



Centring the periphery

Towards youth-sensitive reparations in
transitional justice in Ethiopia

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Abstract

Youth have been key actors in Ethiopia's socio-economic and political transformations. Despite their immense contributions to the country's development, they have long faced marginalisation, exclusion, and recurrent human rights violations. Past efforts to address gross human rights violations were not comprehensive and paid little attention to victims' needs, including youth. The adoption of Ethiopia's Transitional Justice Policy (TJPE) in 2024 presents a renewed opportunity to address historical injustices, promote victim-centred approaches, as well as achieve restorative and transformative justice. This policy brief examines Ethiopia's past and ongoing transitional justice (TJ) efforts from a reparations perspective and through a youth lens. The brief calls for youth-sensitive reparations within Ethiopia's TJ process, reparations that go beyond redressing past harms to transform youth lives, promote inclusion, and build a foundation for lasting peace and social cohesion. The TJPE does not explicitly list youth among vulnerable groups. Its implementation should correct this gap through deliberate inclusion and consultation. Ensuring meaningful youth inclusion in Ethiopia's TJ process is thus both a legal obligation and a strategic investment in the country's democratic and developmental future.

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Introduction

Youth constitute 28% of the total population in Ethiopia,¹ defined by the National Youth Policy as persons aged 15-29 years.² The African Youth Charter (AYC), to which Ethiopia is a State Party, classifies youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 35 years,³ expanding the youth share of the total population. Despite being a significant demographic dividend with huge potential, for the large part of Ethiopia's history, youth have been marginalised and kept at the peripheries of the socio-economic and political landscape, benefiting less from the country's development.⁴ They are often portrayed as a threat to political stability, not as agents of change and sustainable peace. Harnessing youth potential requires centring youth and their needs and aspirations across socio-economic and political spheres.

Yet the historical interaction between government and Ethiopian youth has been described “in terms of control/repression or co-optation rather than allowing the youth to freely contribute to the country's economic and social development.”⁵ In spite of their marginalisation, youth have been at the forefront of movements leading to political changes in Ethiopia. This is evident from the 1960s and 1970s student activism and movement that contributed to the downfall of the monarchy and the Derg dictatorship, which was marked by systemic repression, forced disappearances, torture and

¹ Ministry of Plan and Development and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2023) *Youth Migration: Policy Options for Development in Ethiopia*. Available at: <https://ethiopia.unfpa.org/en/publications/youth-migration-policy-options-development-ethiopia>

² National Youth Policy (2004). Available at: https://ywcaeth.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Ethiopia_2004_National_Youth_Policy.pdf

³ Preamble of the African Youth Charter (2006).

⁴ Sabu, G. M., (2020) *Factors that Affect Youth Political Participation in Ethiopia: Its Impacts on the Democratization Process*, Journal of Political Science and International Relations, 3(3) 61-69. See also: Gebremariam, E. B., (2017) *The Politics of Youth Employment and Policy Processes in Ethiopia*, in: *Africa's Youth Employment Challenge: New Perspectives*, IDS Bulletin, (48)3, 33-50.

⁵ Kefale, A., Dejen, M. and Aalen, L. (2021) *Neglect, Control and Co-optation: Major features of Ethiopian Youth Policy Since 1991*, CMI Working Paper No 3. Available at: <https://www.cmi.no/publications/file/7829-neglect-control-and-co-optation-major-features-of-ethiopian-youth-policy-since-1991.pdf>

extrajudicial killings,⁶ as well as the wave of youth-driven public protests spurring regime change in 2018.⁷

For decades, youth have been subjected to repression and suffered from gross human rights violations. Under the monarchical regime, violent crackdown on the student movement was a common phenomenon. During the Derg era, it was estimated that more than 700,000 people, of whom youth are a significant share, were killed.⁸ During the Red Terror state-sponsored murder and persecution, families were forced to pay the cost of the bullet used to kill their loved ones before they could retrieve their bodies.⁹ The devastating impacts of gross violations committed in the past were not adequately addressed through a comprehensive transitional justice (TJ) process. Past efforts paid less attention to reparative justice and the needs and priorities of victims, including youth.

This brief analyses past and ongoing TJ processes with a focus on reparative justice for youth. It examines the impact of past TJ on youth, youth participation in the current TJ processes with emphasis on inclusivity, and the transformative role of reparations going forward. The brief is based on a qualitative research methodology. Primary sources such as national and continental policies as well as secondary sources including reports, books and journal articles were consulted to enrich the analysis.

The next section discusses Ethiopia's past TJ efforts, including their shortcomings. This is followed by post-2018 TJ initiatives and an analysis of Ethiopia's ongoing TJ process, including discussions on scepticism, criticisms, and concerns raised by different actors. Subsequent sections examine Ethiopia's Transitional Justice Policy from a reparations and youth perspective, with strong emphasis on the need to use reparations not only to address past injustice against youth, but also to transform their situations by confronting contemporary challenges they face. The final section provides actionable recommendations.



⁶ Zewde, B. (2010) *Documenting the Ethiopian Student Movement: An Exercise in Oral History*. Available at: <https://fss-ethiopia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Documenting-the-Ethiopian-Student-Movement.pdf>

⁷ Tadesse, E. (2022) *Social Movements and the Youth: the Ethiopian Experience*, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 55(1) 1–30.

