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URBAN LAND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IN ETHIOPIA: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

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This study aims to assess urban land management in Ethiopia from a policy perspective. A mixed approach with a concurrent nested strategy was employed. A total of 353 questionnaires were collected from civil servants and clients of urban land management systems, 8 focus group discussions (FGDs) with civil servants, and 24 interviews with experts, middle and top managers were conducted. The data were analysed and presented using logistic and multiple regressions. The results indicated that urban land management in Ethiopia continues to employ outdated and traditional systems. The main reasons for the unsatisfactory state of urban land management in the country are lack of commitment, lack of human resources, political influence, maladministration, instability of rules, etc. These factors are hampering the effective management of urban land in Ethiopia. Hence, people are not satisfied with the service of urban land management. Thus, the regional governments must reconsider the policy, employ an automated system, and work to address the identified problems.

KEYWORDS:

urban land management, policy, policy implementation, Ethiopia, land

INTRODUCTION

The land is critical to urban development but its supply is limited in cities.¹ As nations grew in size and rural areas became urban centres, these centres became giant metropolitan areas – thus, there is always increased competition and demand for land for different purposes.² The huge demand for urban land because of ongoing urbanisation becomes more problematic if there are problems connected with identifying who holds what land, which land is private and which is government-owned, and problems identifying the various land-use types.³ Many urban problems are linked in one way or another with the operation of the mechanism for managing land.⁴ Therefore, land management can play an important role in providing suitable conditions for maximising the potential for a beneficial urbanisation process and minimising the negative impacts on the poor and vulnerable.⁵

Land management encompasses all activities related to managing land and the natural resources needed for viable development.⁶ Urban land management is a system of interrelated actors and activities, resulting in the most efficient allocation and utilisation of urban space, particularly of land.⁷ Urban land management in Africa is complicated since it employs traditional administration systems. Moreover, the urban administration system is not indigenous and thus not based on the culture of Africans. Current urban land management models and practices applied in Sub-Saharan Africa have been borrowed mainly from Europe and are often the legacy of colonialism, except for a few like Ethiopia.⁸ Hence, they are not compatible with African urban standards and the characteristics of the local people. The notable deficiencies of urban land management systems in Sub-Saharan Africa have led to the emergence and proliferation of informal elements like land acquisition, land delivery process, and land titling among others.⁹

Like other African countries, Ethiopia's urban land management system is a challenge and the object of much wrangling. Land, for most Ethiopians, is central to their livelihood. Land constitutes one of the factors of production, and access to land facilitates access to a key resource in value-adding economic activities.¹⁰ The land management system in Ethiopia is generally weak and surrounded by a growing number of weaknesses and threats.¹¹ Furthermore, the Ethiopian urban land management system suffers from a high degree of informality.¹² Land management systems are institutional frameworks that

¹ GARBA – AL-MUBAIYEDH 1999; MADAN 2015.

² ARIBIGBOLA 2008.

³ ALEMIE et al. 2015.

⁴ GARBA – AL-MUBAIYEDH 1999.

⁵ LOCKE–HENLEY 2016.

⁶ ENEMARK 2005.

⁷ FEKADE 2000.

⁸ FEKADE 2000.

⁹ GONDO 2012a.

¹⁰ STEBEK 2015.

¹¹ ALEMIE et al. 2015.

¹² LINDNER 2014.

operate in various national, cultural, political, and judicial settings and via technology, which involves a high degree of complexity.¹³ However, urban land management in Ethiopia is accompanied by the absence of independent institutions at the federal and regional levels, a lack of coordination of the existing institutions, a lack of societal participation and transparency, and a weak capacity for implementation and monitoring of laws and spatial plans.¹⁴ Despite these discouraging findings, this study focuses on how the indicators included in the policy for modernising the urban land management system are being implemented and what specific factors are hindering it.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The management of urban land is a complex task in Ethiopia because it is a major socio-economic asset and the struggle over who controls the land, which is equivalent to who controls power, has played a significant role in the history of Ethiopia and is likely to continue to do so.¹⁵ Therefore, managing urban land has become a serious challenge since that is also the space in which urban activities are carried out in general.¹⁶ Ethiopia has a complex institutional environment with regard to land administration.¹⁷ Moreover, Lindner (2014) argued that the Ethiopian urban land administration system is troubled by a high degree of informality. She added that there is a lack of clear policies in Ethiopia in this respect. However, the ruling party argues that public policies are fully and effectively formulated but ineffectively implemented. Therefore, assessing the determinant factors of a sustainable urban land management system would help expose the real situation in the country.

