

Developmental Paradigms and Politics of Eviction: A Case Study of Informal Settlements in Sheger City, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The transformation of Sheger City into a “smart” urban hub has produced complex social, legal, and ethical challenges, particularly for residents of informal settlements. Drawing on data and legal analyses, the article examines the theoretical underpinnings and socio-political consequences of the eviction of informal settlements in Sheger City, Ethiopia. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, the article analyses how far developmental frameworks, modernisation theory, post-development theory, neoliberal development theory, and the rights-based development approach shape the rationale for, and the critique of, eviction practices. Findings reveal that forced evictions, often carried out without due process, compensation, or resettlement, have displaced thousands of residents, deepening poverty and vulnerability. Modernisation discourse has been mobilised to justify large-scale demolitions, privileging technocratic, top-down planning while marginalising low-income communities. Neoliberal frameworks further facilitate “accumulation by dispossession,” clearing informal settlements to attract private investment and global capital, thereby exacerbating inequality. Post-development perspectives highlight the absence of participatory governance and the silencing of local agency, as informal settlers are excluded from decision-making and denied tenure security. This article advances a human rights-based approach to urban governance, emphasising security of tenure as a universal entitlement under international law. Legal reform and policy innovation are essential to bridge the gap between Ethiopia’s constitutional obligations and the lived realities of informal settlers. Preventing and managing informal settlements requires transparent land administration, participatory planning, and community empowerment. By foregrounding human dignity, inclusion, and legal protections, the article argues for alternative frameworks that challenge technocratic rationalities and promote socially just urban transformation.

Keywords

Informal Settlements;
Eviction;
Developmental
Theory; Sheger City;
Ethiopia

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1. Introduction

Informal settlement is characterised by informal housing development and an irregular arrangement of housing, with insufficient infrastructure, utilities, and sanitation.¹ An informal settlement is a residential area of people that has developed without legal claims to the land and/or permission from the relevant authorities to build.² It is the occupation of land without legal title, occurring outside regulatory housing planning and development.³ It is characterised by overcrowding, insecure residential status, and poor housing quality.⁴ Informal settlements arise when the current land administration and planning system fails to address society's housing needs, and people resort to their own means to settle on someone else's land. Such settlements are characterised by rapid, unstructured and unplanned development.⁵ Informal settlements can be attributed to poor land management and eviction practices.⁶ Demolishing informal houses⁷ can have serious social, economic, and political ramifications and can lead to adverse outcomes.⁸

Informal settlements in Ethiopia refer to houses built on unauthorised land without official building permits.⁹ These areas are predominantly inhabited by low- and middle-income individuals who construct houses, often referred to as *chereka bet* "moon houses", in violation of urban planning regulations. In fact, existing urban policies have failed to adequately address the housing needs of low-income people.¹⁰ As a result, many people are compelled to live in informal dwellings that lack

¹Dessalegn G/Silassie, 'The Factors Contributing for Expansion of Informal Settlements: The Case Study of Yeka Sub-City, Addis Ababa Ethiopia', (Thesis Submitted, Addis Ababa University, 2017), P. 9.

²Srivinas Hari, *Defining Squatter Settlements, Division of Human Settlements -development, Bangkok Nations Human Settlements Program*, (2015).

³ Ampofo J. A., Iddrisu A., Arfasa G. F., Mantey I., and Aniah E., 'Causes of Informal Settlement in Africa: A systematic review', *ADRRI Journal of Contemporary African Development*, Ghana: Vol. 1, No. (1), 2024, P. 7.

⁴UN-Habitat, *Policy Framework for Informal Settlements, United Nations Human Settlements Programme*, (2020); OHCHR, *Guidelines for the Implementation of the Right to Adequate Housing*, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, (2019).

⁵Ashenafi Getachew, 'The Factors Contributing for the Expansion of Informal Settlements in Hossana Town, Southern Ethiopia', (Master Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 2015), p. 18.

⁶ Roe, B., 'Urban Challenges in Addis Ababa', (PhD and Master Theses, 2009), In: *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, p. 14.

⁷ 'Informal houses' are dwellings built on unauthorised land, often without legal recognition, not legally registered and regulated houses.

⁸ Bello, M. O., *Squatter Settlement, Accessibility of Land and the Urban Poor; Mustapha Oyewole BELLO, Nigeria; Squatter Settlement, Accessibility of Land and the Urban Poor*, (2009).

⁹ Ashenafi Getachew, (2015), *supra* note, no. 6.

¹⁰ Jemal Abagissa, 'Empirical Review of Informal (Squatter) Settlements in Addis Ababa City, Ethiopia', *International Journal of Current Research*, Vol. 13, Issue 12, 2021, p. 19928.

access to basic infrastructure and utility services. The expansion of informal settlements in *Sheger* City has become a pressing urban challenge, driven largely by Ethiopia's rapid urbanisation rate of 5.4%, which exceeds the Sub-Saharan African average of 4.1%.¹¹ Within *Sheger* Sub-City, towns such as Sebeta, Gelan, Laga Tafo Laga Dadi, Sululta, and Burayu have seen unregulated housing proliferate, reflecting weak land governance and an inadequate supply of formal housing.¹² The consequences are severe: lack of access to basic infrastructure, residents face tenure insecurity, and frequent forced demolitions. In 2023, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission reported that the demolition of informal houses in *Sheger* City worsened homelessness and social instability, underscoring the human rights implications of the city's informal housing crisis.¹³ These dynamics illustrate how informal settlements in *Sheger* City not only strain urban planning but also deepen poverty and inequality, making them a critical issue for sustainable development. In *Sheger* City, eviction practices have intensified, raising concerns about governance transparency, legal safeguards, and human rights protection. The government's efforts to clear these areas have led to widespread displacement, homelessness, and public outcry.

The ambition of the government in *Sheger* City is to transform peri-urban landscapes into modern (smart city), economically vibrant areas.¹⁴ However, this ambitious vision has come at a significant social cost, namely, the widespread eviction of informal settlements that have long contained low-income residents. These evictions raise critical questions about the role of development theories in shaping urban policy and the ethical implications of displacing vulnerable people.

The right to adequate housing, enshrined under Article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), is incorporated into Ethiopian law through Articles 9(4) and 13(2) of the FDRE Constitution.¹⁵ General Comment No. 4 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) identifies tenure security as a central element of housing adequacy, thereby prohibiting arbitrary evictions against both formal property owners and

¹¹ Policy Studies Institute (PSI), *Informal Settlement Expansion in Ethiopian Cities: Challenges and Policy Options*, July 2025.

¹² Frontiers, *Practices and Determinants of Urban Land Governance in Sheger City*, October 22, 2022.

¹³ Addis Insight, *the demolition and forced resettlement of houses in Sheger City in Oromia Region has exacerbated homelessness*, March 31, 2023.

¹⁴ Degu Bekele Nigatu, 'Practices and Determinants of Urban Land Governance in *Sheger* City, Ethiopia', 2024.

¹⁵ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Dec. 16, 1966, Article 11(1); FDRE Constitution, 1995, Arts. 9(4), 13(2).

informal settlers.¹⁶ The FDRE Constitution further protects property rights, consistent with Article 14 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which prohibits arbitrary deprivation of property.¹⁷ In addition, Article 90(1) of the FDRE Constitution outlines national policy objectives, including access to housing as part of broader social development goals.¹⁸ While the Constitution permits expropriation of private property for public interest upon payment of compensation,¹⁹ it does not explicitly address informal settlements or forced evictions, leaving a significant gap in the protection of housing rights.

Relevant to this theme, various studies have examined the legal and socio-economic dimensions of evictions from informal settlements in Ethiopia. Across multiple studies, scholars highlight that informal settlements in Ethiopia are primarily driven by rapid urbanisation, rural-to-urban migration, and the shortage of affordable housing, compounded by weak land administration, poor enforcement of planning regulations, and limited institutional capacity. Jemal Abagissa²⁰ and Debela E.B.²¹ emphasised the scale of informal settlements in Addis Ababa, noting insecure tenure, poor infrastructure, and inadequate services, as well as inefficient government upgrading and resettlement programs. Endalew T.A.²² and Nega A. A.²³ identified similar dynamics in Jimma and Gondar, in which socioeconomic pressures such as unemployment and poverty deepen vulnerability, leading to consequences such as environmental degradation and secondary displacement. Achamyeleh,²⁴ and Degu, Melesse, and Jafri²⁵ showed that institutional fragmentation and poor coordination in Bahir Dar and Burayu further enable informality, with

¹⁶ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 4: The Right to Adequate Housing, U.N. Doc. E/1992/23 (1991).