⁸ African Union Human Rights Memorial Project, Project Focus Area: Ethiopian Red Terror. Available at: <https://au.int/en/auhrm-project-focus-area-ethiopian-red-terror>

⁹ Lauren, V. (2018) *Disappeared to Ethiopia's Bermuda: Tales by a Puppet*, *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, Vol. 44(1), 196–210.



Past transitional justice efforts

The African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP) defines TJ as, “the various (formal and traditional or non-formal) policy measures and institutional mechanisms that societies, through an inclusive consultative process, adopt in order to overcome past violations, divisions and inequalities and to create conditions for both security and democratic and socio-economic transformation.”¹⁰ TJ helps societies to address legacies of conflicts and gross human rights violations and transition to a future of justice, equality, and dignity.¹¹ By so doing, TJ mechanisms serve as bridges between an undesirable past and a promising future.

In the last five decades, Ethiopia has undergone three major political transitions, often marked by instability and prolonged conflict. These are the downfall of monarchic rule in 1974, the overthrow of the Derg regime in 1991, and the 2018 political change. Following these transitions, attempts were made to interrogate and address past violations. In 1974, the Derg regime established a Commission of Inquiry to investigate corruption and other economic crimes committed by officials during the rule of Emperor Haile Selassie.¹² However, as the Commission began its work, the Derg executed government officials and military officers, dissolved the commission, and intensified repression against dissenting voices, ruling the country for 17 years while committing widespread atrocities.¹³ Hence, the TJ effort in 1974 was quashed before it began.

¹⁰ Para. 19 of the AUTJP.

¹¹ Para. 19 of the AUTJP.

¹² Metekia, T. S., & Vinck, P. (n.d) ‘Ethiopia’ in *TJET compilation on human rights prosecutions, amnesties, truth commissions, reparations, and vetting policies around the world*. Available at: <https://transitionaljusticedata.org/en/Africa/Ethiopia.html>

¹³ Ibid.

With the 1991 overthrow of the Derg by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of four ethnically organised political parties, the transition brought another opportunity to address the legacy of suppression and rights violations. In 1992, the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) established the Special Public Prosecutor's Office (SPO) to conduct investigations and bring to trial those who committed crimes during the Derg regime.¹⁴ The SPO, however, did not investigate alleged crimes by EPRDF members committed on their way to topple the Derg. By the time it finalised its work in 2010, the SPO had indicted 5,119 people, of which 3,583 were convicted, but many officials did not serve their sentences as they managed to flee the country.¹⁵ While on trial, 33 Derg officials wrote a letter to the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi requesting to be given a forum to apologise to the Ethiopian people, but no such forum was arranged.¹⁶ In addition, to honour the victims of the Red Terror, the Red Terror Martyrs' Memorial Museum was established in 2010.¹⁷

The post-Derg TJ process has been described as “incomplete, delayed, selective and inadequate”,¹⁸ arguably providing impetus to gross human rights violations that occurred under the EPRDF regime. Moreover, victim participation in the criminal proceedings was limited to being witnesses.¹⁹ Trials and convictions of perpetrators provide satisfaction to victims and can be seen as redress for rights violations, but the emphasis on criminal accountability allowed little attention to other essential needs such as reconciliation and reparations. The latter could have contributed to preventing the recurrence of conflict and the rehabilitation of victims. Lack of reparations means the rights violations youth suffered under the Derg regime were not adequately addressed.

Failure to break with the past through the implementation of TJ has perpetuated the cycle of conflict, deepened grievances, and hindered the consolidation of democracy. The EPRDF regime is remembered for its widespread human rights violations. For instance, Amnesty International referred to the period from 1991 to 2016 as “25 years of human rights violations”.²⁰ During this period, youth, particularly those associated with opposition parties and advocating for the respect and protection of human rights and

“One of the significant legacies of the Ethiopian revolution is that it continues to instil fear in young people who are inclined to engage in politics. This culture of fear has grown out of the atrocious “Red Terror” period of the late 1970s, and continues in different forms to the present as political youth, including social media activists, are vulnerable to persecution.”

(Gebremariam, E. B., & Herrera, L. (2016) *On Silencing the Next Generation: Legacies of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution on Youth Political Engagement*, *Northeast African Studies*, 16(1), 141–166.)

¹⁴Special Public Prosecutor's Office Establishment Proclamation no. 22/1992..

¹⁵ Metekia, T. S. (2023) *Ethiopia: The Post-Dergue Transitional Justice Process*, in: Hoeres, P. and Knabe, H. (eds) *After Dictatorship. Instruments of Transitional Justice in Post-Authoritarian Systems*, pp.23–79.

¹⁶ Aneme, G. A. (2006) *Apology and trials: The case of the Red Terror trials in Ethiopia*, *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 6, 64–84.

¹⁷ African Union Commission (n.d) *The African Union Human Rights Memorial: Remembering Victims of Mass Atrocities in Africa*. Available at: <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/auhrm-booklat.pdf>

¹⁸ Tessema, M. T. (2020) *Dealing with the Legacies of Repressive Past: Transitional Justice*, in: ‘*Transitional*’ *Ethiopia*, *Jimma University Law Journal*, 12, 1–37.

