

**IPSS Briefing Session Concept Note |****Beyond Grievance: War Economy, State Entanglement, and the Dynamics of
Protracted Conflict in Ethiopia's Amhara Region****31 July 2026 | 09:00 -11:00 AM EAT | IPSS Conference Hall****I. Background/Rationale**

Ethiopia has been grappling with internal political instability, civil wars, and the proliferation of armed insurgencies in Tigray, Oromia, Amhara, etc. Scholarly works in Ethiopia explain conflict through the lens of ethnic grievances, flawed federal arrangements, elite power struggles, and insecurity complexes. While these frameworks illuminate crucial perspectives on conflict in Ethiopia, they share a common limitation: they treat armed conflict primarily as a breakdown of political order rather than as a generative system with its own internal economic logic. Against this backdrop, this research aims to explain the complex political economic factors driving why armed movements persist, adapt, and resist resolution, using the Fano insurgency as a case study.

The Fano insurgency evolved from the street youth protests of 2016-2018 that demanded and echoed—identity-territorial question, constitutional revision demands, inclusive economic and political systems, human rights issues, to mention a few. Fast forward to 2023, the hastily dissolution of the Amhara Special Force and the questions on the Pretoria Agreement, *inter alia*, triggered the insurgency in August 2023. Since its outbreak, the insurgency has rapidly evolved beyond its initial political triggers into a complex, self-sustaining armed movement. The diaspora funding, personal wealth, support from the local community, the logistics and ammunition the Fano received from the state security forces during the Tigray war offers the starting capital of the Fano armed struggle. With the unprecedented success in controlling the major cities in the early week of August 2023, the conflict was assumed by the Fano groups, diaspora, and sympathizers to be concluded in short period of time. However, the insurgency faced a reality check when the ENDF successfully regained control of major towns, pushing Fano groups into the countryside and shifting the conflict into a rural-based armed struggle.

The organisational nature of the Fano groups, i.e., diverse, decentralised and loosely affiliated, initially made the rural-based struggle easy, as everyone is fighting in one's own back yard. With increasing pressure from the diaspora, the Fano groups began to come together to form some organisational structures. Consequently, this shift has generated severe logistical and supply challenges, exacerbated by the precarious political environment and a distinct lack of guerrilla warfare experience among both local communities and Fano leadership, unlike the neighboring Tigray Region.

Securing funding became a major sticking point for the insurgency. The diaspora and local community's continued logistical support began to decline out of fatigue and internal fragmentation. The need for sustainable source of funding has led the movement to explore alternative extraction methods, such as household and checkpoint taxation. Furthermore, the decentralized nature of Fano has allowed criminal elements to proliferate in areas where the command structure lacks control. As a result, kidnapping, theft, and abduction have become rampant, particularly in Gondar. This has drawn more and more youth to join the Fano groups as these unemployed and underemployed youth navigate their ways of securing livelihoods.

Within this context, peacebuilding efforts confront severe challenges. For instance, the Addis Ababa Agreement signed in December 2025 between the Amhara National Regional State (ANRS) and the Amhara Fano Popular Organization (AFPO) faction marked a major peace initiative, accompanied by extensive disarmament and demobilisation programmes, especially in South Gondar Zone. Paradoxically, violence has escalated since the agreement. In the South Gondar Zone, for instance, Fano forces have seized control of most woredas and successfully infiltrated the administrative capital of Debre Tabor (BBC,



2026). Reports further indicate a swift (re)mobilisation of disarmed Fano combatants back into the insurgency. Ultimately, the fluidity with which individuals transition between formal state security or administrative apparatuses (e.g., Kebele administrators, militia, police, or military) and the Fano insurgency is striking. This phenomenon poses a pivotal question: does the political economy of war outweigh the political economy of peace? For ordinary fighters, demobilisation means immediate loss of income and social status—making continued armed participation economically rational and peace economically costly, thereby incentivising conflict perpetuation.

This paradox sits at the heart of the research undertaken by Yared Debebe. By drawing its theoretical underpinning from critical Political Economy of War (PEW) and utilising multiple qualitative data sources including interviews, official statements (from both Fano and all levels of government), and informal conversations with former and active combatants, kidnapping victims, truck drivers, and selected local community members, this research reveals three analytically significant patterns in the political economy of Fano insurgency: firstly, individuals join the Fano insurgency for multiple and layered motives. The political and economic motives operate alongside—fighting a “war of survival” and navigating simultaneously income streams, social networks, and status structures. This reveals that the youth engagement in the insurgency constitute a complex and irreducible political economy of participation, i.e., militarised livelihood; secondly, the insurgency’s decentralised organisational structure has solidified the Fano’s economic resilience by distributing income generation across loosely affiliated groups, producing a war economy that is both fragmented and self-reproducing; and thirdly, the fluidity with which individuals move between formal state structures (such as local administration, police, and militia) and the Fano combatants reveals the degree to which the boundaries between the war economy and the formal economy have become structurally blurred.

With this background, the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) at Addis Ababa University is organising a briefing session featuring the author of the research, Yared Debebe. The event will provide a platform for presenting the study’s key findings, recommendations, and their implications for policy and practice.

II. Objective

The main objective of this briefing session is to present and discuss the key findings of the above research with particular emphasis on how the economic dimension of the conflict contributes to its emergence, evolution, and persistence.

By bringing together diverse set of participants and stakeholders, this briefing seeks to foster informed dialogue on the underlying causes of the Amhara conflict and explore peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and policy response options. The discussion will also provide an opportunity to critically examine the research’s findings and identify practical recommendations for addressing the structural factors that perpetuate violence in the region.

III. Expected outcomes

- Gain a deeper understanding of how economic incentives and livelihood challenges contribute to the persistence of the Fano insurgency and influence youth participation.
- Examine the implications of the research for ongoing and future peace initiatives, particularly the need to address the conflict's underlying economic drivers.
- Better understand how interactions between state institutions and the conflict economy can undermine peace efforts and sustain the insurgency.
- Identify and discuss policy and programmatic responses that address the root economic causes of the conflict and support more sustainable peacebuilding efforts.

**IV. Format**

The Briefing Session will be led by Yared Debebe, ARUA 2026 Fellow at the Institute for Peace and Security Studies. The session will be highly interactive, beginning with a presentation by Yared, followed by critical reflections from expert discussants who will offer complementary perspectives and engage with the research's methodology, findings, and broader significance. The briefing will conclude with a moderated Q&A session, providing participants with an opportunity to engage directly with the presenter and discussants, exchange ideas, and explore the practical and policy relevance of the research in greater depth.

V. Target audience

- Peace and Security Policy Analysts,
- Academic Researchers,
- Peacebuilding Practitioners,
- Think-tank representatives,
- Diplomatic Community based in Addis

VI. Date and Venue

The session will take place on 31 July 2026 from 09:00 AM -11:00 AM EAT at the New Conference Hall, IPSS