



Addis Ababa University

College of Technology and Built Environment

School of Built Environment

Department of Urban and Regional Planning

**Peri-Urban Land Conflicts in Tigray National Regional State: Analysis of the
Practice through Explicit Analytical Frameworks in Mekelle City, Tigray
Region, Ethiopia**

By:

Negash Araya Abay

May, 2026

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Negash Araya Abay

**A Dissertation Submitted to the School of Built Environment, College of
Technology and Built Environment, Addis Ababa University, in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Urban
and Regional Planning**

Advisor: Dr. Birhanu Girma

May, 2026
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this dissertation is my own original work and has never been presented at any other university/institution and all materials and resources used for the dissertation have been properly cited and acknowledged.

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Abstract

Peri-urban land conflict is influenced by a number of elements which resulted in urban sprawling. The objective of this study is to investigate the dynamics of peri-urban land conflict in Mekelle City, Ethiopia. While peri-urban land conflict is increasingly acknowledged in both academic literature and policy discourse, much of the existing research tends to highly emphasize isolated themes such as compensation, resettlement, and tenure insecurity rather than peri-urban land conflicts. There is still much to learn about how the connections of public interest demands, governance outlines, and legal uncertainties generate complex land conflict ecologies. In this study, qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to answer research questions. Besides, data from the city's property auction catalogue, focus groups with expropriated farmers, key informant interviews with pertinent specialists and administrators, household surveys of expropriated and non-expropriated target households, field observation, and investigation of lawful documents were the specific methods used to answer the enquiries of the study.

The findings show that farmers mainly divide their land illegally for speculative and private land tenancy intentions, which results in unhinged livelihoods, insufficient compensation, declining landholdings, and disengagement from urban development progressions. Furthermore, a larger network of unofficial land transactions has emerged, which was supported by government organizations and public servants in addition to farmers and brokers. This is a reflection of organizational problems with land governance brought on by political exploitation of land-based resources, legal ambiguity, and a lack of institutional accountability. However, the state has not carried out its constitutional obligation to manage land for the benefit of the public. Moreover, the government has undercut the ideals of equitable development and the rule of law, twisted the perception of public interest to benefit elites, and contributed to the marginalization of peri-urban villages

Lastly, the study comes out to the conclusion that the government has transferred important duties, such as home provision, into already vulnerable peri-urban households while violating both collective and individual land rights over communal land and long-term revenue potentiality, respectively. Future studies should look into how participatory planning methods were implemented?, the strangeness of legal frameworks for co-ownership, the way of decentralized governance might change peri-urban land governance and methods of promoting more inclusive urban development strategies in rapidly urbanizing regions.

Keywords: Logical outline, Land disputes, Semi-urban, Tenancy, Usufruct right, Ethiopia

Published Articles

1. Araya, N., and Girma, B. (2026). The dynamics of formal and informal actors and their perceptions in peri-urban land conflict of Mekelle City, Ethiopia. Urban, Planning and Transport Research, Vol.14 (1),<https://doi.org/10.1080/21650020.2025.2611587>
2. Araya, N., and Girma, B. (2025). Causes and Consequences of Peri-Urban Land Conflicts in Ethiopia: The Case of Mekelle City. Baltic Journal of Real Estate Economics and Construction Management, Vol.13 (1):pp. 10-30, <https://doi.org/10.2478/bjreecm-2025-0002>

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Abbreviations/Acronyms

ADLI:	Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization
EFFoRT:	Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray
ETB:	Ethiopian Birr
FAO:	Food and Agricultural Organization
FDRE:	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FGD:	Focus Group Discussion
FPIC:	Free, Prior, and Informed Consent
FY:	Fiscal Year
GTP:	Growth and Transformation Plan
KII:	Key Informant Interview
LDP:	Land / Local Development Plan
NNPs:	Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples
PLC:	Private Limited Company
PSI:	Policy Studies Institute
PSRC:	Policy Studies and Research Center
TPLF:	Tigray People Liberation Front
UN:	United Nations

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Peri-urban areas continue to be a topic of debate, inquiry, and controversy worldwide. Semi-urban areas are focal points because of the conflicts caused by suburbanization (Alamneh et al., 2023). Fast urbanization, population growth, and changes in land use structures are the root causes of conflicts over the use and development of peri-urban property, which frequently result in disagreements over resource allocation, land ownership, and land use rights (Fenta et al., 2017). Conflicts over land grabbing, land rights, and environmental degradation arise as urban growth encroaches on peri-urban areas, turning rural areas into built-up urban zones and escalating competition for scarce land (Esther, 2016).

Due to conflicting interests between urban growth and agricultural practices in these dynamic regions, the disparate land uses and functional connections to both urban and rural sectors frequently result in conflict with expanding urban cores over rights, access, and benchmarks of resources (Anushiya et al., 2018; Adam, 2024; Adam and Birhanu, 2017). Peri-urban land conflicts are complicated by the presence of multiple parties with competing interests and power dynamics, such as local communities, corporations, and governmental organizations (Muhabaw and Gashu, 2019).

Peri-urban areas of Africa are especially vulnerable to growing land disputes, which are made worse by urbanization, population expansion, rural-to-urban migration, and pressures from economic development over scarce land resources. The continent's enormous urban population growth has greatly raised the demand for urban land, which is mostly satisfied by converting peri-urban agricultural land near the boundaries of already-existing metropolitan districts (Hassan et al., 2023).

Peri-urban conflict is influenced by a number of elements, according to numerous studies, such as Dires et al. (2021). The majority of these aspects have to do with land administration, institutional frameworks, land features, population, and regional diversifications. Others documented that conflicts over peri-urban land resources were specifically associated with poor urban planning, weak legal framework, land availability, land management, and access to land (Eskinder et al., 2023).

With regard to land rights, its importance for urban development is well documented (Adam, 2014). However, a critical gap in the literature is that land use right is not distinguished from land ownership. Although land ownership has a long-term implication in causing peri-urban conflicts and alleviating the sources of the conflicts (Agegnehu et al., 2021), land right entails both permanent and temporary rights for using land. When peri-urban dwellers have land rights, it does not necessarily mean that they are able to use it all through their lifetimes. Even if they possess land rights, conflicts may continue to exist because of observable and unobservable reasons, which may emanate from institutions and different actors (e.g. government, local leaders and investors).

Ethiopia's rapid urbanization has led to significant issues in peri-urban areas, including disputes over land ownership, use, and distribution, which are exacerbated by unclear land tenure regulations and unofficial land rights (Agegnehu et al., 2021). Due to the need for housing and urban amenities brought on by population growth, rural-urban migration, informal settlements, weak governance, and ethnic conflicts, land disputes are exacerbated by urban expansion into peri-urban areas (Teklemariam and Logan, 2021). Conflicts over peri-urban land disturb neighborhoods, discourage investment, obstruct urban growth, and make it difficult to provide urban housing (Adigeh and Abebe, 2023). The peri-urban interface where residential, industrial, and agricultural land uses converge becomes more significant as cities grow due to increased competition and disputes over land use, notably the conversion of agricultural land for non-agricultural uses (Tsfaye, 2019). Local landowners and peri-urban small-scale farmers are at risk of having their property taken away from them without receiving just compensation (Adigeh and Abebe, 2023).

