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Policing Law for Disaster Risk Response in Ethiopia: The case of COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of police services in disaster response, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ethiopia. Using a desk review methodology, the study involved document analysis and interviews with five members of a command post responsible for managing the health crisis. Thematic analysis of the data reveals that the police have a legal mandate to manage disasters, grounded in various legal frameworks, including the FDRE Constitution and relevant proclamations and policies. The findings highlight the police's responsibility for enforcing emergency laws, which included regulations on physical distancing, mask-wearing, and quarantine measures. The Ministry of Health specifically tasked the police with ensuring compliance with COVID-19 directives. However, the study identifies significant challenges, including jurisdictional conflicts, overlapping emergencies, insufficient collaboration among command post members, and the political implications of suspended national elections, which were controversially linked to moral rather than health issues. To enhance disaster response, the paper recommends establishing disaster risk management focal points within the police and creating clear directives defining police roles in disaster management. Furthermore, it advocates integrating disaster risk management training into police education programs, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach to disaster preparedness and response within the police force.

KEYWORDS

Disaster; collaboration; hazard; vulnerability; policing; state of emergency.



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1. Introduction

The evolution of disaster thought has undergone significant transformations from spiritual interpretations to contemporary understandings that emphasize human agency and socio-political contexts. Up until the 1950s, disasters were often viewed through a spiritual lens, perceived as divine retribution for human sins. This perspective limited the analysis of disasters to moral judgments rather than empirical assessments. However, since the 1970s, scholars have begun to shift their focus, recognizing that human actions—often exacerbated by poor planning and socioeconomic factors—play a critical role in disaster risk (Khorram-manesh, 2017). This shift marked the beginning of a more nuanced approach to studying disasters, particularly in the context of emergency events and responses.

The 1990s heralded a more progressive global perspective on disaster risk reduction, spurred by international summits and the integration of sustainable development goals. This period was characterized by an increase in complex emergencies influenced by post-Cold War tensions and political instability (Mcintire, 2015). Contemporary definitions of disasters now encapsulate the interaction between hazards and vulnerabilities, highlighting that disasters result from hazardous events compounded by community vulnerabilities that exceed their management capacities (Mcintire, 2015; UNDRR, 2017). Recent studies, such as those by Cvetković et al. (2022) and Öcal et al. (2020), emphasize the psychological impacts of disasters, including pandemics like COVID-19, illustrating the multifaceted nature of disaster risks and the need for informed decision-making.

Disasters are categorized into two main types: natural hazard-induced and anthropogenic hazards. Natural disasters stem from naturally occurring phenomena, such as earthquakes and floods, while anthropogenic disasters arise from human actions, including technological failures and environmental degradation (Alteneiji, 2015; Khorram-manesh, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic has further blurred these distinctions, prompting researchers to examine societal responses and management strategies implemented globally (Matewos, 2025; Ojha et al., 2025). The dramatic increase in the frequency and impact of disasters globally, with substantial economic losses and fatalities reported (Masson et al., 2016), underscores the urgent need for comprehensive disaster management frameworks that incorporate lessons learned from recent crises.

The global discourse on disaster risk reduction was formally initiated with the first World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Yokohama, Japan, in 1994. This conference emphasized the need for improved early warning systems and cost-effective technologies, marking a shift towards proactive disaster management. Following this, the establishment of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) in 2000 focused on inter-agency cooperation for disaster reduction efforts. The second conference in 2005 resulted in the Hyogo Framework for Action, which aimed at building resilience among nations and communities (IISD, 2015). These frameworks set the stage for a more coordinated global approach to disaster risk reduction.

The Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, held in Sendai, Japan, in 2015, marked a pivotal shift from disaster management to disaster risk management. This framework introduced a more people-centered approach, emphasizing local ownership and holistic strategies that encompass both natural and human-made hazards (UN, 2020). The Sendai Framework outlines four priorities for action: understanding disaster risk, strengthening governance, investing in resilience, and enhancing preparedness and recovery capacities. Although it aims to reduce disaster impacts and foster cooperation among states, it has faced critiques for its limited focus on disasters caused by armed conflict and structural violence (Pearson & Pelling, 2015; Oxley, 2015).

As the field of disaster risk management continues to evolve, there is an increasing emphasis on integrating psychological and social dimensions into disaster responses. The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, has highlighted the need for frameworks that not only address immediate health threats but also consider the broader socio-economic impacts on communities (Cvetković et al., 2022; Öcal et al., 2020). This integration is essential for developing effective communication strategies and fostering community resilience in the face of future disasters. Furthermore, understanding public reactions to crises is crucial for policymakers, as demonstrated by studies examining diverse responses across different countries (Matewos, 2025; Ojha et al., 2025).