¹⁷ African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1981, Article 14; FDRE Constitution, Article 40.

¹⁸ FDRE Constitution, Article 90(1).

¹⁹ FDRE Constitution, Article 40(8).

²⁰ Jemal Abagissa, 'Informal Settlements in Addis Ababa: Extent, Challenges and Measures Taken', *Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law*, 2019.

²¹ Debela E.B., 'An Overview of Squatter Settlements in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia', *Journal of Governance and Development*, 17(2), 2021.

²² Endalew T.A., 'Determinant Factors for the Expansion of Informal Settlement in Gondar City, Northwest Ethiopia', *Journal of Urban Management* 11, 2022.

²³ Nega A. A., *Exploring Causes and Consequences of Squatter Settlement in Jimma Town, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia*, *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* (2021).

²⁴ Achamyeleh G.A., 'Informal Settlements in the Peri-Urban Areas of Bahir Dar, Ethiopia: An Institutional Analysis', *Habitat International*, 2014.

²⁵ Degu B., Melesse A., and S.S.A., 'Jafri, Causes and Remedy of Squatting in Burayu Town, Ethiopia', *Developing Country Studies*, Vol.4, No.11, 2014.

remedies requiring stronger governance, affordable housing, and inclusive planning. Other studies highlight the political economy and actor dynamics sustaining informal housing. Philmon²⁶ showed that regularisation in Addis Ababa improved tenure security but excluded the poorest due to rising costs, benefiting middle-income groups more. Taye, Alemayehu, and Woldeamanuel²⁷ revealed that informal settlements occupy large shares of urban land, expanding unevenly across sub-cities, complicating infrastructure provision and requiring spatial mapping for policy. Tefera and Abebe²⁸ found that brokers dominate land transactions in Burayu, creating unequal power dynamics under weak regulation. Debele and Negussie²⁹ examined *Sheger* City and showed how brokers, officials, and community actors exploit institutional gaps, making informal housing both a survival strategy and a political tool. Collectively, these studies conclude that without affordability measures, stronger governance, transparency, and integrated urban policies, informal settlements will continue to expand, entrench inequality, and undermine sustainable urban development.

Despite constitutional and international commitments to the right to adequate housing and protection against arbitrary eviction, empirical studies across Addis Ababa, Gondar, Jimma, Bahir Dar, Burayu, and Sheger City reveal that informal settlements will continue to expand due to rapid urbanisation, rural migration, weak land governance, and shortage of affordable housing. These settlements are marked by insecure tenure, poor infrastructure, and social inequality, with brokers and local actors exploiting institutional gaps to sustain informal land markets. Government interventions such as upgrading and resettlement have proven fragmented and insufficient, often excluding the poorest and risking secondary displacement. The combined evidence underscores a critical gap between legal guarantees and lived realities: without affordability measures, stronger governance, transparency, and inclusive urban planning, constitutional and international housing rights remain aspirational rather than enforceable, leaving vulnerable groups at risk of exclusion and undermining sustainable urban development.

²⁶ Philmon Gebeyehu, 'Regularization of Informal Settlements: The Case of Shed Sefer in Addis Ababa', (Thesis, 2019).

²⁷ Taye, Alemayehu, and Woldeamanuel, 'Informal Settlements in Addis Ababa: Spatial Extent and Policy Implications', 2025.

²⁸ Tefera B.B. and Abebe B.G., 'Informal Land Transactions and Brokers in Burayu City, 2023.

²⁹ Debele E.T. and Negussie T., 'Political Economy of Informal Housing Scenario in Sebeta, Furi, and Gelan Guda subcity of Sheger City, Oromia, Ethiopia', *Research in Globalization* 7, 100161, 2023.

The studies have treated evictions mainly as technical or policy failures. They have not sufficiently explored how urban eviction in Ethiopia is embedded in broader narratives of modernisation, political control, and development ideology, nor have they applied post-development or rights-based theoretical frameworks to understand these processes. This article addresses that gap by focusing on *Sheger* City, a rapidly urbanising area that condenses new forms of city governance and state-led transformation. By combining legal analysis with empirical fieldwork and by applying critical theoretical lenses, this research provides a more holistic, contextualised, and policy-relevant analysis of informal settlement evictions. The main objective of this article is to explore the intersection of development theories and eviction practices in *Sheger* City. Furthermore, it examines whether theoretical frameworks justify eviction or expose its injustices.

2. Methodological and Theoretical Approach

2.1 Methodological Approach

This article uses a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods to examine development paradigms and the expansion of informal settlements. It combines doctrinal and legal analysis with empirical data for a comprehensive understanding.

2.1.1 Qualitative Research

There is no requirement to ensure that the sample is sufficiently large to provide estimates because qualitative research does not aim to estimate the incidence of phenomena in a wider population.³⁰ Furthermore, qualitative studies yield data that are rich in detail, and to adequately analyse all the detail, it is crucial to keep sample sizes small.³¹ For this article, a qualitative research design is employed, and detailed datasets are documented through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and archival research. Taking *Sheger* City as a case study, four sub-cities, namely Laga Tafo, Laga Dadi, Koyee Face, Burayu, and Sebeta, were covered in the qualitative fieldwork. In addition, the Land Bureau, *Sheger* City Mayor's Office, land offices of these sub-cities, and the Regional Land Bureau were included. A non-probability purposive sampling approach was used because values, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions vary widely, and some informants offer more insights due to social, economic, educational, and cultural factors. Key informants included officials

³⁰ Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. (SAGE Publications Ltd, London, 2003): Cited in Creswell, J., W., *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, (Fourth ed. SAGE Publications, Inc, 2014).

³¹ Ibid

at the regional, city, and sub-city levels, as well as residents, such as informal settlers and farmers. Of the 40 planned interviews, 14 were with officials (heads, deputy heads, land office members, Oromia Land Bureau reps) and 38 with informal settlers, farmers, and displaced persons, for a total of 52 interviews. In addition, four focus group discussions (one per sub-city) were also conducted, each involving 10–13 participants, for a total of 43 participants.

In addition, this article employed doctrinal legal research methods that analysed land and human rights laws, drawing on comparative insights from past national experiences. Sources included federal and regional constitutions, urban land legislation, expropriation proclamations, ratified international human rights instruments, reports from human rights institutions, scholarly studies, and media publications. The National Public Legal Portal and the Legal Library of 5A Law Firm LLP provide access to a wide collection of federal and regional laws.

2.1.2 Quantitative Research

A survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire to collect quantitative data. Availability (convenience) sampling was used to select informal settlers whose houses had not been demolished, as they were readily accessible. Snowball sampling was used to reach displaced people whose houses had been demolished. Cochran's formula was used to determine the sample size. Of 384 questionnaires distributed, 327 were returned, yielding an 85.16% response rate. In addition, three instruments were used, namely self-administered questionnaires, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. Questionnaires targeted informal settlers and institutional employees with knowledge of the issue, while interviews involved administrative staff from the sampled institutions. Document analysis supported triangulation. A concurrent triangulation design was used, with qualitative and quantitative data collected simultaneously. Quantitative data were edited, coded, and analysed using descriptive statistics in SPSS version 26. Quantitative results were presented using percentages, tables, and figures.

2.2. Theoretical Approach

This article has considered and analysed relevant development theories to demonstrate their relevance to the *Sheger* City context and to examine how each framework explains the rationales, mechanisms, and outcomes of informal settlement evictions. The analytical discussion covers modernisation and liberalisation theories, which focus on economic growth. Whereas the post-

development critiques these paradigms, favouring human development and rights-based approaches that put people, not just economies, at the centre of development.³²

2.2.1. Modernisation Theory

Modernisation theory posits that all societies progress through a linear trajectory of development, from traditional to modern, driven by industrialisation, technological advancement, and urbanisation.³³ Within this framework, informal settlements are perceived as obstacles to urban modernity and incompatible with the demands of a modern city. Consequently, they are often targeted for eviction to make way for planned, orderly, and economically vibrant urban growth.³⁴ The theory characterised informal settlements as illegal, irrational spaces that reflect underdevelopment and a lack of modernity.³⁵ Eviction, in this context, is framed as a rational and progressive policy aimed at clearing land for investment or urban renewal.³⁶ Rather than advocating for upgrading or tenure security, modernisation theory promotes clearance and resettlement as the preferred solutions.³⁷ Urban planning guided by modernisation principles tends to prioritise formal housing, infrastructure development, and private investment areas. In this paradigm, low-income residents are not viewed as stakeholders in development but rather as impediments to be managed or displaced.³⁸

Modernisation theory is now widely criticised as the modernist cleansing of urban space underpins class divisions and excludes the poor.³⁹ The modernisation framework privileges elite visions of order and infrastructure while ignoring the adaptive, community-driven structures of informality.⁴⁰ It promotes imposing unsuitable models of development, displacement and exclusion of the urban

³² Varun Gauri and Siri Gloppen, *Human Rights-Based Approaches to Development: Concepts, Evidence, and Policy*, (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 5938, 2012).

