

The Gender Face of Land Expropriation in the Rural-Urban Interfaces of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia¹

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Ethiopia is one of the African countries where the right to land is tied to the issue of gender (in)equity. Apart from the cultural values attached to land as a resource for livelihood and as a means of identity expression, different Ethiopian regimes have used land as an instrument to legitimise their hegemonic power in both rural and urban areas. Since a change in political regime which took place in 1991, land has been commoditised within the rapidly urbanising Addis Ababa and its rural interfaces which pressurises women whose livelihood is entirely dependent on agriculture. This study, therefore, explores the gender aspect of land expropriation due to urban expansion in the Bole Arabsa neighbourhoods, where rural villages are encroached in the administrative boundary of District 6 of Lemi Kura Sub-City of Addis Ababa. Data was gathered through in-depth interviews with women, land administration officers, farmers' representatives, informants from the Sub-City Displaced Farmers Rehabilitation Office. Besides these interviews, legal and local government documents were consulted. The findings show that culturally-established marital authority has not been changed, although legal documents such as the 1995 Constitution have had gender-conscious components.

Keywords: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, expropriation, gender, land, urban expansion, rural.

Introduction

The question of women's property rights encompasses several dimensions, and the demand for gender equity in access to both urban and rural land is central. In this regard, Sargeson (2012: 3) asks, 'Why do women own less compared to men?' In Ethiopia, where the majority of the population is rural, access to land rights is a significant factor in the lives of women whose land is converted into built-up areas in the fast-urbanising cities such as Addis Ababa. Administratively, the city is divided into eleven sub-cities, each with their own smaller municipal units called *woredas* (districts). Bole Arabsa neighbourhood, where this study was conducted, is situated in Woreda Six² of Lemi Kura sub-city. The district is known for hosting development projects such as municipal low-cost house construction and private real estate developers. These urban development projects have dispossessed farming households of huge farmlands in the rural villages near the city, where a continuous land dispossession has impacted the livelihoods of many farmers, and especially women farmers.

However, this situation has not received little attention by urban ethnographers. In fact, some studies such as Feleke (1999), Abdissa (2005), Getahun (2007), Emana (2014) and Gashu (2014), have tried to explore the impact of urbanisation on different sections of the communities in urban and peri-urban areas in Ethiopia in general and in Addis Ababa in particular. However, they did not look at the gendered dimension of urbanisation, land expropriation and, relatedly, women's land rights. For instance, Gashu (2014: 16) argues that the 'rapid growth rate of urbanisation and the resulting compulsory acquisition and reallocation of land by the government has been precipitating a wave of dispossession and termination of the existing land

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² *Woreda* is the smallest administrative unit in the present Addis Ababa city administrative structure.

rights in the peri-urban areas'. His study examines various dimensions of urban development and land expropriation practices. Emanu (2014) also studied the impact of urbanisation on the livelihood of farming communities in a town near Addis Ababa. However, his data were not gender disaggregated to show the true picture of land expropriation and women's access to land. While disregarding the gender component, Feleke (1999) pioneered the exploration of the everyday life of farmers and their families who lost their lands due to the implementation of a real estate development project in the eastern part of Addis Ababa. Similarly, Abdissa (2005) and Getahun (2007) studied the extent of urban expansion and migration without considering the gender aspect of the processes. More recently, Debelo and Soboka (2022) have explored how Addis Ababa City has been creating and recreating its frontiers since its establishment. Their study shows that the expansion of the city has been politically and systematically supported by the country's successive regimes. A more relevant study was conducted by Hailu (2016), who explored the political economy of the rural-urban interfaces around Addis Ababa from a dependency perspective. He concluded that government policies are biased and that politicians had surrendered any real commitment to protect the rural edges of the rural-urban interfaces from exploitation by the metropolitan centre.

All the aforementioned studies overlooked the value of women's access to, and equity in, land ownership, although this aspect in the fast-urbanising contexts of Ethiopia deserves a careful examination from a cultural-historical and contemporary viewpoint. Culturally, many communities, including the Oromo farmers who are dominant in the present-day Addis Ababa and its surroundings, have never recognised women's access to land, with ownerships in their names but only through their husbands, on account of marital authority. Historically, Ethiopian regimes have never valued women's rights in land ownership. In the feudal system, land owners were male feudal lords and women had no ability to access land, and their names did not appear in land entitlements. The situation was no different among the farming communities who used to live in the areas where the present Addis Ababa was established in the late 19th century.

