

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF PERI-URBAN LAND CONFLICTS IN ETHIOPIA: THE CASE OF MEKELLE CITY

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Abstract. In Ethiopia, like in other developing countries, land conflicts in urban fringes are usually subject to severe disputes. Different land tenure and administration systems may clash as land use converted from rural to urban status, resulting in disagreements, contestations, and occasional violence. Nevertheless, the specific reasons for peri-urban land conflict are not well understood in developing countries so far because of the political use of regularizing land tenure and the control exercised by a corporatist system of the government. Hence, accordingly, this paper explores the causes and consequences of peri-urban land conflicts in Mekelle City: Enderta district. A case study was used to answer the research question, while questionnaire and document analysis were the main sources of primary and secondary data. According to the research's findings, overlapping legal and governance frameworks, a variety of property rights claims, local power dynamics, and self-serving individual interests are the main drivers of peri-urban land conflicts. Moreover, lowering tax revenue for the state or municipality, raising expenses, impeding investment, and causing conflict were the consequences of peri-urban land conflicts.

Keywords: *informal settlement, land conflict, land rights, Ethiopia, urban fringe.*

INTRODUCTION

It is true that land conflicts are common and can happen anywhere and at any moment. They can be caused equally by need and greed, and they can worsen due to scarcity and rising land values.

Whether it be state, common, or private property, land disputes especially occur when there is a chance to obtain land for free. The most frequent subject of neighborly disputes and inheritance disputes is peri-urban land (and other immobile property). During post-conflict or early stages of economic transition (e.g., privatization), when regulatory institutions, controls, and penalty mechanisms are not yet in place, people gladly acquire land if their position permits it, lose land, or are in a weak position (UN-Habitat, 2005).

At the receiving end of urbanization, peri-urban areas – where demand for land for urban or non-agricultural land uses is increasing – form tenure hotspots. Rapid urbanization and population expansion have made it more and more clear that peri-urban areas are becoming hubs for a variety of activities and changes (Wehrmann,

2008; Cotula & Neve, 2007). Most Africans will eventually live in urban areas throughout the continent. According to demographic forecasts, over 50 % of Africa's population is expected to live in urban areas by 2030 (UN-Habitat, 2020). The demand for urban land is rising at an extraordinarily high rate due to the previously unheard-of urban population development in Africa and other developing nations. Accordingly, peri-urban agricultural land on the outskirts of existing built-up regions is typically converted to meet the growing demand for urban space (UN-Habitat, 2020; Toulmin, 2006).

Like other regions of sub-Saharan Africa, Ethiopia is experiencing rapid urbanization and intense competition between agricultural and non-agricultural regions for land. The primary methods employed to satisfy Ethiopia's growing need for land for urbanization are expropriation and the reallocation of peri-urban property through leasing agreements. Based on the idea that all land belongs to the Ethiopian people and the state, this demonstrates that land delivery and purchase for urban growth and development is entirely under state control (FDRE, 1995). The current land tenure relationship is anticipated to end forcibly when urban territory expands into peri-urban areas next to municipal boundaries (Adam, 2014a). Thus, the most significant element of Ethiopia's urbanization and urban development processes is the termination of usufruct/holding rights exercised by local peri-urban communities through expropriation decisions and subsequent reallocation of the expropriated land to the urbanities (Adam, 2014b).

A tumultuous and paradoxical collection of rural and urban lands, peri-urban zones with a quickly expanding and dynamic topography are where metropolises mostly expand aggressively. This process is linked to the depletion of urban areas' economic, social, physical, and environmental capital as well as communities' environmental resources (Walker, 1987; Yigitcanlar et al., 2015; Maheshwari et al., 2016). According to Allen et al. (1999), these issues progressively surface in the two domains of the natural and constructed environments, creating undesirable areas and activities in the peri-urban area that result in peri-urban land conflicts.

There is a significant knowledge gap regarding the causes of land tenure conflicts in peri-urban areas, despite numerous attempts to explain them and researchers' examination of their various aspects, including concepts, types, implications, and methods for their evaluation and management. A fresh method for comprehending and resolving the intricacies of land tenure problems in peri-urban areas may be found by concentrating on these conflicts.

Due to historical circumstances, demographic changes, and economic upheavals, the Tigray region of Ethiopia – which includes Mekelle City – faces particular difficulties in its peri-urban districts, which impact resource accessibility and exacerbate tensions (Fenta et al., 2017). Current peri-urban land conflicts in Tigray may be influenced by historical land tenure systems and previous government arrangements. Access to resources, services, and basic requirements has been made more difficult by the region's recent conflict, which has complicated peri-urban land concerns with displacement, economic disruptions, and the influx of displaced populations into peri-urban areas (Woldearegay, 2023). The peri-urban landscape of Mekelle City has been impacted by this.

Mekelle City is a highly urbanized city, with 72 % of its population of 5250 living in facilitated urban areas (UN-Habitat, 2020). Even though the city is now regarded as upper middle city, poverty and inequality are still very significant. According to Singh and Thoradeniya (2016), 11 % of urban dwellers will live in extreme poverty in 2060, while 40 % of Mekelle's urban population is categorized as moderately poor. Up to 50 % of all housing in Mekelle is thought to be in informal settlements, which are frequently inhabited by urban residents and unable to obtain land or housing through the official market (Fenta et al., 2017). Hence, this paper explores the causes and consequences of land conflict in the peri-urban of Mekelle City: Enderta district through an in-depth case study of informal settlers.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Defining Land Conflicts

Sociologists describe a conflict as a social fact involving at least two parties that stems from disparities in the parties' interests or social positions (Imbusch, 1999). Therefore, a land conflict is a social fact that involves at least two parties and arises from conflicting interests regarding the property rights to land, including the right to use, manage, profit from, and keep others off the land, as well as the right to transfer and receive compensation for the land. Thus, a land conflict could be defined as an abuse, limitation, or disagreement over property rights to land (Wehrmann, 2005). As described earlier, land conflicts may be made worse by notable disparities in the socioeconomic status of the parties involved (see Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. The roots of land conflicts (Wehrmann, 2005).

