, and networking.

It **renamed the Charities and Societies Agency**, to Authority for Civil Society Organization limited its administrative duties, and allowed CSOs to challenge its decisions, unlike the previous law.

Sources: MLA (08/2019); EDP (19/09/2019); Federal Negarit Gazette (07/03/2019); WMD (11/2020); ACSO (accessed 05/09/2023)

The official mechanisms of humanitarian coordination do not include local and national NGOs at the federal level. National and local NGOs and CSOs do not actively participate in national and regional humanitarian networks and platforms. Reasons include insufficient knowledge about the existence, nature, and benefits of different humanitarian networks; a lack of incentives, such as capacity building; and limited access to resources and geographic area of operations (CAFOD et al. 11/2016; ActionAid 23/10/2017; IASC 11/2019). The role and impact of CSOs and national and local NGOs in the humanitarian field remain limited, as the previous restrictive system is replaced by the new law, national and local organisations need time to adapt to the environment and enhance their capacity, expertise, and engagement. While ACAPS interviewees said that there was limited coordination at the national level between INGOs, UN agencies, and national and local NGOs, these NGOs and CSOs were present in some subnational clusters and are implementing partners for international organisations (JAS 14/09/2023; KII 19/06/2023; KII 21/06/2023 b; Sida 03/2022; HERE-Geneva 23/01/2020; OPM et al. 09/2021; CAFOD et al. 11/2016).

Limited cooperation between the international humanitarian stage and the local and national levels limits information exchange. Limited engagement with local and national NGOs has direct implications for research design, data collection, and analysis. It also excludes local organisations who know the communities best, limiting the presence of national voices in assessments. Conversations with local NGOs revealed that despite better access to communities for national NGOs and CSOs, there was no strong collaboration between them and INGOs (KII 20/01/2023; KII 25/01/2023). Some INGOs and humanitarian clusters said they received assessments and analyses from national and local CSOs and NGOs (KII 30/06/2023; KII 21/06/2023 a; KII 08/06/2023). The overall lack of communication and collaboration means local voices remain underrepresented in Ethiopia's humanitarian information landscape (JAS 14/09/2023). As mentioned in the limitations, only a few discussions could be held with local organisations to understand their full contribution to the information landscape and role in the ecosystem.

### Research institutes, forums, and universities

Academic institutions and research organisations also explore issues relevant to the humanitarian response, such as food security, health, gender equality, conflict analysis, legal rights, and policy analysis. They provide evidence-based assessments that influence policy and humanitarian programming. Although research is one of the major duties of Ethiopian universities, these institutions appear to focus on teaching and learning for a range of reasons, among them being limited resources and academic freedom restrictions (Weldemichael 2014; DFID 10/2019). That said, some universities in certain regions are members of subnational clusters and commissioned to conduct research (KII 22/06/2023; KII 21/06/2023 b).

There are various national research institutions, associations, and social movements producing research on topics ranging across society, gender, economics, and politics. Among the prominent national research institutions and professional associations are the Ethiopian Economics Association, the Forum for Social Studies, the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, and the Ethiopian Human Rights Council. Most people who spoke with ACAPS said that there was very little engagement between research institutions or forums and humanitarian organisations. Generally, engagement was through the incorporation of relevant products from research organisations and think tanks into the literature reviews of humanitarian organisations (KII 30/06/2023; KII 26/06/2023).

## THE ASSESSMENT AND DATA ECOSYSTEM IN ETHIOPIA

Various assessments and monitoring by the Government (through the EDRMC and line ministries), subnational clusters, and independent humanitarian organisations aid the identification of target populations and the design of humanitarian intervention strategies. These include but are not limited to:

- seasonal assessments
- joint multisectoral needs assessments
- initial rapid assessments and other ad hoc assessments
- regular market-monitoring assessments and price watches
- assessments carried out through cluster members, for example SMART surveys
- monitoring systems and frameworks targeting indicators monitored for the Humanitarian Response Plan
- monitoring and evaluations conducted by different organisations, sometimes jointly (OCHA 05/03/2021, 03/08/2022, and 28/02/2023).

The Government leads the biannual seasonal assessments, including methodology drafting and data collection (OCHA 05/03/2021; JAS 06/09/2023). These assessments focus on food security, leaving non-food components largely unassessed (KII 16/06/2023; JAS 06/09/2023). Humanitarians have reported that once data has been collected, they are sometimes invited to analyse it within a limited time frame, but they are unable to influence the assessment process (KII 22/06/2023; JAS 06/09/2023). Other shortcomings of seasonal assessments include inconsistent data collection tools throughout the regions, a lack of transparency on the limitations and measures to mitigate biases, and insufficient requirements regarding the informed consent of participants (IASC 11/2019). This compromises their overall quality. The assessments are also often rushed because of poor planning, leading to incomplete data collection (JAS 06/09/2023; Tufts University 01/2020; IASC 11/2019). Overall, the biannual



seasonal assessment process is resource-intensive for organisations, with limited output and information that can help inform humanitarian needs and programmes (JAS 06/09/2023).

