

DECENTRALIZED URBAN LAND MANAGEMENT IN THE ETHIOPIAN FEDERAL SYSTEM: A CASE STUDY OF AMBO TOWN

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ABSTRACT

In Ethiopia, after a long year's institution of centralized government, a decentralized form of government has been adopted since 1991 with different layers of government structures. It is widely accepted that urban land is a scarce natural resource that needs to be properly managed in order to optimize the benefits through minimizing environmental and social problems caused due to its mismanagement. One mechanism that helps to effectively and efficiently manage urban land is through the practice of decentralization of power to local governments. Based on this, this study tried to assess the effective management of urban land management under Ethiopian decentralized federal political system. Methodologically, the study used both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The finding of this study shows that the current and past experiences have shown that the urban land management system at the local government of Ethiopia is not development responsive. There are various factors which are cited in this work. It suggests that effective, democratic and efficient urban land management measures are required to bring sustainable socio-economic development of the towns otherwise recentralization of urban land management would be imperative.

Keywords: Decentralization, Urban Land, Urban Land Management, Federal System

1. Introduction

The debate on democratic decentralization raises a number of relevant political issues and experiences throughout Africa vary greatly. This debate focuses on the extent to which powers are transferred to local bodies, the choice between different local institutions and their degree of accountability towards people (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2008). In the same way, the inescapable fact underlying any discussion on urban land management is the sheer scale and pace of the developing world's urban development (Dale and McLaughlin, 1998). Access to land and land related benefits are important factors to reduce poverty and hence induce economic growth (World Bank, 2003). The equity of land access is a challenge for a number of developing countries on the one hand and centralized land management has been devastating the endeavor for development on the other hand. To this, a

government intervention in urban land management is needed to initiate good governance, democracy and economic growth (UNDP, 1998). Of these interventions decentralization of urban land management is critical.

Stuedler and Williamson (2002) addressed urban land management should be coordinated processes to allocate land resources. Allocation of urban land is expected to fulfill the needs, aspirations and desires of human beings and to live friendly with the environment. Moreover, economic and social goals by planning, promoting and controlling efficient land uses in a decentralized way and free from different kinds of corruption related to land management is the essence of urban land management.

Coming to today's Ethiopia, land ownership is vested to both state and public according to the 1995 FDRE constitution. Based on this

constitution, land is a common property of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia and shall not be subject to sale or to other means of exchange. On the other hand, the role to manage urban land is vested on the state and public agents. However, urban land in Ethiopia is characterized by urban sprawl and low density, slum and expansion of squatter settlement, lack of practical urban planning mechanisms and weak land management (MUCD, 2011). Therefore, the research assessed the level and extent of urban land management in Ethiopia's decentralized federal system by taking the case of Ambo town.

In the Ethiopian federal system, land management and land delivery processes are generally decentralized from the federal government to the respective regions and from the regions to the city/towns administrations. In fact, the reason behind this is not only the federal political system because the centralized land delivery process proved that it is difficult to match the demands for land due to the rapidly increasing number of population in some Ethiopian towns and the need for land for diverse economic, social and environmental activities has been increasing from time to time.

Regarding the study area, for many years the growth of the town had been over-involved. Of the different factors that affect the development of the town, inefficient and bungling exploitation of urban land resources is the most important issue. Ambo town has different problems which are directly related to urban land management and vague land delivery system. Land within the

boundary of the town administration is not clearly registered and administered and there is no accurate and reliable information about the ownership, use and value of existing land and its resources. In response to problems like the proliferation of squatter settlements on marginal areas of the Ambo town, slums and other illegal land developments (building extensions without building permits, subdivisions without regard to services and infrastructure) are emerging. Specifically, land development in the town has emerged through illegal land markets from farmers in the outskirts of the town with the expectation that they will be provided title deeds by Ambo town urban land administration office.

A part from this, lack of security, especially for the poor and hence no protection from arbitrary eviction; poor living conditions due to inadequate access to basic services; and location of some squatters affected the socio-economic activities and reduced the environmental quality of the town. On the other hand, current observation indicates that the existing conflict between the town administration and other illegal land developers is weakening the relationship among different stakeholders to work together. The poor are largely affected by these and related problems and these have a cumulative negative effect on the overall orderly urban land administration of Ambo town. Information from the town administration shows that most of these activities and land management related problems opened a wide door for corruption and many officials of the town administration were brought to the courts due to

impropriety and outright breach of the law and many of them are currently serving their prison sentences.

Academically, the study of urban land management in a decentralized federal system like Ethiopia is significant. This is so because; usually many scholars (Ribot J. 2004) study decentralization from the view point of conflicts and identify its contribution to economic development and political participation. But it could have contradictory impacts on urban land management which needed to undertake this study by taking Ambo town as a case study.

2. Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Ambo town, Oromia Regional States, Ethiopia. Ambo town is used as the zonal capital of the West Shoa Zone. It is located at about 112 KM West of Addis Ababa. This town is known due to its warm climate and resistance to barbaric regimes in Ethiopian history. It is the second level of administrative status found in Oromia Regional State. The data for this study is collected and generated in 2019/20.

2.1 Type and Method of Data Collection

To systematically describe and explain the situations in relation to the decentralization and urban land management in Ambo town, data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. In addition to this, methodically both qualitative and quantitative types of descriptive/explanatory study were employed. The primary sources of data include existing reality on

the field (through observation), interviews with officials and questionnaires to members of sample selected residents.

Concerning observation, first hand data on the field was collected by direct observation on development of land and related processes in the study area so as to capture a great variety of interactions and to openly explore the study topic. Different illegal and amorphous construction sites were visited. The situations in the outskirts of the town, squatter settlement and other observable variables were also considered. As far as the interview is concerned, an open-ended and in-depth interview was undertaken with selected primary sources. Apart from this, well-structured questionnaires were developed and distributed to randomly selected respondents who were expected to read and respond. The types of questions were mostly objective type and very limited open-ended questions were also included. Most information described under interview and other related ones were correlated. And data which are relevant and reliable to this study were collected from secondary sources like reports, manuals, newspapers and different books.

2.2 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Ambo town has 6 urban kebeles. The study was based on the data that were obtained through a household survey administered to a sample of residents and employees as well as officials drawn by two stages sampling technique. In the first stage, through a random method five kebeles which mean 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 were selected. From

the total kebeles of the town, five kebeles were purposively selected due to high prevalence of illegal and squatter settlements. In the second stage, sample residents who have been living in the town were randomly selected from each kebele to administer the survey.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of sample respondents by each Kebele

Kebeles	Kebele wise Population			Sample Size	
	Male	Female	Total	Distributed	Collected
1	10512	11197	21709	69	66
2	7712	7796	15508	49	47
3	11357	11299	22656	72	70
4	10966	12140	23106	74	71
5	12109	11837	23946	76	76
Total	52656	54269	106925	340	330

The total populations of selected respondents of the five Kebeles were 52656 male and 54269 female. Based on population proportion in the second stage from the total population 69, 49, 72, 74 and 76 sample respondents from Kebele 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 randomly were selected and distributed respectively. The total number of questionnaires distributed to residents of Ambo town, only 330 of them were collected. Again during data entry process five questionnaires were totally rejected due to missing information and unfilled questions were observed. From 330 questionnaires collected for analysis only 325 questionnaires were used for randomly selected residents of the town. In addition, 68 questionnaires were developed and distributed to random employees and officials of the town's municipality and only 60 of them were collected for analysis.

2.3 Research Approach

Methodologically, this study employed the mixed research method. Certain factors that are difficult to put numerically are approached by using qualitative method whereas ones that are quantifiable is done by quantitative methods. Factors like perceptions, opinions and perspectives are approached through qualitative methods. With regard to other factors some numerical measures are used in collecting the data and descriptive statistics are used in analyzing them.

The primary data is collected by semi-structured interview, questionnaires, and observation. The interviews are conducted with key informants from stakeholders including public officeholders, experts and residents. The questionnaires were dispatched to all the selected respondents in Ambo town while it was cross-checked with interviews held.

Finally the data collected using all methods were triangulated in the analysis part of the research in order to evaluate and validate the data collected by using those different methods. Triangulation, inter alia, is used for confirmatory and completeness purposes (Yasmin and Rahman, 2012).

2.4 Data Analysis Method

For this study, the data that were collected via questionnaires, interview, observation and document review were analyzed by employing descriptive methods and to some extent percentage, table and charts. Apart from this, factor analysis (analysis of different factors for

example on formal land delivery systems) and examining the already set were used in the process. Though the efforts made in order to triangulate this study using data from various sources, it is not out of limitations.

3 Results and Discussions

This section presents the main focus of this study. Firstly, it identifies the status and challenges of urban land management at the town. Of these, the status of Ambo town urban land management is characterized by unlawful practices. Following this, it also examines the practices and challenges as well as institutional frameworks and arrangements in urban land management.

3.1 Unconstitutional Urban Land Transaction at Ambo town

In a given federation, one of the major methods to study whether decentralized urban land of a given town is managed effectively and resourcefully is based on method of land acquisition by residents for different purposes (Todaro, 2012). It is evident that based on Ethiopian legislation directives Proclamation No. 31/1975, it is impossible to sell or buy a land.