Because of historical factors, demographic shifts, and economic disruptions that affect resource access and heighten tensions, Ethiopia's Tigray region which contains Mekelle city faces unique challenges in its peri-urban districts (Fenta et al., 2017). Current peri-urban land conflicts in Tigray may be influenced by historical land tenure systems and previous government arrangements. Peri-urban land conflicts in Mekelle City are being conducted with the goal of conducting a thorough analysis of the context, actors, and consequences of the conflict because the area has been a focal point of recent conflict, making peri-urban land issues more complicated by displacement, economic disruptions, and the influx of displaced populations into peri-urban areas. This further complicates access to resources, services, and basic necessities (Woldearegay, 2023).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Providing land for urban expansion presents a noteworthy problem in the twenty-first era (UN-Habitat, 2020). The expansion of a city on its immediate rural hinterland disrupts communities; and the community disruption in turn triggers challenges that hinder urban development because the hindrance challenges land supply. This bidirectional problem triggers new or intensifies existing conflicts in the peri-urban zone (Hassan et al., 2023) which also encounters Ethiopia amidst rapid urbanization over the recent three decades.

Over the past three decades, Ethiopia's urbanization has experienced a very rapid growth averaging about 5 percent annual growth rates. This swift urban expansion has circumvented extensive rural communities and converted the immediate hinterland into urban use. While the land-use conversion not only transformed natural and agricultural land into urban use such development is often justified as serving the public interest, the critical concern is, however, it has significantly affected the livelihoods of rural communities. Accordingly, the immediate urban expansion frontier zone has triggered extensive conflicts between agricultural usufruct peasant communities, whose long-term interests are centered on income continuity, and the government, which is supposed to represent public interest through public purpose (Tame et al., 2025).

Government imminent domain for compulsory land acquisition is among key concerns that threaten land tenure insecurity in peri-urban areas. The ability of local peri-urban land holders to use their land for agricultural, residential or other purposes is increasingly challenged by urban population growth and spatial expansion, which prioritize urban development needs over local community interests (Fertner, 2012). The second driver of the land tenure instability and insecurity that threatens social cohesion and economic development emanates from weak land governance and management within the peri-urban zone (Jallaludeen, 2010). Transformation of peri-urban zones into urbanization through informal processes generates disputes regarding land transactions and access and benchmark over land that explains distinct power dynamics in the zone (Shafi, 2021).

What so ever the driver of the conflict is and the discourse analysis (priority of urban development over rural interest; and land governance/management) disparity is the conflicts over peri-urban land acquisition hinders efforts of providing land for urban development, including affordable housing and working premises for industrial premises and physical

infrastructure that facilitate the mobility function of the city across Ethiopia (Arash, 2010; Mohammed, et al., 2017).

Mekelle city, the capital of the Tigray regional state, is among the fastest-growing urban centers in Ethiopia and faces critical challenges related to peri-urban land conflicts. Over the last three decades, the city has experienced rapid demographic and spatial expansion. The population of the city has grown rapidly from 96,000 in 1994 to an estimated 637,000 in 2025. This substantial population growth has required the conversion of approximately 2,411 hectares of land for residential purposes by 2024, intensifying competition over land and contributing to recurring peri-urban land conflicts (Macrotrends, 2025).

Furthermore, the city's expansion has been influenced by national development plans initiated since the 1990s, which have led to the extension of Mekelle's planning and administrative boundaries. In 2004, the spatial extent of the city was 10,240 hectares; it grew to 21,000 hectares within two years. Currently, the city's structural plan covers a total area of 26,444 hectares, with the built-up area occupying 14,595 hectares (55.2%), and the remaining 44.8% of the area under the administrative/planning zone is an expansion area primarily covered by crop agriculture field, including irrigable tracts, open public land, and rural village settlements (Mekelle City Planning Project Office, 2024)

According to the 2024 data of the city, the extravagant expansion of the planning/administrative boundary of the city into the rural hinter land of Enderta rural district has intensified conflicts over peri-urban land, as urban expansion competes with agricultural and residential uses in the surrounding areas. The conflict discourse of this kind is a dichotomous urban versus rural development. It is often claimed that government compulsory acquisition of peri-urban land prioritizes urban development over the peri-urban rural economy-based communities. Consequently, studies presume land tenure founds the core problem of the conflict, though unfounded empirically and from alternative theories' perspectives.

On the other side, actual land release for urban development in the peri-urban land is insignificant, particularly for residential use, which triggers critical concerns over land management. The limited release of land for urban use, particularly initiates illegal land transaction in the peri-urban zone. The conflict involves rights and responsibilities of government, usufruct right holding peasants, and communal use land holding communities over transfer of rights on land, conversion of land, and land value appropriation in the peri-urban area. It is argued that government acquisition of land for public purposes often leads to informal

settlements and unplanned land development (Woldearegay, 2023). With scarce free land within the city limits, acquiring peri-urban land for public use often conflicts with regional and local administration policies with peri-urban farmers, prompting farmers complain over the land expropriation processes and to engage in informal settlements, illegal land purchases, and unplanned land use in the peri urban areas, thereby challenging urban development efforts (Gidey et al., 2023).

Although the context of peri-urban land conflict in Ethiopia is wide, as was previously mentioned, the majority of studies acknowledge the inevitable growth of urban areas while focusing on compensation rates and the transformation of rural life into urban life through relocation and rehabilitation (Gebrezgabher, 2015, PSI, 2017; PSI, 2023). Nonetheless, the constitutional framework of peasant land-use rights has been used to analyze the peri-urban land-use issues and the transition from rural to urban life. Uninterrupted agricultural revenue, any royalty portion, and inheritance to children are all part of the constitutional environment. Collectively, communities are entrusted shared interests on communal land that has remained out of sight of the per-urban land conflict. Furthermore, land-use conversion may pose critical challenge on both the rural hinterland communities and urban society but never been considered in the per-urban zone land conflict. In theory, the peri-urban land conflict shall involve choice of mode of life and means of economic production but do not attract attention in the literature.

From land management perspective, studies explored the land-use conflict from land-use efficiency. The concern addresses the mode or process of the peri-urban land use conversion (Bayuma and Abebe, 2023). Some other studies keep public ownership of land as a curse hindering land supply for urban development. Some argue that considering only land rights without regarding households' quest for acquiring land ownership may mask the true causes of peri-urban conflict. But such claims are often ungrounded in theory.

Transformation of peri-urban into urban use and the conflict thereof involves formal and informal actors. It involves government (regional and local), peri-urban residents, usufruct peasants, urban residents who need residential land and land speculators. Nonetheless, no study examines the interrelationships among them and the process involved. Besides, high tenure insecurity among farmers, insufficient payments for expropriated farmers, absence of a clear, cohesive framework to oversee the shift from agricultural to urban land, lack of participation and inclusion are the gaps to be filled out in this research. Specifically, as explained in the policy framework, there was a separate land administration system for built-up (leasehold) and

rural (holding/usufruct) regions. This duality results in a "power vacuum zone" where property is not clearly under urban or rural jurisdiction as cities grow, which increases the conflicts of peri-urban land and unchecked informal development.