Many empirical studies on urban land management have been conducted in Ethiopia.¹⁸ However, none of these studies has focused on the implementation and urban land management systems and the factors affecting them. While a handful of studies by Lindner and Fairlie et al. have identified the determinant factors of urban land management systems, their focus was chiefly on institutional factors. Moreover, some of these studies are very narrow in their scope, being conducted in a single town/city.¹⁹ In addition to the high level of dissatisfaction of beneficiaries with urban land management, this study aims to address the geographical and content-related shortcomings of previous studies.

¹³ ENEMARK 2005.

¹⁴ ALEMIE et al. 2015.

¹⁵ BELACHEW–AYTENFISU 2010.

¹⁶ DUBE 2013.

¹⁷ FAIRLIE et al. 2017.

¹⁸ GONDO–ZIBABGWE 2010; GONDO 2011, 2012a, 2012b; ACHAMYELEH 2014; DUBE 2013; BELACHEW–AYTENFISU 2010; LINDNER 2014; BENNETT–ALEMIE 2016; TESSEMA et al. 2016; ALEMIE et al. 2015; KEBEDE 2017; SUNGENA et al. 2014; WELDESILASSIE–GEBREHIWOT 2017; BELAY 2018; MENGIE 2017.

¹⁹ For example BELAY 2018; DUBE 2013; SUNGENA et al. 2014; TESSEMA et al. 2016; while others are extremely broad in focus, and were conducted at a national level but not at a policy level, for example MENGIE 2017; LINDNER 2014; WELDESILASSIE–GEBREHIWOT 2017; BENNETT–ALEMIE 2016.

Furthermore, the Amhara and Tigray regions were selected because of the similarities of their experience of urban land management systems. According to a report by the Ministry of Urban Development, Housing & Construction (2014) the City Proclamations of 2000–2003 were developed first in Amhara, then followed by Tigray. In the end, all regions reached, more or less, the results arrived at in Amhara and Tigray. These regions were the centre for an experimental test of the city proclamations, including the urban land management systems. Thus, it is wise to conduct a study in these regions to represent the country as a whole. Hence, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. What does the implementation process of urban land management policy look like in Ethiopia?
2. What are the determinant factors influencing urban land management in Ethiopia?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Urban land management

Virtually all human activities require land, but there is often intense competition for land because of the diverse needs of different human activities.²⁰ Land as an economic resource has always been the subject of debate in the research literature between scholars who favour a neo-classical economic approach to its management and those who favour a political economy approach.²¹ As rapid urbanisation led to increased competition over land ownership and higher land prices in urban and suburban settings, it became necessary to design appropriate Land Use Planning to balance conflicting interests.²² Land management is the process of putting land resources to good use, and all the activities associated with managing land and natural resources are required to achieve sustainable development.²³ A central issue in land disputes and conflicts is the security of tenure, which demands an enabling land administration.²⁴ Therefore, the vital role of land in development makes it imperative to ensure it is appropriately managed.²⁵

Land administration is concerned with managing the land tenure system, including arrangements for monitoring and enforcing many of the laws and regulations affecting tenure. In any country, land administration is a product of the political and social development of the nation.²⁶ Urban land administration is a complex issue and one, which is more difficult in developing countries. Therefore, to address the contemporary

²⁰ NUHU 2007.

²¹ GARBA – AL-MUBAIYEDH 1999.

²² DADI et al. 2016.

