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Overseas Scientific Collaborations and their Role for Mirroring Humanitarian Catastrophes

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KEYWORDS. — Conflict; Scientific Collaboration; Humanitarian Situation; Tigray; Ethiopia.

SUMMARY. — Conflict has deep historical roots in the horn of Africa, particularly in Ethiopia. Such conflicts often go hand in hand with humanitarian catastrophes including famine and mass-displacement (ANNYS *et al.* 2021). The Tigray region of Ethiopia has experienced such conflict induced catastrophes in the 1984/85 (DECKERS *et al.* 2020), and now again (NYSSSEN *et al.* 2021a).

The current conflict has resulted in world's worst humanitarian-catastrophe in a decade. In an attempt to report the humanitarian situation, researchers have partially succeeded by bypassing the communication-blackout. This was made possible because of the long-standing collaboration between Flemish Universities and Mekelle University, through which many Ethiopians studied in Belgium and many Belgian researchers did research in Ethiopia.

Besides, during the history of academic collaboration, Belgian researchers showed strong commitment towards communities in Ethiopia, engaging as far as disentangling unnoticed profound agricultural policy biases (NYSSSEN *et al.* 2017). This has equipped researchers an opportunity to establish vast field knowledge and community integration enabling field data collection in wartime.

Here, we show how such overseas scientific collaborations were important in mirroring the dire humanitarian situation since the devastating conflict started in November 2020. It has resulted in an internationally recognized atlas documenting the tragic humanitarian situation including 260 massacre incidents, public services interrupted, 2.1 million displaced living in grim conditions, at least 400,000 people in famine conditions, and agricultural production declined by over half further threatening to compound hunger crisis (ANNYS *et al.* 2021; ASFAHA *et al.* 2021; NYSSSEN *et al.* 2021a, 2021b, 2021c).

These scientific outputs served as reference points for various UN, EU and US humanitarian and human-rights organizations, and worlds major media-outlets. Hence, overseas scientific collaborations not only responds to research questions, but also serve as a reference-point informing the general public and diplomatic-circles working towards cessation of hostilities and improved humanitarian situation.

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