The evolution of disaster thought reflects a growing recognition of the complex interplay between human actions and environmental factors. The integration of psychological and social dimensions into disaster risk management, particularly in light of recent global crises, underscores the necessity for a comprehensive approach that addresses both immediate responses and long-term resilience strategies. As we move forward, future frameworks must prioritize technical solutions while fostering community engagement and empowerment, ensuring that vulnerable populations are adequately supported in disaster scenarios.

This study aims to assess policing practices and challenges in COVID-19 disaster risk management in Ethiopia. Data collection involved document reviews and interviews with key informants selected through purposive sampling. The analysis is thematically structured around the legal frameworks for policing in disaster risk management, operational practices during the state of emergency, and the challenges faced by police in responding to COVID-19.

2. Methods of the study

This study employed a desk review methodology to assess police service laws and practices during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ethiopia. The primary data collection involved document analysis, which included reviewing relevant legal frameworks, policies, and guidelines related to disaster management and police responsibilities. To gain insights into the practical application of these laws, the study also conducted semi-structured interviews with five members of a command post established for COVID-19 response. The participants included two individuals from the Police Commission, one person from Disaster risk management commission and two from the Ministry of Health. These members were selected using purposive sampling techniques to ensure that the interviewees had relevant experience and knowledge regarding the enforcement of emergency regulations during the pandemic.

The interviews aimed to explore the challenges and successes faced by the police in implementing COVID-19 directives, including physical distancing and mask mandates. Thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data collected from the interviews, allowing for the identification of key themes and patterns related to police involvement in disaster response. By integrating document analysis with targeted interviews, the study provides a nuanced perspective on the intersection of law enforcement, health policy, and disaster management in Ethiopia during the pandemic.

3. Basis of Disaster Risk Management in Ethiopia

This section discusses the legal basis of Disaster Risk Management (DRM), such as the constitution, DRM policy and strategies, national incident management system guidelines, state of emergency proclamation, regulation, and directives as follows.

3.1. FDRE constitution

The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) serves as the supreme law, establishing a federal system of governance that includes a federal government, 12 regional governments, and two city administrations. Each level of government, federal, regional, and city, has its own legislative, executive, and judicial branches, as outlined in the FDRE Constitution of 1995. This structure allows for a decentralized approach to governance, enabling regions to address local issues while adhering to national laws.

According to Article 89(3) of the FDRE Constitution, the government bears the primary responsibility for disaster risk management, which encompasses prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. This comprehensive framework is essential for effectively managing disasters, ensuring that both federal and regional governments coordinate their efforts in times of crisis.

One significant strategy for disaster response utilized by both levels of government is the declaration of a state of emergency. The federal government is empowered to declare a state of emergency in situations such as external invasions or armed uprisings. In contrast, regional governments can declare emergencies in response to natural disasters or epidemics. However, the language used in the constitution raises concerns; the term “natural disaster” is misleading, as it implies that disasters are inherently natural events. In reality, disasters result from the interaction of natural hazards with societal vulnerabilities. Therefore, it is more accurate to refer to “natural hazards” rather than “natural disasters.”

The FDRE Constitution also grants the Council of Ministers the authority to issue decrees for states of emergency, which must then be approved by the House of Peoples’ Representatives. Additionally, an inquiry board is established to oversee the implementation of emergency measures, as stipulated in various articles of the constitution (Arts 51(16), 55(8), 77(10), 89(3), 93). This oversight mechanism is crucial for ensuring that emergency responses are carried out effectively and in accordance with constitutional provisions. The rationale behind declaring a state of emergency is to protect citizens from threats that physically endanger them or jeopardize the sovereignty of the state. In this context, the government must act decisively to safeguard the population and maintain stability during crises.

Despite the established framework, the FDRE Constitution does not clearly address which emergency laws take precedence in the event of a conflict between federal and regional emergency regulations during natural disasters or pandemics. This lack of clarity can lead to confusion and inefficiencies in emergency response efforts.

In comparison to other studies, it has been observed that effective disaster management requires a cohesive legal framework that delineates the roles and responsibilities of various levels of government. Research has highlighted the importance of coordination between federal and regional authorities to ensure timely and effective responses during emergencies (Mcentire, 2015). Moreover, the need for a clear definition of terms and a unified approach to disaster classification is essential for effective risk management.