1.2. Theories of Urban Land Use Conflict

Both “generative” and “parasitic” factors may contribute to the growth of urban land use disputes in the peri-urban area. Accordingly, it is likely generative in the majority of developed nations since it promotes economic expansion and generates “surplus” in the larger urban area or region. In developing nations, on the other hand, it was parasitic in their development (i.e., surplus was taken from nearby regions), but it is now primarily generative (Isaac et al., 2000). There are four theories that address the growth of urban land use conflict in developing nations. Specifically, colonial legacies, land management, a weak economy, and an imbalance between supply and demand. According to the land management school of thought, the growth of urban land conflict in the peri-urban area is caused by the ineffectiveness of urban authorities, as well as by subpar land management techniques and insufficient urban planning schemes (Fekade, 2000).

The notion of demand and supply imbalance, as defined by Jacobsen et al. (2002), is the genesis and growth of urban land conflict associated with the imbalance between the supply and demand of urban land infrastructures and services. This can investigate how long-lasting and sustainable the growth of urban land disputes is. Since these theories lend credence to the issue being studied, the researcher considers the theories of modernization, reliance, imbalances in supply and demand, and land management. Here, it makes sense to choose these theories above the others listed above since they have a significant correlation with the issue being studied.

1.3. The Causes of Peri-Urban Land Conflict

1.3.1. Rural-Urban Migration

Tacoli (2003) explains that the main reason for the growth of urban land into the peri-urban area, which results in urban land use conflicts, is the migration of people from rural to urban areas to towns and cities. Because the town is renowned for being a hub for modernity, offering a wide range of services, employment possibilities, and cutting-edge technology, there would be a high rate of migration. As a result, it becomes one of the main reasons why the population of cities is growing so quickly in many countries, particularly in emerging nations. This has led to the spread of urban land into peri-urban areas, which has created urban land use conflicts in the region.

1.3.2. Informal Settlements

According to Asmamaw (2010), the primary factor contributing to the growth of urban land use conflict is informal settlement. This is a result of an inadequate urban planning and land administration system. Conflict may result directly from the system's inability to accommodate the urban land growth into peri-urban settlements without providing reasonable compensation.

According to the viewpoint, the rapid urban population growth, the ineffective urban land management system, the high demand for land followed by its scarcity, and the migration of both rural and urban populations to the urban center are the

primary causes of the rise in urban land conflict. Thus, those phenomena lead to conflict in the peri-urban area.

1.3.3. Shortcomings of the Land Market

Land market forces by themselves do not result in socially and ecologically desirable land use patterns. Therefore, even an ideal, economically efficient land market cannot avoid land disputes. This is due to their propensity to ignore the detrimental consequences of environmental degradation and the impact that so-called market evictions have on the impoverished. As a result, in addition to protected property rights, the following conditions must be met for a land market that is both socially and environmentally sustainable: ethical principles and land administration (including land use planning, land use restrictions, land readjustment, and land banking).

1.3.4. Institutional Failure

Constitutive and regulatory institutions are the two primary categories of institutions. Fundamental components, including land rights, land registration, and the rule of law, are examples of constitutive institutions that are necessary for the operation of an economically efficient land market. On the other hand, regulatory bodies supply the components – such as ethical values and land management – that are required to make the land market environmentally sound and socially viable (see Fig. 3). A sustainable land market does not require supportive and complementary institutions like financial processes and land valuation, although they can make land transfers easier, which can reduce or even increase land conflicts.

1.4. Consequences of Peri-Urban Land Conflict

Conflicts over land ownership hurt both the economy of the country and individual households. They lower tax revenue (land tax, trade/commercial tax) for the state or municipality, raise expenses, impede investment, and may cause a conflicting party to lose property. Conflicts over land are more likely to arise when land markets are less transparent, information is not distributed equally, and regulatory and constitutive institutions are weaker. As a result, people must invest a lot of time and resources in finding information and keeping track of contracts and agreements. This implies that either high transaction and agency costs are linked to land disputes or that a high likelihood of land conflicts is indicated by (relatively) high transaction and agency costs (Isaac et al., 2000).

Land use disputes typically have a detrimental effect on the impoverished or the environment, whether it is natural or constructed. They affect the wealth of the country by either lowering the standard of living for certain segments of the population or, if addressed and improved, by contributing to more governmental spending. Political and social instability are often exacerbated by land disputes. People lose faith in the state and begin to distrust one another whenever there are numerous multiple sales, evictions, land grabs, etc. Violence that accompanies land conflicts further undermines social and political stability. Therefore, reestablishing

confidence in both public and private institutions is a necessary part of resolving land conflicts (Wehrmann, 2005).