²³ ENEMARK 2005.

²⁴ NUHU 2007.

²⁵ GARBA – AL-MUBAIYEDH 1999.

²⁶ NICHOLS 1993.

urban land management-related challenges, formulating and implementing policies and laws while taking into consideration the principles of governance is important to create harmony between urban people and urban land.²⁷ Effective urban land management should not only be the task of the government or another authority. Successful sustainable land management efforts rely on stakeholder support and the integration of stakeholder knowledge.²⁸ Considering the complexity of sustainable development, sustainable land management – which is supposed to support sustainable (land) development – must be defined as both process-oriented and action-oriented, according to Lange, Siebert, and Barkmann (2015). They argued that urban land management is a matter of what kind of development can be achieved and how this is done (e.g. participatory, transparent).²⁹ Hence, urban land management requires different stakeholders' involvement with genuine participation, transparency, equity, etc.

Urban land management in Ethiopia

Urban land governance in Ethiopia is neither new nor was it adopted from other Western countries, unlike in other African states. The urban land management system can be traced back to the imperial regimes. It has been practiced for a very long time and is based on indigenous systems. Ethiopia's urban land management system has reached its present state through many ups and downs. Therefore, it has been accompanied by different informalities, challenges, and good practices in its path. Historically, the land issue in Ethiopia has been a vital and sensitive topic throughout different times.³⁰ Even though city administrations bear responsibility for urban land management in Ethiopia, the system differs from one city to another. Gondo (2012) argued that urban informality in the land management process is plural and characterised by multiple linkages in Ethiopia. According to him, just like in many other developing countries, the land management process in Ethiopia has not been immune to the growing phenomenon of urban informality. Besides, one of the main problems in urban land administration is the absence of clear legislation as well as confusion about the applicability of legislation.³¹ Of course, the legislation in itself is not the problem, but its implementers do not obey the rules and regulations but instead provide circular letters during its implementation.

Effective land administration requires clarity on land issues and the decisions of the body responsible for administering land at any level.³² The Ethiopian government has tried to address rural and urban land administrations by strengthening land administration

²⁷ ALEMIE et al. 2015.

²⁸ KLAUS 2005.

²⁹ LANGE et al. 2015.

³⁰ ACHAMYELEH 2014.

³¹ LINDNER 2014.

³² BELAY 2018.

systems and developing Land Use Planning at the national and regional levels.³³ Even though efforts have been carried out to develop the policy and legislative framework for urban land administration, these initiatives need to be scaled up.³⁴ The current Ethiopian land administration programs are not harmoniously coordinated between national and regional levels.³⁵ Detailed guidelines and working procedures do not provide the necessary support for urban land management policies in Ethiopia, while coordination problems impinge upon the efficiency of infrastructure provision. There is also a lack of a systematic land management information system that would serve as a basis for decision making and a lack of capacity to effectively implement, monitor, and update urban land management related policies.³⁶ Nevertheless, the Ethiopian government is quite confident about the quality and content of its policies and consistently claims through the media that the policies are well formulated.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design and sampling techniques

This study employed a mixed approach method. Therefore, a concurrent nested design was applied. In this study, both primary and secondary data sources were employed. The primary data were collected through key informant interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires. Secondary data sources were collected from the reports and plans of urban land management offices. The urban land management policy of Ethiopia was also reviewed.

This study was conducted in the Tigray and Amhara regional states in northern Ethiopia where the urban land policy was initially implemented. The major focus of the study was the regional and zonal capital cities, due to their central position in business and investment. The regional capital cities, i.e., Mekelle and Bahir-Dar, were deliberately selected because the demand for urban land in these cities is very high. Besides, they have large populations and are experiencing a significant influx of people. Along with the regional capital cities, the Zonal capital cities have a high demand for land and investment. Amhara and Tigray have ten and six Zonal capital cities, respectively. Among these, three cities were randomly selected from each. Thus, Adi-Grat, Axum, and the Shire from Tigray and Debre-Berhan, Dessie, and Gondar from Amhara were studied. Next, the urban land management office of each selected city was investigated because the mandate for urban land administration was given to them.