³³ Rostow W. W., *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*: (Cambridge University Press; Free Press, New York, 1960).

³⁴ Bubaker F. Shareia, 'Theories of Development', *International Journal of Language and Linguistics* Vol. 2, No. 1, 2015, p. 79.

³⁵ Daniel K. A., *How Different Theories of Development Address the Relationship between the Urban Informal Economy and Poverty in the Labor Market*, (Discover Global Society, 2024).

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Lerner, D., *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*, (The Free Press, Glencoe, 1958).

³⁹ Mike Davis, *Apocalyptic Anti-Urbanism: Mike Davis and His Planet of Slums: Planet of Slums*, (New York: Verso, 2006).

⁴⁰ Mohammad Agung et. al., 'Theoretical Study of Poverty in Urban Slum Settlements', *International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research*, Volume 9, Issue 03, 2020, p. 4827.

poor, disregarding grassroots solutions and local contexts, and creating unsustainable urban inequality and homelessness.⁴¹ Ethiopia's urban policy, inspired by modernisation theory, emphasises industrialisation, infrastructure expansion, and planned urban growth. The establishment of industrial parks in cities reflects the modernisation view that industrialisation drives economic transformation.⁴² While modernisation theory assumes that urbanisation will naturally lead to improved living standards and formal housing, rapid rural-to-urban migration in *Sheger* City has outpaced the government's capacity to provide affordable housing and services.⁴³ As a result, informal settlements have proliferated, reflecting both the demand for urban opportunities and the shortcomings of modernisation's linear model.⁴⁴ These settlements illustrate how modernisation-driven policies, focused on industries and infrastructure, often neglect the immediate housing needs of low-income people.⁴⁵ Ethiopia's urban policy, chiefly the *Sheger* City smart city (modern city) project, reflects modern standards. The *Sheger* city's smart city project is a typical example of modernisation theory in practice, pursuing linear development, urban renewal, and technological advancement. Yet, its challenges highlight the tension between modern ideals and local realities.

2.2.2. Liberalisation Theory

Liberalisation theory, rooted in neoliberal economic principles, emphasises market freedom, privatisation, and minimal state intervention.⁴⁶ This theory views development as a function of open markets, deregulated land use, and private capital investment.⁴⁷ In urban planning, this translates into prioritising land commodification, reducing the provision of public housing, and favouring investor interests.⁴⁸ This trend may result in greater inequality, reduced access to essential services for marginalised communities, and the prioritisation of profit over residents' well-being.⁴⁹ In the

⁴¹ Daniel K. A., (2024), *supra* note, no. 57.

⁴² Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, Ethiopia's Urban Policy Framework, 2017.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ UN-Habitat, *Informal Settlements in Ethiopia: Challenges and Opportunities*, 2020.

⁴⁵ Pankhurst, A., 'Urban Development and Social Change in Ethiopia', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, no. 3, 2016.

⁴⁶ Rachel Beatty, *Neoliberal Urbanism: Socio-Spatial Fragmentation and Exclusion*, *New Visions for Public Affairs*, (Volume 6, May 2014), p.44.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*

⁴⁸ Armita Khalatbari, *A Critique of Neoliberal Urbanization and Its Downsides on Housing Policies*, (Preprints.org, April 2024), p. 5.

⁴⁹ Harvey D., *A Brief History of Neoliberalism, Gentrification and Social Mixing: Towards an Inclusive Urban Renaissance?* *Urban Studies*, 45(12), (Oxford University Press, 2008); pp. 2449-2470.

neoliberal development model, housing needs, livelihoods, and other aspects of social life receive little attention.⁵⁰ Most new cities emerge from a neoliberal drive to create the next world city to be competitive and attract investment.⁵¹ Liberals view informal settlements as inefficient or as obstacles to economic growth.⁵² Under this model, the city is a site of investment, and land becomes a commodity rather than a social good.⁵³ Informal settlements are displaced to make space for more efficient land use and become spaces for capital accumulation rather than inclusive habitation.⁵⁴ In the Ethiopian context, this theory has influenced urban development policies since the government began adopting market-oriented reforms.

The main shortcomings of this theory are redevelopment⁵⁵ and the displacement of existing residents, resulting in social and economic exclusion and the loss of affordable housing options.⁵⁶ Moreover, the presence of public land ownership and the extensive powers granted to the government through the expropriation proclamation led to eviction, even when someone is a legal occupant of the land. The core issue lies in the circumstances that arise after eviction. In neoliberal urban policies, attracting investment and promoting economic growth⁵⁷ that can lead to increased property values and rising rents.⁵⁸ As a result, low-income residents become unable to afford to remain in their homes, ultimately facing displacement.⁵⁹ Neoliberal urban development projects exacerbate existing inequities and create new forms of inequity.⁶⁰ Thus, informal settlers are doubly marginalised, excluded from formal markets and evicted.

⁵⁰ Gideon Baffoe, *Neoliberal Urban Development and the Polarization of Urban Governance*, (2023), p. 2.

⁵¹ Harvey D., *Neo-Liberalism as Creative Destruction*, *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, (2006), p. 147.

⁵² Gilles Pinson and Christelle Morel Journel, *The Neoliberal City, Theory, Evidence, Debates, Territory, Politics, Governance*, (2016), p. 139.

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Harvey D., (2005), *supra* note, no. 51.

⁵⁵ Mele, C., *Casinos, Prisons, Incinerators, and Other Fragments of Neoliberal Urban Development*, (Social Science History, 2011), p. 419.

⁵⁶ Armita Khalatbari, (2024), *supra* note, no. 50, p. 6.

⁵⁷ Florida R., *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*, Basic Books, (2003).

⁵⁸ Van Noorloos F. and Kloosterboer M., *Africa's New Cities: The Contested Future of Urbanization*, (Urban Studies, 2018), p. 1226.

⁵⁹ Lees L., *A Reappraisal of Gentrification: Towards Geography of Gentrification*, *Progress in Human Geography*, (2000), p. 390.

⁶⁰ Brenner N. and Theodore N., *Cities and the Geographies of Actually Existing Neoliberalism*, (Antipode, 2002), pp. 341–347.

2.2.3. Post-Development Theory

Post-development theory emerged as a critical response to conventional development discourse, chiefly the Western-centric, growth-driven and technocratic paradigms.⁶¹ This theory challenges the universality of development models by ignoring the idea that modernisation is the only development path.⁶² It emphasises plurality, local agency, knowledge diversity, and autonomous grassroots innovation.⁶³ Post-development theory critiques the hegemonic discourse that labels non-formal urban life as backward or illegitimate, including informal settlements that do not fit within the formal urban planning frameworks.⁶⁴ From this theoretical perspective, informal settlements should not be viewed solely as illegal encroachments or slums to be cleared for urban beautification; rather, they represent adaptive, locally grounded responses to systemic exclusion from formal land and housing markets.⁶⁵ The eviction of informal settlements in the name of modernisation constitutes an exercise of top-down developmental power that disregards the lived realities, survival strategies, and cultural logic of the urban poor.⁶⁶

2.2.4. Rights-Based and Human Development Approach

The rights-based approach to development emphasises that all development efforts must respect, protect, and fulfil internationally recognised human rights.⁶⁷ It is rooted in international human rights laws. It frames housing not merely as a commodity but as a fundamental human right essential for dignity, security, and well-being.⁶⁸ This approach shifts the focus from economic growth metrics to people's capabilities and freedoms.⁶⁹ It prioritises enhancing individual well-being, social inclusion, and empowerment over material accumulation.⁷⁰ These approaches also advocate for

⁶¹ Escobar A., *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton, (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁶² Ferguson J., *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*, (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1994).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ananya Roy, 'Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning', *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 2007, p.41.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 71.

⁶⁷ Morten B. and H. S., 'Strengths and Weaknesses in a Human Rights-Based Approach to International Development, An Analysis of a Rights-Based Approach to Development Assistance Based on Practical Experiences', *The International Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 22, No. 5, 2018, pp. 664–680.