1.5. Peri-Urban Land Conflicts in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, existing rural communities in peri-urban areas are being incorporated into growing urban centers. Residents of the peri-urban villages are evicted from their farmlands to meet the demand for urban land. Many farm households have thus been compelled to move to the city in exchange for monetary compensation for the farmland (property) they have lost. Due to land policy, some farmers are unable to purchase additional land to carry on their farming operations. To diversify their income, survive in metropolitan settings, and integrate into the urban economy, these households are ultimately compelled to transition from agriculture-dominated to nonfarm activities. This process affects farm households' welfare and livelihood plans (Mezgebo, 2014). Insufficient land use laws, policies, and regulations; outdated spatial and socioeconomic data; poor titling, which leads to tenure insecurity; and a lack of organizational capacity and community involvement are some of the factors that have contributed to the rise in peri-urban land conflicts, according to UN-Habitat (2020).

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Description of the Study Area

In northern Ethiopia, Mekelle city serves as the capital of the Tigray Regional State (Fig. 2(a)). Mekelle is the second-largest city after the capital, Addis Ababa, and one of the fastest-growing cities. The city is situated between $13^{\circ} 25' 24''$ and $13^{\circ} 33' 44''$ N and $39^{\circ} 25' 26''$ and $39^{\circ} 33' 14''$ E, approximately 780 kilometers north of Addis Ababa. It is between 1930 and 2353 meters above mean sea level. About 75 % of the city's 615 mm of annual rainfall occurs during the wet season, which runs from June to September.

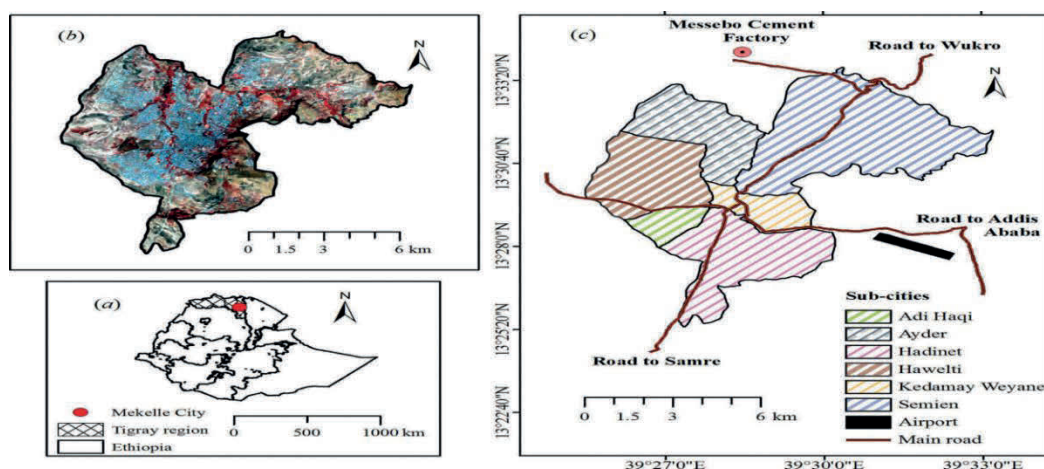


Fig. 2. Location map of the study area: (a) – country map including Mekelle city and Tigray region, (b) – the false color composite Landsat image of 2014; and (c) – sub-cities of Mekelle city (Fenta et al., 2024).

Over the same time, the average daily minimum and maximum temperatures are 11 °C and 27 °C, respectively. Based on the Population and Housing Census data (CSA, 2008), the total population of Mekelle City was 61 583 in 1984, 96 938 in 1994, and 215 914 in 2007.

Mekelle, which includes the seven sub-cities of Adi Haqi, Ayder, Hadinet, Hawelti, Kedamay Weyane, Quiha, and Semein, is taken administratively as a Special Zone (Negese et al., 2017). Mekelle is located in the Southeastern zone of the Tigray regional state, inside the boundaries of the Enderta region, where the city grows. Eight of the 17 kebeles that make up the Enderta district are connected to the four Mekelle sub-cities of Hadnet, Adihaqui, Ayder, and Quiha.

The study was carried out in Mekelle city's peri-urban region. Mekelle city exhibits a significant pace of urban expansion, making it one of Ethiopia's fastest-growing cities (UN-Habitat, 2020). The peri-urban kebeles of Mekelle city are included in the research regions. The district closest to Mekelle is Enderta. A diverse mosaic of residential, meadow, woodland, and agricultural land predominates in the land use pattern of the study areas. Conflicts between urban and peri-urban people have increased because of the municipality's quick expropriation and transformation of agricultural land in the peri-urban districts brought on by urban expansion. Purposively, three peri-urban kebeles – Debri, Aynalem and Romant – were chosen to conduct the study. Rapid urbanization, the current high pace of land tenure alteration, and informal settlement were the primary factors in choosing this location for the investigations.

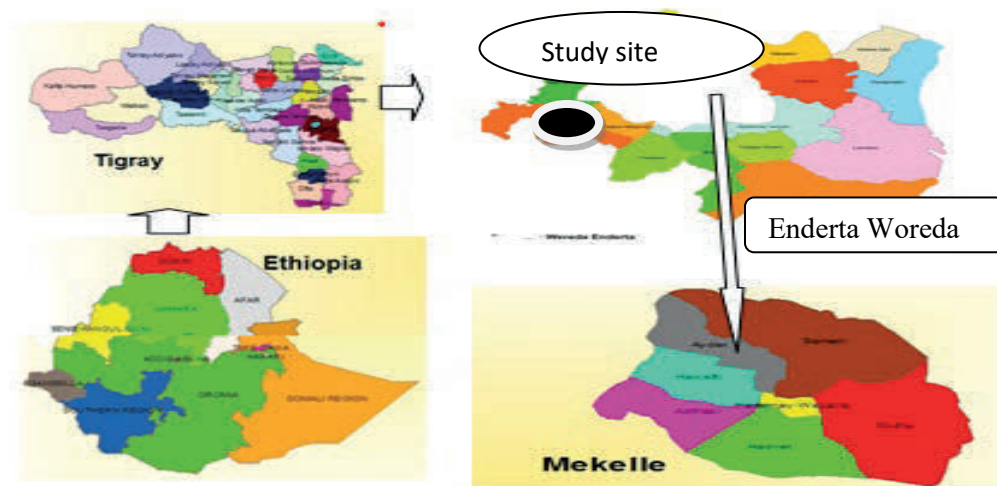


Fig. 3. Location map of case study area, Enderta district and Peri-Urban Conflicting Areas (Retrieved from Google Maps, 2024, <https://www.google.com/maps>).