In summary, while the FDRE Constitution provides a solid foundation for disaster risk management in Ethiopia, challenges remain regarding the clarity of emergency laws and the terminology used to describe disasters. A more precise understanding of the distinction between natural hazards and disasters, along with a cohesive legal framework that resolves potential conflicts between federal and regional laws, is necessary to enhance the effectiveness of disaster response and recovery efforts in Ethiopia. Future studies should focus on developing comprehensive legal and policy frameworks that support collaborative disaster management at all levels of government.

3.2. DRM Policy and Strategy

The Ethiopian Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Policy and Strategy, enacted in 2013, aims to build resilient capacities across communities and institutions, with a vision to significantly reduce disaster-related damages by 2023. This policy represents a strategic shift in Ethiopia’s approach to disaster management, emphasizing a comprehensive, people-centered, and integrated system that prioritizes multi-hazard and multi-sectoral strategies throughout all phases of disaster management—before, during, and after events. The core mission of the Ethiopian DRM policy is to establish a robust system that is effective, accountable, and decentralized, focusing on integrating disaster risk reduction into development plans and improving recovery and rehabilitation efforts for vulnerable populations.

A critical aspect of the policy is its organizational framework, which includes the establishment of the Disaster Risk Management Council and coordination mechanisms at various administrative levels. However, a significant contradiction arises between the DRM policy and the FDRE Constitution, which assigns the authority to declare a state of emergency to the Council of Ministers. This discrepancy can lead to confusion during disaster responses, as it is unclear which body holds ultimate authority. Similar studies in disaster governance emphasize the need for clear legal frameworks and delineation of responsibilities to avoid such conflicts, which can hinder effective disaster management.

The Ethiopian DRM policy also adopts a “bottom-up” approach, empowering local communities to actively engage in disaster risk management. This approach encompasses six key strategies: prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, rehabilitation, and reconstruction, all grounded in a robust early warning system. By recognizing the interconnectedness of various risks, including drought, floods, agricultural failures, health crises, and conflict, the policy aligns with global best practices in disaster risk management. Research has shown

that integrated DRM strategies that consider multiple hazards tend to be more effective in building resilience, highlighting the importance of local knowledge and capacities.

In comparison to similar studies, while Ethiopia's DRM policy stands out for its emphasis on resilience-building and community involvement, challenges remain regarding practical implementation. Issues such as resource limitations, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and the need for capacity building at local levels have been noted in other contexts as well. Successful disaster management requires clarity in legal frameworks, strong local engagement, and a comprehensive approach that anticipates the complexities of various risks. Future efforts should focus on harmonizing policy and constitutional frameworks, enhancing local capacities, and ensuring that disaster risk management is truly inclusive and responsive to community needs .

3.3. Police laws

The police serve as a critical organ within the executive branch of the Ethiopian government, established as an autonomous federal entity with its own legal personality. The primary mission of the police is to ensure adherence to the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) and laws enacted pursuant to it. This mission aligns with national efforts to build a democratic system, maintain peace, and enhance development. The police are expected to operate impartially, serving the public equitably, maintaining strict discipline, and delivering efficient, quality services (Ethiopia Federal Police Establishment Proclamation 720/2011). This foundational framework emphasizes the integral role of the police in upholding democracy and governance in Ethiopia.

A significant aspect of the police's responsibilities includes crime prevention and investigation. According to Article 6(13) of the establishment proclamation, the police are tasked with maintaining peace and security during emergency situations arising from natural or man-made disasters. This provision underscores the police's duty not only to respond to crime but also to collaborate with relevant government agencies, charities, and associations to provide assistance to disaster victims. Such collaboration is essential for effective disaster response, as it allows the police to leverage resources and expertise from various sectors to mitigate the impacts of disasters.

Despite these mandates, challenges remain in integrating disaster risk management within the police force. While the crime prevention and health departments have incorporated disaster response strategies into their planning, the overall approach is not yet fully mainstreamed across all police departments. There is a notable absence of organized focal points dedicated to disaster risk management within the police commission. This lack of specialized focus can create gaps in preparedness and response efforts. Ultimately, it undermines the police's ability to manage disaster situations effectively.

In comparison to similar studies and practices in other countries, the Ethiopian police's approach to disaster management reflects a need for further development and integration of disaster risk frameworks. In many effective disaster response models, police forces are integrated into broader emergency management systems, with clear roles and responsibilities established across various departments. Successful disaster management requires not only immediate response capabilities but also proactive planning and collaboration with other sectors. Therefore, enhancing the police's capacity for disaster risk management through training, dedicated personnel, and integrated strategies will be crucial for improving overall disaster resilience in Ethiopia.