Under the subnational cluster setup, multisector needs assessments are carried out to understand humanitarian needs and highlight gaps to advocate for possible crisis interventions and responses (OCHA 12/06/2020). Assessments are often initiated at the regional level, and then findings are shared at the national level for awareness raising and fundraising (KII 22/06/2023; KII 19/06/2023). The national clusters are sometimes unaware of assessments being carried out at lower administrative levels. The current information flow limits the involvement of national clusters in tool and methodology development and confidence in the quality of data collected. National clusters could promote information sharing and lessons learnt across regional clusters more effectively if they were aware of planned assessments in advance (KII 22/06/2023; KII 19/06/2023; KII 16/06/2023).

When multisectoral assessments are not possible because of resource constraints, limited coordination, and a lack of organisational interest, rapid assessments are often done instead (KII 26/06/2023; KII 21/06/2023 b). In sudden-onset emergencies, OCHA promotes the use of the Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment tool to carry out such assessments, with organisations often developing and implementing their own tools (IASC 07/2015; REDLAC et al. 12/2006; GoE et al. 26/06/2022).

Assessments done by individual organisations are also carried out based on the gaps and needs observed at lower administrative levels (regional, zonal, woreda) (JAS 14/09/2023; KII 19/06/2023; KII 16/06/2023; KII 08/06/2023). Most needs assessments conducted by humanitarian stakeholders focus on their specific mandate and expertise, limiting the understanding of interconnected needs (KII 08/06/2023; KII 21/06/2023 b).

## Data and information availability

The lack of updated baseline data, such as census data, affects the work of humanitarian organisations at different stages in the project cycle management, especially assessment, design, or monitoring (UNHCR accessed 03/09/2023). The last census was conducted in 2007. As per the schedule, the next one was supposed to take place in 2017, but it is yet to happen (Wilson Center 30/09/2022). On 17 April 2023, the Ministry of Planning and Development stated that the next national census will take place sometime between 2024–2026 (BBC 17/05/2023). The census is the main baseline source for data in social, political, economic, developmental, and humanitarian planning and analysis. As there is no updated census data, organisations work with projected population datasets. These datasets vary across the federal, regional, and zonal levels, leading to uncertainty around numbers (MSF 06/2019). The lack of sex and age disaggregated baseline data makes it challenging to determine the population requiring

programming needs, e.g. child immunisation, gender mainstreaming, and programmes targeting people with disabilities or the elderly (JAS 06/09/2023; JAS 14/09/2023; KII 30/06/2023; KII 26/06/2023; KII 19/06/2023; KII 16/06/2023; KII 08/06/2023; Tufts University 04/2020).

Existing data is also not always made available in a timely manner because of government endorsement processes, with some time-sensitive data, such as displacement figures, rapidly becoming outdated by the time it is released. This is especially difficult for emergency responses. To bypass this, organisations share data and findings bilaterally but refrain from making them publicly available. This limits data reach and availability and, accordingly, the number of organisations that benefit from these findings. The lack of data sharing affects data availability, awareness raising, and decision-making in the long run (JAS 14/09/2023; KII 19/06/2023; KII 22/06/2023; KII 21/06/2023 b; KII 30/06/2023; USAID 18/05/2021; Tufts University 01/2020; MSF 06/2019).

## Data collection

In Ethiopia, there are some persistent data collection challenges. These include insecurity, political interference, network and internet cuts, infrastructure limitations, and a lack of a national data protection protocol. As a result, some geographic areas are more frequently excluded from data collection than others and are left behind in humanitarian programming, leading to humanitarian needs not being sufficiently addressed in those areas (KII 21/06/2023 a; KII 21/06/2023 b; KII 19/06/2023; KII 16/06/2023; KII 08/06/2023).

## Data collection methods

Humanitarian organisations in Ethiopia use qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches depending on the objective of assessments, as well as the time and resources available.