2.2. Research Methods

The case studied here was selected as part of a larger research project on peri-urban land conflict in Mekelle city due to its representativeness in relation to land transactions (the informal sale of peri-urban land), the diversity of the actors and claims involved, and the irresolvable nature of the dispute. Due to the scarcity of data for examining Mekelle city's peri-urban land dispute, a qualitative case study

methodology was used. In order to comprehend the combination of “spatio-historical circumstances” and external causes, a single case study enables an in-depth examination of a particular conflict at the micro-scale (Simmons, 2004, p. 197).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to employ a case study technique to investigate the causes and effects of peri-urban land disputes in Mekelle city from the standpoint of political economics. The case study was chosen in order to gather as much information as possible. The challenges discussed are pertinent to other Ethiopian cities, not just Mekelle city and its peri-urban areas. Both primary and secondary sources of information were used. Focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews provided the primary data. Senior officials and specialists from the Mekelle Region Rural Land Administration and Use Bureau (two interviewees) and Urban Development, Housing and Construction Bureau (two interviewees) participated in the key informant interviews.

Additionally, three focus groups with six people each were held. A group of local inhabitants, a group of land brokers, and a group of land experts from the Mekelle city administration/municipality made up the FGD groups. The discussants were chosen using the purposeful non-random sampling technique. A thorough review was conducted of related papers, including journal publications, prior study reports, and legal and policy documents.

2.3. Sampling and Sample Size Determination

The populations of interest were 14 645 aged and adult people who lived in the informal settlements of peri-urban areas for more than ten years.

A questionnaire survey was conducted using a three-stage multi-stage sampling technique. Based on the prevalence and practice of informal settlements, the three kebeles (Debri, Aynalem, and Romant) were selected from the peri-urban kebele in the first phase using a purposeful sample technique. Purposive selection of informal settlement areas was carried out in the second step, which included a preliminary field appraisal conducted with city land use administration experts. In light of the size of informal settlements, 18 sites were purposefully chosen for the study. In addition, these areas are peri-urban areas with a high concentration of informal housing.

A simple random sampling of informal houses from the designated locations is carried out in the third and final step. Following the identification of the three research kebeles, the sample size of the study population was calculated. Only 14 645 of the 26 450 informal homes in the city were officially recognized as informal settlers. Accordingly, 14 645 informal households made up the study population, as reported by the urban land use administration of the city. A simple random sampling procedure was used to guarantee that every informal settler had an equal chance of being chosen for the study.

Because this formula allows us to acquire a representative sample of the population with the appropriate level of precision, the sample size determination method was used to calculate the sample size of the houses for the analysis. Based on the given scale of measurements, the respondents' answers were utilized to

examine the occurrences or degrees of agreement with the concerns brought up for them.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}, \quad (1)$$

where

N – the population size;

e – the level of precision of the sampling error margin, which is $\pm 5\%$;

$n = 14645/32.3625 = 452$.

Consequently, 387 sample households in all were chosen for this study. Based on the size of each kebele's population, this number was then divided among them proportionately. For every kebele, a percentage of the sample size was also determined based on population: Aynalem (150), Debri (195), and Romant (107).

2.4. Methods of Data Collection

Primary and secondary sources provided both quantitative and qualitative data for this investigation. Respondents provided the quantitative data, while focus groups, court records, and key informant interviews provided the qualitative data.

To gather information for the selection of respondents and to determine the reasons behind peri-urban land conflicts and consequences, a preliminary study was conducted in the sample region. Basic information and secondary data were retrieved through discussions with pertinent offices. While the lists of all landholders in the study's peri-urban areas were documented, the lists of landholders in the selected kebeles were provided by the Land Administration and Land Use Office. From these lists, 452 peri-urban respondents were selected at random. Equal opportunities were given to respondents who had or had not been involved in land tenure disputes. When selecting the families, the distribution of ages and genders in the neighborhood was also taken into account.

In survey research, data can be gathered through web surveys, self-administered questionnaires, postal questionnaires, telephone interviews, and in-person interviews (Neuman, 2007). To collect the required data for this study, in-person interviews were conducted. Because the interviewer interacts with each respondent directly, poses questions, and notes their answers, in-person interviews are preferred (Neuman, 2007). In survey research, in-person interactions offer numerous benefits. It helps to effectively handle lengthier and more complicated questions and encourages a higher response rate. Furthermore, the interviewer controls the process and helps the interviewees comprehend the questions. A prepared questionnaire served as the basis for the interviews. Prior to starting the main data-gathering procedure, the questionnaire was pre-tested.

