

# Socio-Economic Analysis of Homeless Population in Urban Areas a Case Study of Northern Ethiopia

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**Abstract-** Homeless is the condition of the people who are unwilling to maintain regular and adequate housing in both developed and developing countries. Present work was attempted with the objectives to address socio-economic conditions of the homeless people and identify the problem with respect to the homelessness at Mekelle city. On basis of random sampling four sub-cities were selected where by using purposive sampling 120 homeless households were sampled. Findings reveal that homeless population is a result of international and internal migration, 72% homeless population is either illiterate or poor in education. Casual/daily labour (64.7%), transportation (64.3%), pity trades (52%) are their main occupations, while restaurant workers, housemaids are among the females. They live rented houses, slums and under open sky where insufficient amenities are common.

**Index Terms-** Homelessness, pity occupations, migration, dwelling, ethnicity and gender

## I. INTRODUCTION

Homelessness describes the condition of people without a regular and insecure dwelling at every type of economies in the world particularly in urban areas. Homeless people who unable to get and maintain regular, safe and sound houses, or lack of fixed usual and adequate night-time residence [1].

Homelessness problem is most often caused by multiple and interrelated individual structural depreciations. It leads to maladjustment and social, economic, health and starvation [2]. The term homeless includes people whose primary night-time residence is a shelter at ad-hoc housing situation. The unsheltered segments of a homeless community who do not have ordinal lawful access to building such persons frequently prefer the term homeless. The homeless term has others uses as street people who do not fully encompass unsheltered in that many such persons do spend their time on urban street environments, unoccupied buildings, or to inhabit mountains or more after low land meadows, creeks and beaches [3]. The more recently, the focus has switched to recognizing that the population residing in temporary, insecure or physically ruined sub standard accommodation [4].

The legal definition of homeless varies from country to country, or among different entities or institutions in the some countries or regions. According to United Nations, homeless households are without shelter that would fall within the scope of living quilters. They carry their few possessions with them, sleeping in the streets, in doorways or on piers or in another space, on a more or less random basis [5]. According Census of

India persons who do not live in building or census houses but live in the open on road side, pavements in home pipe, under flyover, at places of worship, railway plate forms etc. are treated as homeless [6]. In western countries the large majority of homeless are men (75-80%), with single males particularly over presented [7].

Homelessness is evident in both industrialized and developing countries. In USA over 0.7 million were projected homeless. In Britain, 175,000 households accounting for about 0.4 people are accepted as homeless by the government. It was estimated that 1.2 million western European people are homeless, or live in precarious accommodations [8]. The poor quality of the houses, transitional units produce particularly high levels of hidden homeless problem. In third world countries, rapid population growth rise as homelessness due to urbanization, industrialization and migration for employment and livelihood towards cities where people live in slums, pipes, tents, caves, cars, vans, under flyovers, along roads, railways lines, with their relatives in inadequate or dilapidated facilities [9].

Homelessness is a visible problem that stigmatizes individuals or families with alcoholism, drugs, HIV crime and mental ill-health, domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, threatening conditions that relate to violence against a member of the household is considered under homeless category [10].

In Ethiopia the empire homeless people is mainly in urban areas, i.e. Addis Ababa, Diredawa, Harar, Mekelle, where they live. But it is difficult to find document their data of birth or address, their identification and other documents and a photo identity. Homeless people do not easy get job or access all social services. Somewhere, people lose their homes by government order to make way for newer upscale high rise buildings, roadways and other government needs. The compensation is nominal in which, the farmer occupants are not find appropriate new housing and become homeless [11]. In some cases, they are denied to the most basic assistance clothing, food pantries, certain public benefits, and emergency shelters. Major reasons and causes for homelessness as documented by many reports and studies include, i.e. unavailability of employment opportunities, poverty including unemployment and underemployment, war or armed conflict, natural disasters, disability, especially where disability services or poor performing, prevailing chronic and weakening diseases [12].