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Anand S. and A. Sen., *Human Development and Economic Sustainability*, (World Development Volume 28, Issue 12, 2000).

⁷⁰ Nussbaum M., *Women and Human Development: A Study in Human Capabilities*, (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

development policies that centre on equity, participation, accountability, and non-discrimination,⁷¹ essential principles when addressing informal settlements and evictions.⁷² It argues that settlements can be seen as a legitimate claim to urban space; all urban inhabitants, regardless of tenure status, have a right to shape the city, access services, and remain in place. This concept directly challenges eviction-based development strategies and aligns with theories advocating redistributive justice, participatory democracy, and inclusive urbanism.⁷³ Forced evictions tend to prioritise government development programs over residents' rights, exacerbating vulnerabilities.

The link between development theories and informal settlements in *Sheger* City lies in how each theory frames urban development, land use, and human rights. Modernisation and liberalisation theories often justify rapid urban expansion and market-led urban development that fuel informal settlements. Post-development and rights-based approaches highlight the need for local agency, justice, and human rights. The clash of these theories explains why *Sheger* City faces both expansion of informal housing and aggressive eviction campaigns.

3. Informal Settlement Practices in Ethiopia

Informal settlements in Ethiopia result from a complex interplay of structural, socio-economic, and institutional factors. These drivers are deeply interconnected and reflect broader challenges in governance, urban planning, and economic development.⁷⁴ Poverty remains a central driver of informal settlement growth. The absence of affordable housing options forces low-income groups to seek shelter in unregulated areas, often without legal tenure or basic services.⁷⁵ Ethiopia has experienced accelerated urbanisation, particularly in cities like Addis Ababa and *Sheger* City. This growth is fuelled by rural-to-urban migration, driven by the search for employment, education, and safety.⁷⁶ However, urban infrastructure and housing supply have not kept pace with this demographic shift, resulting in overcrowding and proliferation of informal settlements. Conflicts and political instability have led to internal displacement, with affected populations migrating

⁷¹ UNDP, Human Development Report: The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World, New York, 2013.

⁷² Loren King, Henri Lefebvre, *The Right City*, Sharon Meagher and Joe Biehl, eds. *Philosophy of the City Handbook* (Routledge 2019).

⁷³ Johan G., 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1969, pp. 167-191.

⁷⁴ Ashenafi G., (2015), *supra* note, no. 6.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Dessalegn G/Silassie, (2017), *supra* note, no. 1, P. 9.

toward urban centres in search of security and livelihoods.⁷⁷ These displaced groups often settle informally due to the limited formal resettlement programs and affordable housing alternatives. The scarcity of formal employment opportunities in urban areas also exacerbates vulnerability. Without a stable income, many urban dwellers cannot afford formal housing and hence are pushed into informal settlements where living costs are lower, but conditions are precarious.

Corruption, lack of transparency, and weak enforcement of planning regulations contribute to the unchecked expansion of informal settlements.⁷⁸ The absence of participatory planning mechanisms excludes marginalised communities from decision-making processes.⁷⁹ The informal land market operates with minimal oversight, facilitating the sale and occupation of land without legal documentation.⁸⁰ This undermines formal planning efforts and perpetuates tenure insecurity. Ethiopia's land tenure system, which vests land ownership in the state, complicates access to residential land. Bureaucratic hurdles, unclear land rights, and inefficient land administration systems limit formal land allocation.⁸¹ This drives informal land transactions and unauthorised construction.

In Ethiopia, most of the informal settlements are characterised by people who have low or middle income and built *chereka bet* (moon house - house built during nighttime), informally in violation of urban planning rules. Urban policy, aimed at meeting the housing needs of low-income people, cannot solve residents' housing problems.⁸² As a result, people are obliged to live in informal houses that lack access to infrastructure and utility services.

According to the 2022 Supervision Report of the Oromia Regional State President's Office, informal settlement is a more complex problem than a good governance issue,⁸³ becoming a political and systemic problem in the region. As stated in the report, illegal settlement is practised

⁷⁷ Alemayehu G. J., *Land Law and Clearance of Informal Settlements in Sheger City, Ethiopia*, International Journal of Leadership and Public Sector Reform (IJLPSR), 2024.

⁷⁸ Jemal A., (2021), *supra* note, no. 11, p. 19928.

⁷⁹ Daniel B, *Informal Urban Land Holdings in Ethiopia: A Policy Debacle*; in Murado Abdo (Ed), *Ethiopia's Urban Land Questions: Focus on Access to Justice and Dispute Resolution*, (Ethiopian Civil and Commercial Law Series Vol.9, 2020), P.184.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*.

⁸¹ Alemayehu G. J., (2024), *supra* note, no. 79.

⁸² Jemal A., (2021), *supra* note, no. 11. p.19929.

⁸³ Oromia Regional State Office of the President Supervision Report, 2021.

both at the centre and the periphery of the towns. Moreover, it is reported that in towns identified by the supervision, 45,000 houses in Burayu Town, 7,077 houses in Adama Town, and 5,110 houses in Sululta Town were built illegally. Above all, it was also reported that the problem is severe in the urban and peri-urban areas. According to this supervision report, it is the place where corruption is highly exercised.

4. Eviction: A Legal Framework

4.1. Eviction in International Human Rights Law

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), in General Comment No. 7, has emphasised that States must ensure due process before carrying out evictions, including genuine consultation with affected individuals and groups.⁸⁴ Under international human rights instruments, arbitrary deprivation of property is understood as the failure of a State to provide fair notice and an opportunity to be heard.⁸⁵

The right to property ownership and protection against arbitrary deprivation is recognised in Article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR);⁸⁶ Consequently, forced eviction constitutes a violation of property rights. In line with these obligations, municipal authorities are required to provide adequate notice and engage in meaningful consultation with those facing eviction before demolitions or displacement.⁸⁷

The obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil the right to adequate housing is firmly established in international human rights law, particularly under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Article 11(1) of the ICESCR recognises “the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, including adequate housing,” and obliges States Parties to take appropriate steps to ensure its realisation.⁸⁸ Ethiopia, as a signatory to the Covenant, is legally bound to uphold these provisions.

⁸⁴ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General Comment No. 4: The right to adequate housing, 1991, Article. 11(1): Forced evictions, 13, U.N. Doc. E/1998/22 (1997).

⁸⁵ ICESCR, Article 11(1), adopted by the UN General Assembly, 1966, Article 17.

⁸⁶ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948, General Assembly Resolution, 217A (III), U.N. Doc. A/810, Art. 17.

⁸⁷ UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-Based Evictions and Displacement, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/4/18 (2007), pp. 37–39.

⁸⁸ ICESCR, Article 11(1), UN General Assembly, 1966, Article 11(1).

The CESCR, in its authoritative General Comment No. 4 (1991), elaborates that adequate housing is not merely a roof over one's head but encompasses elements such as legal security of tenure, availability of services, affordability, habitability, accessibility, location, and cultural adequacy.⁸⁹ Furthermore, General Comment No. 7 (1997) addresses forced evictions, stating that such actions are prima facie incompatible with the requirements of the Covenant unless carried out in exceptional circumstances, with due process and the provision of alternative housing.⁹⁰ These interpretations underscore that informal settlers, even if residing without formal tenure, are entitled to protection under international law.⁹¹ Evictions carried out in accordance with the law differ fundamentally from arbitrary forced evictions in that lawful evictions must be grounded in clear legal authority, conducted only in exceptional circumstances, and accompanied by due process safeguards such as prior notice, genuine consultation, and provision of alternative housing, whereas arbitrary forced evictions are removals undertaken without legal basis, notice, or procedural guarantees, and are therefore considered prima facie violations of international human rights law under the ICESCR and CESCR General Comment No. 7.⁹²

4.2. Informal Settlement Eviction under Ethiopian Laws

The legal basis for land use and urban development in Ethiopia is primarily governed by the Urban Land Lease Holding Proclamation No. 721/2011, which stipulates that all urban land is owned by the state and leased to individuals or entities for specified periods. Informal settlers, who often occupy land without formal lease agreements, are considered to violate this law, making them vulnerable to eviction without full legal protection. In *Sheger* City, eviction practices have been justified under the guise of urban renewal and infrastructure expansion.

According to the Ethiopian Constitution (Article 40), citizens are guaranteed the right to property and protection from arbitrary displacement. International human rights instruments, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), also affirm the right to adequate housing and protection from forced evictions. However, the Ethiopian Constitution does not explicitly address the eviction of informal settlements. The constitution does not grant

⁸⁹ CESCR, General Comment No. 4: The right to adequate housing (Article 11(1), 1991.