¹⁹ Metekia, T. S. (2023) *Ethiopia: The Post-Dergue Transitional Justice Process*, in: Hoeres, P. and Knabe, H. (eds) *After Dictatorship. Instruments of Transitional Justice in Post-Authoritarian Systems*, pp.23–79.

²⁰ Amnesty International (2016) *Ethiopia: 25 Years of Human Rights Violations*. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/4178/2016/en/>

democratic principles, were persecuted. A clear example was the 2005 post-election unrest, when thousands of youths were arrested and detained without charge.²¹ Youth were also among those who were killed by security forces while protesting against the election results.²² The inability and/or unwillingness to seize the political transition in 1991 as an opportunity to address the legacies of injustice left the country prone to conflict and instability, making youth vulnerable to rights violations and deprivations.

The legacy of past repression is today reflected in youth political participation that partly mirrors the general public's attitude towards political engagement. The fear of engaging in political activities is felt in the widely used saying, “ፖለቲካና ኮረንቲን በፋቂ”, loosely translating to “politics and electricity should be kept at bay”. The core message is that just like electric shocks, political participation can paralyse or even cause death, and hence people should distance themselves from involvement in politics. This sentiment displays a political culture rooted in the rights violations that met those who dared to actively seek to challenge undemocratic practices. Consequently, citizens and young people carry a collective conscience of the risks associated with active political participation. TJ provides the opportunity to investigate the culture of fear that clouds political participation and pave the way for enhanced youth participation in governance.



²¹ Saalen, L. and Tronvoll, K. (2009) *The End of Democracy? Curtailing Political and Civil Rights in Ethiopia*, Review of African Political Economy, 120, 193–207.

²² Abbink, J. (2006) *Discomfiture of Democracy? The 2005 Election Crisis in Ethiopia and its Aftermath*, African Affairs (105)419, 173–199. afr25/4178/2016/en/



Post-2018 initiatives

Following the 2018 political transition, the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) was established with a broad mandate “to maintain peace, justice, national unity and consensus and also Reconciliation among Ethiopian Peoples”.²³ The Commission was criticised for lack of clarity in its mandate, including the period to be covered under investigation, as well as flawed processes for appointing and removing Commissioners.²⁴ The NRC was comprised of 41 Commissioners, of which only two were youth,²⁵ selected not as youth representatives but as religious group representatives. Three years after its establishment, the NRC was dissolved without any significant achievement.

The dissolution of the NRC was followed by the establishment of the National Dialogue Commission (NDC) in 2021, with a mandate to facilitate consultation between the various segments of society by identifying the root causes of differences on fundamental national issues and laying a firm foundation for national consensus and the building of a legitimate State.²⁶ The NDC has 11 Commissioners, but no youth representation. Concerns have been raised regarding the legitimacy and credibility of the national dialogue process.²⁷ The Caucus of Opposition Parties recently accused the NDC of “political bias” and “failure to ensure inclusivity”.²⁸

²³Article 5 of the Reconciliation Commission Establishment Proclamation No.1102 /2018.

²⁴ Heliso, T. E. (2020) *Critical appraisal of the Ethiopian Reconciliation Commission: A comparative study*, Journal of Law and Conflict Resolution, 11(1), pp.15-25.

²⁵ Borkena (5 February 2019) Ethiopia named members of National Reconciliation Commission. Available at: <https://borkena.com/2019/02/05/ethiopia-named-members-of-national-reconciliation-commission/>

²⁶ Article 6 of the Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission Establishment Proclamation No. 1265 /2021.

²⁷ Yared, T. (11 July 2025) *Ethiopia's national dialogue needs a reset*. Available at: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/ethiopia-s-national-dialogue-needs-a-reset>

²⁸ Addis Standard (23 May 2024) *Caucus of Opposition Parties accuses National Dialogue Commission of 'political bias' and 'failure to ensure inclusivity'*. Available at: <https://addisstandard.com/caucus-of-opposition-parties-accuses-national-dialogue-commission-of-political-bias-and-failure-to-ensure-inclusivity/>

The Commission is currently finalising agenda collection across the country and among the diaspora community. It is expected to conduct the grand dialogue and put forward its recommendations before January 2026.





The journey towards a comprehensive transitional justice process

The need to implement comprehensive TJ started gaining momentum after the 2018 political transition, but the concrete policy decision only came in 2022. Recognising the inadequacy of previous attempts to deal with its unaddressed past and to build its future based on the pillars of justice, reconciliation, human rights, and repairing harms, Ethiopia decided to develop a comprehensive TJ policy. The Ministry of Justice established the ‘Transitional Justice Working Group of Experts’ (TJWGE) to lead the crafting of Ethiopia’s comprehensive, integrated, and context-specific TJ policy based on a consultative process.

The signing of the *Agreement for Lasting Peace through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front* (TPLF), referred to as the ‘Pretoria Agreement’, was among the factors contributing to political buy-in for the adoption of a comprehensive TJ policy.²⁹ The Pretoria Agreement ended the devastating conflicts that broke out in November 2020, causing significant loss of lives, mainly in the Tigray, Amhara, and Afar Regional States. Reports show that youth were both victims and

²⁹ The Pretoria Agreement (2022). Available at: <https://igad.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Download-the-signed-agreement-here.pdf>

perpetrators in these conflicts,³⁰ and hence any peace and TJ processes put in place to address the impact of conflict must take youth needs and perspectives into account.