The basic problems of homelessness are the need for personal shelter, warmth and safety, other difficulties include; personal security, quiet and privacy, especially for sleeping, safekeeping of bedding, clothing and possessions, which may have to be carried at all times, hygiene and sanitary facilities, cleaning and drying of clothes, preparing and storing food, without permanent location or mailing address, hostility and

legal powers against urban vagrancy [13]. Many homeless people keep their possessions with them because they have no access to storage. They use laundry facilities their hygiene and toilets at public places which up surge a band of diseases in urban areas [14]. Homeless people freely enjoy toilet of public and religious places such as churches for purpose of washing and bathing. The homeless population grows larger and increasingly congregated. As a result many churches closed their doors when services were not being held and most places hired private security guards. Many public toilets were closed; this banishes the homeless population to sidewalk, parks, under bridges flyovers and so on [15].

## II. OBJECTIVES

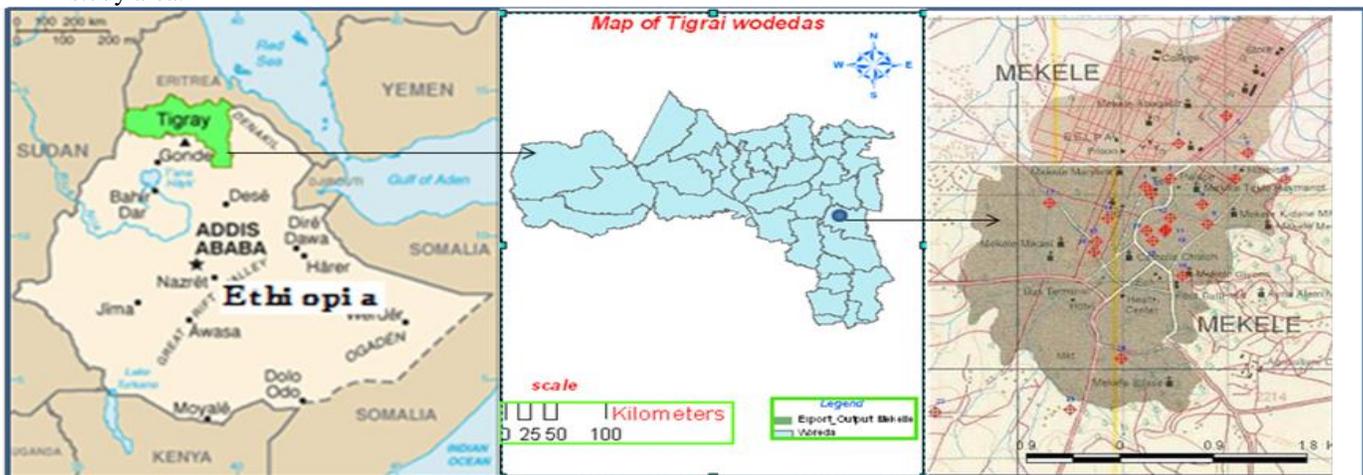
Keeping in view the importance of the homeless people and their socio-economic conditions in Mekelle city, the work was conducted with following objectives:

- To identify demographic characteristics of homeless people.
- To assess socio-economic conditions of the homeless population.
- To describe problems created by homeless people in the study area.

## III. STUDY AREA

Mekelle is one of the ancient time cities of northern Ethiopia and regional capital city of Tigray state, situated about 780 km from Addis Ababa near border of Ethiopia and Eritrea at 39° 25' 21''- 39° 33' 35'' E and 13° 34' 29''-13° 26' 21''N. The eastern side of the city is bounded by Enda-Eyesus ridges; a fault block mountain tiled river Ellala by north. The average annual temperature of the town is 14°C to 34°C and 575-650 cm rainfall [16].