Hence, this study sets forth to examine the peri-urban land conflict in Mekelle comprehensively from context delving into the basic constitutional and theoretical discourse, actors in the peri-urban land conflict and their roles, and the consequences of the conflict on land supply for urban development. Part of the discourse analysis of the peri-urban land conflict requires quantitative interpretations, which is often missed in the literature regarding Ethiopia. In particular, the main causes of peri-urban conflicts have not yet been addressed, and since it is unclear how these conflicts will affect urban growth, more research is required.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1.3.1. General Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study is to explore the peri-urban land conflict contextual and policy frameworks, the actors and their roles, as well as the institutional problems of land governance in the peri-urban zone of Mekelle City.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives of the study

This study aims to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To examine the causes and consequences of peri-urban land conflicts through the lens of policy framework, land rights and responsibilities.
2. To explore the scope of peri-urban land conflict within the context of illegal land transaction
3. To examine how public interests, actors and actors role are shaping the peri-urban land conflict in the selected sites.
4. To evaluates the land governance institutional system and its application in resolving the land conflict in the peri-urban zone of the study area.

1.4. Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the causes and consequences of peri-urban land conflicts among residents and government over land use with the lens of policy frame work, land rights and responsibilities?

2. What are the scope of peri-urban land conflict within the context of illegal land transaction
3. How public interests on land, actors and actors' role are shaping the peri-urban land conflict?
4. How does the land governance system and its execution contribute in resolving the peri-urban land conflict else aggravate the conflict?

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study adds important new information to the corpus of knowledge already available on resolving peri-urban land conflicts. The results will help planners, legislators, and administrators to manage peri-urban land conflicts more skillfully, guaranteeing a sufficient and sustainable supply of land for the construction of urban infrastructure and residential dwellings. Additionally, the study will serve as a secondary source of information for future studies on urban land management and land supply for urban purposes, further enriching academic discourse in this field.

1.6. Scope of the Study

This study is delimited geographically, temporally, thematically, and methodologically. Geographically, this study is delimited to peri-urban of Mekelle City. Although formal definition is not available regarding peri-urban in Ethiopia, considering operational definition is worth. Specific to this paper, peri-urban area would mean the area within the administrative boundary of the city where communities with rural land tenure exists in a particular point in time. The area is frontier of the urban expansion and is prone to land conflict. These areas, which were once part of the rural district of Enderta, have been incorporated into Mekelle city under the newly approved master plan. Temporally, the study covered 1992 to present a time the city has faced noticeable peri-urban land conflicts. Thematically, it focuses on analyzing the context of the conflict in relation to land rights, actors and their roles, and examining the socio-economic and spatial development effects of the conflict on the city's development. In terms of methodology, the study used a mixed research design that drew from secondary sources, such as pertinent documents and literature, as well as primary sources, such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups discussions.

1.7. Limitation of the Study

Like any research, this study has a number of limitations. The first limitation of the study is the exclusion of non-peri-urban farming households. This constraint contracted the zone of analysis by limiting the chance to gather opinions from the excluded population regarding the strategies and policies that are crucial for resolving peri-urban land conflicts.

The second constraint stems from the conflict that began in November 2020 among the Ethiopian Federal Government and the Tigray Region. The debate affected the study in two noteworthy ways. First, all of the important information became confused due to the internal displacement that took place during the conflict. Moreover, this made it challenging to arrange and make important data accessible, which increased the amount of time needed to gather and arrange data. Second, the quarrel caused logistical difficulties and psychological annoyance that hindered the study process's seamless extension. The results were more credible and reliable since every attempt was taken to mitigate the impacts of these constraints and improve the study's trustworthiness through methodological thoroughness, triangulation, and cross-referencing data from other sources.

1.8. Organization of the Study

There are five chapters in this study. The introduction is covered in the first chapter. The study's background, the research statement, the research objectives, the research questions, the dissertation's scope, significance, limitations, and general organization are all given. The study's research gaps are given in the second chapter, which also covers important philosophies about theoretical and empirical literature. In particular, this chapter's theoretical framework offers the empirical results and theoretical underpinnings of the research on peri-urban conflicts.

The research approach is covered in the third chapter. The research design, data sources, sampling techniques, data collection instruments and techniques, data analysis and presentation tactics and study area selection process are all described. The primary research findings from the study are presented in the fourth chapter. It highlights important findings and ramifications by analyzing, discussing, and interpreting the results in light of the study's goals. The study is concluded in the fifth chapter. It recommends recommendations, draws attention to the most significant findings, renders conclusions, and proposes topics for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2. Introduction

The literature relevant to peri-urban land conflicts is painstakingly evaluated in this chapter. The fundamental ideas of land, peri-urban regions, and peri-urban land disputes are covered first. After that, the episode gives a quick summary of Ethiopia's peri-urban land disputes, emphasizing the nation's land management techniques as well as the historical and current background. The theoretical and empirical frameworks that direct this research are also evaluated, and research gaps are identified, in order to establish the foundation for the current study.

2.1. Peri-urban land in the context of land administration and land tenure

Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 2012) defines land as a delineable area of the terrestrial surface along with its bio-spheric elements such as climate, soil, terrain, hydrology, biological populations, human settlements, and the results of human activity. Land also includes resources like water, forests, fisheries, and minerals, making it crucial for food production, livelihoods, housing, economic activities, and cultural values (Lucy, 2024).

Land is a valuable resource with numerous benefits to humankind, whose value may be classified into five economic, ecological, socio-cultural, and political value broad categories (David et al., 2009). In terms of its uses, land uses/activities can be grouped broadly into industrial, education, recreation, public purpose, commercial, public utility, transportation, deferred and agricultural land uses, each requiring special planning considerations (Lucy, 2024). Land is one form of property that is a subject of ownership or other form of use rights. Property is everything that has material or moral value for human beings and guaranteed and enforced and protected by law which calls effective land administration (Ambaye, 2015).

Land administration is a broad concept. Its main concern is collecting, managing, organizing and disseminating rights, responsibilities and restrictions related to land. It is described as “the process of recording and disseminating information about the ownership, value and use of land and its associated resources (Salfarina et al., 2014), essential for implementing land management policies. It is the way that land tenure, use, value and development within a defined territory administered (Jeanett and Jennifer, 2014). Land administration encompasses functions that regulate land development and use, revenue generation from land, and conflict

resolution related to land ownership and use (Hussein, 2004; Boipuso, 2006). Activities under land administration include titling, transferring land, and resolving disputes, with community engagement crucial for transparency and accountability (Ambaye, 2015).

Socio-economic and infrastructural developments increased the demand over land and this has necessitated the need to utilize effective land administration. Effective land administration systems, which encompass land registration, cadastral mapping, and land-use planning, are vital for sustainable land use and preventing disputes (Arko, 2011). It is expensive to create and maintain good land administration systems, although they produce many benefits such as: provision for land rights and security of tenure (juridical cadaster); reduction in land boundaries disputes; improvements in conveyance to reduce the time and costs spent on land transfer; and development and stimulation of formal land markets e.g. through mortgages; regulation of the land markets which leads to improved land and improvements in valuation; management of state owned land; support for land reform; support for fiscal cadastral sub-system for and revenue collection; improvement in physical planning for land use and development benchmark; and development of a multipurpose cadaster (Jeanett and Jennifer, 2016).

Land administration systems typically consist of four main components: land registration, cadastral surveying and mapping, land valuation, and land-use planning. The activities are critical for promoting sociopolitical stability and economic development, reflects the relationships between individuals, groups, and the government regarding land rights (John and Sally, 2011).