Prior to the adoption of the Transitional Justice Policy of Ethiopia (TJPE) in April 2024,³¹ the TJWGE held more than 80 consultations³² across the country using the *Policy Options for Transitional Justice* as a guiding document.³³ The TJWGE's report on the public consultations notes that consultation participants included representatives of children, women, youth, and persons with disabilities, including associations and organisations working to advance the rights of these groups.³⁴ However, targeted youth-only consultations were not held,³⁵ meaning issues specific to young people were only discussed as part of the general consultations.

Unlike for youth, women-only consultation forums were organised. Lack of adequate youth participation might be a reflection of their low representation in decision-making spaces. *Given the historical marginalisation of youth, their key role in movements that brought about political changes, and their potential in shaping the future of Ethiopia, consultations dedicated to youth alone would have provided a more nuanced youth perspective into the process for developing the TJPE.*

The adoption of the TJPE is a historic moment in the country's journey towards dealing with the past. The TJPE provides policy directions that indicate legislative, procedural, and institutional measures needed to implement holistic TJ in Ethiopia. The Policy underscores that it is necessary to implement a comprehensive TJ process that establishes and publicises the truth of grievances, ensures accountability for gross human rights violations, provides conditional amnesty, facilitates individual as well as communal reconciliation, establishes a system of reparations, and introduces victim-centred institutional and legal reforms. The Policy also stresses the roles of the traditional justice system and actors, including civil society organisations in the TJ implementation process.

In June 2024, the Ministry of Justice adopted the *Roadmap for the Implementation of Transitional Justice in Ethiopia* to guide the implementation of measures envisaged by the TJPE.³⁶ Subsequently, the process for developing laws, strategies, and standard operating procedures was initiated. It is expected that enabling legislation providing the necessary legal and institutional frameworks, once drafted, will go through nationwide consultations before adoption. These include the Transitional Justice Code, which will establish the Transitional Justice Special Prosecution Offices, Truth and Social Cohesion Commission, and Vetting Commission, as well as the Proclamation on Crimes in

³⁰ See the Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties to the Conflict in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (2021). Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/OHCHR-EHRC-Tigray-Report.pdf>. This report details, among others, widespread human rights violations committed by parties to the conflict against civilians including youth and youth's implications in the violations.

³¹ Transitional Justice Policy of Ethiopia (2024). The Amharic version is available at: <https://www.centerfortransitions.org/resources>. There is no official English translation at the time of writing this brief.

³² Ethiopian News Agency (14 December 2024) *Ethiopian Justice Minister Briefs Diplomats about Transitional Justice Policy Implementation*. Available at https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/eng_5626876

³³ TJWGE (2023) *Policy Options for Transitional Justice*. Available at: <https://www.justiceinfo.net/wp-content/uploads/Ethiopia-Policy-Options-for-Transitional-Justice-2023-v2.pdf>

³⁴ TJWGE () የሽግግር ፍትህ የፖሊስ አቅጣጫ አማራጮች የሕዝብ ምክርና ግብዓት ማሳሰብ ሂደት ሪፖርት. Available at: <https://atjhub.csvr.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Amharic-Transitional-Justice-Working-Group-of-Experts-Transitional-Justice-Options-for-Ethiopia-Public-Consultations-Report-December-2024.pdf>

³⁵ Metekia, T. S. (2024) *From Policy to Practice: Implementing Transitional Justice in Ethiopia with International Standards*. Available at: <https://www.kas.de/documents/13332971/30910236/Policy+Brief+%28final+version%29.pdf/76a1139a-ea20-a2d2-5e69-8a425e491c22?version=1.0&t=1719830386453>

³⁶ Ethiopian News Agency (19 August 2024) *Transitional Justice Implementation Roadmap Finalized: Ministry of Justice*. Available at: https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/eng_5001231

Violations of International Law and the Proclamation to Establish the Special Bench. **Meaningful youth participation in these consultations is urgent and crucial.**

Nonetheless, at the time of writing, the process had been delayed. Under the Roadmap, the process of enacting the enabling laws should have been completed by December 2024. According to many commentators, “Unofficial but widely circulated claims in the public domain suggest that transitional justice is informally on hold until the National Dialogue Commission concludes its mandate.”³⁷ The two processes can run in parallel, complementing each other. Delaying or stalling the TJ process risks undermining the momentum that has been achieved thus far. Inadequate official updates on the process may lead to further misinformation and diminish public trust. To ensure transparency and maintain public interest, it is crucial to keep the public informed on the status of the TJ process and key forthcoming activities.



³⁷ Metekia, T. S. (14 May 2025) Ethiopia's national dialogue and transitional justice: competition or complementarity? Available at: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/ethiopia-s-national-dialogue-and-transitional-justice-competition-or-complementarity>



Scepticism, criticisms and concerns

Different actors have expressed scepticism, criticisms, and concerns on various aspects of the ongoing TJ process in Ethiopia.

Before the TJPE was adopted, some opposition political parties urged that a consensus through national political dialogue should precede any attempt to ensure TJ and reconciliation.³⁸ The Chairperson of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia argues that “the Ethiopian Government’s actions with regard to international and regional monitoring show all the hallmarks of a strategy that has been termed *quasi-compliance*”.³⁹ The TJPE limits the role of international experts to the provision of technical support, advisory, and training functions, with this restriction also subject to criticisms.⁴⁰ The minimal role given to international actors is perceived as an attempt to avoid international scrutiny. Moreover, the Tigray Interim Administration demanded participation on equal footing with the federal government in the Policy’s design and implementation.⁴¹ The TJWGE likewise indicated that conflict and instability affected the consultation process.