Some regularly published key assessments are quantitative, such as seasonal assessments and the Displacement Tracking Matrix. ACAPS interviewees said that they preferred quantitative data collection tools as they were easier to use within shorter time frames, provided precise answers or figures, and generated quick data and analyses (KII 26/06/2023; KII 21/06/2023 a; KII 08/06/2023). When organisations prioritise quantitative approaches, they can determine the number of affected people, identify the most affected locations, and find the key needs of crisis-affected populations, answering the 3Ws. Quantitative data collection, on the other hand, often fails to provide information on the depth of the impact of a crisis and the experience of the affected population. It might identify priority needs but fail to explain why these needs are a priority. In a context like Ethiopia, where conflict is one of the primary causes of internal displacement, the quantitative approach fails to portray IDP experiences

and voices. Furthermore, without consolidated baseline data like the national census, the representativeness of quantitative approaches is questionable (Tufts University 01/2020; Tufts University 04/2020; ICRC 11/06/2020; ACAPS 18/05/2012).

Mixed-method approaches combining quantitative and qualitative methods are also used. Some of the organisations ACAPS spoke with collected qualitative data to substantiate and clarify the gaps in quantitative data collection and triangulate the findings (KII 08/06/2023; KII 22/06/2023; KII 16/06/2023; KII 26/06/2023; KII22/08/2023). Other organisations stated that they preferred qualitative approaches to understand phenomena, sociocultural norms, and the experiences of different population groups (KII 21/06/2023 b; KII 22/06/2023). Qualitative approaches allow for analysis from the perspective of groups and individuals. These methods can identify intangible factors and help explain how different aspects, such as cultural norms, gender roles, and ethnic and religious implications, affect the population. It results in data that is not always objectively verifiable, requiring a more intensive analysis process and skilled data collectors (ICRC 11/06/2020; ACAPS 18/05/2012).

### Security and access

Various conflicts across the country hinder data collection. In areas of conflict, data collectors are not deployed to ensure their safety and security. Ethiopia is among the world's deadliest countries for humanitarian workers. Since 2019, 36 humanitarian workers have been killed on duty (OCHA 12/04/2023; AWSO accessed 24/07/2023). Aid workers also faced harassment and violence in Tigray during the conflict by armed forces from November 2020 to November 2022 (OCHA 11/06/2021; NYT 17/03/2022). Humanitarian access within and into Tigray region during this two-year conflict was highly constrained and sporadic. A de facto blockade over several months prevented needs assessments and impeded a better understanding of humanitarian needs and people's living conditions (OCHA 08/08/2022 and 17/10/2022; Reuters 11/11/2022). Today, some areas of Ethiopia remain inaccessible. These include parts of Amhara, western, southwestern, and eastern Oromia, SNNP, and Tigray regions, as well as areas along the Somali-Afar border (OCHA 07/09/2023 and 29/08/2023).

### Political interference

The EDRMC and the Regional Disaster Risk Management Council authorise most data collection before an assessment is carried out at any level (KII 21/06/2023 a; KII 21/06/2023 b). Upon data collection, it may need government endorsement at different levels. There is limited clarity as to which data needs endorsement, but it appears to be politically sensitive topics, such as nutrition, food security, disease outbreaks, and IDP figures (KII 26/06/2023; KII 21/06/2023 a; KII 19/06/2023). Information sharing on such topics to the public requires approval at different administrative levels. This process can take between two to four weeks, even longer in some instances (KII 30/06/2023; KII 22/06/2023; KII 21/06/2023 a). If a humanitarian

organisation's findings clash with the Government's, the data will not be endorsed or published. It is instead shared informally between organisations or not at all (KII 19/06/2023; KII 21/06/2023 a). In some cases, organisations conducting needs assessments are pushed to use government figures of people in need (JAS 06/09/2023; KII 21/06/2023 b).

The Government approves most assessments but can be restrictive when it comes to operational planning and response informed by the collected data, preferring organisations to continue working within their existing mandate, rather than expanding their programs to tackle issues identified in the data collected. This results in survey fatigue, occurring when data collection is not used to trigger intervention, and the duplication of efforts in the absence of data sharing. It also leads to an unnecessary use of data collection resources (KII 21/06/2023 b).

### Network and internet access

There is only one government-owned telecommunications provider in the country. Given its monopoly over phone and internet networks, the Government is able to block telecommunications access in the affected areas during times of conflict (Proton VPN 24/03/2023). This information blackout affects the ability of affected communities to communicate during a crisis and the ability of humanitarians to understand its scale and the needs to address, preventing humanitarian intervention. Network interruptions hinder remote data collection in areas experiencing conflict or natural hazards, such as Afar, Amhara, western and eastern Oromia, Somali, and Tigray regions (KII 21/06/2023 a). These disruptions also obstruct tools for data collection, such as Kobo Toolbox, resulting in delayed data submission and the exclusion of areas experiencing network interruptions (KII 30/06/2023; KII 26/06/2023; KII 21/06/2023 a; KII 21/06/2023 b; KII 19/06/2023; KII 16/06/2023; KII 08/06/2023).