The present market-oriented urban development approach, under the pretence of public land ownership in the ever-expanding Addis Ababa City, fails to accommodate any improvement to women's access to land and land entitlement. Given the Constitutional (FDRE 1995) and other legal provisions by the city administration to ensure equity in land use rights and other property ownerships, women's access to land is far less visible than their male counterparts among the communities in Bole Arabsa neighbourhoods, which were originally peasant settlements. Women's invisibility in accessing land emanates from the rural patriarchal gender power relations and the present urban legal framework continuum which, in turn, has become a source of what Sargeson (2012: 3) calls 'durable inequality' between men and women. In this regard, Pardo and Prato (2021:1)³ conceptualise equality as the quest for 'opportunity, of right to compete for whatever goal one chooses to pursue'. Here, women's

³This book brings together ethnographic works that explore displacement in urban spaces and the marginalisation of different communities irrespective of their geographical locations in the world. This widens our understanding of the magnitude of inequalities in today's urban spaces.

inequality extends to preventing their access to land in the fast-urbanising Addis Ababa. In this article, the concept of ‘rural-urban interface’ refers to a context where a continuous but unequal rural-urban development processes persistently meet, sometimes mix, and interact (Hailu 2016) with the inevitability of the transformation of the rural edge into urban space. Women have no viable means to challenge the gender-blind urban land governance as ‘local land structures are often disadvantageous for women because of the inequalities in the social networks that men and women access’ (Rurii and Smith 2010: 5).

Although the 1995 Constitution of Ethiopia (FDRE 1995) grants usufructuary rights to all citizens, the lack of a clear, gender-sensitive legal framework around urban development reinforces the traditional patriarchal structure in the fast-urbanising Bole Arabsa neighbourhoods where this study was conducted. This sustains the symbolic violence (Bourdieu 2001) endured by women because, in the process of land expropriation and payment of compensation, women remain unnoticed, having little-to-no material stake in the developing urban landscape. So, this study will address the question, ‘How are these dynamics reflected in the everyday life of the women in the farming communities in Bole Arabsa neighbourhoods?’

Theoretical Points of Departure

The concept of land rights refers to the ‘right to access to and control over land’ (UN-HABITAT 1999: 10). Improving women’s land rights is not only an issue of human rights but also key to the development of all people in the dynamic rural and urban economic systems across Africa. However, ‘numerous cultural, legal, political, and social factors have systematically impeded’ such important rights among women (Rabenhorst 2011: 6).

While studying the complex factors that impact gender power relations at family and societal levels, we may lack a single and comprehensive theoretical framework. Thus, the present discussion has benefited much from the concepts and theories developed in different academic disciplines such as anthropology, law, feminist political economy, and other social sciences. To begin with, by referring to the Boserupian (1965) notion which has to do with women’s land and property rights, Yngstrom (2002: 22) argues that the ‘[...] complex and gendered historical processes can be examined within the evolutionary theories of landholding [...]’ because, under the customary laws in many African countries, ‘[...] ownership of land is anchored in patriarchy [...]’ (Kameri-Mbote 2005: 2).

Throughout the evolutionary process, customary patriarchal land ownership gave way to privatisation and foreign market control as is the case in access to urban land today (Rurii and Smith 2010: 3). The FAO (2011) explains that women across the developing world are steadily less likely to own land and have fewer rights to it, and how this becomes an impetus to advance the yet unaddressed debate in feminist political economy which connects political, economic, and social factors in examining gender equalities. In the context of urban development practices, a feminist political economy approach (Porobic et al. 2018) looks at access to and distribution of wealth and power in order to understand why, by whom, and for whom certain decisions are taken. This approach also examines how multiple co-existing domains of gender differences result in unequal power relations between women and men in

the context of access to resources (Ritu 2014). Ritu argues that the feminist political economy approach is useful in understanding how development discourses (the market, the state, the global forces, and multiple regimes of property rights) affect women's access to land. This argument is supported by the empirical evidence from the Bole Arabsa neighbourhoods where land is expropriated for urban development projects in which state political and economic actors play the role of 'middle agent' in order to catalyse the commercialisation of land and the politicisation of land rights in the rural-urban interfaces of Addis Ababa. These actors facilitate what Koechlin (2019: 231-232) calls 'the material transformation of urban areas to produce new spaces that urban actions are appropriating'. I argue that the new urban development narrative orchestrated by the state is shaping/reshaping the political economy of women's access to land. This reinforces the culturally-entrenched gender disparity in access to resources, such as land, in the area of study.