The major land of the city is young interior scarped plain (plateau) by average elevation ranges between 2000 to 2200 masl. It city has 215,456 population consisting 104,758 males and 110,788 females. They spread over seven sub-cities, i.e. Hawelti, Aider, Adi-haki, Semien, Hadnet, Kedamey weyane and Quiha. [17]. Population growth includes internal and international migration associated with rural-urban as well as cross border migration form Eretria [18]. The livelihood and main occupations of the city are based on the agro-processing, small and household level industries by formal and non-formal sectors. Recently, the city has been popular where rapid political and economical development taken place.



Source: Tigray regional office, Mekelle, 2010

Fig. 1 Location map of the study area

## IV. DATA AND METHODS

The study is based on primary sources of the data which were collected through questionnaire/schedule focused on socio-economic conditions of homeless population. On basis of random sampling out of seven, four sub-cities (57% of the total) were selected consisting 1095 (50.2%) homeless households. A list of identified homeless households' heads was arranged sub-city wise in alphabetical order, in which 120 heads as sample size were determined those represented about 11% to the total homeless households. Purposive sampling was used to select homeless population; a single sample represented about 10 homeless households.

The share of households in each sub-city was determined by Bhan (1989) recommended; cited in Birhane [19] model sample

size of target population is enough to serve an adequate representative and small enough to be chosen cost-effectively in terms of both time and difficulty of analysis. After determining sample homeless population, the sampling was conducted by calculating the proportion of homeless population existing in each sub-city on the basis of the following formula.

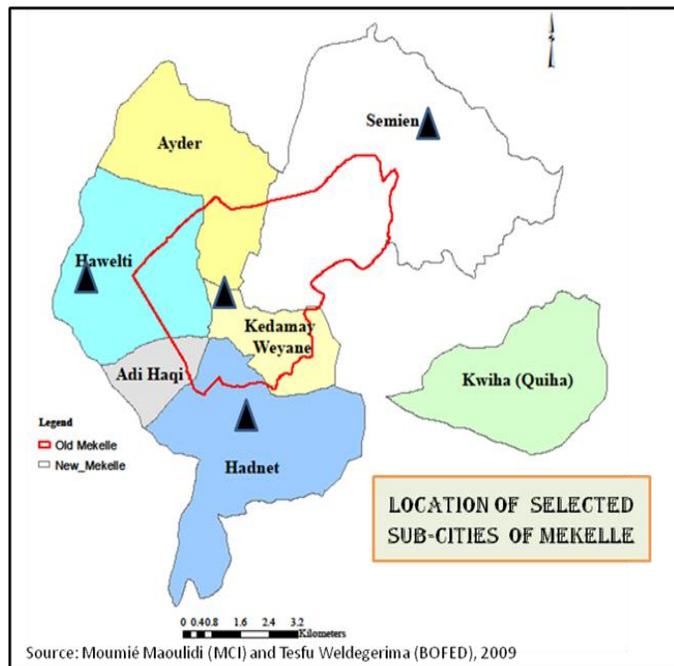
$$S = \frac{th}{TH}$$

Where, S = samples to be taken  
th = target homeless population heads  
TH = total homeless population heads in all sub-cities

**Table 1 Procedure for selection of female-headed households**

Target <i>kebeles</i>	Calculation	Sample proportion	Absolute samples
Hawelti	$120 \times \frac{305}{1095}$	=33.42	33
Kedamay	$120 \times \frac{245}{1095}$	=26.85	27
Hadnet	$120 \times \frac{269}{1095}$	=29.48	30
Simien	$120 \times \frac{276}{1095}$	=30.24	30
Total	$1095 \times \frac{100}{2180}$	=50.02	120