A method for recording details about ownership, tenure, value, and land use is land management, which comprises organizations, processes, systems, and operational functions for effective land administration (Arko, 2011).It could be:

- Statutory, customary, and informal entities engaged in land distribution, interest protection, conflict resolution, planning, and creative land use management are referred to as "organizations."
- The concept ownership relates to the relationship between people and the land within any jurisdiction, considering the mode in which rights to land are held under statutory law, common law, or customary law.

- Value encompasses economic assets, social, historic, or cultural values, while use pertains to the potential uses and land cover according to defined classification systems.

Land administration is implemented through a range of functions to organize land tenure, land value, land use, and land development (Shima et al., 2018). Land tenure defines the rights to access and use land. Land tenure refers to the systems of land ownership (Lucy, 2024). Land tenure refers to the relationship, whether legally or customarily defined, among individuals or groups with respect to land. It determines who can use land, for how long, and under what conditions. In essence, land tenure defines the proprietary relationship between people and land and provides rules for allocating land within a community. Broadly, it encompasses the complex relationships among individuals, groups and the government, which can be analyzed in terms of rights, responsibilities, and restrictions. Some of these rights and responsibilities are formal and are regulated under statutory or religious laws (FAO, 2012).

A land tenure system is said to be sustainable if it reflects the actual relationships between people and the land. Land tenure systems may be codified (e.g., by religious law, common law, civil codes, judicial reviews, legislation and regulations), undocumented (e.g., customary rights, stool land, squatter rights) or a mix of these types of formal and non-formal tenure systems. Land tenure has to promote both social stability and economic development (John and Sally, 2011). Common tenure systems include freehold, customary, leasehold, and state tenure (Emmanuel, 2017).

Freehold Tenure:

Freehold tenure grants individuals complete benchmark over their land, fostering productivity and economic growth through secure ownership and the ability to transfer land rights. This tenure system offers individuals with the highest level of land rights, enabling them to utilize their property for various purposes, such as cultivation, construction, or any other activity permitted by law (Finserv, 2024).

The main feature of the freehold system is the lack of restrictions on property rights, which allows landowners to utilize their property whatever they like. These rights, however, may occasionally be curtailed, particularly when expropriation is carried out for public purposes like infrastructure development or urban planning (Emmanuel, 2017). The freehold system typically increases output by facilitating the effective use of land resources, notwithstanding possible disadvantages. This is due to the fact that landowners are encouraged and able to invest in their

property to increase its prospective worth. Furthermore, the ease of transferring land rights under this system promotes investment and expansion, which eventually boosts wealth and economic progress (Adam and Birhanu, 2017).

Customary Tenure:

The fact that customary tenure is widely accepted and has been used for a long time in various regions of the world is one of its primary advantages. It promotes social solidarity throughout the community and is comparatively simple to govern and maintain. Collective ownership overseen by families, groups, tribes, or community organizations as opposed to individuals is known as customary tenure. Leaders or traditional authorities oversee this communal ownership on behalf of the community, but it faces obstacles including accountability and demand to modernize.

However, there are several issues with this approach. Lack of accountability among traditional authorities is a major problem that can cause problems with justice and fairness in land management decisions. Despite this, its most notable feature is that it gives local communities the freedom to rule and make decisions about land matters. This decentralized approach to governance is in line with concepts of decent ascendency since it permits community participation and contribution in decision-making processes (Adam and Birhanu, 2017).

Conversely, the traditional tenure system struggles to realize its full potential as communities become more modern. However, these groups may participate in more sophisticated forms of land exploitation, such as using their land as collateral for loans or selling some land for cultivation while retaining ownership of the remaining areas. This flexibility can increase output and provide tenure security in order to achieve sustainable growth. Nevertheless, it can be costly and technically challenging to access and maintain land using this method. Furthermore, landowners may abuse their complete control over their properties by erecting significant barriers to entry, which restricts others' capacity to use the space efficiently. The non-uniform features of this tenure system may result in unequal access and administration, making governance challenging and perhaps unfair, even while the lack of interference allows them to do so by accident (Lucy, 2014).

Leasehold Tenure:

Leasehold tenure permits the temporary use of land through government contracts. A contract must be signed in order to obtain the right to utilize land for a predetermined amount of time. This right is usually granted by the government to the lessee through a written contract. The terms and conditions of the two parties' tenancy relationship are described in the lease agreement. Only the lessee may use the property for the purposes specified in the lease at that time. The leasehold system allows individuals or organizations to access and use land without having full ownership. The lease contract, which outlines the rights and responsibilities of both the lessor and the lessee, makes the land-use arrangement transparent and unambiguous.

Lease tenancy's primary advantages are its ability to support development initiatives, attract investment, and promote effective land use. But there are drawbacks and dangers as well, like uncertainty over lease renewal and limitations on long-term investment and planning (Gebresilassie, 2006).

State Land Tenure:

State tenure entails government benchmarking over land allocation to ensure equitable access. Under this system, land rights are distributed by public authorities, who base their decisions about land access on preset standards. State land tenure grants usage rights to individuals or entities as established by law, in contrast to the freehold system where individuals have complete ownership rights.

This arrangement is different from freehold tenure in that individuals may experience tenure instability because the state has the final say over their land rights. State land tenure actually reduces production, despite the fact that it may increase justice and fairness through efficient governance and regulation (Adam and Birhanu, 2017). People might not be motivated to invest in and fully develop the land in the absence of secure and legitimate property rights. Furthermore, the volatility of land tenure would deter long-term investment and planning, which would reduce productivity even more (Emmanuel, 2017). In truth, state land tenure may lessen some of these difficulties and guarantee fair access to land resources with sound management and open legislation. By passing legislation that encourages accountability, openness, and participation in land allocation procedures, governments can allay worries about tenure insecurity and encourage productive land use for the good of the society as a whole.

Informal Tenure:

Unauthorized settlements or the failure of legitimate land distribution processes sometimes lead to informal land tenure. This tenure is intrinsically fragile because of the potential for eviction and the frequent lack of access to basic utilities and resources including suitable housing, sanitary facilities, and shelter. Informal land tenure must be addressed by fully recognizing its underlying causes and incorporating informal agreements into authorized land management systems in order to provide tenure security and development. Promoting efficient and justifiable growth requires formalizing informal agreements, increasing access to land and property rights, and putting policies in place that put the welfare and empowerment of those impacted by insecure land tenure first (UN-Habitat, 2025).

Individual rights, the socioeconomic growth of the peri-urban area, and state authority and accountability are all defined by the many forms of land tenure. The worth of land rights that people, groups, and communities acquire through the governance systems is determined by the power relations, which include authorities, obligations, and duties. Rent disparities, which usually characterize peri-urban land conflicts, are a common way for economic value variations to show up.

Over the past fifty years, the term "peri-urban" has evolved to overcome the shortcomings of the rural-urban dichotomy. It is frequently replaced by terms like peri-rural, urban edge, and urban periphery (Gabriel, 2016). Peri-urban may include lands inside or at the fringes of urban areas and lands further away from the city, encompassing either formally or informally occupied urban and rural land (Anushiya, et al., 2018). Definitions of peri-urban areas vary. Some studies base on distance from the urban proper, say 30-50 kilometers in Sub-Saharan Africa and up to 300 kilometers in extended East Asia Metropolitan Regions. Others consider land use type, economic activities, and social characteristics of inhabitants. These areas are dynamic transitional spaces between urban and rural zones (Rahayu and Mardiansjah, 2018).