### Limited infrastructure

Areas inaccessible because of flooding are a challenge for data collection in parts of Afar, Gambela, Oromia, SNNP, and Somali regions. Perennial river and flash floods can block roads, collapse bridges, and leave communities unreachable. Seasonal inaccessibility is prevalent during the *Kiremt* rainy season, as the heavy rains affect the majority of regions, in some cases flooding and blocking roads. In the drought-affected areas of Somali and southeastern Oromia, roads are degraded, making car journeys to communities difficult. Other areas across the country are difficult to reach because of remoteness and poor road infrastructure. Physical inaccessibility makes assessments more expensive and time-consuming. Because cellular network is weak in isolated areas, remote data collection is not an option. Physical inaccessibility can also affect data verification, affecting quality assurance mechanisms (KII 22/06/2023; KII 21/06/2023 a; KII 16/06/2023; KII 22/08/2023).

## Lack of national data protection protocol

There is no specific law in Ethiopia to address personal data collection, processing, transfer, and security (DLA PIPER accessed 07/09/2023). This lack of a national data protection protocol is a challenge for organisations collecting personally identifiable data in Ethiopia, keeping data ownership and storage uncertain. People who spoke with ACAPS said that their organisation did not do personal registration in Ethiopia, as there was no legal protection for the personal data collected. There was also no safeguard for the people giving the information, especially sensitive data relating to health, ethnicity, and religious, political, or armed group affiliation. This puts identified people at risk if accessed by unintended third parties (such as authorities, groups driven by various interests, and private entities) (KII 21/06/2023 a; JAS 06/09/2023; ICRC 07/2017).

### Data analysis

Data analysis helps humanitarians make informed decisions and understand the needs, risks, capacities, challenges, and preferences of affected populations. It can also identify trends and forecast future outcomes. Lacking data analysis limits the use of information and an evidence-based approach for decision-making.

### Data quality issues

The circumstances around data collection in Ethiopia affect data quality and reliability. Some challenges to data quality include rapid turnaround times, verification difficulties, a lack of baseline data, comparable data, standard data collection tools and processes, and data triangulation. Another major challenge is research capacity, including the training of research teams and data collectors. The Government push for the use of its figures in needs assessments is also a challenge that has resulted in the overreliance of humanitarian responders on unverified figures (JAS 06/09/2023; Tufts University 04/2020; Shalash et al. 09/10/2022; KII 26/06/2023; KII 08/06/2023; KII 30/06/2023; KII 16/06/2023; KII 19/06/2023; KII 08/06/2023).

### Biases

Other identified limitations to data quality are biases, such as institutional and response biases and human error. Institutional bias results in organisations designing and carrying out data collection with the presumed needs of communities that complement their programmes. Donor requirements also influence data collection exercises and the focus of programme evaluation. This results in narrow questionnaires and guiding questions and survey fatigue. Some areas in the country have also been recipients of humanitarian aid for a long time, training affected populations on how to respond to humanitarian questionnaires to

ensure that their communities receive assistance, creating response bias (KII 21/06/2023 a; KII 21/06/2023 a; KII 21/06/2023 b; JAS 14/09/2023). This bias substantially affects data reliability and the extent to which it represents actual needs. That said, there is limited secondary data on institutional and response bias despite it being a common concern across the humanitarian sector. This could be an area of future research.

Human error in data collection presents another challenge to data quality. Normally, it is caught and addressed by robust data quality and verification mechanisms, such as routine data quality assurance for accuracy, checks on completeness and timeliness, and data triangulation with other data sources. Quality assurance varies across organisations, but in the absence of such mechanisms, mistakes compromise data quality (Tufts University 04/2020 and 01/2020; KII 22/08/2023; KII 21/06/2023 a; KII 21/06/2023 b; KII 16/06/2023; KII 08/06/2023).