Six people from the peri-urban areas participated in each of the three focus group discussions (FGDs). Experts from justice offices and both rural and urban wereda courts participated. Since the legal bodies are specifically in charge of land disputes that are heard in court, the experts gave general information concerning land dispute cases in peri-urban areas. To gather qualitative information during the FGD, a checklist was created. This made it easier to evaluate in-depth data and

triangulate information from survey responses. Examining both published and unpublished records from the appropriate offices allowed for the collection of secondary data.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 20) was used to evaluate both quantitative and qualitative data using descriptive statistics. For the final investigations, mean values, standard deviations, and percentages of the gathered data were computed. Each questionnaire was coded and verified during the data processing process.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Characteristics of Respondents

As can be seen in Fig. 4, most of the respondents (78 %) were in urban and peri-urban areas and ranged in age from 30 to 65. There were fewer female interviewees than male interviewees because there were fewer households led by women, and the majority of female interviewees in peri-urban areas worked in low-paying occupations other than agriculture. The majority of interviewees in both research locations were married, although peri-urban areas had a higher percentage of divorced and widowed interviewees (13 %) than metropolitan areas (10 %). This is due to peri-urban areas' advantageous position for widowed or divorced women, particularly impoverished rural women, who can find non-agricultural revenue-generating jobs like retail and daily labor. Urban locations have greater rates of female labor force participation (Cohen, 2006).

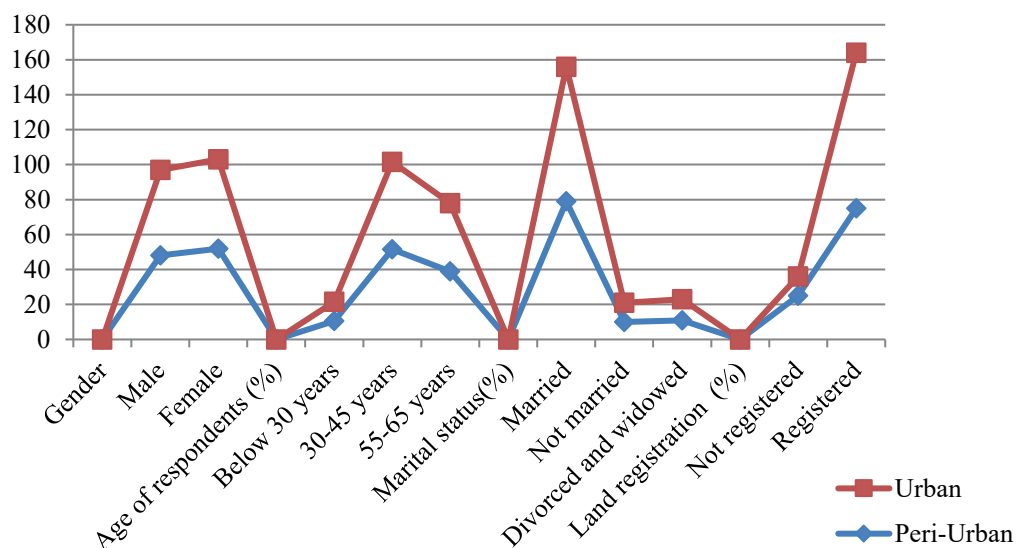


Fig. 4. Respondents' Characteristics (Number of Peri-Urban respondents 225, Urban Respondents 225) (data from the field survey in 2024).

Urban expansion has resulted in significant land tenure transformation and agricultural land losses in peri-urban areas (Haregeweyn, 2012). Nearly all of the research participants' landholdings were registered in the urban areas. About 25 % of the interviewees in the peri-urban areas had unregistered landholdings and lacked a landholding certificate. Perhaps, land tenure conflicts are likely typically higher for unregistered landholdings.

3.2. Extent of Peri-Urban Land Conflicts

Land tenure conflicts were examined more frequently in peri-urban areas (87 %) than in rural areas (64 %), as shown in Table 1. Cross-tabulation analysis of the hypothesis test reveals that there is a significant difference in land conflicts between these two sites (p -value < 0.05). Besides, results obtained from interviews and focus group discussions demonstrated that there were more land tenure disputes in peri-urban areas than in urban ones.

Table 1. Extent of Land Tenure Conflicts

Site	Count			% Within site			Pearson Chi-Square		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Value	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Urban fringe	195	30	225	87	13	100			
Rural	144	81	225	64	36	100	14.159 ^a	1	0.00
Total	339	111	450	75	25	100			

Note: The bases are those farmers interviewed for peri-urban conflicts: urban fringe, $N = 225$; rural, $N = 225$. Statistical significance: Fischer's exact test $p < 0.05$. ($\chi^2 = 14.159$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$)

3.3. The Pattern of Peri-Urban Land Conflict

Conflict and land tenure insecurity are widely seen as being more prevalent in Mekelle than in other cities found in Ethiopia (Focus group discussion with expertise, 2024), and this topic has long been at the center of policy discussions. Discussions frequently centered on the connection between urban and rural land policy, informal settlement, causes and effects of peri-urban land conflicts and land-related disputes. As a result, in certain parts of the nation, land certification programs have been in place since the late 1990s. Land registration is frequently cited as being necessary to increase access to finance, decrease land-related conflicts, and promote tenure security (Interview with key stakeholders, 2024).

Data collected from the study area and focus group discussion showed that land registration and certification, along with giving local authorities more power over land matters, did not always lessen land-related conflicts in the studied districts. In actuality, disputes were skyrocketing between households, private organizations, social entities and local government. In recent years, land disputes have become widespread in the studied regions, especially in the peri-urban Mekelle. A sizable portion of the sampled homes in the peri-urban area had a land-related conflict, as seen in Table 2. In the five years prior to 2024, when the survey was conducted,

62.3 % (in Aynalem) and 27.3 % (in Deбри) of the households in the city's peri-urban kebele had dealt with land conflicts, which originated from corruption and corrupt services.