Peri-urban areas in developed countries are integral parts of urban systems in terms of function and planning. In contrast, in developing countries, where the rural-urban distinction remains significant, peri-urban areas are dynamic zones transitioning spatially (referring to land use) and structurally (referring to economic activities) between urban and rural areas. Economic activities in these regions depend on investments and the nature of the nearby city. In Southeast

and East Asia, peri-urban areas often undergo industrialization, while in Africa, rapid growth occurs without substantial industrialization, leading to expanding transitional zones (Tesfaye, 2019).

Geographically, peri-urban area is the city periphery that has abrupt transformation, where land is in a state of conversion from individual agricultural uses to developed built-up area. It could also be described, in particular, as rural agricultural land immediately outside municipal boundaries with a higher than normal possibility of being urbanized and incorporated into urban territory (Muhabaw and Gashu, 2019). Peri-urban areas are defined as dynamic zones that function as a transition between primarily agricultural areas and completely urbanized territory in cities, both geographically and structurally. Mixed land uses, unclear boundaries, and substantial changes over time as a result of urban expansion are characteristics of peri-urban areas. They undergo quick changes in the labor market, land use patterns, natural resource demands, and the economy and society. These regions are viewed as transitional zones where the distinctions between urban and rural areas are hazy, requiring criteria to draw boundaries and comprehend the consequences of urban expansion.

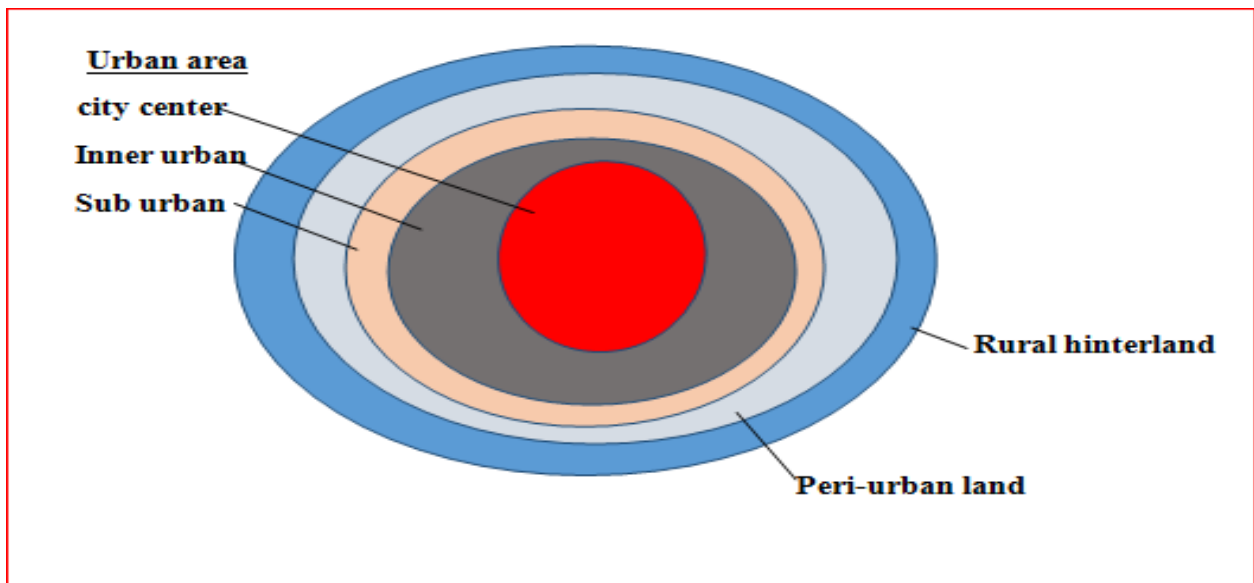
Theoretically and functionally, peri-urban zones can signify a place, concept, or process. They are rural agricultural areas situated between urban and rural zones, acting as hubs for the interchange of resources between rural areas and the outskirts of cities. Peri-urban areas as a place are physically demarcating the circulation of services and goods between rural and urban settings. It is described as the space between the two broadly understood land use categories urban and rural marked by the interaction of rural and urban forces, resulting in the exchange of resources. Peri-urban areas, often not discrete but identified by combinations of features and phenomena generated by urban zone activities, experience significant land transformation due to urban core expansion. This transformation is fueled by the resources and energy supplied by peri-urban areas at the expense of their natural/semi-natural land (Olga and Darya, 2018). Referring to dynamic transitional zones between a city/town and rural countryside, peri-urban areas are composed of urban and rural features with inner and outer boundaries. Pre-existing settlements that were officially under urban development planning, absorbed into urban administration as a result of urban expansion, and had restricted access to farmland are represented by the inner boundary. On the other hand, the outside boundary is subject to

growing pressure and influence from the city, has greater access to farmland, and is formally under rural development planning (Mezgebo, 2014).

As philosophies, they highlight the sites in geographical space where rural and urban institutions and activities intersect. They involve the two-way movement of goods and services between rural and urban regions. Peri-urban landscapes thus serve as a conceptual and physical representation of the ways in which rural and urban dynamics interact to affect land development and resource exchange (Venkatesh, 2012). Rahayu and Mardiansjah (2018) state that contradictory claims of power, overlapping governance institutions, and legal frameworks make it challenging to develop unambiguous institutional arrangements for peri-urban property from an institutional approach (Yanti and Vidya, 2015). The areas witness intense contestation over property relations, undergoing rapid changes in access to wealth and authority. Criteria for classifying a village as peri-urban include the continual presence of bush/fallow agricultural land and competition for land for non-agricultural uses (Arko, 2011).

In an Ethiopian context, peri-urban land is understood as agricultural rural land adjacent to municipal boundaries, held by local landholders/farmers with usufruct rights for life. Peri-urban agricultural land being converted into urban built-up property due to urbanization demands often result in unauthorized informal settlements (Adam and Birhanu, 2017). To make the conceptual usage of the concept, peri-urban areas in this dissertation are described as: (i) dynamic transitional zones between the city/town and the countryside; (ii) composed of urban and rural features within urban boundary; and (iii) being under increasing pressure and highly influenced by the city activities then ultimately becoming predominantly urban. Geographically, the peri-urban area is a zone delimited by the city's boundary separating the planning/administrative territory and the rural administrative territory as an outer shell and the fully developed urban proper from within (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Urban and Peri-Urban Zone Based on Mono-Centric Model



Source: Author's own development, 2023

As indicated in the Figure 2.1, the term 'peri-urban area' is used to describe transitional zones between urban and rural areas that are undergoing urbanization, and which are therefore progressively assuming many of the characteristics of urban areas. Regardless of the various spatial types, peri-urban zones share some common characteristics, including shifting land use pattern, high land transaction rate, proliferation of informal settlements, and customary tenure dominance.

Once-rural areas are encroached upon by urbanization, which has a transformative effect and sets off a series of changes in the distribution and use of land. Initially agrarian, these areas move to differentiated land uses due to sprawl and relocation, snowballing populace compactness and modifying land utilization practices.