³⁸ Addis Standard (13 March 2023) *Political parties oppose ongoing consultations on transitional justice policy options, urge priority for peace, national dialogue*. Available at: <https://addisstandard.com/news-political-parties-oppose-ongoing-consultations-on-transitional-justice-policy-options-urge-priority-for-peace-national-dialogue/>

³⁹ Statement of the Chairperson of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, at the 78th Session of the UN General Assembly, Third Committee (2023). Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/chreetiopia/ichree-oral-stm-unga.pdf>

⁴⁰ Metekia, T. S. and Dessalegn, B. (2024) *Ethiopia’s transitional justice: tensions around international experts’ role need swift resolution*. Available at: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/ethiopia-s-transitional-justice-tensions-around-international-experts-role-need-swift-resolution>

⁴¹ Zekarias Beshah Abebe, Z. B. (2024) *As Ethiopia Moves Forward With Its Transitional Justice Initiative, Challenges Abound*. Available at: <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2024/04/as-ethiopia-moves-forward-with-transitional-justice-initiative-challenges-lie-ahead/>

Furthermore, it has been argued that the TJ process is susceptible to political capture in that the government might use the process to target political opponents and shield its own members from accountability.⁴² Besides, the 2018 political transition was led by a coalition of old and new elites within the existing political institutional structure, which may undermine political determination to implement a genuine TJ process.⁴³ In addition, it has also been reasoned that the incumbent regime “concocted the notion of transitional justice to placate international donors and creditors, as it urgently requires foreign assistance and currency”.⁴⁴ *The absence of a vibrant civil society that plays a crucial role in advocating inclusive and victim-centred processes poses another challenge.*⁴⁵ Over and above, the post-conflict economy of Ethiopia may not be able to adequately finance resource-intensive TJ processes.

These concerns might not be specific to youth engagement in the TJ process; however, the effectiveness or otherwise of the entire process impacts youth participation. Unquestionably, participation in consultations was affected by ongoing conflict and instability in parts of Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray. It becomes more challenging if the conflict continues when implementation commences, as it will affect community engagement and youth participation in the process. It is imperative that gaps observed around participation in the policy development process, particularly in conflict-affected regions, be rectified at the implementation stage. It has been argued that “although the policy is imperfect, as most policies are, it could be retrospectively legitimised and rectified through an implementation that adheres to these international standards.”⁴⁶ *Ethiopia’s TJ process, like those of other countries, is not expected to be free of shortcomings. However, certain TJ fundamentals – redress for victims, holding perpetrators to account, paying particular attention to the needs of women, youth, and vulnerable groups – should not be compromised.*



⁴² Getahun, Y. H. (2025) *The Transitional Justice Policy of Ethiopia and Its Relevance to Peacebuilding*, African Journal on Conflict Resolution 25(1) 37-54.

⁴³ Legide, K. K. (2023) *Exploring the challenges and limits in the compliance with transitional justice norm in non-regime transitions: The case of post-2018 Ethiopia*, Journal of Law and Conflict Resolution, 13(1) 1-26.

⁴⁴ MAbebe, H. (2 May 2024) *Ethiopia’s Illusion of Justice: The Flawed Narrative of Transitional Reform*. Available at: <https://www.eastafricanreview.com/2024/05/02/ethiopias-illusion-of-justice-the-flawed-narrative-of-transitional-reform/>

⁴⁵ The Civicus Monitor (2024) rates the civic space in Ethiopia as “Closed”. See <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/ethiopia/>

⁴⁶ Ibid, note 35.



Ethiopia's Transitional Justice Policy: reparations and youth

Reparations are among the major pillars of the TJPE. The Policy defines reparations broadly to encompass multi-sector issues with a variety of measures that ensure restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, commemorative or memorial events, and other satisfaction measures as well as guarantees of non-repetition.⁴⁷ The TJPE stipulates that individuals and communities who have been victims of gross human rights violations and injustice shall benefit from a comprehensive reparations programme tailored to the nature and scale of the harm they suffered.⁴⁸ In terms of institutional arrangement, the TJPE entrusts the Truth Commission with the reparation task to ensure the harmonious application of reparations aligned with amnesty-granting and truth-seeking, disclosure, and reconciliation.⁴⁹ By doing so, the TJPE recognises the synergy and complementarity of reparations with other TJ mechanisms.

Moreover, the TJPE provides for interim measures aimed at addressing the pressing and urgent needs of victims pending the implementation of comprehensive reparations programmes.⁵⁰ Rehabilitation services, especially for victims of sexual violence, could be among the rights violations that require urgent responses. For instance, the joint investigation conducted by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) revealed the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence during the

⁴⁷ See Glossary Section of the TJPE.

⁴⁸ Section 2.4 of the TJPE.

⁴⁹ Section 2.4.2 of the TJPE.

⁵⁰ Section 2.4.1 of the TJPE.

conflict in the Tigray Region.⁵¹ Addressing the physical and psychological needs of victims of sexual abuse cannot wait until formal national reparations are established, and hence, interim measures are of paramount importance.