The property rights approach is also useful when examining the debate over the level of women's participation and position in the struggle for access to land and property ownership processes. This approach frames the decision-making processes regarding the use of resources such as land, economic behaviour (North and Thomas 1973), and control of benefits. In addition, North (1990: 5) argues that the institutional structure of a society in general, and property rights arrangements in particular, contribute to the improvement or deterioration of women's status in decision-making over property rights. This property rights approach is also instrumental in helping us explore the disparity in power relations between men and women in access to land, particularly in newly-urbanising rural areas such as the Bole Arabsa neighbourhood where land is highly commercialised. To put this in the words of Feder and Feeny (1991), the property rights approach helps to understand the gains and losses which follow from the actions of agents and the links between property rights and investment decisions linked to land expropriation (Alchian and Demsetz 1973). The FAO (2004) considers security in land ownership as a basis for women's security in relation to other rights, such as access to economic and social capitals in everyday gender relations.

From a human rights perspective, Scalise and Giovarelli (2020: 4) contextualise the property rights approach in terms of women's access to land and property, wherein reforms to urban and peri-urban land governance are directly connected to women's rights. Gender equality in access to urban land and to the benefits gained from land-transfer processes is a question of gender power relations. Thus, the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs 5)⁴ aims '[...] to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls [...]' in relation to urban housing and economic development.

In line with the above general frameworks, Article 35:1 of the 1995 Ethiopian Constitution (FDRE 1995) explicitly states that 'Women shall, in the enjoyment of rights and protections provided for by this Constitution, have equal rights with men'. Similarly, Article 35:7 recognises women's equal rights to acquire, administer, control, use, transfer and administer properties. After all, land is a common property of the state and people of Ethiopia

⁴ In addition to SDG 5, SDG 11 means to ensure sustainable cities and communities to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable by 2030.

(FDRE 1995, Article 40: 3). Yet much of the theoretical and constitutional recognition of gender relations in women's access to land and related resources remains largely rhetorical, especially when viewed from the everyday perspective of women in the rural-urban interfaces of Addis Ababa.

Methodology

This article is based on the qualitative data gathered from women who were purposively selected based on their encounters during processes of land expropriation led by urban development ventures such as the condominium development projects in the Bole Arabsa neighbourhoods in Addis Ababa. The approach is mainly ethnographic, with data gathered through in-depth interviews with women, farmers' representatives, local land administration officers, and informants from the Sub-City Displaced Farmers Rehabilitation Office during the fieldwork conducted from May 2021 to June 2022 in Bole Arabsa neighbourhoods, an urbanising rural village in Lemi Kura sub-city of Addis Ababa. Despite the observable changes caused by development projects, farmers in the neighbourhoods were predominantly dependent on agriculture together with some forms of engagement in off-farm livelihood activities such as daily labour in the urban economy.

Until 1991 the area was sparsely populated, with land administered by peasant associations (partly as a result of the 1974 Revolution which nationalised rural lands with the Proclamation 31 of 1975). However, since the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front-led government (EPRDF, which evolved into the Prosperity Party in December 2019) came to power in 1991, the area has been subject to extensive development. Farmers' associations were dissolved, and land was distributed to individual households with mere usufructuary rights (see the 1995 Constitution, FDRE 1995). Thus, farmers in Bole Arabsa village continued practising their usual mixed agriculture by the traditional means of rearing animals and producing the most common crops such as *teff* (*Eragrostis tef*), barley, grass pea (*Lathyrus Sativus*), and wheat in the area and beyond until their land was gradually expropriated by the government and divided for both public and private urban development projects.

Today, the area is fast urbanising except for small pockets of traditional rural houses which await their turn to leave or adapt to the new urbanisation processes and urban way of life. When I first went to the neighbourhoods for preliminary observation in February 2021, there were a few cattle and sheep and piles of crops such as *teff* and wheat near the thatch-roofed traditional houses, and a few other urban-style houses. By then, a few households had started renting some rooms to other people, mainly to daily laborers who migrated from other areas in search of jobs. All these have contributed to the dynamism of everyday life for women farmers in the neighbourhoods.