Table 2. Incidence of Land Conflicts (The Author's Survey, 2024)

Incidence of land conflicts in peri-urban area	Study district	
	Deбри	Aynalem
Households had land disputes over the last 5 years (%)	27.3	62.3
Conflict over (% of total) ^a :		
Land use	91.3	89.3
Land right	75.3	67.4
Inheritance	7.22	8.78
Access	23.5	31.9
Conflicts involved (% of total) ^a :		
Other farmers	90.7	94.3
Local government	6.7	9.8
Zonal Administration	-	-
Household/family members	79.7	81.7
Households had conflicts over grazing rights on communal land (%)	13.2	11.1

^a Column totals exceed 100 because certain land conflicts have multiple causes

According to the survey's findings, land disputes are becoming more frequent in Mekelle city's peri-urban area, causing social tensions to rise within households and communities. An individual in his forties who lives in a peri-urban area explains the circumstances:

Land disputes have grown continuously so far. Even anything as little as a stretch of land that the plough can only pass through once has become a point of contention in the community these days, occasionally escalating into murder (Interview, Deбри kebele, 10 October 2024).

Land-related conflicts are not new, but they have increased in frequency and intensity as land access has become more restricted. According to one informant:

Land has always been a source of contention, even in the past. The question of land ownership has always been the source of numerous violent confrontations, not just in the present when there is a shortage of land but even in the past when there was plenty of land (Interview, October 13, 2024, Aynalem kebele).

3.4. The Nature of Land Conflict in Peri-Urban Area

Compared to Aynalem, land disputes have been more common in the Deбри sub-city (Table 3). One could argue that increasing rivalry and conflicts over land access have been exacerbated in part by the rise of informal settlements, which offer

overlapping land rights, as well as the relative availability of (and unequal access to) land in Debri. The claim that land disputes are common in Debri is supported by the number of land dispute cases brought before the sub-city court between July 2022 and November 2023. Approximately 564 land matters were heard by the sub-city court annually on average; the top judge characterized this number as extremely high for a single sub-city (Report and record of Debri sub-city, 2024).

3.5. Types of Peri-Urban Land Conflicts

According to the study participants, there are disagreements over land usage, parcel exchange, divorce, inheritance, landholding, rental, and border trespassing (Table 3). Furthermore, the data gathered indicated that most conflicts are interpersonal in nature, involving isolated instances and that they are typically promptly addressed.

Boundary conflicts accounted for the largest percentage of respondents (about 50.7 % in both research areas) who were involved in various forms of land tenure disputes. The claims of various parties on the same piece of land increase when property rights are unclear or when land adjudication is not done. Although peri-urban regions accounted for a large share (9.8 %), followed by border disputes, landholding disputes have significantly decreased (by 8.5 %) in both places following land registration. Following land registration, there are fewer landholding disputes in rural areas. Rather, the next most common disagreement type in these areas is land rental disputes.

Table 3. Types of Land Tenure Disputes (Multiple Responses)

Categories of conflicts	Peri-urban		Urban		Total	
	Count	% within	Count	% within	Count	% within
Boundary	103	50.7	52	45.6	155	48.8
Landholding	20	9.8	7	6	27	8.5
Land rental	15	7.3	7	6	22	7
Divorce related	7	3.4	12	10.5	19	6
Land bequeath	15	7.3	9	7.8	24	7.5
Parcel exchange	21	10.3	11	9.6	32	10
Land use related	22	10.8	16	14	38	12

Note: The bases are the farmers involved in land tenure disputes: peri-urban, $N = 203$; rural, $N = 114$.

Land use disputes were cited by almost 12 % of the respondents as the primary issues facing the local community. The respondents identified three specific topics as the main sources of land use related disputes in the peri-urban and rural study areas: improper waste disposal, land misuse, and communal land encroachments, despite the fact that land use related disputes are complex (Interview, Adihaq kebele, November 5, 2024). While improper garbage disposal and land misuse are issues unique to peri-urban settings, communal land invasion is a problem in both urban and peri-urban communities.

3.6. Causes of Peri-Urban Land Conflicts

3.6.1. Diverse claims to land rights

Data gathered from important stakeholders showed that the various interests of the parties engaged in the land transactions in Mekelle city's peri-urban area are reflected in the land conflict's complexity and intractability. As a result of these disparate interests, actors are more inclined to compete. Although it is typical to have a wide range of rights to a particular plot of land, conflict can occur when competing claims are made. For example, conflicts between current residents and the original purchasers of subdivided plots are prevalent in Mekelle City's peri-urban area.

3.6.2. Overlapping legal and governance frameworks

Because of their characteristics, peri-urban areas could be more impacted by overlapping governance and legal systems than other sections of the city. However, because their neighborhoods are regarded as neither rural nor urban, residents may find themselves in a "legal limbo" due to the uneasy nature of this setting, which is "characterized by the loss of 'rural' aspects [and a] lack of 'urban' attributes" (Interview, Quiha kebele, 10 November 2024). Despite unofficial urbanization activities, Mekelle city's peri-urban area is still seen as a source of conflict because of the illegal acquisition of land and the prevalence of settlements in the mostly Quiha sub-city. Likewise, the plot is still chosen as having rural land use under the urban planning outline.

The friction and possible overlap between the jurisdictions of many municipalities within the same metropolitan area are reflected in this situation and could get worse. Some peri-urban sub-cities are located inside the borders of other metropolitan zones, within another municipality. In this instance, the responsibility for resolving them would be a difficult issue because the municipality of overlapping boundaries is not in charge of providing services to settlements outside of its own boundaries, including those inside the metropolitan zone (interview with Official 8).