³³ DADI et al. 2016.

³⁴ FAIRLIE et al. 2017.

³⁵ BELACHEW 2010.

³⁶ YUSUF et al. 2009.

Individual respondents were recruited using two different approaches. On the one hand, beneficiaries were recruited using a convenient sampling method. Volunteer beneficiaries who visited the urban land management offices during the data collection process were investigated in this study. On the other hand, employees of the urban land management administration were recruited using a systematic random sampling method. A list of all the employees in each selected urban land management office was collected from its human resources department. Finally, employees were chosen based on a certain number of intervals. Forty-eight were surveyed from each selected city and a total of 384 participants were recruited in this study. Finally, 353 completed surveys were returned, representing a response rate of 91.9%.

In the interview stage, the managers of the urban land management offices and regional directors were recruited using the purposive sampling method because they have a thorough knowledge of urban land management systems. Thus, one interviewee from each city urban land administration office and the regional urban land directors, a total of ten key informants, were recruited. Moreover, case team coordinators were recruited purposefully to participate in the focus group discussion due to their responsibility and detailed knowledge of the issue. One focus group discussion was conducted in each regional capital city with a total of two focus group discussions being conducted in this study.

Data analysis

Multiple and logistic regression models were employed in this study. Multiple regression analysis was employed to distinguish existing relationships between effective urban land management systems and their determinant factors, specifically governance, motivation, skill, teamwork, leadership, politics, commitment, and human resources. Therefore, these eight explanatory variables were used to predict the dependent variable (effective urban land management system). The choice of explanatory variables was obtained from existing literature on the area. The logistic regression model was applied to determine the influence of technology-related determinant factors on the urban land management system. The qualitative data were first transcribed and summarised in accordance with the objectives of the study. Therefore, the qualitative data obtained through the interview, FGD, and document review were described qualitatively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the result of the study. The urban land management systems were evaluated based on the performance indicators included in the urban land management and development policy of Ethiopia formulated in 2011. The results indicated that the urban land management systems in both regions are not effective.

Table 1: Binary logistic regression predicting likelihood of reporting effectiveness in urban land management

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	p	Odds Ratio	95% C.I. for Odds Ratio	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1 ^a	Region (1)	1.052	.404	6.776	1	.009	2.86	1.297	6.325
	Standardised cadastre	.130	.218	.359	1	.549	1.14	.744	1.745
	Digital service delivery	.115	.325	.126	1	.722	1.12	.594	2.120
	Automation system	-.800	.387	4.267	1	.039	.45	.210	.960
	Digital identity number	.363	.332	1.192	1	.275	1.44	.749	2.758
	Land grabbing	.262	.264	.991	1	.320	1.30	.776	2.179
	Green area development	.589	.288	4.196	1	.041	1.80	1.026	3.167
	Constant	-3.822	.854	20.039	1	.000	.02		
a) variable(s) entered on step 1: region, standardised cadastre, digital service, automation system, digital identity number, land grabbing, and green area development									

Source: compiled by the author

As indicated in Table 1, binary logistic regression was performed to assess the urban land management systems in terms of the likelihood of its effectiveness. The model contained seven independent variables (region, standardised cadastre, digital service, automation system, digital identity number, land grabbing, and green area development). The full model containing all predictors was statistically significant, $\chi^2 (7, N = 186) = 20.23, p < .005$, indicating that the model was able to distinguish between the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of urban land administration in the regions investigated. The model as a whole explained between 10.3% (Cox and Snell R square) and 15.9% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in urban land management effectiveness. The Amhara region is 2.86 times more likely to exhibit effective urban land management than the Tigray region. It can be seen in Table 1 that only three independent variables contributed statistically significantly to the model. The strongest predictor of effectiveness was green area development, recording an odds ratio of 1.80. This indicated that Amhara is over two times more likely to be effective in green area development than Tigray, controlling for all other factors in the model. The odds ratio of .45 for the automation system was less than 1, indicating that Amhara is .45 times less likely to report having an automation system, controlling for other factors in the model.