Table 1. Legal Instruments Governing Police Roles in Disaster Response

Legal Document	Key Provisions for Police	Gaps/Challenges
FDRE Constitution (1995)	Art. 89(3): Gov't responsibility for DRM	Ambiguity in federal vs. regional authority
Police Proclamation No. 720/2011	Art. 6(13): Police role in disaster emergencies	No dedicated DRM focal points in police units
State of Emergency Proclamation (2020)	Authorizes enforcement of lockdowns/curfews	Overreach risks (human rights violations)
DRM Policy (2013)	Bottom-up community engagement in DRM	Poor coordination with police

Table 1 summarizes key legal documents that define police roles in disaster response, highlighting both provisions and challenges. The FDRE Constitution (1995) mandates government responsibility for disaster risk management but lacks clarity on federal versus regional authority. Police Proclamation No. 720/2011 outlines police roles in emergencies but reveals a gap due to the absence of dedicated disaster risk management focal points. The State of Emergency Proclamation (2020) allows enforcement of lockdowns, raising concerns about potential human rights violations. Finally, the DRM Policy (2013) stresses community engagement but suffers from poor coordination with police, undermining effective disaster response. Addressing these gaps is crucial for improving overall disaster management efforts.

4. Policing to COVID 19 Response

This section discusses COVID 19 control the state of emergency law and practice. Its first section talks about the contents of state of emergency laws. The second section addresses the institutional frameworks' of state of emergency operation. It focuses on characteristics of police service during pandemic risk administration. The last section will talk about the challenges of police to effectively discharge this responsibility.

4.1. State of Emergency Laws

To manage the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ethiopian government declared a state of emergency through Proclamation No. 3/2020, enacted on April 9, 2020, and approved by Parliament the following day. This proclamation was necessitated by the recognition that the pandemic could not be effectively controlled through regular health and law enforcement systems. As a result, the law aimed to coordinate human and material resources across the nation to combat COVID-19. It applied to the entire country for a period of five months, rendering any conflicting federal or regional laws void. Article 5(3) of the proclamation authorized law enforcement organs to enforce this emergency law, imposing penalties for violations, including imprisonment for up to three years or fines ranging from 1,000 to 10,000 birr.

In response to the emergency proclamation, the Council of Ministers enacted Regulation No. 466/2020, which established the COVID-19 National Ministerial Committee. This committee, comprised of key ministers, was accountable to the Prime Minister and was responsible for issuing directives to enforce the emergency measures. The committee enacted three primary directives: one governing transport service providers, another establishing sub-committees and task forces, and the third outlining precautionary measures in public spaces. However, as per revised Directive No. 288/2022, the ministerial committee evolved into a broader task force that included all ministers, the police commission, and public health institutions, reflecting a more integrated approach to managing the pandemic.

The directives listed numerous prohibited acts that the police were expected to enforce, such as barring individuals infected with COVID-19 from entering public spaces and requiring mask-wearing in public areas. Additionally, positive obligations were imposed on citizens to report suspected infections and ensure public health measures were followed, such as maintaining physical distancing and providing sanitary materials in service environments. These measures illustrate a comprehensive approach to public health, mandating active participation from individuals and organizations to mitigate the virus's spread. The state of emergency law also included specific precautions for those infected or suspected of being infected, emphasizing self-isolation and hygiene practices.

In comparison to similar studies in other countries, Ethiopia's approach to managing the COVID-19 pandemic reflects both strengths and weaknesses. The establishment of a national task force and comprehensive regulations mirrors practices in countries like South Korea and New Zealand, which also implemented strict measures to control the spread of the virus. However, challenges remain in the effective implementation of these measures, particularly regarding public compliance and resource allocation. Research indicates that successful pandemic responses often rely on clear communication, community engagement, and sufficient resources for enforcement (Bahl et al., 2020). Ethiopia's reliance on law enforcement to ensure compliance may not fully address the underlying issues of public trust and community cooperation necessary for effective health interventions. Future studies should explore the effectiveness of these measures and the role of community engagement in enhancing public health responses in Ethiopia.

4.2. State of Emergency Command Post

According to the Ethiopian Constitution, the Council of Ministers holds the authority to enforce state of emergency laws. However, the implementation of these laws has led to the establishment of a separate committee, often referred to as the command post, which is accountable to the Prime Minister. This structure indicates a potential overlap in authority and raises questions about the delineation of roles in emergency management. Additionally, an informant has noted the existence of the National Incident Management System (NIMS), which is designed to streamline disaster response efforts across various government levels. The Ethiopian Disaster Risk Management Commission has enacted directives that define the processes and procedures for NIMS, incorporating structures like Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC), the Emergency Coordination Center (ECC), and the Incident Command System (ICS).