The TJPE requires that reparations programmes be implemented having due consideration for the needs of vulnerable groups.⁵² Under the TJPE, *vulnerable group* is defined as “women, children, elderly, internally displaced persons, and other vulnerable sections of the population.”⁵³ Youth are not specifically mentioned in the list, though it could be argued that youth are covered within the phrase, other vulnerable sections of the population. The AUTJP, for instance, includes youth in the category of marginalised and vulnerable groups, underscoring that TJ processes should address their needs.⁵⁴ Thus, the TJPE’s failure to explicitly mention youth in the list of vulnerable groups should not cloud attention to their unique vulnerabilities at the implementation stage.



⁵¹ See the Report of the EHRC/ OHCHR Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties to the Conflict in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (2021). Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/OHCHR-EHRC-Tigray-Report.pdf>.

⁵² Section 2.4.1 of the TJPE.

⁵³ See Glossary Section of the TJPE.

⁵⁴ Para. 33 of the AUTJP.



Reparations as an instrument of transformation

Addressing root causes

Reparations have the potential to transform the lives of community members if implemented in a holistic and inclusive way. The AUTJP envisions the implementation of both ‘restorative and transformational justice’.⁵⁵ Inasmuch as reparations are a corrective measure and hence backwards-looking, they also chart a new future and are therefore forward-looking. Indeed, “to maximise the impact requires that reparations look at harms done and the structures underpinning such harms, rather than at decontextualised acts of violence, and understand that the role of reparations in unequal societies is not to return poor victims to poverty and discrimination but to transform their circumstances and in so doing address the injustice that drives conflict.”⁵⁶ By addressing the root causes of violence and fostering reconciliation, reparations can set the ground for sustainable peace.

Ethiopia has long suffered from interethnic conflicts and communal violence. The causes of such conflict include competition for natural resources (farming and grazing lands) and disputes over boundaries.⁵⁷ Grievances related to past unequal power relations, cultural domination, and

⁵⁵ Para. 11 of the AUTJP.

⁵⁶ Gready, P. and Robins, S. (2014) *From Transitional to Transformative Justice: A New Agenda for Practice*, *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, (8) 339–361.

⁵⁷ Admassu, M. D. (2019) *Causes of Ethnic Conflict in Ethiopia and its Effect on Development: The Case of ‘Amhara’ and ‘Gumuz’ Communities*, *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 21(3) 64–79.

uneven political representation continue to fuel disagreements among different groups. Youth are often expected to defend the interests of their ethnic groups, including through violence.⁵⁸ Consequently, they are disproportionately affected today by the impact of the historical legacy of injustice. Indeed, “the interethnic clashes in Ethiopia were both effects and causes of the growth of contending ethno-nationalisms.”⁵⁹ It has been argued that although the federal state arrangement solved the problem of formal ethnic equality, it contributed to ethnic tensions and conflict.⁶⁰ Transitional justice provides the platforms to investigate the causes of ethnic conflict and address resultant rights violations.

“Reparation programmes should be transformative and promote equality, non-discrimination and participation of victims and other stakeholders. They should build solidarity across victim communities, restore dignity, be fair and just and tailored in their form to the needs of different categories of victims, particularly children and youth”

(AUTJP, Para 66(ii))

Through reparations, it is possible to recognise past harms, disable the conditions that allowed violence, and create an environment that sustains peace among different ethnic groups. Reparations, therefore, address not only historical injustice but also rights violations exacerbated by interethnic tensions and thereby lay the foundation for sustainable peace in Ethiopia. In communities that are transformed from conflict to cohesion, youth get the opportunity to unleash their potential for sustainable development.

Youth marginalisation and potential

Transformative reparations aim to radically change victims’ circumstances of deeply entrenched socio-economic inequality, which in itself constitutes an injustice and often a root cause of the conflict.⁶¹ Transformative reparations, therefore, “propose a harmonisation between the imperatives of corrective and distributive justice.”⁶² Accordingly, transformative remedies should change the realities of people who are impacted by violence.⁶³ Youth are among those significantly affected by conflict and rights violations. Thus, reparations, particularly collective reparations, should be designed in a way that addresses the structural causes of youth marginalisation. The need for youth-focused reparations arises not only from their experiences as victims but also from their vast potential to contribute to national development when adequately supported through reparations programmes.

⁵⁸ Tufa, G. G. (05 June 2024) Memories for the future: Ending violent conflict and empowering youth in Ethiopia. Available at: <https://addisstandard.com/memories-for-the-future-ending-violent-conflict-and-empowering-youth-in-ethiopia/>.

⁵⁹ Yusuf, S. (2019) *Drivers of ethnic conflict in contemporary Ethiopia*. Available at: <https://ethiopianeconomy.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/mono-202-2.pdf>

⁶⁰ Bayu, T. B. (2021) *Ethnic conflict in Ethiopia: Federalism as a cause and solution*, *Religación Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades* 6(30) 1-17.

⁶¹ Gready, S. (2022) *The Case for Transformative Reparations: In Pursuit of Structural Socio-Economic Reform in Post-Conflict Societies*, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 16(2) 182-201.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Manjoo, R. (2017) *Introduction: reflections on the concept and implementation of transformative reparations*, *International Journal of Human Rights*, 21(9), 1193-1203.