The qualitative results indicated that the land banking system was introduced in both regions in the recent past, but it is not auditable and has no effective implementation system. Moreover, land banking has not yet been implemented appropriately, especially in small towns. Thus, there is no modern handling and management mechanism for land banking. There is a land inventory, but the land information system is ineffective because of material shortages, lack of human resources, and lack of educated employees. Although the counting of small free plots, assigning identity numbers to plots and registration have been started, the ownership right for small free plots and other lands whose ownership is controversial is still

Table 2: Multiple linear regressions on the factors of urban land management

Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.396	.186		2.132	.034
	Governance	.175	.078	.167	2.258	.025
	Motivation	-.072	.046	-.106	-1.563	.120
	Skill and ability	-.156	.089	-.156	-1.757	.081
	Teamwork	.177	.077	.195	2.302	.022
	Leadership	.367	.084	.365	4.353	.000
	Politics	.311	.068	.338	4.554	.000
	Commitment	.121	.048	.160	2.537	.012
Human resources	-.123	.055	-.151	-2.235	.027	

Dependent Variable: Effective urban land management

Source: compiled by the author

not finished. Hence, without properly addressing these issues, it is difficult to incorporate them into the land banking system.

Despite starting to implement the cadastre system, recruiting trained professionals and establishing an office, the system is not decentralised in all the Woreda towns. On the one hand, the cadastre system is only found at the regional level; on the other hand, it is not being implemented effectively even at that level. Hence, it is not yet functional because of material shortages.

Although automation and digital services are mentioned in the policy documents, they are not yet functional in practice. In the Tigray region, the plot numbers are entered in soft copies, but problems remain regarding possessing the appropriate software. Except for AutoCAD, no modern system is utilised in urban land management. For example, in the Tigray region, land parcel identification numbering was initiated, but it was suspended because of an unclear standard. Of course, the files and the land are now harmonised, but the modern systems are not fully functional. Even though there is an interruption in the implementation process, the urban land information management situation is relatively good. However, there is still a poor utilisation of technology in the urban land management system with the available resources. Furthermore, illegal urban land grabbing, illegal constructions and illegal practices on the land are common. There has been a small decrease in the amount of urban land grabbing but it has not stopped.

As indicated in Table 2, a multiple regression was run to predict the effectiveness of urban land management based on the determinant factors (governance, motivation, skill, teamwork, leadership, politics, commitment, and human resources). These variables statistically significantly predicted the effectiveness of urban land management, $F(9, 175) = 25.637, p < .0005, R^2 = .569$. Among the eight, six variables added

statistically significantly to the prediction, $p < .05$. Therefore, the major factors for effective urban land management are governance, teamwork, leadership, politics, commitment, and human resources.

The qualitative result indicated that implementers are not sufficiently familiar with the content of the urban land policy. As a result, they are implementing the policy without understanding its objectives and intended outcomes. Furthermore, commitment is a major problem in the implementation process. Urban land administration is the riskiest and most sensitive area of land management. There is no excuse for the slightest risk in this area. A minor error is not considered a mistake; instead, it is regarded as a misuse of power or corruption. Therefore, implementers are hesitant to implement urban land management appropriately; instead, they evade responsibility for deciding because a minor error in land issues can be extremely costly.

The focus groups discussed the proclamations on urban land, such as proclamation no. 818 Urban Landholding Registration, Urban Lands Lease Holding Proclamation no. 721/2011, Urban Planning Proclamation no. 574/2008, Expropriation of Landholdings for Public Purposes and Payment of Compensation Proclamation no. 455/2005, and Re-Enactment of Urban Lands Lease Holding Proclamation 272/2002, and found that these proclamations have gaps. For instance, Urban Lands Lease Holding Proclamation 721/2011 states that: "If a lessee, with the exception of inheritance, wishes to transfer his leasehold right prior to commencement or half-completion of construction, he shall be required to follow transparent procedures of sale to be supervised by the appropriate body." However, the meaning of half-completion of construction has not been standardised. What does half-completion mean? It is not clearly stated in the proclamation. Such ambiguities in the proclamations are hindering the urban land management systems. Furthermore, the annual report of the urban land management offices in both regions indicated that the available human resources are not carrying out the office's workload sufficiently because the number of employees and customers is not matching. The urban land management offices did not fulfil the required demand for human resources.