The MAC is positioned as a vital coordination mechanism, providing the architecture necessary for prioritizing incidents, allocating resources, and managing communication during emergencies. As described by an interviewee, the MAC includes representatives from various ministries and organizations, including the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Health, and UN agencies, among others. This integration of diverse stakeholders reflects a collaborative approach to disaster management, akin to frameworks seen in other countries. For instance, studies from the United States demonstrate the effectiveness of multi-agency coordination in managing large-scale emergencies, where various agencies work collectively to address complex challenges (National Response Framework, 2017). The Ethiopian model similarly aims to create a unified response to disasters, emphasizing the importance of diverse expertise in policy decisions.

The ECC acts as a central hub for coordinating resources and information during incidents, bridging the gap between the MAC and on-scene command. This aligns with emergency management best practices observed in other countries, where coordination centers are critical for ensuring effective communication and resource management during crises. For example, the United Kingdom's emergency response framework highlights the role of coordination centers in facilitating information flow and operational support during disasters (Civil Contingencies Act, 2004). In Ethiopia, the ECC has adapted to specific needs during the COVID-19 response by establishing additional centers within the Ministry of Health, demonstrating flexibility in its operations.

At the local level, the ICS provides a structured approach for implementing tactical decisions in response to emergencies. This system draws upon expertise from various government offices, enabling a coordinated response at the site of incidents. The cluster approach within the ICS, which categorizes efforts into specific areas like shelter, food, and health, is similar to frameworks utilized in other nations, such as the cluster coordination mechanism employed by the United Nations during humanitarian crises. This method fosters collaboration among various sectors, ensuring that resources and information are effectively shared and utilized. Overall, while Ethiopia's NIMS is designed to enhance disaster response through coordination and collaboration, the effectiveness of these systems will ultimately depend on their integration into existing governance structures, ongoing training, and the establishment of clear communication channels among all stakeholders involved.

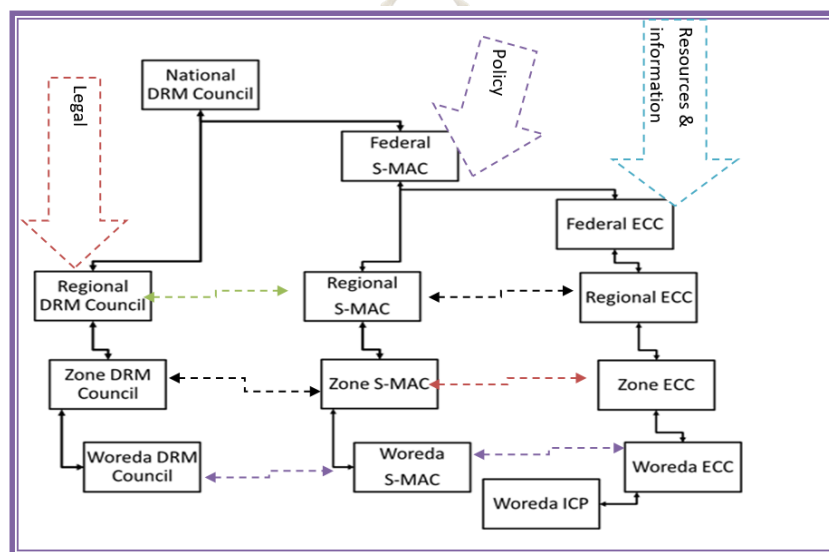


Figure 1. Ethiopia incident management system

To effectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ethiopia activated its National Incident Management System (NIMS), which encompassed various structures, including the Disaster Risk Management (DRM)

Council, Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC), Emergency Coordination Center (ECC), and Incident Command System (ICS). The Minister of Health led the ECC, reflecting the health-centric nature of the crisis, while the World Health Organization (WHO) played a significant role as a secondary leadership body in the response team. The National Disaster Risk Management Commission was tasked with coordinating the overall pandemic response, establishing a structured framework to address the crisis.