### Lack of capacity to analyse data

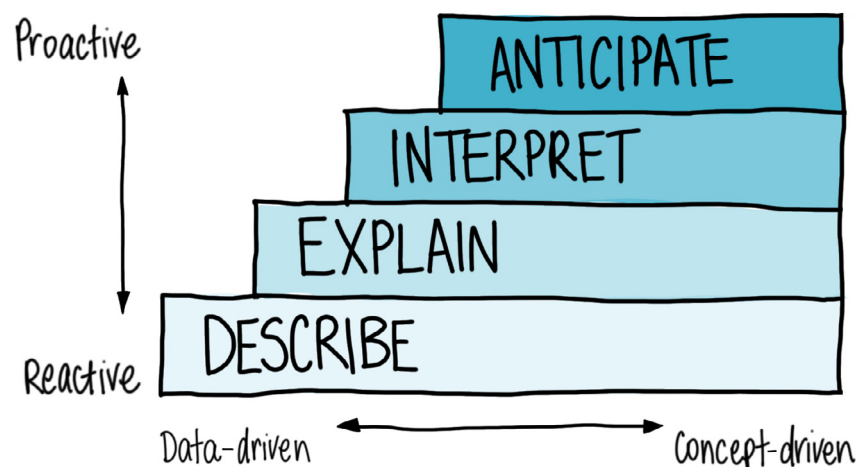
Some organisations told ACAPS that they lacked the time or capacity to carry out a thorough analysis of collected data in response to emergencies and that, when they did produce a rapid analysis, they tended not to publish the findings because of perceived poor quality. Others noted the difficulty of carrying out assessments in quickly changing contexts, such as rapid-onset emergencies (Tufts University 04/2020; KII 21/06/2023 b; JAS 14/09/2023).

### Lack of contextual analysis

Humanitarian organisations tend to use their own dataset when doing analysis, lacking broader contextual understanding and integration. Most people who spoke with ACAPS said they rarely used data from non-humanitarians, while others lacked the time and capacity to look for such sources (KII 21/06/2023 b; KII 22/06/2023). A deep understanding of the context is essential to analysis in a multi-ethnic and multicultural country like Ethiopia. Context understanding allows for a more nuanced analysis, helps humanitarians better understand the underlying causes of crises, and allows for more community-led solutions. It is key to ensuring conflict-sensitive programming and anticipating seasonal and access challenges linked with natural hazards.

A lack of contextual analysis also means that data is often only described and not sufficiently interpreted. Without strong contextual analysis, humanitarian responders risk focusing on addressing immediate basic needs without understanding the key dynamics in the context and the positive and negative impacts of their programmes (HPN 04/05/2021; UN 2022; FAO 13/09/2019). Analysis falls on a spectrum from descriptive to anticipatory, with increasing layers of complexity, moving from a description of the findings to explaining their context, interpreting their significance, and anticipating how the situation might evolve.

Figure 3. Analysis spectrum (adapted from Pherson, 2010)



Source: ACAPS

### Lack of comparative analysis

The lack of comparable data limits analysis. Assessments by single organisations are sometimes done as a one-off exercise or use data collection tools that change over time, hindering comparison and limiting trend analysis (IASC 11/2019). The people who spoke with ACAPS also noted the lack of comprehensive multisectoral needs assessments affecting comparative analysis (JAS 14/09/2023). This also hinders the humanitarian response's ability to evaluate trends in the humanitarian situation.

Assessments covering multiple geographic areas sometimes do not follow a uniformly structured data collection methodology. This results in incomparable data between different areas for the same types of assessments (KII 19/06/2023; KII 16/06/2023; KII 08/06/2023; Shalash et al. 09/10/2022).

### Publication, sharing, and dissemination

Depending on the sensitivity of information, some organisations publish their findings on their websites (KII 08/06/2023; KII 21/06/2023 a; KII 26/06/2023). Others primarily share their results within organisations, especially those without government endorsement (KII 21/06/2023 b). The lack of a general data-sharing protocol outlining the terms and conditions for safe, ethical, and effective data management serves as an obstacle to data sharing. It contributes

to limited data availability in the sector; without sharing, it is difficult to know what data is already available, leading to the potential duplication of assessments (KII 22/06/2023; JAS 14/09/2023). Others only share their data upon the request of interested organisations because of internal data-sharing protocols (KII 22/08/2023). This means that only organisations aware of others' internal analysis pipeline can obtain the data, limiting availability.

In 2021, the Government suspended the operations of several NGOs on allegations of disseminating misinformation and operating beyond their mandate (Devex 28/08/2023; ENA 04/08/2021; The Guardian 06/08/2021; TNH 09/08/2021). In September 2021, the GoE expelled seven UN representatives, accusing them of meddling in internal affairs (Al Jazeera 30/09/2021; NYT 17/03/2022). This attitude towards humanitarian organisations and staff has contributed to organisational caution around data sharing, as it could directly jeopardise their staff and operations (CSIS 12/08/2021; KII 16/06/2023; KII 21/06/2023 b; ENA 04/08/2021; The Guardian 06/08/2021; TNH 09/08/2021).