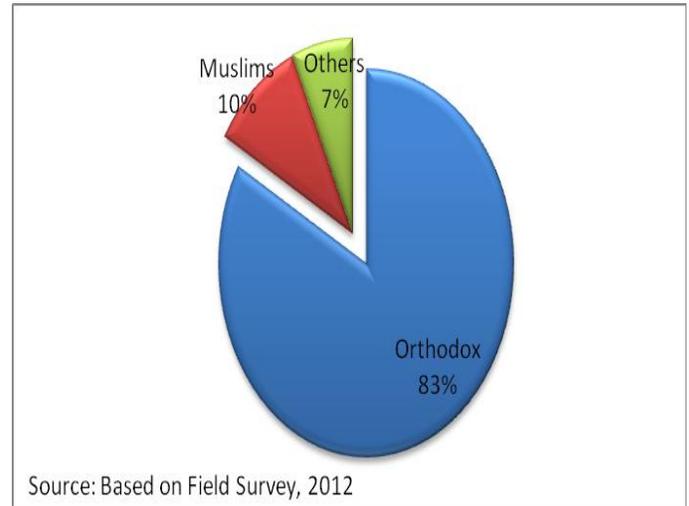
Source: Based on Field Survey, 2012



**Fig 2: Location of selected sub-cities**

**V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

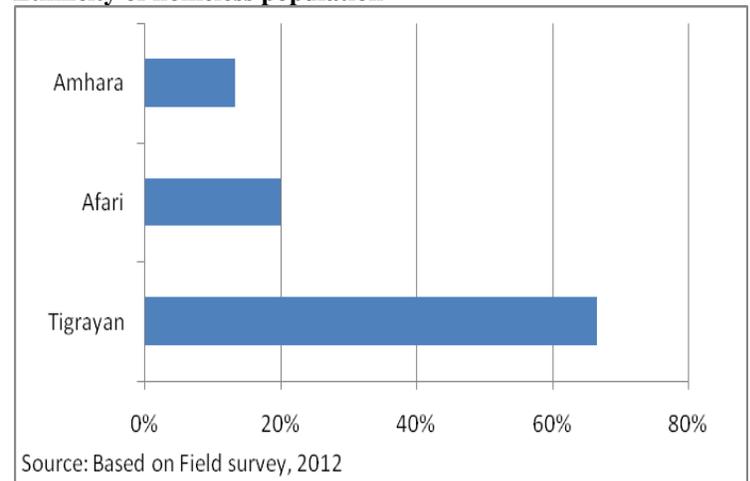
**Religious composition of the homeless population**



**Fig.3: Religious composition of homeless population**

Table 3 shows the religious composition of the homeless population that those who believe on the Orthodox Christianity were 83%, the remains were followers Islam and other religions. The highest proportion (83%) of orthodox Christianity followers reflect that the Christianity has been considered a way of life, a tradition, which, for centuries shaped the thought, the outlook, the culture and the economic life of the people. Therefore, it is continued to be central to the socio-economic development [20]

**Ethnicity of homeless population**



**Fig.4: Ethnicity of homeless population**

The Ethnic group of Tigray people was leading group (67%) in the study area. Tigray people who are known by language, culture in the Ethiopia and Eretria, this city also lies at hub of Tigray region. The remains were Afari, and Amhara based on origin place shared 13.33% and 20% of respondents (Fig 4). Afari Ethnicity reflects the culture by language dress and cultural activities has been developed in Afar river valley that is known as ancient cradle of humanity. Amhara Ethnicity has been carried the language, traditions those were oriented at the source of the Blue Nile [21].



**Fig 5 : Distance covered by homeless population from origin places**

Fig 5 indicates that a big segment of homeless population belonged to neighbouring areas, i.e. Adwa, Aynalem, Adgrat, Afar, Amhara and adjacent country Eritrea. A higher proportion (56.67%) of them covered a minimum distance (below 35 km) to Mekelle city.