This hierarchical disaster response structure was cascaded down to regional and local government levels, ensuring that the response was comprehensive and responsive to local needs. At the regional level, the MAC was headed by the president of the regional government, maintaining a direct line of communication and coordination with the federal MAC. This organized approach mirrors practices observed in other countries, such as the United States, where emergency management frameworks emphasize the importance of structured coordination at multiple governance levels. Research has shown that effective disaster responses often rely on well-defined roles and responsibilities within multi-tiered systems (National Response Framework, 2017). Ethiopia's adaptation of similar principles illustrates its commitment to a coordinated response.

The regional ECC was organized under the regional DRM commission and led by the health bureau, conducting meetings three times a week to assess the situation and strategize responses. This frequency of meetings highlights the importance of ongoing communication and decision-making in disaster management. Comparative studies from countries like Canada have demonstrated that regular coordination meetings among various agencies can significantly enhance responsiveness and adaptability during crises (Public Safety Canada, 2018). Ethiopia's proactive engagement at the regional level reflects an understanding of the need for agility in addressing evolving challenges during the pandemic.

Additionally, the participation of regional government presidents in meetings organized by the federal DRM Council at the Prime Minister's Office underscores a centralized approach to managing the pandemic while still allowing for regional input. This balance of central authority and local engagement is crucial for effective disaster management, as highlighted in studies on emergency governance in various contexts. In countries like Japan, the integration of local government participation in national disaster response efforts has been shown to improve community resilience and enhance the effectiveness of interventions (Kato et al., 2019). Overall, Ethiopia's structured response to COVID-19 through its NIMS illustrates a commitment to leveraging both centralized coordination and local participation, which is essential for addressing complex health emergencies effectively.

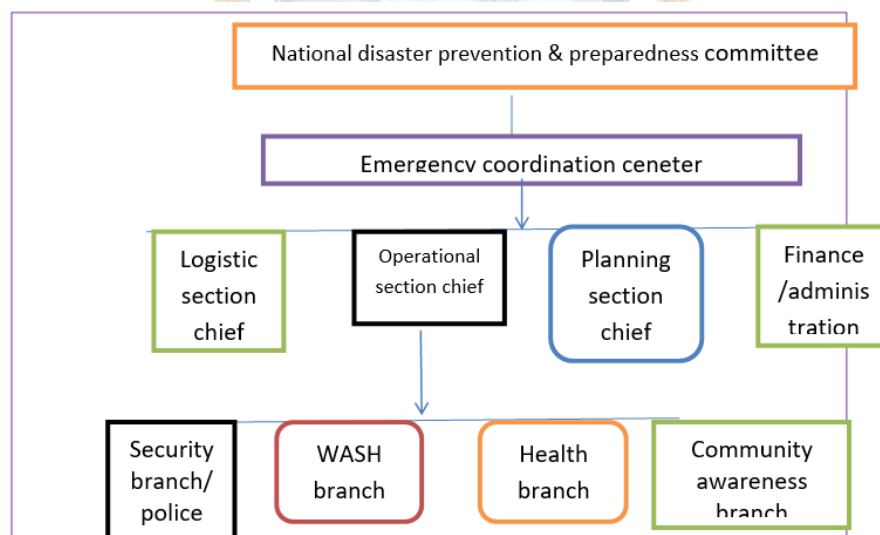


Figure 2. National Incident management system for COVID 19 response
(source DRM commission website)

The Ethiopian National Incident Management System (NIMS) activated in response to COVID-19 exemplifies a structured approach to emergency management, integrating various governmental and non-governmental entities. The federal inter-ministerial task force, which includes the police commission as part of the Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC), is led by the Deputy Prime Minister and remains accountable to the Prime Minister. This hierarchical setup is crucial for effective decision-making and resource allocation during crises, as highlighted in other studies of disaster management frameworks.

The Emergency Coordination Center (ECC) of the National Disaster Risk Management Commission (NDRMC) plays a pivotal role in organizing response efforts. It is divided into logistics, operational, planning, and financial/administrative sections, reflecting best practices observed in successful emergency management systems worldwide. For instance, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the United States employs a similar structure, emphasizing the importance of coordinated logistics and operational planning during disaster responses (FEMA, 2019). The classification of operational sections into specific clusters—such as security, WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene), shelter, health & nutrition, food, protection, and public awarenessdemonstrates Ethiopia's commitment to a comprehensive response strategy that addresses multiple facets of the pandemic.

The security cluster, led by the police, is tasked with preventing the spread of the virus and enforcing state of emergency laws. This dual role highlights the importance of law enforcement in public health emergencies, a concept supported by studies that emphasize the need for coordinated law enforcement efforts during health crises. Research indicates that effective policing can enhance compliance with public health directives, thereby mitigating the spread of disease (Harris et al., 2020). Additionally, the involvement of police scholars in providing socio-psychological support for individuals in isolation centers underscores a holistic approach to managing the pandemic, recognizing the mental health implications of isolation.