⁹⁰ CESCR, General Comment No. 7: The right to adequate housing Article 11(1): Forced evictions, 1997.

⁹¹ UN Basic Principles and Guidelines, (2007), p. 56.

⁹² CESCR, General Comment No. 7, Article 11.1: Forced Evictions, pp. 13–15.

urban dwellers the right to acquire land. It clearly outlines the rights of peasants and pastoralist communities to access rural land free of charge and provides them protection against eviction. Since the constitution does not recognise the land rights of urban dwellers, it is unexpected that it would offer them protection against eviction either. Urban Land Lease Holding Proclamation No. 721/2011 grants urban authorities the power to demolish houses built on informally occupied urban land by serving a written order to residents, without providing alternative accommodation (Article 26(4)). This means residents may be evicted without compensation or resettlement.⁹³ The proclamation appears inconsistent with international human rights law, as such law clearly permits forced eviction for unauthorised occupation of land.⁹⁴ The law does not distinguish between informal and illegal settlements; as a result, it presumes the two concepts are the same.

Despite this, the proclamation itself allows regulation of land possessed without formal permission, provided it does not conflict with urban planning or parcelling standards, through the lease system.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the Oromia Urban Land Lease Administration Directive provides that houses constructed before January 24, 2013, can be regulated and legalised.⁹⁶ This means they may be informal but not necessarily illegal, given urban planning. Therefore, in Ethiopia, the law does not protect informal settlers whose land is subject to demolition as a result of eviction. Informal settlers will not be compensated in case the land or houses they used to reside in are subjected to demolition for a public purpose or the houses are constructed without permission.

According to Article 11 of the draft Urban Land Lease System (2024), where urban land is acquired outside the lease system, the relevant authority is responsible for taking preventive measures to prevent illegal possession of urban land. Any city that has not completed the regularisation of urban land acquired before November 18, 2004, without the permission of the relevant authority must complete it within three consecutive years from the date this Proclamation comes into effect. Any

⁹³ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, (2011), Urban Land Lease Holding Proclamation No. 721/2011, Federal Negarit Gazeta, Addis Ababa, (hereafter called Proclamation No. 721/2011), Article 26(4); Re-enactment of Urban Lands Lease Holding Proclamation No. 272/2002.

⁹⁴ Ibid, Article 26(4).

⁹⁵ Ibid, Article 6(4)

⁹⁶ Oromia Regional State, Urban Land Lease Administration Directive No. 9/2013 Article 63; Directive No. 5/2016, Articles 25 and 11.

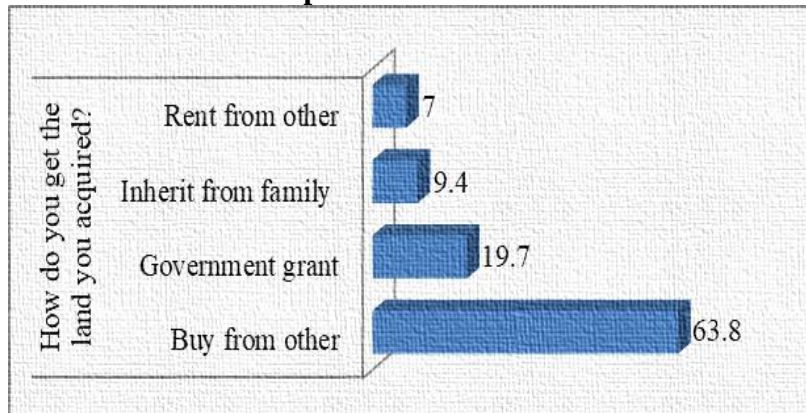
buildings constructed on land occupied without permission after November 18, 2004, shall be demolished, and the relevant authority will take them over and transfer them to the Land Bank.

5. Informal Settlements in *Sheger* City: Context and Complexity

5.1. Expansion of Informal Settlements

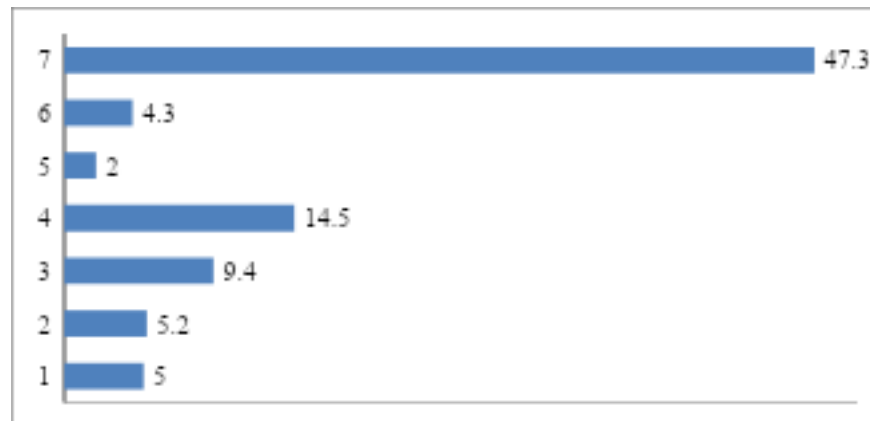
The emergence of informal settlements resulted from the failure to address rapid urbanisation.

Figure 1: Original source of land occupied



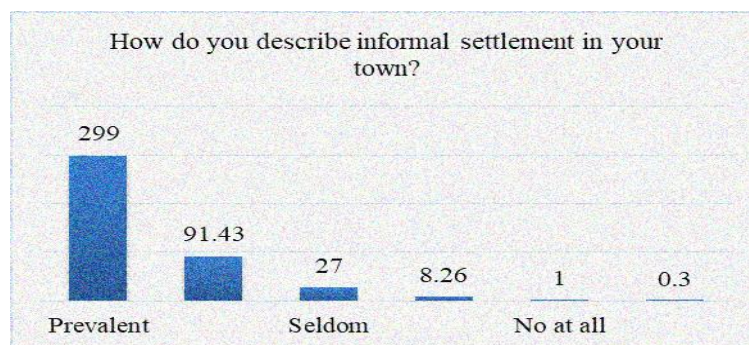
Source: *Survey Data, 2024*

The residents initially acquired the land on which they built their shelters through various means. In this study, participants were asked to reflect on their perceptions regarding the original methods of land acquisition. As illustrated in Figure 1, the majority of respondents reported that the land was obtained through purchase rather than through rental agreements, inheritance, or government grants, and more than 63.8% acquired land from other sources. Additional modes of acquisition included renting from others, inheriting land from family members, and receiving government allocations. Within the framework of current land legislation, acquisitions through inheritance and government grants are not necessarily illegal; however, they may be classified as informal due to inconsistencies with the city administration's urban planning regulations.

Figure 2: From whom the land was acquired

Source: *Survey Data, 2024*

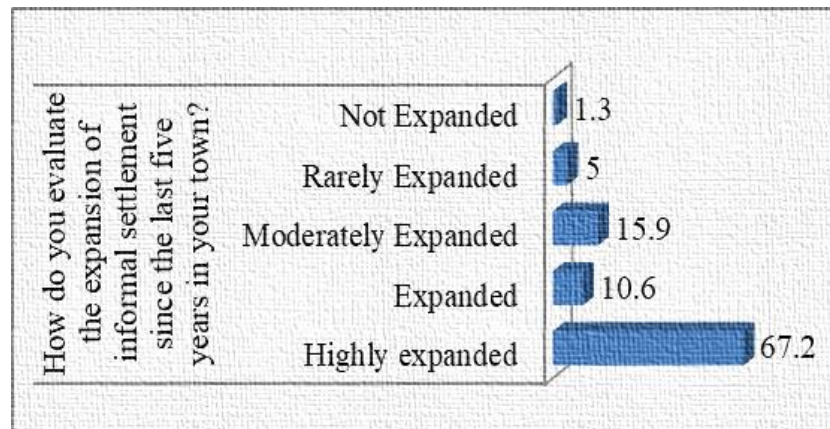
The participants also discussed the origin of the land occupied by informal residents. As shown in Figure 2, the majority (47.3%) bought a plot of land from farmers. A small number bought from landholder agents (14.5%). Most of the time, speculators do not want to sell the land themselves; they prefer to sell through a third party (an agent). The qualitative data revealed that the majority of the land for sale is farmers' landholdings. Farmers sell their land to others at better prices, which is better than the compensation the government pays them upon expropriation. This left them in severe poverty, as they had already sold their land and spent the proceeds. As the qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions reveal, almost all local farmers who reside on the peripheries of the study towns have neither land nor money.