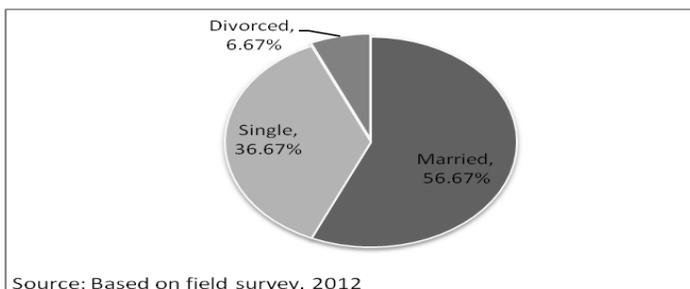
**Table 2 Distance covered by homeless population**

Distance covered (km)	Share of respondents (%)
Below 35	56.67
35-70	20.00
70-105	13.33
105-140	10.00
140-175	6.67

Source: Based on field survey, 2012

It was due to the rural-urban migration, poverty, non-availability of perennial work in agriculture and prevailing unemployment in surrounding rural spaces. A chunk of Tigray people arrived even from Eritrea due to cultural and economic pull factors to survive their lives (Table 2).

**Marital status of homeless people**



Source: Based on field survey, 2012

**Fig 6: Marital status of homeless people**

Marriage determines the reliability and stability social life [22]. Fig 6 shows that the share of married homeless population was 56.67% followed by single (36.67%), divorced (6.67%) respectively. Majority of respondents were married and living marital established life, however, a segment of them was as forced bachelor because they left their wives and children at the origin places and arrived to earn income. Similarly, due to poor socio-economic conditions and to earn the livelihood a chunk of population was single; they also left the country (native places) to earn money.

**Homeless population by Age and Sex**

**Table 3 Age and Sex composition of homeless population**

Age group	Male	Female	All
Below 7	14.53	19.67	16.29
7-14	25.64	31.15	27.53
15-59	47.01	40.98	44.94
Old	12.82	8.20	11.24

Source: Based on field survey, 2012, N=336

Table 3 reveals that the share of working age 15-59 years among homeless population was about 45% followed by juvenile (43.82%) and senile dependences (11.24%). Homeless people mainly arrived at the town to earn money. Therefore, the proportion of working age-group was generally, dominated by males than females. The child population was about 44% among the houseless population, it was due to children were considered as earning assets, they earn as child labourers, and also by begging, particularly small girls get easily sympathy of people to collect money.

**Educational status of respondents**

**Table 4 Houseless population by educational status**

Educational status	Male	Female	All
Illiterate	10.47	24.19	16.22
Literate	38.37	33.87	36.48
Primary	20.93	20.97	20.95
Secondary	19.77	11.29	16.21
10+2 & Above	10.47	9.68	10.14

Source: Based on field survey, 2012, N=296

Table 4 highlights that among homeless population 36.5% were literate who know only read and write with understanding. Mainly they arrived as freshman to survive their lives with

backward socio-economic conditions, so they could not get opportunity for education. The homeless population had lower education among females as they were 24.19% illiterate than their counterpart (10.47%).

**Economic profile of homeless population**

Homeless people who live in the study area engaged in the different types of works in order to survive as well as improve their living standard. It was recorded during field survey that mostly males worked daily/casual labourers because the homeless people who joined newly the city; they were unskilled, and considered unreliable to do work at home and trading activities. That is why they adopted the daily/casual laboureres to earn immediate money for survival.

**Table 5 Homeless population by types of occupations**

Types of work	Total	Male	Female	Children M	Children F
Casual/daily labor	26.15	64.71	23.53	7.84	3.92
Hotel/restaurant worker	18.46	36.11	44.44	8.33	11.11
Housemaids/servants	12.82	44.00	28.00	8.00	20.00
Pity traders	13.85	51.85	22.22	3.70	22.22
Transport by horse cart, donkey	7.18	64.29	0.00	35.71	0.00
Animal herding/selling milk, egg	21.54	28.57	35.71	14.29	21.43
Total	100	47.18	28.72	10.77	13.33