Leadership within the health and nutrition cluster by the Minister of Health aligns with findings from similar studies that stress the importance of having health professionals at the forefront of disaster response. For instance, a study from the World Health Organization emphasizes that effective health leadership is critical in managing public health emergencies, ensuring that health services are prioritized and effectively coordinated (WHO, 2020). Ethiopia's multi-cluster approach, with designated leaders for each area, facilitates a more organized response, allowing for tailored strategies that meet the diverse needs of the population during the pandemic. Overall, the structure and organization of Ethiopia's NIMS in response to COVID-19 reflect best practices in disaster management, emphasizing collaboration, clear leadership, and a comprehensive approach to addressing multifaceted challenges.

4.3. Policing During Pandemic Response

The role of police in enforcing emergency laws during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ethiopia has raised significant concerns regarding human rights and the balance between public safety and civil liberties. As highlighted by various informants, the emergency law granted law enforcement agencies expanded powers to control the spread of the virus, including implementing curfews and restricting movement. This enforcement was framed within principles such as necessity, proportionality, non-discrimination, and accountability. However, many informants expressed concerns that these powers often led to the suspension of fundamental human rights, reflecting a broader trend observed in other countries during public health emergencies.

For instance, studies conducted during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa revealed similar tensions between public health measures and civil liberties. In those cases, the enforcement of quarantine measures and movement restrictions sometimes resulted in human rights violations, including arbitrary detentions and excessive use of force (Sharma et al., 2015). The Ethiopian experience echoes these concerns, particularly as police conducted city patrols and fixed checkpoints in public and religious spaces to enforce compliance. The capacity of law enforcement to arrest individuals for disseminating information perceived as threatening, such as the arrest of journalist Yayasew Shimelis for allegedly inciting panic, illustrates the precarious balance between maintaining public order and protecting freedom of expression.

Moreover, the mention of police involvement in monitoring the conduct of command post members raises questions about accountability and oversight within the emergency management framework. The case of Mitiku Kassa, a former head of the NDRMC charged with corruption, highlights the complexities of governance during crises. Corruption and misuse of power in disaster management are well-documented issues in various contexts. For example, a study by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies pointed out that corruption can undermine disaster response efforts and erode public trust in institutions (IFRC, 2019). The Ethiopian situation reflects these challenges, where the intertwining of emergency responses and allegations of misconduct can lead to diminished effectiveness in managing public health crises.

Overall, while the police's role in enforcing COVID-19 laws is framed within a legal and ethical context, the realities on the ground reveal potential overreach and the risk of human rights violations. Comparative studies underscore the need for clear guidelines and oversight mechanisms to ensure that law enforcement actions remain within the bounds of legality and respect for human rights. The Ethiopian experience serves as

a critical case study in understanding the implications of emergency powers and the necessity of preserving democratic principles even in times of crisis.

4.4. Challenges of Policing in Pandemic Response

The challenges faced by the police in controlling the COVID-19 pandemic in Ethiopia reflect broader issues of governance and crisis management that have been observed in other countries during similar health emergencies.

One of the primary challenges in Ethiopia was the conflict of jurisdiction between federal and regional governments. Both levels of government held the constitutional authority to declare a state of emergency, leading to overlapping declarations, particularly evident in the Tigray region. This situation has parallels in other federal systems, where jurisdictional conflicts can hinder effective crisis management. For instance, during the H1N1 pandemic, conflicts between state and federal authorities in the United States created confusion over public health directives and response strategies (Gonzalez et al., 2010). In Ethiopia, this conflict not only raised legal questions about which state of emergency took precedence but also contributed to political tensions, culminating in armed conflict. Such politicization of health emergencies can exacerbate existing divisions and undermine collaborative efforts, as seen in similar contexts worldwide.

In addition to the pandemic, Ethiopia faced a myriad of challenges, including civil war, desert locust invasions, floods, and droughts, which complicated the policing response to COVID-19. The prioritization of civil conflict over pandemic control mirrors situations in other countries where multiple crises have strained governmental resources and attention. For example, during the Ebola outbreak in Liberia, the government struggled to manage an ongoing civil crisis while addressing the epidemic, leading to resource allocation issues and delays in response (Mokdad et al., 2019). In Ethiopia, the pressing need to address the civil war diverted focus and resources away from pandemic management, creating a complex emergency scenario that overwhelmed police capabilities.