Accordingly, the method by which land is acquired in Ambo town is unconstitutional as well as illegal. Nearly all of the respondents (98%) acquired land for residence through informal land transactions where as 0 % obtained their land through municipal allocation, and 1.0% acquired through inheritance from relatives and the remaining 1.0% acquired through gift from relatives/friends.

Table 2: Land Acquisition Methods at Ambo town

Method	No.	%
Gift from relatives/friends	4	1.23
Inheritance	7	2.15
Informal land transaction	314	96.62
Municipal allocation	0	0.00
Total	325	100.00

Source: Survey, June 2021

From the above method of land acquisition, one can easily understand that informal land transaction is the first and best method in Ambo town which needs due attention. According to respondent, this is not due to the shortage of land to be provided and to satisfy the demand of residents but the failure of the Ambo town administration to satisfy residents through the formal channel of land delivery system. According to Article 40(3) of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopian Constitution, all urban and rural land is the property of the state and the Ethiopian peoples. Accordingly, sale, exchange and mortgage of land are prohibited. However, in practice there is buying and selling of the land at Ambo town (Interview and Observation, May 2021).

According to the agreement between those individuals what is sold and bought is the house though in fact there is no house on the land. It is clearly observed and understood that peoples sign for each other through prohibited mechanism. This leads to conflict and the major causes for the reported land use conflict cases in the town were

mainly associated with the mismanagement of land. In this regard, title deed registration with double issuance for a single plot, boundary defiance of neighbor plot holders and the selling of the single plot for two or more individual by using illegal and informal channels of land transaction in the town is widely experienced (Interview with respondent on May 4, 2021 in Ambo).

For this particular study, respondents who got land through informal land transactions were asked to specify the reason why they bought it. Accordingly, 98.2 percent of the respondents reported that they bought the land because of the delay of the town administration to provide land and the rest, 1.8 percent bought the land through illegal channel for other reasons. The above agreement held between two anonymous individual is invalid for many reasons. For instance, according to this written agreement (see pic.1 below), the date of this agreement is presented as if it was before 11 years (13/04/2003 E.C) where as in fact they signed and agreed while this study was underway (12/02/2013).



Plate-1: Solid Waste Management at Ambo Town

3.2 Centralization of Urban land management

It is clear that decentralization of urban land administration enables in exploring the status of land use that matches with the available resources and the requirements of the rapidly increasing population. In other words, effective urban land management helps to equate the supply of land with the demand for different functions such as industry, housing, commerce and the like. It also minimizes the effort, cost and time to use land and available economic resources in relation to the demand of residents. The main importance of urban land management decentralization would be fulfilling residents' interest in providing land for at least housing on legal basis after fulfilling the criteria required. In Ambo town, it is either impossible or unimaginable that the town provided its residents land (Interview, May 2021). Concerning this, majority of the respondent stated that even if they organized in group and saved money in block account, it will take a minimum of more than nine years to get land. As it is shown in below table, 87 (26.77%) of resident respondent confirmed that it took one to 3 months and 98 (30.15%) of them expressed as it took six months to a year for application and legal fulfillment only. However, 51 (85%) of employees and officials replied for applications and fulfilling all legal requirements it took less than three months. To get land for investment, residents gave contradicting responses; 74 (22.77%) replied it took less than a year, 93 (28.62%) replied it took one to two years, 86 (26.46%) replied two to three years, and 72 (22.15%) replied it took more than three years. In

similar scenarios, officials and employees replied to get land took only less than two years.

	Particulars	Residents		Employees and officials		
		No.	%	No.	%	
Waiting time	For application and legal fulfillment	<1 Month	30	9.23	23	38.33
		1-3 Months	87	26.77	28	46.67
		3-6 Months	67	20.62	9	15
		6 Months	98	30.15	-	
		- 1 Year				
		>1 Year	43	13.23	-	
		Total	325	100	60	100
To get land	Less than a Year	1-2 Years	74	22.77	39	65
		2-3 Years	93	28.62	21	35
		3-5 Years	86	26.46	-	
		More than 5 Years	47	14.46	-	
			25	7.69	-	
		Total	325	100	60	100
Problem	Total	Financial problem	71	21.85		
		Bureaucratic challenges	146	44.92		
		Poor Service	108	33.23		
	Total	325	100			
Extra payment beside the formal payment	Yes		159	48.92	14	23.33
		No	166	51.08	46	76.67
	Total	325	100	60	100	