The evolution of land use reflects a complex fusion of geographical, social, and environmental influences. A reassessment of administrative structures and land use restrictions is necessary when the demand for residential, commercial, and industrial areas increases with population density. Additionally, the flood of migrants, driven by the promise of urban conveniences and economic possibilities, puts increased pressure on land resources and necessitates adaptable strategies to satisfy the diverse requirements and goals of an expanding population (Hamore, 2019).

The frequency of land transactions in peri-urban areas highlights the intricate relationships between formal and informal land governance systems. Despite efforts to establish formal legal frameworks, informal practices usually persist, reflecting the complex reality of land tenure and administration in rapidly evolving peri-urban situations. In many African states, formal land tenure systems coexist alongside traditional a customary practice, which complicate the regulatory environment and necessitates sophisticated methods to land governance. According to Rahayu and Mardiansjah (2018) and Idowu et al. (2018), the significance of property transactions in peri-urban areas extends beyond straightforward business transactions; they are an essential instrument for negotiating the boundary between rural livelihoods and urban growth.

Informal settlements are created as a result of people turning to unofficial transactions, primarily for residential land, due to the constraints of traditional land administration. When looking for land for residential use, unofficial transactions are occasionally exploited, which results in the construction of homes without official authorization. To solve this problem, land administration mechanisms must be enhanced. Traditional elders and community members play important roles in the informal land auctions that frequently take place inside customary institutions. From the beginning to the end and beyond, social groups made up of different community members actively assist in enabling these transactions. Although it presents difficulties for fairness and legal legitimacy, customary land tenure emphasizes the impact of traditional practices in peri-urban settings (Hamore, 2019).

The common traits of peri-urban areas would imply an all-encompassing approach to the land problem. The presence of customary tenure suggests that the community's rights may have been incorporated. To put it another way, the conversion of a peri-urban area into a completely urbanized area will guarantee that the original communities are either better off or not at all. The growth of illegal settlements is a sign of a cautious approach to the zone's transformation process, as the informal land transaction may deprive the original communities of their development potential or tap potential economic value that would otherwise be appropriated for the urban society's common good. Furthermore, informal settlement is a legal matter in the land governance. Regularization overrides state (public) power and the politic allocation of rights over land. Land use patterns raise concerns over best use value of land in terms of economic return and ecological service value. The stability and social cohesion of the community may be

impacted by the land transaction rate. Additionally, there are several kinds of peri-urban land depending on the community's lifestyle, population density, and geographic location:

Village Peri-Urban Land:

It demonstrates metropolitan lifestyles without having a direct geographic connection to urban areas and is the meeting point of rural and urban life. Some locations maintain traditional land use practices and a rural environment despite having larger populations due to migration, even with slight urban impacts.

Despite the social fabric's obvious urban tendencies, these communities are geographically isolated and hence do not experience much pressure from nearby urban centers. Village peri-urban lands represent a unique blend of rural tradition and urban influence. By preserving unique population compositions and lifestyles that cut across both domains, they show how rural heritage may endure in the face of growing urbanization tendencies. These villages carve out their own identity within the larger peri-urban landscape by striking a balance between urban-like features and traditional customs, providing a window into the complex dynamics of modern rural life.

Diffuse Peri-Urban Land:

Due to its proximity to an established metropolis, this typology's populace is diversified and greatly influenced by metropolitan influences. Land use transitions from agriculture to residential, commercial, and manufacturing activity (David and Axel, 2017).

Chain Peri-Urban Land:

Shaped by chain migration; where the whole villagers move to the periphery of the cities. These migrants are more likely to be open to change because they are usually the most adventurous and flexible members of their original community. These areas display strong ethnic homogeneity and adapt traditional behaviors in new contexts (Amrutha, 2019).

In-Place Peri-Urban Land:

It naturally develops close to metropolitan centers and transforms into urbanized areas as a result of migration and population expansion. They are either reclassified to reflect their de facto urban status or progressively included into the growing city bounds. They occasionally become more urbanized due to migration from rural areas or natural population expansion. They typically come from peri-urban communities that are undergoing a combination of these changes in addition to migration from adjacent urban regions.

Existing power structures are maintained in these regions, and social polarization between long-term inhabitants and recent arrivals is common. Conflicts between long-time inhabitants and recent arrivals frequently occur when large numbers of migrants from urban regions relocate. Residents in these areas, excluding recent urban migrants, usually represent extremes of the local power spectrum: the least opportunistic (such as the poor, who opted not to migrate earlier), those who benefited most from traditional arrangements (such as the wealthy and powerful, who had a vested interest in staying put), and those who are firmly established in traditional roles (such as women) and have few opportunities to migrate. These settings tend to maintain conservative conventional institutions because of their lack of physical displacement and the possibility of social conflict

Absorbed Peri-Urban Land:

Located near or inside metropolitan areas; maintaining traditional institutions despite changes in the initial population. Over time, these regions transform from chain or in-place peri-urban zones and become part of the urban fabric (Amrutha, 2019).

Scrutinizing the physiognomies of each peri-urban zone categories, the peri-urban land of Mekelle City has the dispersed type. This is owing to closeness to urban centers and Mekelle's rapid expansion and the resulting demand on nearby communities. Diverse populations and land use conflicts result from land use patterns shifting from agricultural practices to more urbanized uses, such as residential, commercial, and industrial uses, on diffuse areas close to metropolitan centers like Mekelle. Significant urban pressures in these places lead to disputes about land ownership, rights, and priorities for land use. The primary conflicts are likely arise in dispersed peri-urban-land areas due to intense urban development and direct pressures from urban expansion and the diverse land use changes linked with it.

2.1.1. Land Governance and Administration: Conceptual Debates

Land governance and management concern the organizations, procedures, and regulations that specify how land rights, usage, and expansion are achieved. Important debates emphasis on striking a balance between legal security and customary rights, fighting corruption to promote sustainable development, and moving from top-down, opaque administration to inclusive, "fit-for-purpose" systems (Hamore, 2019). And, land governance describes the regulations, laws, and power structures that dictate how land is utilized and managed, whereas land administration refers to the practical procedures such as registration, mapping, and valuation that carry out land

policy. Governance is the conceptual foundation, whereas administration is the technical execution (Ambaye, 2015).

2.2. Peri-Urban Land Conflicts

2.2.1. Nature and Causes of the Conflicts

Human interaction inevitably involves conflict, which is influenced by conflicting interests, choices, and institutional injustices (Melanie, 2012). Conflicts, which are frequently caused by historical, political, and economic factors, are seen by sociologists as social truths that arise when various individuals pursue incompatible objectives. In the context of land, disputes damage social and economic stability, particularly when the legality of land titles is questioned. These disputes can jeopardize economic stability and are connected to political, historical, and economic events, especially when the validity of land titles is called into doubt (Lucy, 2014).