This requires deliberate action to empower youth to meaningfully participate in the implementation of TJ processes, including in designing reparations programmes. It must also ensure that reparations target the socio-economic challenges youth face. In 2022, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs conducted an assessment of the implementation of the 2004 National Youth Policy of Ethiopia. The findings revealed that despite progress made over the years, challenges such as unemployment, lack of access to credit facilities, poor quality education, gaps in the provision of youth-focused reproductive health services, and limited rehabilitation services for youth persist.⁶⁴ These challenges often overlap and intersect, increasing youth vulnerabilities. The National Youth Policy urgently needs reviewing. It must be revised to reflect the contemporary opportunities and challenges facing youth.

In addition, conflict and instability in parts of Ethiopia have destroyed thousands of schools, resulting in the disruption of youth and children's education.⁶⁵ Destruction of health facilities in conflict-affected areas is yet to be fully repaired.⁶⁶ Limited access to health and education services not only affects youth in the present but also impacts the quality of their future. *As such, the reparations Ethiopia plans to implement should be tailored to youth needs and priorities*, as well as tackling the aforementioned challenges. This is in line with the AUTJP which underlines that collective reparations may include "rebuilding health, education, security, judicial and other public service infrastructure as well as the livelihood systems of affected communities, with due regard to the interests of children and youth."⁶⁷

Broad reparations policies risk overlooking youth needs, perpetuating intergenerational disadvantage. In designing reparations programmes, it is therefore necessary to integrate the specific priorities of youth. *Youth-sensitive reparations are not only a legal obligation but also an investment in youth empowerment*. As the TJPE draws inspiration from the AUTJP normative guidance, its implementation should follow suit by translating policy orientations into reparations that benefit and transform youth lives.

Needless to say, reparations alone cannot resolve all the challenges youth face. Pursuant to the AUTJP, "along with the reparative measures, forward-looking redistributive measures that address underlying socio-economic marginalisation and exclusion"⁶⁸ are needed. In that way, in transitional societies, reparations can build victims' civic trust in other citizens and in the state, and reaffirm their dignity by prioritising their suffering as deserving redress.⁶⁹ In Ethiopia's TJ process, reparations can be used as a means to recognise and address the injustices and marginalisation youth have suffered in the past, as well as an instrument to transform their lives.

⁶⁴ Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (2022) *An Assessment of the Implementation Status of the National Youth Policy of Ethiopia (2004)*. Available at: <https://www.mowisa.gov.et/?wpdmpo=national-youth-policy-of-ethiopia-2004>

⁶⁵ EHEC (2022) *Efforts to get students back to school in conflict-affected areas should be redoubled*. Available at: <https://ehrc.org/efforts-to-get-students-back-to-school-in-conflict-affected-areas-should-be-redoubled/>

⁶⁶ EHRC (2024) *Human Rights Monitoring Report on Tigray*. Available at: <https://ehrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/240219-Human-rights-monitoring-report-on-Tigray-For-release.pdf>

⁶⁷ Para. 65(iv) of the AUTJP.

⁶⁸ Para. 68 of the AUTJP.

⁶⁹ Moffett, L. (2017) *Transitional justice and reparations: remedying the past?*, in: C. Lawther, C., Moffett, L. & Jacobs, D. (Eds.), *Research handbook on transitional justice*, pp.377-400.



Conclusion

This policy brief highlighted that despite their demographic significance and contribution to socio-economic and political changes in Ethiopia, youth have been subjected to repression, exclusion, and gross human rights violations. They were often portrayed as a threat to political stability, not as agents of change and sustainable peace. Efforts made in the past to address legacies of injustice and gross human rights violations were not comprehensive and sensitive to youth needs.

The adoption of the TJPE in 2024 provides another opportunity to right past wrongs, yet limited youth participation in consultations that informed the policy development partly reflects their historical exclusion from decision-making processes. Most importantly, the TJPE's failure to explicitly list youth as a vulnerable group should not result in their priorities being overlooked. At the implementation stage, it is necessary to ensure meaningful youth participation in the country's TJ processes.

As one of the TJPE pillars, reparations are key to addressing youth needs. Drawing from the AUTJP, Ethiopia should implement youth-inclusive reparations that go beyond redressing past harms and invest in transforming the futures of young Ethiopians. In particular, it is important to channel collective reparations into programmes that address youth unemployment and enhance their access to essential services such as education and health. Transformative and forward-looking reparations will contribute to strengthening youth agency and resilience.

Recommendations

The Government should:

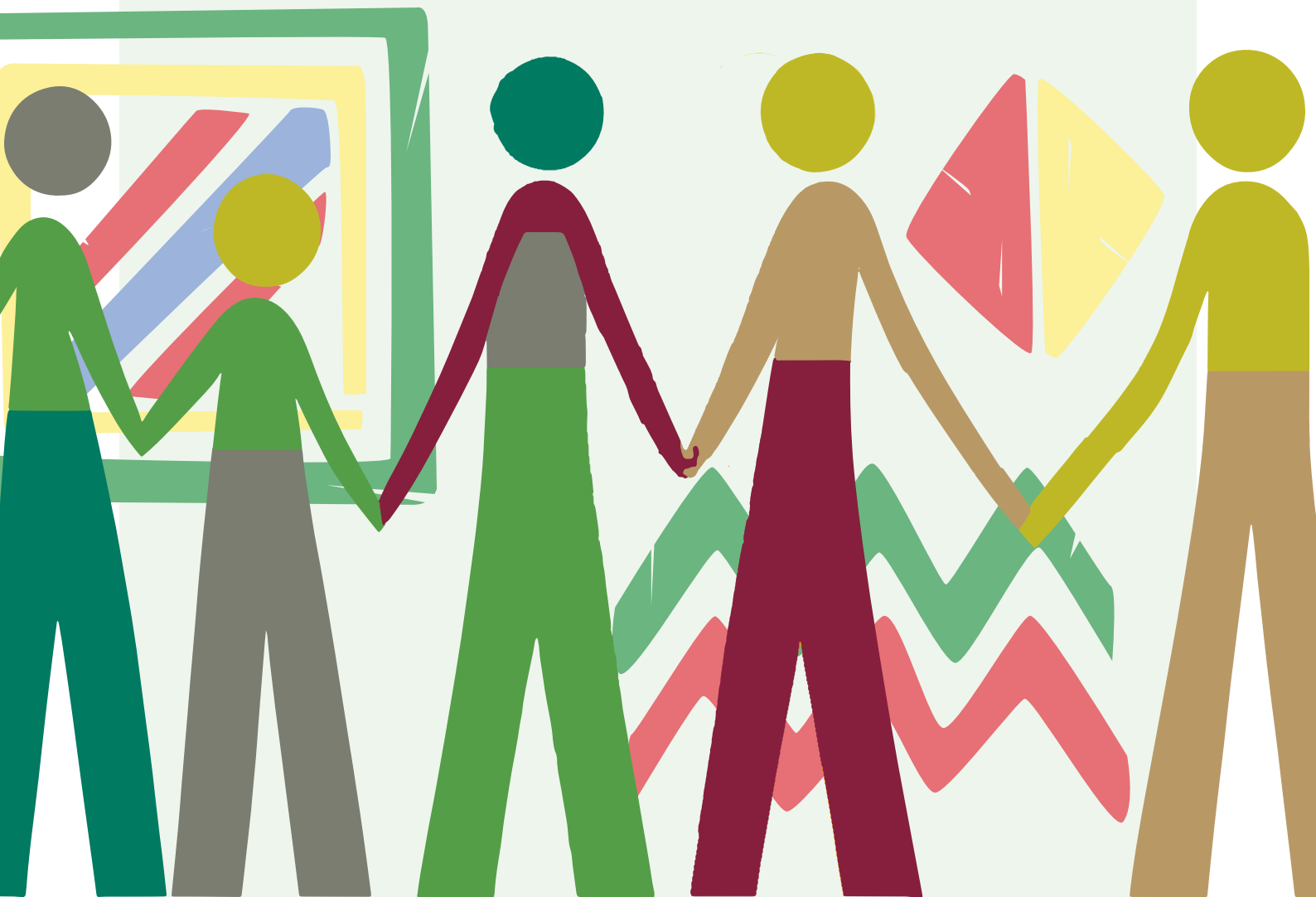
1. **Recognise that youth are among the vulnerable groups in society** whose needs and priorities should be given particular attention throughout the TJ process.
2. **Establish a youth advisory group made up of a representative cross-section of society** as part of efforts to guarantee meaningful youth participation in TJ processes, including in decision-making structures and their representation in TJ institutions.
3. **Ensure reparations are designed and implemented in a transformative way**, addressing the needs and priorities of youth.
4. **Adopt a reparations programme grounded in the diverse needs and expectations of victims, communities, and youth**, guaranteeing regional and gender inclusiveness. The policy would be the foundation for a national reparations programme, established with victim and youth representation, transparent oversight, and coordination with the truth commission.
5. **Provide community-based reparations in areas most affected by conflict**, including rebuilding schools, access to socio-economic opportunities, livelihood programmes, and mental-health and psychosocial support.

Civil society organisations should:

1. **Raise awareness and conduct civic education campaigns on the importance of youth participation in TJ**, building youth knowledge to sustain their active engagement and participation in the process.
2. **Advocate for youth-sensitive, transformative reparations**, including through facilitating experience-sharing forums to learn from other countries.
3. **Coordinate a national civil society coalition on reparations**, bringing together human rights groups, young people, women's organisations, and victim associations, including advocacy for inclusive consultation processes in the design of a reparations programme, ensuring representation from rural, conflict-affected, and marginalised regions.
4. **Collaborate with the government, federal authorities, and development partners to deliver** mental health and psychosocial support, economic reintegration, and livelihood programmes that promote youth empowerment, gender transformation, and reparative justice.

Youth should:

1. **Individually and collectively engage in the ongoing TJ process** to voice their concerns, needs, and priorities. This could include forming networks to document experiences, share perspectives, and advocate for inclusive reparations, and using creative and innovative platforms to convey visions for justice.
2. **Advocate for youth-sensitive transformative reparations** that contribute to addressing their pressing needs, with particular focus on essential sectors such as education and health.
3. **Lead community reparations initiatives and intergenerational platforms** to institute repair from the ground up, build social cohesion, and constructively preserve collective memory.
4. **Champion intersectional reparations and justice processes** by empowering marginalised groups and regions.



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