As the changes were immense, however, only the major aspects connected to land expropriation and women's access to land were addressed in this study. The data is thematically categorised in terms of women's access to land resources, their participation in the decision-making processes, their power over controlling land resources, their access to information about the decisions that their husbands and the local government make, and their livelihood

opportunities and asset building mechanisms following the expropriation of land. As land matters are very sensitive both politically and culturally, the anonymity of the informants is secured as much as possible by using merely the initial letters of their names throughout the analysis and presentation of the data. As this article is a result of an ethnographic study, however, the findings will not be generalised to reflect the extent of the impacts of urbanisation on the land rights of the larger women population who have been affected by urbanisation in those rural-urban interfaces of Addis Ababa.

Discussion

Anyone who walks along the roads in the rural-urban interfaces of Addis Ababa will observe new buildings cropping up quickly because of the advancement of construction technologies, access to financial resources, and the supply of relatively cheap labour. These construction projects have created a significant number of job opportunities for the urban poor, the families of dispossessed farming communities, and for a large number of young rural-urban migrants from different areas of Ethiopia. The findings of this study reveal that this booming construction industry has affected the land tenure system of the communities in the rural-urban interfaces in the city. It has impacted women's access to land because women were victims of two systems of land property rights in those fast-urbanising rural areas. One is the continuity of the traditional patriarchal system of gender-biased access to land at community and household levels. Second, the rural-urban interfaces such as Bole Arabsa neighbourhoods were continuously incorporated into Addis Ababa City administration since the establishment of a nation-wide rural land registration and certification programme in 1998. The process of rural land registration and certification was clearly gender sensitive because of the legal requirement that a rural land certificate was written and issued in the name of both the husband and the wife. However, the area in this study was incorporated into urban administration before each rural family's landholding was measured and certified. As a result, land in the area was neither registered by the then rural land registration programme nor fully covered by the urban land laws which operated in the locale. As the new urban administration was conscious of the highly increasing value of land in those interfaces, it deliberately left the areas unoccupied as a 'vacuum to be filled by urban development' projects whenever the need arises. Amid this complex land administration and rapid land-commercialisation process, women's access to land is not fully recognised, partly because of the assumption that they would access it together with their husbands once they are married. Based on the field data, this part of the article presents the dynamic nature of women's access to land in the due process of land expropriation for urban development projects in Bole Arabsa rural neighbourhoods in Addis Ababa.

Access to Land and Control Over Resources

The context of land expropriation for urban development purposes in Addis Ababa encompasses a history of dispossession and discontent for the farming communities in and around the city. These trends are more acute for women because of the marital authority they live under and the gender dimensions of land expropriation practices for urban development

projects. Although existing literature shows that urbanisation would empower women in terms of better access to resources and improved skills allowing them to become earning members of their families and build assets, informants' personal experiences in this study show that there is no significant improvement in terms of resource control such as land and the income generated from it. The informants pointed out that several plots of their farm lands were taken with insufficient cash compensation. On top of that, they had no legal certificate for the remaining land after expropriation. From the opinions of the informants, this failure to certify farmers for the remaining plots seems deliberate, because the urban administration can expropriate additional lands with minimum confrontation anytime the need arises. The following opinion from a woman in the village supports the above argument, showing that the uncertified land at household level is under the control of the husbands on the basis of traditional marital authority. For instance, a 46-year-old woman said:

'It is 18 years since I married. We were farmers before they (the urban administrators) came and took our land for construction. Now we are left with this plot (they locally call it *qerxi*, which is approximately 0.5 ha) of land near our house. We have no land other than this. My husband goes to far places in the countryside to rent land for farming. How can we live without it? What can we do? My husband is registered by the district office here to get a certificate for this plot of land but we have not got it yet. They also promised to give us condominium houses which some farmers have already got. We are on the waiting list. God knows if it happens.' (Interview MK, 13 March 2022).

Later, I went to the land administration office of the district to learn more about the partially dispossessed farmers with regard to the status of their remaining plots of land. The land administration officer, Mr FK, a 48-year-old informant, told me that none of the farming households had land certificates. He said:

'They (farmers) simply pay rural land use tax, and this is considered legal. I know that land tax receipts are prepared in the name of the male house heads, the husband though they do not have certificates. I sometimes see some women who come to our office to settle their land issues. They may be widows or those who have got land from their parents.' (Interview with FK, 12 May 2021).

This highlights a policy contradiction between the property rights associated with rural land and urban land because, in the two phases of the rural land registration and certification programme which began in 1998, all farmers were required to register their land holdings, with all holdings certified in the name of both the husband and the wife. However, the urban land administration does not have a clear legal framework for managing farmers' land that falls within the boundary of an urban administration. This makes the issue more interesting because it is not bound up with just demand of the access to land by both men and women; it is also a matter of sustaining their livelihoods. This demands further evidence to bring the true picture of the context to the surface.