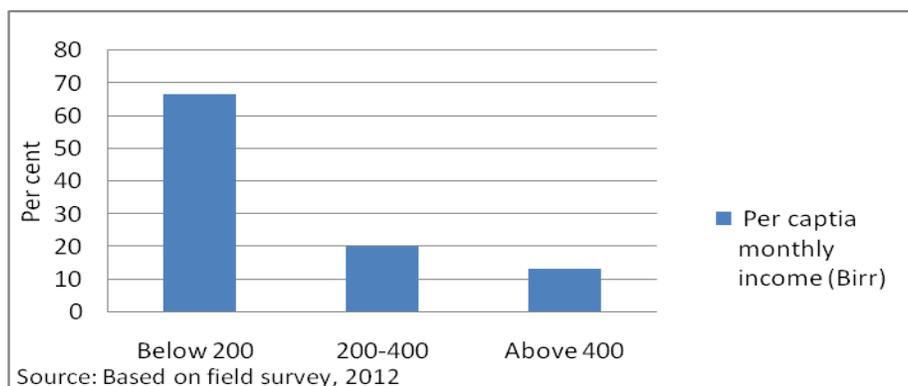
Source: Based on field survey, 2012, N=195

Table 5 reveals that animal herding and in selling milk and egg was recorded a preferable occupation among the homeless households. As agriculture and livestock herding is a traditional major activities of Tigray region of Ethiopia and Eretria where both female and male participated in this occupation. Particularly, it is a lucrative occupation among women and children, their about 66% was engaged to sell milk and egg as economic activities.

Tables also explains that Transportation activities as supply water by carrying horse cart, mule, and donkey (64.29%) are also important occupation of homeless male population to earn cash. In many cases these carts were borrowed on rent for carrying the water and commodities. Generally, Mekelle city is

under crises of water supply, it was severe in newly extension areas where construction of buildings and houses were on full swings. But water supply from municipality through pipe line either absent or not properly in working position. However, direct involvement of the women was not recorded in this business. Other lucrative business was trade of commodities, as pity traders who could be seen along road side, in front of religious places, bus stops or in the streets as hawkers (Table 5). Females among the homeless population generated income by performing their works in restaurants/hotels as waiters and in the house as housemaids. For inside of house, males are not accepted as traditional labour division which exists from the ancient time tradition. Since, females are considered as household workers, while male are business and related workers.

**Income of homeless population**



**Fig.7: Homeless Population by monthly income**

In the study area, majority of homeless population (66.67%) earned per capita monthly income below 200 birr<sup>1</sup>, 20% belonged to the range 200-400 birr monthly per capita income, while 13.33% had income above 400 birr (Fig 7).

**House conditions of homeless population**

**Table 6: Homeless population by dwelling conditions**

Type of dwelling	%
Rented house	53.33
Hut (slum)	40.00
Along road/street/pedestrian	06.67

Source: Based on field survey, 2012, N=120

House is one of basic needs for the population in order to survive and protected life [23]. Table 6 shows that more than 50% homeless population was residing in rented houses, it was noted 2/3 part of their income was spent for rent of the houses. However, 40% homeless population lived in hut/slum those were congested, dirty without basic amenities. There was 6.67% homeless people spent their night along the road, street, pedestrian, inside of pipe under tree and the open sky.

**Homeless population Food status of**

During the field survey, it was recorded that 46.67% homeless households did not get sufficient food for their family. In the case of women, among 43.33% households had not enough food for females.