According to some respondents, there is a misalignment between the regimes of private property and society, which might be particularly noticeable in peri-urban areas. According to the Land Administration Department's respondent, these regimes are founded on "two different logics," which leads to conflict between land management systems in rural and urban areas (interview with Official 6). According to a Department of Urban Land Administration's informant:

The Adihaq is communal belonging, a bequest of each community. It is not very apparent where the power of the Adihaq ends and the power of the city begins ... each is confined by its norms (Interview with Official 8).

3.6.3. Local power relations

In addition to the two criteria mentioned above, which are consistent with the literature on land disputes, the research also revealed a highly significant factor:

local power relations, which support the variety of claims and overlapping authorities. This is especially important in peri-urban areas where, as previously said, a lack of judicial clarity may coexist with a variety of interests. The association has consolidated its de facto dominance over the neighborhood and its land market by taking advantage of the power vacuum created by the conflicting claims to the land obtained from the land invasion and the overlapping legal authorities related to regularization.

3.6.4. Selfish individual interests

According to focus group discussions and data gathered, land conflicts are not primarily caused by institutional deficiencies but facilitated by them. The motivation is profiting maximization, demonstrated by wrongful land grabs or the exclusion of underprivileged groups from lawful land use. In theory, all social gatekeepers are among these actors. These individuals have the ability to influence the land market to their benefit due to their occupation, status, and affiliation. Corrupt practices by social gatekeepers in the land sector are a result of the public sector's notoriously low salary. Nonetheless, the "normality of misbehavior" is what determines these anomalies. The populace views nepotism, corruption, and disobedience to rules as commonplace. These conditions, if widely seen in the institutions, can be taken as a source of urban and peri-urban land conflict.

3.6.5. Informal settlement

According to discussions with relevant experts, the capacity to acquire land at a reasonable price has been identified as a crucial component of house ownership. In light of the pay levels, formal housing is both unaffordable and unattainable. Because of this, the bulk of low-income households are now located in unofficial regions. Similar to this, urban residences in developing African nations have been constructed in squatter communities on empty or peripheral property or found in rented rooms inside squatter settlements due to the failure of housing programs and regulations to meet the housing needs of impoverished urban people. Low income, inadequate remuneration, population growth, housing affordability, and rental pricing are some of the significant social and economic indicators that have resulted from these viewpoints. Together, these socioeconomic factors have a negative impact on people's capacity to own their own houses and support the growth of informal settlements in Mekelle city's outskirts.

Lastly, results of the survey conducted with 425 respondents in urban and peri-urban study areas with the response rate of 89 % are summarized in the following Table 4.

Table 4. Causes of Peri-Urban Land Conflicts (data from the field survey in 2024)

Causes of peri-urban land conflicts	Indicators
Political	Political corruption
Economical	Increased land price
Socioeconomic	Marginalization
Sociocultural	Strong mistrust
Demographic	High population growth
Administrative	Administrative corruption
Legal and juridical	Legislative loopholes

3.7. Consequences of Peri-Urban Land Conflicts

Conflicts over land ownership hurt both the economy of the country and individual households (UN-Habitat, 2020). The interviewed key informant remarked that land conflicts could lower tax revenue (land tax, trade/commercial tax) for the state or municipality, raise expenses, impede investment, and may cause a conflicting party to lose property. Conflicts over land are more likely to arise when land markets are less transparent, information is not distributed equally, and regulatory and constitutive institutions are weak.

Moreover, political and social instability is often exacerbated by land disputes. People lose faith in the state and begin to distrust one another whenever there are numerous multiple sales, evictions and land grabs. When land disputes are coupled with violence, social and political stability is further harmed. Therefore, reestablishing faith in public and private institutions is necessary to resolve land issues.

High level of violence in Ayder's land conflicts

According to a study of five peri-urban land conflicts in the Ayder region, 20 % of them have involved severe levels of violence, including murder, serious injuries, and property damage. Violence escalated to a middle level in 35 % of the disputes, marked by disagreement, hatred, attacks, and intimidation. Low level of aggression, such as mistrust, arguments, and impatience, were present in 22 % of cases. Cooperative relationships founded on patience and trust were beneficial in only 15 % of all land disputes (data from the field survey in 2024).

Different communities are impacted by land conflicts in different ways. Not only do they typically affect the poor's standard of living more than of the wealthy, but they also affect men and women, urban and rural populations, farmers and pastoralists, and other groups differently, severely marginalizing those like squatters, ethnic minorities, and orphans.

Impact of land conflicts on women – an example from Mekelle city

Over the past ten years, land conflicts in Enderta district have resulted in the internal displacement of thousands of residents. Due to the fact that most Ethiopian families are de facto led by women who primarily rely on farming, which was impossible to continue in the new (peri-urban) setting due to a lack of own land, the families who settled in urban areas not only contributed to the escalation of land conflicts there but also had to find new sources of income. Despite the fact that women found alternative ways to make a living, such as prostitution, hawking, cultivating on rented property, and providing domestic assistance, they were more resourceful and able to adapt to the new situation than men (data from the field survey in 2024).

4. DISCUSSION

Although there are locational variations, land can be seen as the direct or indirect source of most disputes in agrarian societies (Augustinus et al., 2007). In most developing countries, even if horizontal urban expansion is the major cause of peri-urban land disputes (Hui et al., 2013), the problem is exacerbated in situations where there is a lack of sound spatial planning and where there are institutional problems, inadequate compensation payments, and the absence of effective land tenure (Adam, 2014a). The results section of this study also shows that a higher frequency of respondents in peri-urban areas are victims of land tenure disputes than those from urban areas.