As a result, I continued exploring the feelings of the women informants to understand their perception of the land expropriation processes and their level of participation in the land resources management at family level. The following is a narration from the story told by BD, a 37-year-old woman, whom I first met in the compounds of the District 6 administration office.

‘We owned the land for several years before it was taken away by the government. Thanks to them, they gave us some money after they took many plots. *Misooma jedhanii fudhatan* (they took it in the name of development). We also sold other plots for fear that they (people from the district office) may come and take it again. Then my husband bought a car to start a new business. Now we get some money from his daily engagement using the car in addition to what we get from the remaining plot of land. The car is registered in his (the husband’s) name. Our first son is a taxi driver hired by someone in the city centre. These days he is thinking of buying his own car to work for himself.’ (Interview with BD, 23 May 2021).

The above narration shows the complexity of matters related to land expropriation, changes in the farmers’ livelihood, and gender relationships at family level. First it demonstrates how urban development narratives facilitate land dispossession from the farming households in the rural-urban interfaces of the city. Second, it shows how what Rabenhorst (2011) and Kameri-Mbote (2005) call ‘cultural factors’ favouring patriarchal land rights are surfacing in the control of land and related resources even after expropriation. Third, the story depicts that land entitlement is still made in the name of the husbands, even after their inclusion in the urban administration. Finally, the story indicates that transformation is inevitable, and that some households have started to look for alternative livelihoods (being encouraged by the urban administration). However, lack of a clear gender-sensitive legal framework, together with traditional rural patriarchal land ownership, could shackle women’s land rights and their capacity to have control over the newly created wealth after their inclusion in the urban economic system.

Furthermore, this study shows that urban expansion and the introduction of development projects into the area do not significantly alter women’s awareness regarding the benefits gained due to land expropriation. I asked some women whether they knew the amount of cash compensation their husbands had received. The following narration is from a 46-year-old woman who felt that she was neither informed by her husband nor by the local administration when the government dispossessed them of their land and how much cash compensation her family should earn.

Nangaafatin; maalan beeka. Silaa lafa fudhatani. Birrii isaa Abbaa warraa kootu fuudhe. Meeqa akka ta’e hinbeeku ani. Isatu beka. Kunoo immoo mana kana ijaarranne, waaqa hagalatu. Ati garu maaliif wa’ee birrii nagafatta? (Do not ask me; they have taken the land. It is my husband who knows how much money they gave us. I do not know how much it was. Thanks to God, we have built this house after that. By the way why do you ask me about money?’).’ (Interview with MD, 14 May 2021).

From this story we can see that there is lack of consultation and transparency between husbands and wives on the one hand, and between dispossessed families and local administration on the other. This, in turn, has become the main cause for dissatisfaction and distrust from the women's side, because the lack of transparency and consultation has affected their land rights and their negotiating power with respect to control of land and related resources at family and societal levels. This indicates that the traditionally engineered patriarchal land rights (Rabenhorst 2011, Bourdieu 2001, Yngstrom 2002) still exist in the rural-urban interfaces. Accordingly, I came to know that Addis Ababa city administration has developed a new approach for managing the cash compensation given to farmers whose land is expropriated. This new approach requires the cash to be deposited in bank accounts registered in the names of both the husband and the wife. However, the approach is facing hostility from the beneficiaries of traditional marital authority. This contradiction was illustrated in the interview I had with LG, a 48-year-old farmer, who was a member of the land measurement committee in the village. I asked him whether his wife knew the amount of cash compensation they were given. LG says, 'She does not have to know it. It is me who married her. I am the husband'. In the tradition, a man who has married a woman has a superior power over his wife to control all resources within the family. This informant also told me that he could withdraw any amount of money from the bank account without the knowledge of his wife. A divorced woman, TS, had confirmed the above argument saying,

'I was in marriage for many years. When they took our land, I did not know how much they pay us in cash. My husband knew that. In fact, we have been separated. I live with my daughter.' (Interview with TS, 23 May 2022).

Land Measurement and Compensation

Land measurement and valuation is one of the activities that should be carried out by the concerned government bodies to facilitate the execution of expropriation and payment of compensation (see Proclamations 455/2005, 721/211 and 1161/2019). Although the regulations demand the establishment of a land valuation committee comprising professionals and community members, I could see that these duties were undertaken by a committee formed by the top leadership of the sub-city administration. A common complaint related to the inconsistency between legally mandated processes and the way that decisions were taken by committees. My interviews show that women were not consulted during the estimation of compensation and land valuation, and there were no women representatives in the committee.