**Table 7 Food and health of situation homeless families**

Food, water, health and sanitation	%
Is food sufficient for your family	53.33
Is if sufficiency from women	56.67
Source of drinking water from tap	40.00
Source of drinking water from spring	60.00
Family members of suffering from diseases	83.33
Toilet facilities within premises	46.67

Source: Based on field survey, 2012

Safe water is important for surviving biological life of the human being. It was recorded during that 60% homeless households were dependence on springs for drinking water. Those who use spring water informed that they walked generally distance 0.5 km distance for fetching the water at the nearest water points. But during March to May months (before rainy season), the nearby springs become dry, then they travel more distance even they travelled for fetching water more than 1 km distance, even spent 2 hours for fetching 20 water by jerry cane. Such type of duties was mainly performed by women and children as water carriers. It was also recorded that members of 83.33% homeless households were suffering from one or more diseases (Table7). Majority of them did not get health services because of homelessness. Average distance from houses to health

centre was recorded up to 1-2 km. Toilet facilities in a house are necessary and important in a civic society to biological cycle need [24]. But, toilet facilities, generally, was not available in 52.37% homeless households. However, 46.67% households were recorded with traditional toilets (open without walls), as well as with seat and side walls.

**Problems faced by homeless population**

**Table 8 the main problem for the homeless people**

Problems	%
1. Use toilet open field and the illness or lack of health facilities	16.67
2. Unavailability of sufficient water and shortage of supply economic and social factors	23.33
3. Unemployment	20.0
4. Shortage of infrastructure	10.00
5. Shortage of houses	30

Source: Based on field survey, 2012

Table 8 shows that the main problems faced by sample respondents were shortage of houses/dwellings (30%). They were followed by unavailability of sufficient water and shortage of supply economic and social factors (23.33%), prevailing unemployment conditions (20%), use of open toilet at field and the illness or lack of health facilities (16.67%), and shortage of infrastructure (10%) respectively.

**Suggestions to improve the Socio-economic condition homeless population**

**Table 9 How to solve the socio problem of the homeless people**

How to solve the socio problem of the homeless people	%
1. To provide cheap and easy access of houses	23.33
2. To develop health facilities	13.33
3. To make availability of water and food assistance	6.67
4. To open education institutions for houseless people	6.67
5. To introduce easy the institutional loan and to make collaboration with sectors for income generation opportunists among houseless population	16.67
6. To develop employment opportunities	16.67
7. Government should control the corruption in government bodies and improve the ability of administrative workers	13.33
8. To distribute land, livestock equally among houseless people	3.33

Source: Based on field survey, 2012

\* 1 USD = 18.14 birr in May, 2012

Table 9 indicates that the majority of the respondents suggested to improve the socio-economic conditions homeless people were to provide cheap and easy access of houses (23.33%), to develop employment opportunities (16.67%), to develop health facilities (13.33%), government should control the corruption in government bodies and improve the ability of administrative workers (13.33%), to make availability of water and food assistance (6.67%), to open education institutions for houseless people (6.67%), and to distribute land, livestock equally among houseless people (3.33%).

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the study shows that the mainstream of homeless population was followers of the Orthodox Christian and Islam religions. Their ethnicity was largely Tigrayan followed by Afari and Amhara. These homeless people arrived at Mekelle from the hinterland of 175 km even from cross border. The study explains that juvenile and senile dependency was a common feature of homeless population. Education was either illiterate or till primary grade at least 72% homeless population. The casual/daily labour, transportation, pity trades were popular occupations of males while among their counterpart animal herding, selling milk, egg, restaurant workers, housemaids were familiar works. Their earning was below 200 birr/person/month of 2/3 homeless population, while only 13.33% earned more 400 birr/person/month. House is one of basic needs as 53.33% homeless people lived in rented houses, 40% was slum dwellers, and 6.7% of them were passing their nights along road under trees and open sky. Scarcity of sufficient food particularly for women, lack of safe drinking water, prevailing diseases and poor sanitation facilities were major problems among homeless population.

The suggestions from respondents to improve the socio-economic conditions of homeless population reveals to provide cheap and easy access of houses, to develop health facilities, to make availability of water and food assistance, to open education institutions for homeless people, to introduce easy the institutional loan and to make collaboration with sectors for income generation opportunists among homeless population, to develop employment opportunities, to distribute land, livestock equally among homeless people and government should control the corruption in government bodies and to improve the ability of administrative workers.

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