Source: Own Survey, 2021

In relation to the above claims, Ambo town urban land administration shared the concern raised and

stated that the root cause of the problem is from Oromia urban land management. With the existing effort and capacity, Ambo town urban land administration would not cover costs of land grants. Due to this, the financial and capacity building has to be provided but where in fact there is no, if not very limited cooperation with the center. At the principle level, one never denies that decentralization enables urban land management in terms of different socioeconomic and political benefits. However, in practical effective and efficient urban land management, particularly at Ambo town is far from desirable. One of the employees explains how decentralization of urban land management has influenced the development of Ambo town as follows:

"I have worked in different government offices at different levels. I was working during the Derg regime as an administration expert of the Ambo town. The urban land management was made centrally. The government made houses and granst for residents as a whole. The house was managed by Kebele leaders. Nowadays, decentralization of urban land management opens a door for corruption and finally urban land is mismanaged as it is also observable."

The fact that one cannot deny is that there is a high rate of corruption prevalent in the chains of officials, experts and employees of the municipality.¹ The basic principle of

¹ During interview, anonymous official of the town explained how decentralization of urban land has been handicapped at Ambo town

decentralization is independence from any form of intervention.

By any measures decentralization has been broadly known as transferring functions and responsibilities to lower levels of government structure. This process often creates trust land management. It creates the space necessary for autonomous policies at lower levels of government. However the framework of decentralization tasks and responsibilities which include; formulating and implementing economic policies at the urban level is expected to minimize the time required for applications, registration and land grant to stimulate economic activities, social policies to be able to deal with problems such as poverty reduction and expansion of educational facilities under performance, policy with respect to the urban environment and policies to increase the income of the town fall on the shoulder of political elites, rich people of the town and brokers.

There is a political and economic exchange between interest groups (Interview with respondent on May 4, 2020 in Ambo). When interest groups are involved in political activities; officials hear nothing from many, but a lot from few (Interview, May 2021). This ideology opens the door for rent seeking behavior. Rent -seekers emerge in the process, having access to public funds in a very unnoticeable way to their own benefits.



Plate- 2: Squatters at Ambo Town



Plate- 3: Illegal Settlements at Ambo Town

Apart from this, the land use pattern of the town is characterized by haphazard development which is mainly geared towards horizontal expansion (Observation, May 2021). Particularly, most of the inner town areas are not well kept and utilized as per the acceptable standard. Out of the entire available hectare of the town's land, built-up area or already used land comprises only 31.3%. The prime concern regarding the urban land use indicator is to investigate whether the distribution is appropriate in terms of future development and meeting the need for the people. This is another related apprehension needed to re-centralization of urban land management in the Ethiopian federal system.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

In the Ethiopian federal system, managing the urban land has become a serious challenge since it is the space over all urban activities carried out. With this view, this study is undertaken with the aim of assessing the decentralized urban land management. Another challenge in the town is inadequacy in housing services which brought about squatter settlements. The growth of squatter and illegal settlement deteriorated basic public services. The landscape on the outskirts of the town is a blend of temporary, featureless road patterns, precarious settlement, monotonous and substandard housing built by informal occupants and land speculators. Squatter settlement is abundantly found in the southern margin of the town with no basic public services. Squatter settlements are built by illegal occupants on the skirt of the town which have no sufficient electric, running water, unsanitary dwellings and sewage systems. It is inhabited by poor people who get service from the closest central place. Squatter settlements have been expanded due to cheap availability and lack of formal land supply for housing development services. To combat the expansion and formation of squatter settlement and enable these neighborhoods to become part of the town, exerting proper oversight, providing and increasing land and housing supply, regularization and formalization of squatter settlements in the periphery of the town is important. Reasons for squatters and illegal settlement poverty, migration, expectation of better living conditions in the town and bureaucratic character were noted.

Some of the existing services are not withstanding the fast pace of population growth and expansion of the town. The growth of population and expansion of the town by far are the major challenges that forced town administration to increase its expenditure. The growth of population of the town requires additional services and the cost of construction of these services have risen sharply. There is a considerable expansion of the functions by the municipal office to maintain the livelihood of the residents, to narrow the gap of inadequate infrastructure and give efficient services to its residents by pulling together joint effort of the town administration and the community to benefit poor and rich residents alike in the town. Residents claim policy related constraints, financial constraints, shortage of skilled manpower and material problem constraint the operations of the municipal whereas employees and officials believed financial and materials problems challenged the operation of the municipal. These all call for improving the management of urban land in the town. The study recommends that efforts need to be made to create the arrangement and execution process participatory, comprehensive and mutual enough so that the democratic and effective Ambo town urban land management be ensured. Finally, it is stressed that the regional state government should afford strategies to lessen confrontations of urban land management at the town.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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