To learn more about this, I asked LD, a farmers' representative, if there were women committee members. This 62-year-old informant said, 'At first, we had a woman in the committee; but later, we left her out because she was not active' (Interview with LD, 23 May 2022).

On 23 March 2022, I asked GT, a 48-year-old female farmer, whether she knew the size of land her family lost as a result of the expropriation. She said, '*ani hinbeeku; maalin beeka*' (I do not know. I know nothing about it). *Eenyu akka fudhatesi hinbeeku?* (I do not know who took it) (Interview with GT, 23 March 2022).

Management of Cash Compensation

As stated earlier, the male domination of land rights is also reflected in the management of cash compensation received upon land expropriation for development projects in the rural-urban interfaces. On top of that, sufficiency of cash compensation and awareness about its management is equally important in the life of the women in the study area. In relation to this, a 42-year-old informant said:

‘We use the cash compensation to buy grains/food/ for our family since we do not produce enough now. The money they gave us is not enough.’ (Interview with ZM, May 23, 2022).

A similar opinion was given by a 52-year-old woman, DG, who explained the situation by saying,

‘Yes, we have taken the compensation and we have been using it. We do not have other assets. We always buy food and the cash is finished every day.’ (Interview with DG, 12 May 2021).

The above interviews show that women’s problems in the sphere of land rights are multi-layered and point to an unpredictable future. The above informant added another story in the middle of our discussion. The story concerned the gender aspect of land-related resources management. She said:

‘I know a family whose land is taken and they are now left with a small plot. The husband has taken cash compensation in thousands of Birr for the large farm land they gave away for urban development. With the money, they built a house similar to other fellow villagers. But his wife always complains that she did not know the exact amount of money her husband spent. In addition, she felt that he wasted some of the money without her knowledge. Oh, we all are in problem; we are not sure, we may face more challenges in the future.’

The above account encompasses the interrelated issues of women’s land rights and resource control. First, the interviewee complains that the cash compensation is insufficient to sustain her family’s living. Second, she seemed to be in a state of liminality (see Turner 1969) in that she compared the past with the inevitable (but uncertain) future which her family would face in their new urban way of life.

I went back to the village on May 25, 2022 to talk to the head of the family. I introduced myself and told him why I was there. Soon he expressed his feeling about my being there by saying ‘What do you want to know? Why did they (I guess the district officers) send you?’ Finally, he cautiously accepted my request and began to tell me stories about the situation his family was in following the urban expansion into the village. He told me that he received cash, but he did not want to tell me the amount. I did not want to press the issue. He admitted that he did not use the money wisely, due to a lack of experience in managing considerable amounts of money. He told me that his wife realised he had spent the money for his own individual use

(drinking, buying clothes, and inviting his friends to hotels) and presented the case to village elders for hearing. But there was no final decision by the elders, except advising him to use the money more wisely and care for his family.

Women and Resource Registration and Certification

It is important to connect the gender dimension of land expropriation with women's legal access to land certification and other resources in the rural-urban interfaces of Addis Ababa. In Ethiopia's federal legal system, and more specifically in the 1995 Constitution (FDRE 1995), Addis Ababa City Administration has a legal framework for property rights ownership. The major resource that rural families have in Bole Arabsa rural neighbourhoods is land and land-related resources. Since the locality is within the urban administration boundary today, farming households expect to have a legal certificate for the plot of land they use. However, the land administration officer of District 6 told me that no farmer was given a land certificate, and that there was no plan to do so. Interestingly, though, farmers whose land was expropriated for urban development projects were eligible for condominium houses so long as they could submit the right evidence. Knowing this, I went to Lemi Kura Sub-City Displaced Farmers Rehabilitation office to ascertain more about this new approach to supporting the dispossessed farmers. Though not exhaustive, the following table shows the number of farmers who had received insufficient cash compensation and thus need additional support for rehabilitation (as of September 2021, 2014 Ethiopian Calendar).

No of farmers whose land was expropriated	Number	%
Male	8,314	64.2
Female	4,634	35.8
Total	12,948	100

Table 1. Source: Lemi Kura Sub-City Displaced Farmers Rehabilitation Office (May 2022).