The requirement for collaboration among security, development, and humanitarian actors is critical in disaster response. However, the Ethiopian police response to COVID-19 was hampered by a lack of coordination among command post members due to overlapping mandates and poor communication systems. This challenge is not unique to Ethiopia; studies have shown that inadequate inter-agency collaboration can severely hinder disaster response efforts. For instance, a study on the coordination of disaster response during Hurricane Katrina highlighted that fragmented communication and unclear roles among agencies led to significant delays and inefficiencies in the response (Graham et al., 2006). Similarly, Ethiopia's experience underscores the importance of establishing clear communication channels and delineating responsibilities among various stakeholders to enhance the efficacy of emergency responses.

Table 2. Challenges in Policing COVID-19 vs. Recommended Solutions

Challenge	Root Cause	Recommended Solution
Jurisdictional conflicts	Federal vs. regional mandates	Clarify hierarchy in emergency laws
Lack of DRM training for police	Absence from police curricula	Integrate DRM into police academy training
Human rights concerns	Excessive enforcement powers	Independent oversight mechanisms
Poor inter-agency collaboration	Overlapping mandates	Establish clear communication protocols

Table 2 highlights challenges in policing COVID-19 regulations, their root causes, and recommended solutions. Jurisdictional conflicts arise from unclear federal versus regional mandates, necessitating clarification of emergency law hierarchies. Additionally, the lack of disaster risk management (DRM) training for police is due to its absence in curricula; integrating DRM into police academy programs is essential for preparedness. Human rights concerns stem from excessive enforcement powers, and implementing independent oversight mechanisms can help protect civil liberties. Finally, poor inter-agency collaboration results from overlapping

mandates, which can be addressed by establishing clear communication protocols. These solutions aim to enhance police effectiveness, safeguard rights, and improve cooperation during emergencies.

In summary, the challenges faced by the police in managing the COVID-19 pandemic in Ethiopia illuminate critical lessons about governance in crisis situations. The conflict of jurisdiction, compounded by simultaneous crises, and the lack of collaborative mechanisms are issues that resonate across various international contexts. Comparative studies reveal that successful disaster management often hinges on cohesive governance structures, clear lines of authority, and effective communication among all parties involved. Ethiopia's experience can serve as a cautionary tale for other nations facing similar multifaceted crises, emphasizing the need for integrated and collaborative approaches to emergency management.

5. Conclusion

Disasters, whether natural or human-induced, present extraordinary challenges that exceed the capacities of affected communities. The Ethiopian government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic through the declaration of a state of emergency and the establishment of a command post reflects an organized approach to disaster management. The command post, structured to include a Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Council, Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) center, Emergency Coordination Center (ECC), and Incident Command System (ICS), demonstrates a commitment to coordinating resources effectively.

The police commission's role in enforcing emergency laws, including mask mandates and social distancing, highlights the critical function of law enforcement in public health crises. However, significant challenges have emerged, including jurisdictional conflicts between federal and regional authorities, the politicization of disaster responses, and misconceptions about COVID-19 influenced by cultural and religious beliefs. These issues have complicated the police's ability to implement effective disaster response measures.

The Police Commission should develop and implement a comprehensive disaster response operation procedure. This protocol should outline clear guidelines for police actions during emergencies, ensuring that law enforcement is equipped to respond effectively while respecting human rights. The Police Commission should develop and implement a comprehensive disaster response operation procedure that outlines clear guidelines for police actions during emergencies. This protocol will ensure that law enforcement is well-equipped to respond effectively while upholding human rights. Additionally, the creation of Disaster Risk Management Focal Points within the police commission will enhance specialization and focus on disaster-related issues. These focal persons will serve as liaisons between various departments and agencies, facilitating better communication and coordination among stakeholders. Furthermore, integrating disaster risk management into the curricula of the International Police Academy and the Ethiopian Police University will provide police officers with essential training in prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery strategies for future emergencies.

To strengthen overall disaster response, it is crucial to enhance collaboration between federal and regional governments, minimizing jurisdictional conflicts that can hinder effective action. Establishing clear protocols for communication and cooperation will help ensure that both levels of government work towards a common goal without political interference. Alongside this, conducting public awareness campaigns to address misconceptions about COVID-19 and reinforce compliance with public health measures is necessary. Engaging community leaders and using culturally relevant messaging can help shift public perceptions and promote adherence to emergency laws. Finally, implementing a robust monitoring and evaluation system will assess the effectiveness of police actions during disasters, allowing for continuous improvement based on lessons learned from previous responses.

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