Figure 3: Existence of informal settlements in the study area

Source: *Survey Data, 2024*

Respondents to the questionnaire were asked whether informal settlements exist in the towns where they live. As shown in Figure 3, informal settlements and illegal constructions are very prevalent in the city where they live (91.43%).

Figure 4: Extents of expansion of informal settlements

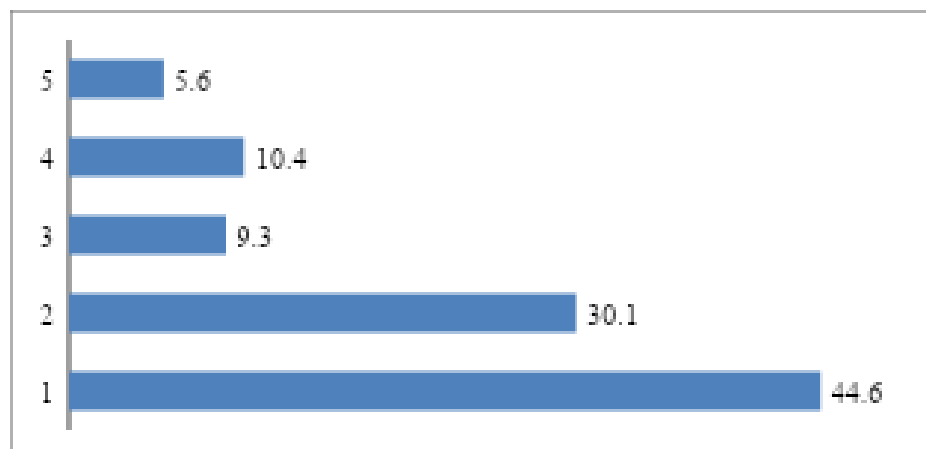


Source: Survey Data, 2024

Respondents were also asked to share their observations regarding the expansion of informal settlements, particularly since 2018. As indicated in Figure 4, 93.7% of respondents reported that informal settlements have expanded in the towns where they reside. Interviews conducted with local officials also confirmed that the expansion is occurring at a significant scale.

5.2. Actors Driving the Expansion of Informal Settlements

Figure 5: Players in the expansion of informal settlements



Source: Survey Data, 2024

Different actors are involved in the expansion of informal settlements, including government officials. As indicated in Figure 5, brokers and speculators are the main actors in the expansion of informal settlements (44.6%). The actors who participate in the expansion of informal settlements and land grabbing include government officials (30%). Other actors involved in the expansion of informal settlements are landholders (10.7%) and employees (9%). The interviews conducted with residents divulged that government officials, police officers and even members of local militia receive money (bribes) and cooperate in the expansion of informal settlements, violating de jure housing procedures (formal, legally established processes and regulations that govern housing) as lands are exchanged for money. In this regard, collaboration between speculators and officials has significantly exacerbated the expansion of informal settlements.

5.3.Causes of Informal Settlements Growth

Table 1: Reason for the emergence of informal settlements

No	Items	Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
		F	P	F	P	F	P
1.	Lack of housing for residents	257	78.6	13	4.0	57	17.4
2.	Local officials encourage informal settlements	290	88.7	10	3.1	27	8.3
3.	Local community welcomes informal settlements	159	68.6	17	5.2	151	26.2
4.	Land inaccessibility for housing	251	76.8	7	2.1	69	21.1
5.	Ineffective formal housing	287	87.8	9	2.8	31	9.5

Source: *Survey Data, 2024*

As shown in Table 1, respondents reported their perceptions of the causes of informal settlements in *Sheger* City. The results reveal multifaceted and deeply rooted causes. A significant majority (78.6%) attributed the growth of informal settlements to a lack of adequate housing for citizens. Furthermore, 88.7% of respondents believed that local officials intentionally encourage informal settlements, while 68.6% indicated that local communities, including farmers, actively welcome such developments. Inaccessibility of land for residential purposes was cited by 76.8% of respondents, and 87.8% cited the ineffectiveness of formal housing programmes as a key factor driving residents towards informal alternatives.

These results underscore the complexity of the issue, revealing that informal settlements are not merely the result of housing shortages but are shaped by governance failures, local complicity, and systemic barriers to land access. The proliferation of informal settlements, driven by diverse and interrelated causes, poses a significant challenge for urban management and policy intervention in Sheger City. Qualitative data from FGDs and interviews with officials further revealed the economic behaviours fuelling informal expansion. Many individuals reportedly sell their legally acquired land at higher market prices and purchase land informally from local farmers at lower prices to build new housing. Government employees are also implicated in this practice, often selling their formal plots and reinvesting in informal land occupation. This cycle has contributed to a sharp rise in both land and informal housing prices, creating a lucrative yet illegal market that incentivises further unauthorised development. The growing profitability of informal land transactions and housing construction reflects a breakdown in formal land governance and housing provision. Without coordinated efforts to curb speculative behaviour and enforce legal frameworks, informal settlements will continue to expand, undermining urban planning and exacerbating social inequality.

Table 2: Economic reasons

No	Items	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1.	Unemployment	67.4	7.7	24.9
2.	Compensation and replacement upon expropriation	74.3	5.6	19.7
3.	Unaffordable land lease price	71.7	7.7	20.2
4.	Weak urban house affordability	69.5	10.4	19.1
5.	Low income of settlers	65.2	3.9	30
6.	Housing shortage	78.7	1	16.9
7.	Land speculation	89.6	2.3	7.9

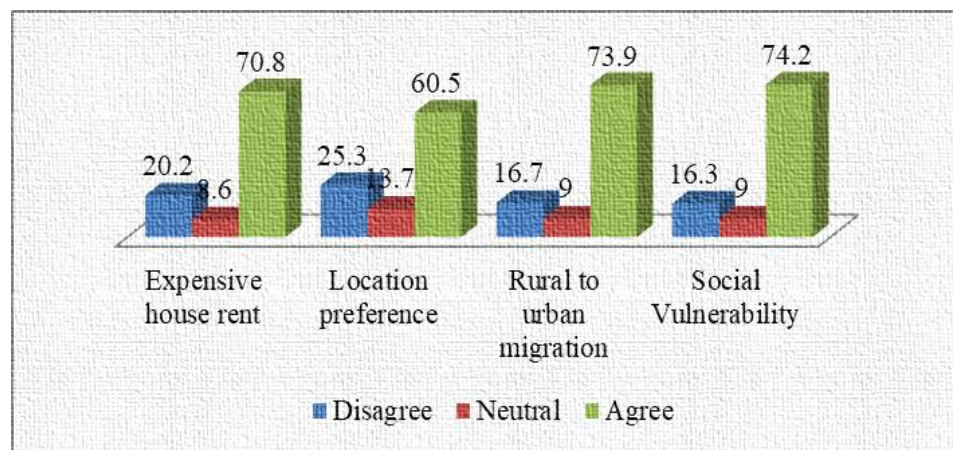
Source: Survey Data, 2024

As presented in Table 2, the expansion of informal settlements in the study area is driven by a combination of economic pressures and institutional shortcomings. Unemployment is identified by 67.4% of respondents as a key factor, highlighting the struggles of many urban residents to obtain

a stable income needed for formal housing. Low affordability of urban housing, cited by 69.5% of respondents, further pushes individuals toward informal alternatives. The rising cost of land leases, reported by 71.7%, effectively excludes low-income populations from acquiring residential plots through formal channels, making informal land acquisition a more viable option. Income levels also play a significant role, with 65.2% of respondents indicating that low earnings contribute to the growth of informal settlements. The housing shortage, particularly of affordable units, was cited by 78.1% of participants as a major driver. Land speculation emerged as the most prominent factor, with 89.6% of respondents identifying it as a contributor to the expansion of informal settlements. Speculative practices inflate land prices and distort access, favouring profit-driven transactions over equitable housing distribution.

Qualitative data from interviews and FGDs conducted with residents reinforce these findings. Participants observed that weak and ineffective land and housing management systems have exacerbated the problem. Shortage of low-cost housing for low-income groups is consistently highlighted as a core issue. Moreover, the desire to own housing, amid rising costs, rigid procedures, and limited formal options, drives many residents to pursue informal housing solutions.