Table 1 above illustrates the gender disparity regarding the number of farmers whose land was expropriated in the sub-city. The table may not clearly indicate who these men and women are, but it is possible to deduce from the legal practice that wives and husbands who live together are compensated as one family. However, their children who are above 18 years are eligible for such compensations separately. As a result, the list of women includes single mothers or unmarried and girls above 18 years. Similarly, the list of men includes both the male house-heads and male children above 18 years (as children below this age are legally minors). So, as I explain in the next section, married women do not have the right to claim compensation or any certificate in their names. All these interrelated factors have created a gender gap in access to land and other resources. As stated earlier, the major causes could be attributed to a combination of cultural, administrative, and policy factors. In terms of culture, the strong influence of tradition has made the present urban land administration system remain gender insensitive which, in turn, has affected women's access to land and other property ownerships in the rural-urban interfaces of the study area.

With regard to policy, the existing urban land policy of Ethiopia does not seem gender sensitive except for the fact that all citizens are given equal right to land and property rights in the general legal provisions (FDRE 1995, Family Law, Proclamations 455/2005, 271/2011, and 1161/2019). In the area of local urban administration, women are not given equal opportunity to claim their land rights and no couple has joint land certificates in the name of the husband and the wife. The cumulative effect of all these factors might constitute a response to Sargeson’s (2012) question, ‘Why do women own less?’ Recently, however, after the 2018 reform in the Ethiopian political system, new politicians and urban land administrators come to power and established some legal frameworks to support dispossessed farmers. One visible approach entails allocating new condominium houses for farmers and their children above the age of 18 years, as discussed in the following section.

Condominium House Allocation: Mothers are Less Visible than their Children

About 70,000 farming households are located within the capital’s boundaries (see *Addis Fortune*, 25 June 2022 and UN-Habitat 2017). These households have been at risk of displacement and dispossession because of urban development projects and the associated demand for land. In the meantime, these farmers have complained about the insufficiency of the cash compensation awarded in relation to the expropriation of land. Thus, the 2016-2018 land-related political and social unrest and resistance movements in Oromia Regional State in general and in the Oromia Special Zone Surrounding Finfinne/Addis Ababa prompted the Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed-led reformist government and the city administration to reconsider the livelihoods of the farmers in those rural-urban interfaces. Since then, a promising political initiative has been underway which favours the dispossessed farmers. Consistent with this, *Fortune News Papers* in its June 25, 2022 edition states that the city Mayor ‘[...] receives cabinet approval to compensate farmers’. Of course, some benefit packages were initiated long before the approval of this new initiative. One such action is allocating condominium houses for those households whose land was expropriated with nominal cash compensation which was as low as three Birr for a square meter of land. At present, all farmers who are above 18 years of age and who can produce evidence of losing land due to urban expansion are eligible for this benefit package. Table 2 below illustrates the number of people who are given condominium houses as of June 2022 (2014 Eth. Calendar).

Number of farmers who are given condominium houses		
Married men and boys above 18 years	Single mothers and girls above 18 years	Total
6,623	2,998	9,621
1691	1631	3,327
8,314	4634	12,948

Table 2. Source: Displaced Farmers Rehabilitation Office, Lemi Kura Sub-City (May 2022).

This new approach is attractive for many farmers, despite complications in its implementation. In the process, married women are not given a separate house but receive one

with their husbands in common. The certificate is issued in the name of the couples. Yet, this study shows that gender disparity is extended to the new urban development benefit package. The underlying intention is to help the farmers develop an urban way of life, though, in the context of the plan, married women are less visible than their children. In table 2 above, mothers are included in the households represented by husbands, while boys and girls above 18 years of age are categorically included in the housing benefit package. In the long run, this practice might leave married women without assets in their own names. The house allocation package uses a lottery method where individuals have a single chance from a pool of different condominium sites in different sub-cities in Addis Ababa. So, it is likely that the farmers will move from their recent villages, where they have established enduring economic and socio-cultural ties with their relatives and other fellow farmers, to new sites where they are expected to start anew

In addition to the invisibility of married women in this new benefit package, the fear and uncertainty it has created has prompted many farmers to sell their newly acquired condominium houses. Thus, a 48-year-old informant in the Sub-City Displaced Farmers Rehabilitation office told me:

‘This year we called some of the farmers to our office to bring the original copies of their (farmers) condominium house certificates for documentation purposes. However, none of them could do that. I think they have transferred the house together with the original documents to others illegally. We know that these farmers have signed an agreement with the municipality not to transfer the houses for at least ten years.’ (Interview with FK, 22 May 2022).