According to Raquel and Luisa (2017), land is a major barrier to development and recovery as well as a major source of conflict. It is not only an economic asset but also a political, cultural, and, strategic resource, making it fiercely contested among individuals, communities, private entities, and the state (Ambaye, 2015). Land conflicts may be classed based on the actors, the object of quarrel, the lawfulness of claims, and the level of ferocity positioned. Sketchily, they happen over private, shared, communal, and public-sector possessions (Babette, 2008). There are three types of land conflict: peri-urban, urban, and rural. Boundaries, inheritance, and grazing rights are common issues in rural conflicts, which are normally resolved through customary institutions before reaching senior and paramount chiefs (Raquel and Luisa, 2017). In metropolitan and peri-urban settings, however, conflicts develop from overlapping land sales, illegal occupations, and contestations over extensions, driven mostly by political shifts, socioeconomic inequities, and inadequate legal frameworks. Political changes, social inequality lead to urban land conflicts (Mbilikita, 2016). Tenure insecurity is still especially severe in urban areas, where it frequently results in forced relocation, discourages investment and development, and exacerbates conflicts due to poor governance and inconsistencies between official and customary systems (Raquel and Luisa, 2017).

Conflicts and tensions that arise in the places where urban and rural areas meet are referred to as peri-urban land conflicts. Tenure agreements, property rights, and land uses are highly competitive in these regions (Raquel and Luisa, 2017). Ownership problems resulting from non-

registration, confrontations between state authorities and private or communal owners, arguments over compensation during expropriation procedures, and disputes over quickly increasing land prices are also common (Babette, 2008). These conflicts are further intensified by unauthorized land use, including informal settlements, particularly where formal housing markets exclude vulnerable populations. In Africa, rapid urbanization and population growth escalates demand for land for residential housing but the land conflict hinders the demand satisfaction (Adam and Birhanu, 2017).

Peri-urban land conflict arises from a number of causes spanning the inherent nature of the tenure structure, land administration and governance platform, variations of advantages of various interests while converting the existing rural land right into urban land right, planning conditions, and governance of the transformation of the urban fringe zone. Probably the main issue that draws notice is a disagreement about ownership and tenure. Uncertain land titles, informal settlements, or competing claims give rise to disputes over property rights, tenure, and land ownership. Formal and informal land tenure systems coexist, adding complexity as traditional customs conflict with contemporary urban development objectives (Tesfaunegn, 2017).

Probably, the second ranked claim that causes peri-urban land generated conflicts is hindrance to urban expansion. Land conflict hinders the expansion of the city beyond its current built up area limit. As over 50 percent of the global population resides in urban areas, access to land for housing is pressing. Insecure tenure in informal settlements leads to forced evictions, displacement, and resettlement, threatening urban security and safety. Legalizing land tenure itself can become a source of conflict (Melanie, 2012). Conflicts over land are particularly acute in global Southern cities, often associated with rapid urban growth and the emergence of informal settlements. In cities where formal (state and market) housing provisions lag, up to 70 percent of inhabitants may live in informal settlements. Rising land values due to urban growth exacerbate tenure insecurity and conflict (Melanie, 2012). Peri-urban areas often see conflicts involving unauthorized land use, including undeveloped land that hinder formal residential land supply that ultimately (Adam and Birhanu, 2017).

Another facet of peri-urban land conflict is contesting claims for property utilization. Housing, infrastructure, real estate, agriculture, urban development, and conservation are all competing in the urban fringe zone. Pressures from urban growth and traditional rural land usage collide (Melanie, 2012). The disruption of peri-urban biodiversity, water sources, and natural

ecosystems caused by urban expansion leads to conflicts between environmentalists and developers. Infrastructure projects may encounter resistance from farmers and neighbors due to possible disruptions. Insufficient planning and regulations result in institutional character clashes. Inadequate land-use planning and weak regulatory frameworks exacerbate competition for scarce land resources, leading to conflicts over land allocation. Uncertain rules promote unanticipated incidents and disputes (Adam and Birhanu, 2017).

2.2.2. Challenges of Peri-Urban Land Governance

Peri-urban land management is intrinsically complicated, requiring creative and flexible solutions to the many problems the region faces. Understanding the social, economic, and spatial processes that characterize peri-urban settings is the main challenge. Despite their critical function as transitional spaces between rural and urban contexts, their distinct features and ramifications are usually overlooked in policy and practice. Effective land administration and management require a deeper understanding of these dynamics (Adam and Birhanu, 2017).

One of the main issues is the cohabitation of formal and expected tenure systems. Even though they mostly function outside the purview of official regulatory frameworks, these traditional groups regularly negotiate real estate deals, offer advice, and settle disputes. Therefore, recognizing and incorporating customary systems into formal governance procedures is necessary to increase justice, lawfulness, and dispute steadfastness (Tesfaunegn, 2017).

Institutional deficiencies further impede peri-urban governance. It is frequently difficult to establish basic infrastructures like a strong legislative framework, institutional players, efficient administrative procedures, and efficient land information management systems. Land governance becomes unclear, erratic, and susceptible to corruption in the absence of these pillars. Effective institutionalization of land administration ensures equity in land management and promotes accountability and transparency, which ultimately benefits social stability and the well-being of peri-urban residents.

The changing nature of peri-urban land usage is another important obstacle. Rapid changes from primarily rural to varied and frequently informal usage are characteristics of these places. Land markets are fiercely competitive and sometimes uncontrolled as a result of population growth, migration, and increased demand for housing and infrastructure (Adam and Birhanu, 2017). As communities and individuals attempt to obtain property through informal ways, ambiguities in

tenure arrangements intensify these pressures and promote uncivilized transactions. In the community, informal settlements could have social value. Land management programs need to be improved to offer more tenure security and service accessibility in order to address this. To guarantee fair access, these problems must be resolved by effective land governance (Tesfaunegn, 2017).

2.2.3. The Role of Urban Land Use Planning in Managing Peri-Urban Land Conflicts

Due to competition for land, inadequate tenure security, and inconsistent laws, urban land use planning in peri-urban areas frequently results in fierce disputes between nearby farming communities and growing cities. Rapid urban sprawl turns farmland into built-up regions, leading to serious land-use disputes. Inconsistent land management frameworks, dispersed developmental strategies, and the pressing need for coordinated planning are some of the major problems. Due to inadequate institutional frameworks, peri-urban land use planning frequently results in tenure instability, fragmented development, and disputes. It plays a crucial, frequently contentious role in rapid urban expansion. Building a bridge between formal legislative and customary systems is necessary for effective planning. Significant land-use issues arise from poorly designed land usage.

Therefore, by balancing conflicting interests, ensuring secure tenure, and directing sustainable development, land use planning serves as an essential, proactive instrument for controlling peri-urban conflicts. In order to lessen political meddling in land distribution, effective planning unifies disparate urban-rural programs, promotes democratic decision-making, and reduces disputes over property expropriation and rapid expansion.

2.3. Peri-Urban in Ethiopia

2.3.1. Historical Context of Land Tenure Systems

Following the 1974 revolution, Ethiopia's land tenancy system changed from a feudal system under the imperial state to communal possession. Although problems with land management and tenure security continue, these actions were intended to resolve land-related inequalities (Wabelo, 2020). This section examines the development of land tenure in Ethiopia over three time periods: pre-1974, the Derg era (1974–1990), and the post-1991 period.

Pre-1974 land tenure system

Three different regimes in Ethiopia have dissimilar tenancy systems (Adam, 2014). The imperial era was noticeable by a feudal land tenancy system that varied private, government, church, and communal landholdings based on tribute, individual services, and familial relationships. Tenant-landlord subtleties subjugated land tenure relations (Adenew and Gebreslasie, 2003).