Figure 6: Social and Spatial Drivers of Informal Settlement Expansion



Source: Survey Data, 2024

The expansion of informal settlements in Ethiopia is closely linked to a range of social and spatial factors. One of the most significant causes is the shortage of residential housing that meets the needs of urban residents, coupled with the escalating cost of house rent. According to the data, 70.8% of

respondents identified expensive rental prices, rising unexpectedly across *Sheger* City, as a key driver pushing individuals toward informal housing options. Additionally, 60.5% of respondents indicated that people prefer to settle on informally acquired land due to its strategic advantages, such as proximity to city centres, improved security, and access to larger plots.

Rural-to-urban migration also plays a critical role in the proliferation of informal settlements. Driven by limited job opportunities, insecurity, and weak governance in rural areas, migrants seek better prospects in urban centres. This trend was confirmed by 73.9% of respondents, who agreed that migration is a major factor in the growth of informal settlements. The influx of migrant's places additional pressure on urban housing markets, which are already strained by inadequate supply and affordability challenges. Social vulnerability is another contributing factor, cited by 74.2% of respondents. Low-income groups, displaced populations, and marginalised communities often lack access to formal housing and are forced to settle informally.

6. Eviction Practices: Legal and Human Rights Dimensions

6.1. Forced Evictions and Human Rights Violations

Table 4: Demolition and human rights protection

No	Items	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
1.	Force used during house demolition	20.8	6.4	72.4
2.	The demolition body took the property (corrugated iron, door, windows) of the people whose houses were demolished	17.1	5.4	77.6
3.	Persons who resisted the demolition were arrested	17.2	7.2	75.4
4.	The security forces tired people out when the houses were demolished	13.5	7.9	78.6
5.	Following the demolition of their residences, affected individuals filed a petition with the court, which subsequently issued an order to cease the demolition.	81.1	8.9	11.0
6.	People were appealing to the administrative body to stop the demolition and to keep their property intact	65.3	12.3	22.4
7.	The city administration provided shelter and housing for the people whose houses were demolished	81.3	7.2	11.5
8.	The government body accepted the petition of the people whose houses were being demolished and stopped the demolition	7.1	10.2	82.7

No	Items	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
9.	Compensation paid to the people whose houses were demolished	5.0	14.2	80.8
10.	The demolition of houses was carried out at an appropriate time	47.7	11.6	40.7
11.	When houses are demolished, the government security forces surround the area and threaten people	28.4	9.7	61.9

Source: *Survey Data, 2024*

According to international human rights law, particularly as articulated in General Comment No. 7 (1997) of the UN Committee on ESCR, forced evictions are permissible only under exceptional circumstances and must be carried out in strict accordance with legal procedures. These include prior consultation with affected communities, adequate notice, legal remedies, and provision of alternative housing. The use of force is strongly discouraged and considered a violation of the right to adequate housing under Article 11(1) of ICESCR. However, evidence from *Sheger City* indicates widespread violations of these principles. According to survey data, 72.4% of respondents confirmed that the city administration used force during house demolitions. Furthermore, 77.6% reported that when houses were demolished, residents' property was confiscated or appropriated by the demolition teams. FGDs made with residents revealed that task forces not only demolished houses but also loaded valuable materials, such as logs, doors, and windows, into vehicles and removed them from the site. Participants alleged that these materials were later sold, with the proceeds used to pay labourers involved in the demolition. Yet, 75.4% of respondents reported that government security forces engaged in beatings, arrests, and imprisonment of those who protested the demolitions. Additionally, 78.6% indicated that residents were subjected to physical and psychological exhaustion during these operations. Testimonies from FGDs made with residents further confirmed that security forces deployed by the city administration inflicted severe harm on individuals, especially those who resisted the demolition of their houses.

The judiciary, as a constitutionally empowered institution, plays a critical role in upholding human rights and ensuring that government actions, including forced evictions, comply with national and international legal standards. While Ethiopian law and international human rights instruments affirm the right of access to justice, including the ability to challenge eviction orders in court, the data reveal significant procedural and institutional barriers. According to survey responses, 81.1%

of affected individuals reported being unable to file complaints or obtain court orders to halt the demolition of their houses. Furthermore, 65.3% indicated that they could not appeal to administrative bodies to protect their property, although 22.4% disagreed, suggesting that a minority were able to seek administrative relief. Despite these isolated cases, the broader trend shows that government bodies largely failed to respond to petitions from residents facing eviction. A striking 81.3% of respondents confirmed that their appeals were ignored and demolitions proceeded without legal recourse.

International human rights standards also stipulate that evictions must not result in homelessness. Governments are obliged to provide alternative accommodation or land for displaced persons. However, in *Sheger City*, 81.3% of respondents reported that no shelter or land was provided after their houses were demolished, resulting in widespread displacement.

Compensation for the demolition of informal residents' houses is another critical component of lawful eviction procedures. Yet, 80.8% of respondents confirmed that no compensation was paid for demolished houses, further exacerbating the vulnerability of displaced residents. Regarding the timing of demolitions, opinions were divided: 47.7% disagreed that demolitions occurred at appropriate times, while 40.7% agreed, citing daytime and winter periods as examples. This suggests inconsistency in the execution of eviction operations. Alarmingly, 61.9% of respondents reported that during demolitions, government security forces, including Federal Police, Regional Police, Special Police Forces, and Local Militia, surrounded the area and threatened residents.

Accurately determining the number of houses demolished in *Sheger City* remains a challenge. According to officials from the Land Bureau and Sub-City Land Offices, the absence of a comprehensive eviction monitoring system makes it difficult to track the scale of demolitions. Moreover, the process is ongoing, and demolitions have not ceased, suggesting that the actual number of affected homes may be significantly higher than currently estimated.

6.2. Demolition Procedures

Table 5: Community involvement in decision-making

No	Items	Yes	No
1.	Have you observed that the community affected by eviction were involved in any decision-making regarding the demolition of houses?	7.10	92.20
2.	Were you adequately informed about your rights during the demolition process?	4.90	95.10
3.	Did you get a resettlement package from the city administration?	3.97	96.03

Source: *Survey Data, 2024*

According to the data presented in Table 5, an overwhelming majority of respondents (92.2%) reported that affected individuals were not involved in the decision-making processes related to the demolition of their houses. During FGDs, residents stated, “No one invited us to participate in any meeting about the demolition of our houses; the authorities decided clandestinely and eventually demolished our houses.” This sentiment reflects a widespread perception of exclusion and lack of transparency. In contrast, government officials interviewed denied these claims, asserting that residents were unwilling to attend officially convened meetings. They attributed the information gap to the residents themselves.

The data reveal a deeply troubling pattern of rights violations in the context of forced evictions in *Sheger City*. An overwhelming 95.1% of respondents reported that evicted individuals were not informed of the demolition of their homes, indicating a lack of communication from the city administration. According to Table 4, 96.03% of respondents reported that individuals did not receive any resettlement assistance or service packages. Only 3.97% reported receiving support, suggesting that relief efforts were minimal and were applied inconsistently. This failure to provide alternative housing or compensation directly contravenes obligations under ICESCR, which requires states to ensure that evictions do not result in homelessness or further marginalisation.

6.3.Procedural Deficiencies

Table 6: Notice and preparation time

No	Items	Responses	Count	Per
1.	Have you been given prior notice about the eviction?	Yes	87	26.6
		No	189	73.4
2.	If you were given prior notice of the eviction, how much time were you given to prepare?	Less than two days	37	11.3
		Three days	20	6.1
		Four days	4	1.2
		Five days	10	3.1
		Six days	8	2.5
		Seven or more days	75	22.9

Source: Survey Data, 2024

The data presented in Table 5 highlight serious procedural deficiencies in the execution of forced evictions in *Sheger* City. A significant majority of respondents (73.4%) reported that displaced persons received no prior notice before the demolition of their houses, while only 26.6% indicated that some form of notice was provided. Among those who received notice, the timeframe was notably inadequate: only 22.9% were informed seven or more days in advance, whereas 11.3% were notified less than two days before the demolition. Such short notice periods severely limit affected individuals' ability to prepare, seek legal remedies, or secure alternative housing.