The annual plan of Mekelle and Bahir Dar cities' urban land management offices indicated that they would be able to provide all the necessary materials for the budget year. However, the annual report for both cities subsequently indicated that they had material shortages of items such as laptops, computers, stationery materials, tables and other office equipment, and logistics supplies (vehicles for fieldwork). Moreover, access to the internet was not available to check Google Earth. In addition, various factors in urban land management, including the complexity of illegal work on urban land, problems with integrity, delays in service delivery, lack of responsibility, frequent change of regulations, shortage of budget, lack of controlling illegal construction, inappropriate compensation, contradiction of proclamations and addressing these through circular letters are highlighted in the annual reports. The cabinet of the town issues decisions which do not comply with the regulations, and the implementation is carried out accordingly. Thus, the professionals and political appointees do not agree on the urban land issue. As a result, the ineffective communication between these two bodies affects urban land management.

There is a difference between the two regions in the structure and implementation process of urban land management. For example, the Tigray region gave 70 square meters of residence land to unions, while this program is not applicable in the Amhara region. There are also valuation differences in urban land.

Another major problem is that the structural plan of cities and the actual situation on the ground is different. The residential, business, investment, and green areas provided in the structural plan are not accurately reflected on the ground. For instance, the satellite image of Mekele City is not designed based on the facts on the ground. In this city, the residential area in the structural plan was found to be a forest; the business area became the residence and contrariwise on the ground. This hinders the effective implementation of urban land management.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ethiopia's urban land management and development policy clearly states that a standardised cadastre, digital service, automation system, digital identity numbers for plots, etc., are performance indicators of urban land administration. However, these performance indicators are not effectively implemented in the country. While the introduction of cadastre and digital identity numbers for plots has commenced, it is not yet efficiently implemented. This implies that a well-designed policy is a good but insufficient condition for sustainable urban land management. Comparatively, Amhara has exhibited more effective urban land management in green area development than Tigray, while it was less likely to report the presence of an automation system. To address these problems, on the one hand, all the regions of Ethiopia should share their experiences of land management practices based on their effectiveness. For example, Tigray should take into consideration the experience of green area development of Amhara, while Amhara can learn from Tigray's success in implementing the automation system. On the other hand, the regional governments need to engage with all the stakeholders that render effective service delivery to bring the urban land service online. Finally, a strong land information administration and management system is required because having all these in place helps to achieve efficient and transparent land management in the regions.

Sustainable urban land management has not yet been achieved despite the endeavours of the two regional governments to address the problem. The major causes of the failures in urban land management systems in the country are the absence of good governance, ineffective teamwork, leadership failure, political interventions in the decision process and the appointment of leaders, lack of commitment, and shortage of human resources. Moreover, shortage of budget, shortage of material, illegal land invasions, unfair compensation for farmers, contradictory laws, circular letters, and inappropriate structural plans are further reasons for the unsatisfactory state of urban land management systems. Therefore, an appropriate intervention would be to provide effective training for the implementers and better education in land affairs for the general public. Moreover, proper

monitoring and evaluation strategies are required to manage the emerging and evolving factors of urban land management systems. Strengthening the institutional capacity of land administration is also required to address the problems of urban land management while staying independent. It should also be stressed that urban good governance, which is explained by elements including equity, efficiency, transparency, responsiveness, accountability, sustainability, subsidiary, participation, and security, must be ensured in the country. Finally, the importance of advanced planning and reconsidering urban land policy ought to be emphasised.

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