The above informant also told me that farmers who were given houses had entered into an agreement with the urban administration that forced them not to transfer the houses to a third party for at least ten years. Though this agreement is indicated on the ownership certificate, many farmers have proceeded to sell the houses illegally. If the trend continues unchecked, it may lead to further displacement and threaten the farmers and their families with homelessness.

Overall Gender Sensitivity of Urban Development Plans

This study has explored the gender aspect of ongoing land expropriation tied to urban development. This part of the article explores whether urban development plans (projects) attempt to address the potential challenges that farming women could face due to land expropriation. In the available literature (UN-Habitat 2011, Jarvis et al. 2009), it is argued that urban development projects should be conscious of the living conditions of women and people from different social groups living in cities. Strategies and approaches that take gender issues into consideration in urban development planning often end with positive impacts, both at societal and household level (UN-Habitat 2011). But the informants in this study had contrasting views. Some hoped that urbanisation would come with opportunities for them, while others were sceptical. The following opinions were taken from interviews with some of the women in Bole Arabsa neighbourhoods. A 42-year-old woman said:

‘We (women) are busy as usual with house chores. We care for our children; farm works are decreased; we do not go to many places for farming and cattle keeping as before; my husband rented a plot of land far away there outside the city; we expect some yield from there after some months for our own consumption. Except that we do not have any extra work which is non-farming? I am not sure whether we get better off-farming employment opportunities to diversify our livelihood activities in the projects such as the Industrial parks here next to us.’ (Interview with ZM, 17 May 2021).

Another informant, 48-year-old, seemed to be convinced of the advantages/benefits which her family would get from the ‘development’ of her village. She said:

‘I think there are some changes in our village. Some families are renting some rooms to get income. I also do some daily activities at the construction sites. My son is a grade ten student. He tries to sell some vegetables such as cabbage and potatoes near the cobble stone road there near the condominium houses. I think there is no way to pursue with agriculture after this. Our children will live a better life if they work hard.’ (Interview with GT, 3 March 2021).

Officers at the district and sub-city level strongly believed that if the present urban development activities continued as planned, farmers will not face serious challenges in the future. The land administration officer in District 6, Mr FK, aged 47, told me that,

‘[...] farmers in this village are not the farmers you know somewhere else. They are totally different because they are rich. They have received several benefits such as land for urban agriculture, condominium houses, and better cash compensation. They are engaged in additional non-farming activities to increase their income now.’ (Interview with Mr FK, 6 April 2022).

In the above stories there are two contrasting positions regarding the overall benefits of development projects for farmers in the neighbourhoods. One position is that there are some advantages brought by urban expansion into the area. Some informants indicated that the new urban development activities have given them the opportunity to diversify their means of income. On the other hand, some informants are sceptical about the benefits they are getting from the current urban development projects in that it has limited their ability to produce enough food for their families.

Conclusion

The rural-urban interfaces of Addis Ababa are always in flux. Urbanisation histories and current legal and practical activities show that there is a heated face-off between traditional socio-cultural values surrounding women and the intention of the current Ethiopian Constitution which seeks to ensure gender equity in all aspects of the lives of its citizens. This confrontation has impacted women’s rights to access to land and other land-related resources amid inevitable transformation processes in the rural-urban interfaces of Addis Ababa. The problem exists at two levels: the family and the system. At family level, the traditional value system continues to

support the perception that the husband is in charge of managing a family's productive resources, including land, upon which women do not have a say. In the context of urban governance today, the system is unable to challenge this traditional perception of the status of women in resource control. During land expropriation and the associated processes of land measurement, determination and management of cash compensation, the voices of women were not heard.

The change in the registration and certification of condominium houses, which were allocated to farming households who surrendered their farmlands for urban development projects, seems to be a step forward, representing a challenge to traditional marital authority and deficiencies in the urban governance system. However, there is a disparity between married and unmarried women regarding the registration and certification of the condominium houses. In addition, although the 1995 Constitution guarantees equal rights for both women and men with respect to property ownership, there seems a deficit at the implementation stage of the various urban administration systems.

This may reassert the male domination of resource control in rural-urban Addis Ababa. In the meantime, new initiatives such as allocating condominium houses to dispossessed women and men, together with stronger gender-sensitive urban development policy frameworks and practices, appear to offer women in Addis Ababa's rural-urban interfaces the possibility of a sustainable livelihood by recognising their access to land. This would support Pardo and Prato's (2021) suggestion that old and emerging social and economic inequality in urban settings needs to be questioned in order to break the system that functions to sustain inequality.

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