During FGDs, residents reported being excluded from any form of consultation. Participants stated that “no prior notice was given” and that demolitions were carried out without warning, a *prima facie* violation of the FDRE Constitution and of international human rights law under the ICESCR and CESCR General Comment No. 7. Similarly alarming are the findings on resettlement and rehabilitation. Many participants reported receiving only verbal communication, with no written documentation or clear information about the reasons for eviction, relocation options, or available support services. This lack of transparency and procedural clarity undermines the right to information and meaningful participation, both of which are protected under international human rights law. Interviews with government officials acknowledged that the city administration reclaimed land under tight deadlines, often dictated by city cabinet orders. Regional Land Bureau officials were accused of carrying out demolitions without prior notice, adequate preparation time,

or consultation with residents. These practices, coupled with the use of force, are widely viewed as violations of human rights norms.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) reported that between October 2022 and the time of reporting, approximately 111,811 houses were demolished in *Sheger* City and the Adama City Administration.⁹⁷ The EHRC concluded that these mass demolitions and forced evictions were illegal and contravened both international human rights standards and domestic laws, including federal and Oromia Region regulations. The EHRC emphasised that evictions were carried out without due process, prior notice, or consultation with affected residents. In contrast, the mayor of *Sheger* City, in an interview with VOA, defended the demolitions as a lawful enforcement measure targeting unauthorised constructions. He claimed that discussions were held with residents before the demolitions. However, this assertion stands in stark contrast to the widespread reports of procedural violations and lack of engagement. Further concern was raised by the Ethiopian Ombudsman Institution, which announced it had received about 100,000 complaints related to the demolition of residential houses under the pretext of illegal construction.⁹⁸ The institution expressed alarm over the absence of temporary accommodation for displaced individuals, highlighting a critical gap in post-eviction support and rehabilitation.

7. City Administration Acts in the Course of Demolition

Since *Sheger* City was established as a new administrative entity, house demolitions and forced evictions have become routine, carried out by a coordinated task force. These operations suggest a systematic approach to clearing informal settlements without legal safeguards or human rights standards. FGDs with affected residents, including long-term settlers, revealed disturbing accounts of evictions, with government security forces, including the national defence force, Oromia police, Oromia special force, local militia, and labourers, forcibly removing residents. Evictions involved heavy militarisation: trucks, armed police and militia surrounding the area, day labourers dismantling houses, and bulldozers demolishing buildings.

⁹⁷ Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) press release, the demolition and forced resettlement of houses in *Sheger* City in Oromia Region has exacerbated homelessness, Ethiopia, (March 31, 2023). Available at: <https://ehrc.org/reports/sheger-evictions> (accessed 15 September 2024).

⁹⁸ Ethiopian Ombudsman Institute Report, Ethiopia, March, 2023.

Residents emphasised that the demolition areas were sealed off, with security forces preventing anyone from approaching. Those who attempted to protest the destruction of their houses were met with violence, beaten, arrested, and in some cases, jailed. These accounts point to a pattern of excessive force and suppression of dissent, raising serious concerns about violations of the right to housing, freedom of expression, and protection from arbitrary detention. Such militarised eviction practices not only contravene Ethiopia's constitutional guarantees but also breach international human rights obligations.

The EHRC has documented serious human rights violations associated with the demolition and forced eviction practices in *Sheger City*.⁹⁹ According to the Commission's report, the eviction process in several areas has resulted in violence, abuse, physical and psychological harm, and imprisonment. These outcomes reflect a failure to uphold basic human rights protections and due process guarantees, particularly for vulnerable populations. Consistent with EHRC's report, the evictions were often carried out in adverse conditions, early mornings, rainy periods, or under cover of darkness, leaving families exposed to the elements without alternative accommodation.¹⁰⁰ Such practices violate international human rights standards.

While city administration officials claimed that certain groups organised to disrupt illegal house demolition operations and allegedly attempted to harm security forces, EHRC received independent reports of tragic incidents, including the loss of human life. One such case involved a fatal domestic attack on a woman in Filidoro, located in the Gafarsa Guje Sub-city of *Sheger City* Administration.¹⁰¹ This incident underscores the chaotic and dangerous nature of eviction operations conducted without adequate planning or safeguards.

Senior officials from the Oromia Regional Government have defended the widespread demolitions in *Sheger City*, citing prior administrative weaknesses and the strategic importance of the affected areas. According to Addisu Arega, a high-ranking official speaking to the Associated Press, the houses were constructed during a period of unrest when the government lacked the capacity to enforce land use regulations. He stated that the areas were designated for public infrastructure,

⁹⁹ EHRC, (2023), *supra* note, no. 100.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*

green spaces, manufacturing hubs, and investment projects, and emphasised that reclaiming the land was essential for restoring law and order: “Everyone should know that this is something that is not up for discussion.”¹⁰² However, this official narrative stands in stark contrast to the lived experiences of residents and findings from independent investigations. FGDs and interviews with sub-city officials and residents revealed that land grabbing, illegal construction, and informal land trade have significantly increased since 2018, coinciding with the rise of the current administration.

The EHRC has raised serious concerns about the legality and human impact of these evictions.¹⁰³ The Commission reported that demolitions were carried out without prior consultation, adequate notice, or sufficient time for residents to respond, often occurring while individuals were away at work. Moreover, the EHRC documented instances of detention, physical assault, and intimidation by government security forces during the eviction process. In its official statement, the EHRC emphasised: “It is necessary to follow the legal process for the action of demolishing illegal construction and facilitate alternative solutions considering the social crisis that the action may cause.” Other civil society actors and human rights advocates have echoed these concerns, urging the government to uphold the rule of law, respect citizens’ rights, and adhere to due process in all eviction-related actions.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

This article examines the eviction of informal settlements in *Sheger* City, a process that poses a major human rights challenge. Its “smart city” initiatives follow a top-down approach that excludes residents of informal settlements from decision-making, undermining legitimacy and fuelling public resentment. Evictions often occur without court orders or proper procedures, while the Urban Land Lease Proclamation leaves settlers in a legal grey area, disconnecting constitutional guarantees from lived realities. Modernisation views evictions as necessary for renewal, yet they cause social displacement. *Sheger’s* smart-city strategy has favoured evictions over inclusive housing, revealing a tension between modernisation goals and residents’ rights. Large-scale demolitions, justified as essential for development, embody a top-down model that marginalises low-income communities, disregards the socio-economic value of informality, and deepens

¹⁰²Elias Meseret, *Anger in Ethiopia as Officials Demolish Hundreds of Houses*, 2019: <https://www.yahoo.com/news/ethiopia-demolish-thousands-houses-prompting-anger>.

¹⁰³ EHRC, *supra* note, no. 100.

inequality. The approach contradicts inclusive urban principles, marginalising informal residents in the name of smart city development.

The approach of *Sheger* City manifests a neoliberal development goal, in which informal settlements are often cleared for luxury housing and investor projects, illustrating that the trend of steady advancement in Ethiopia's urban land liberalisation is marked by evictions that prioritise capital accumulation over inclusive housing, thereby marginalising the urban poor and undermining housing rights. Accordingly, *Sheger* City's "smart city" agenda exemplifies neoliberal "accumulation by dispossession," involving forced evictions without compensation or due process to attract investment, violating rights. This technocratic approach favours private interests, ignores the value of the informal sector, and deepens inequality.

This article showcases *Sheger* City's urban development approach, emphasising the post-development perspective that supports locally grounded, human rights-based development, legitimises informal settlements, and values community agency. This perspective offers an ethical framework for addressing evictions that focuses on dignity, participation, and legal protections, challenging technocratic models in favour of people-centred urban transformation. In contrast, Ethiopian urban development often justifies exclusion and demolitions under the guise of building a "smart city," reflecting Escobar's concept of a "development apparatus."¹⁰⁴ and legitimises displacement in the name of modernisation. Eviction practices in *Sheger* City ignore community-led upgrading and participatory governance, undermining sustainable development. The disconnect between grassroots strategies and top-down goals delegitimises local realities, with many houses demolished as "illegal." These demolitions often occur without notice, compensation, or resettlement, breaching protections and undermining participation, accountability, and empowerment.

This highlights the gap between legal frameworks and practice, sidelining rights-based development in favour of exclusionary urban governance, and calls for reforms to recognise informal tenure and integrate settlements into urban planning. Bridging urban land laws and human rights requires a holistic approach, with community participation crucial, giving informal residents a voice in planning and regularisation. Policies such as housing subsidies, low-cost rentals, and

¹⁰⁴ Supra Note no. 62

cooperative housing provide options for low-income groups. Engaging settlers as co-creators promotes sustainable strategies. Preventing future informal settlements requires proactive governance, affordable housing, legal clarity, inclusive planning, and strong institutions to achieve equitable development. At the national and local levels, including the *Sheger* City Administration, a transparent, digital land management system with GIS and satellite monitoring should be established to verify land rights, track land use, and prevent the formation of informal settlements. Accordingly, this article emphasises managing informal settlements via upgrades, formalisation, community empowerment, targeted resettlement, and institutional strengthening, aligned with human rights-based approaches for inclusive urban growth.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.