Furthermore, the results of this study and a study carried out in China revealed that the primary causes of land peri-urban disputes are insufficient compensation payments and a lack of institutional competence, which refers to the exercise of power by lower governments without entering into agreements with farmers.

The study found several categories of land disputes: Land usage issues, divorce-related land tenure problems, parcel exchange disputes, boundary disputes, landholding disputes, land rental disputes, and bequest disputes are among them. Boundary conflicts can occur between individuals, between groups, between public agencies, or between individuals and public institutions. Boundary trespassing issues are the most prevalent of the several land disputes that have been documented. Even if land has already been registered, the primary obstacle is the absence of surveying to establish cadastral boundaries. Researchers from other African nations likewise attest that a notably large portion of land dispute types are border disputes.

According to the municipal master plan, Mekelle city's territory has grown rapidly in all directions since 2006. Consequently, landholders whose homes are located within the expanding radius are allocated as residents of the urban areas, and formerly rural regions have been recognized as urban areas. These are the regions where land administration institutional issues are present. For instance, one farmer in the interview stated that some of his portions are currently designated as

urban zones, while other parcels are still listed as rural. One plot is even divided between rural and urban areas.

Peri-urban landholders are occasionally subject to two distinct sets of regulations from two different authorities, which put their land tenure security at risk and cause disputes, as demonstrated by Nega et al. (2021) and the findings of this study. Land tenure disputes are also caused by imprecise institutional responsibility assignments and a municipality's peri-urban growth, which is frequently driven by its own whims rather than a coherent spatial plan (Agegnehu, 2016). Therefore, due to a lack of institutional systems for managing peri-urban land, property rights in these areas are sometimes unclear (Nega et al., 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

The political economics of local government, both from general and specific views, must consider the rising value of land and uneven access to it when analyzing land contestations and conflicts. When peri-urban land is turned into urban land in response to new demand, competition for new or extra land resources arises, leading to land conflicts that overlap with the implementation of land rights registration. Furthermore, the way in which land access and control are defined, claimed, negotiated, maneuvered, and contested within and between individuals, households, and local authorities is largely determined by the structure of local social and political connections. The paper highlighted the complexity of land conflicts due to a variety of issues, including inheritance, gender inequality, commercialization, urbanization, and population growth, all of which interact with corrupt land administration systems.

This research has shown how land issues related to local government seem to have had a role in land disputes. If a more democratic local land governance system is not in place, local political elites and other favored social groups are likely to exploit the opportunities provided by decentralized land administration systems. Facilitation of fraudulent practices, bogus land certificates, and land expropriations are likely to lead to land conflicts. According to Toulmin (2008, 15), land certification may have a detrimental effect on the tenure security of the poor because “elite groups may seek to assert claims over land which was not theirs,” leading the impoverished to learn that the land they thought was theirs was actually registered to someone else.

According to the research's findings, overlapping legal and governance frameworks, a variety of property rights claims, local power dynamics, and self-serving individual interests are the main drivers of peri-urban land conflicts. Moreover, lowering tax revenue for the state or municipality, raising expenses, impeding investment, and causing a conflicting party to lose property were the consequences of peri-urban land conflicts. Furthermore, the character and nature of land disputes seem to be changing because of land registration, and they seem to be more about rights to the entire plot of land rather than boundaries, whether due to contested land sales or exchanges, overlapping claims over a parcel of land, or claims over communal lands. It is important to understand that the most

fundamental issue at hand is the structural embeddedness of tenure insecurity in state-society relations.

Once the fundamental causes of tenure insecurity – the unequal power relations in society and the subjection of impoverished rural land users to the state – are addressed, the issue of tenure insecurity and the cause of peri-urban land conflicts can be largely resolved. Land registration and the institutional changes that come with it can be used as tools to strengthen and expand the power of the state and other privileged social actors over vulnerable rural people in the current context of increased and conflicting demands for land. This can worsen tenure insecurity, see (Chinigò, 2015).

In general, a specific set of local settings and procedures are used to introduce and implement land policies. The way state-society interaction unfolds and the resulting power dynamics within and between different states and societal actors in a given context determine their results. A competent, democratic state and efficient governance are necessary for the implementation of any cadastral and trustworthy land certification system that will aid in resolving land disputes. However, as noted by Migdal et al., (1994, 3), “the various ways in which state-society relations are interwoven determine a state's relative effectiveness.” In land governance, a constant, dynamic, and reciprocal state-society engagement is essential. With more competing demands for land, the implications for land governance research and political action include that more attention needs to be paid to examining the circumstances and means by which a mutually constitutive state-society interaction can be improved.

FUTURE CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It will be necessary to find ways to prevent instances where wealthy elites exploit institutional change to freely divide property rights for valuable land parcels among themselves. Plots in urban areas, vast forests, fishing grounds, mines, and tourist attractions are among the lands that are unfairly distributed. This creates the groundwork for future land distribution disparities that will have a detrimental impact on the nation's development and the standard of living for most of its citizens for a very long time.

Stated differently, how can an institutional framework be developed in a timely manner? What other actions are necessary? Who are the actors? Who can carry out these actions? How land use can be managed in the face of so many unofficial players, both legal and illegal, who uphold their own or their group's interests against institutions and laws of the state, is another important concern in the rapidly expanding cities.

Establishing a suitable institutional framework and re-establishing (traditional) values through the creation of incentives, checks and balances, and sanctions aimed at favorably influencing people's behavior will always be the first and most crucial steps in actively and consistently preventing land conflicts.

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