The "rist" and "gult" were the two main land tenure systems that the monarchy and the Orthodox Church could use to retain their authority through taxes and tributes collected from farmers and tenants (Wabelo, 2020). The land tenure system was based on feudalism. Rist conferred hereditary usufruct rights to descendants of a common ancestor, barring land from being sold outside the family line (Adenew and Gebreslasie, 2003). In contrast, the monarch granted regional rulers the non-transferable authority to tax property in exchange for services like military service (Jemma, 2004; Gebru, 2011).

Nearly 60% of peasants, or 65% of the nation's population, were covered by private tenure as the imperial system came to an end. It often came about as a consequence of crown land distributions to military administrators and loyalists. The king retained ultimate ownership of the land, even though individuals might sell their rights.

The Gult system entrenched inequality, a small elite (around 5% of the population) benefitted, while the majority particularly indigenous groups suffered insecure tenure, evictions, and exploitative rents (Wabelo, 2020; Kebede, 2002) led into insecure tenure rights, and arbitrary evictions (Adam, 2014). Land speculation by landlords exacerbated insecurity and inequality (Gebru, 2011). These injustices fueled land-related tensions and contributed to the regime's downfall (Adenew and Gebreslasie, 2003). The ultimate outcome was simplification of the rights of the tenure where government allocates freehold land right. However, the peri-urban zone transformation was with serious planning and urban development consequences. The effect on urban development in major cities in Ethiopia last even these days.

During the socialist regime (1974 – 1990)

Following the 1974 revolution, both rural and urban lands were nationalized under Proclamation 31/1975 and Proclamation 47/1975, abolishing private ownership (Bacry et al, 2009). Land was allocated to those willing to cultivate it, tenant-landlord relations were abolished, and usufruct rights were introduced. Land sales, mortgages, and transfers of land were prohibited.

Urban land was managed under a socialist framework with nominal payments and rents that did not reflect market values. This led to inefficient land use and growing competition between public agencies, individuals, and businessmen for land (Yusuf et al, 2009, Policy Studies Institute [PSI], 2017). The regime's rural-biased development perspective limited land supply for urban growth, despite rapid population expansion (PSI, 2023).

Consequently, peri-urban zones began to transition informally into urban uses; in Addis Ababa alone, about 60,000 housing units were built on illegally acquired land, reportedly with involvement of ruling party officials.

Post-1991 period

The 1991 regime change maintained the public ownership of land. Article 40(3) of the 1995 constitution provides that land is a common property of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia and shall not be subject to sale or to other means of exchange (FDRE, 1995). The Federal Rural Land Administration and Use Proclamation No. 89/1997 (amended by Proclamation 456/2005) enabled regional states to enact rural land administration laws, abolishing forced land redistributions and clarifying rural land use rights. Farmers retain indefinite usufruct rights, including succession and limited rental rights (Ambaye, 2015). However, land can be reacquired for public development, creating insecurity in peri-urban areas. Unauthorized land use changes also threaten farmers' rights (Alemu, 2014).

Urban land has been governed since the early 1990s by leasehold tenure (Proclamation 80/1993). Here, the government sole owners of urban land leases use rights to private individuals. The tenure allows land use right transactions between the government and individuals. Under the urban lease tenure, the transaction of land use-right is between the government as sole owner of urban land, representing the public interest on land, and private. The tenure, at least in theory, encourages investment of private capital on property and it generates revenue for public infrastructure investment spending services (Yusuf et al, 2009). Involvement of private capital investment on land use right is the second key element that guides the formal transition of the peri-urban zone into urban and is one source of the conflict. One objective of the lease tenure is abolishing speculation in land transactions by embracing market principles in the management of publicly owned land. Illegal land holding would mean therefore discouraging private capital investment on land. Illegal land holding is against public interest, as well. Accordingly, both government and the public should, in theory, deter illegal holding of land within the peri-urban zone.

In Ethiopia, the system with state ownership of land has been heavily disputed over time. The government has stated that privatization of land would lead to massive eviction of the rural farming population, since they would be forced to sell their land to private investors. On the contrary, public ownership is criticized for the lack of tenure security for the landholders, which affects the incentive to make investments in the land and thereby increase the productivity of the land. The system also deprives farmers the right of collateralization of their holding right, thus access to credit and mortgages for farmers does not exist.

In Ethiopia regime changes caused fundamental land tenure changes. Each succeeding regime uprooted past legacies. The ‘land to the tiller’ slogan of the 1974 ended the landlord tenant relationships. The post 1995 replaced the freehold tenure with public leasehold for urban land while the peri-urban is a transition zone from freehold possession to leasehold. Consequently, the contemporary peri-urban land conflict in Ethiopia can be explored within the post 1991 land tenure, land governance, and land administration setup.

2.3.2. Urbanization and Peri-Urban Land Conflict

Rapid urban expansion increasingly encroaches on peri-urban areas in Ethiopia, which is blurred the rural versus urban dichotomy of geographic space, functional areas, socioeconomic states, and life style. A complex interplay of actors with diverse values, goals, and policies operates in this blurred zone.

Ineffective land management techniques and unstable land tenure regulation systems are the results of this hazy zone. Conflicts and uncertainty are more likely in peri-urban areas due to the existence of many organizations, cultures, and values. It goes without saying that defining exact rules for the physical and administrative boundaries of suitable urban and peri-urban areas is a difficult undertaking. The changing environment of the peri-urban zone is confusing. Rapid urbanization and demographic shifts increase competition for peri-urban land, frequently depriving residents of their agricultural land. Repayment, which is normally ten to fifteen years of produce value, is frequently criticized as insufficient for maintaining evicted farmers' livelihoods or helping them transition into urban occupations, despite the pressure on displaced households to switch from agricultural to non-farm livelihoods (Mezgebo, 2014).

Peri-urban land in Ethiopia is a sphere of unauthorized land transactions, informal settlements, and frequent disputes over access and land value. In cities such as Addis Ababa, Hawassa, Bahir Dar, and Assosa, hundreds of thousands of informal houses have caused recurring conflicts between authorities and residents (Tesfaunegn, 2017). Illegal land

occupations have also reported in Adama, Dire Dawa, Gondar, sometimes leading to violent clashes with municipal officials. Informal market participants face tenure insecurity, as they are ineligible for compensation upon eviction (PSI, 2023).

Landholders in peri-urban territories are subject to expropriation and inadequate compensation practices, which often ignore income-generating alternatives and limit provision to shelter plots (PSI, 2017). The absence of mechanisms to convert peri-urban farmland rights into urban rights during the process of urbanization exacerbates insecurity, poverty, and social burdens on city administrations (Tesfaunegn, 2017). The process of urban expansion and large-scale private developments in peri-urban areas through expropriation does not entail enough participation and negotiation between the affected local peri-urban landholders and private developers nor have inclusive planning for this process.

Urban population growth and market development in Ethiopia have created increasing competition for peri-urban land by people of diverse backgrounds. As a result land rights in the peri-urban areas are shaken and challenged by distinct sparking power which resulted in instability and insecurity of land tenure. As a city boundary expands into the adjacent peri-urban areas, expropriation decision that discontinues the usufruct right of local peri-urban communities follows and then a new urban leasehold system will be introduced with better and thicker rights to practice. Thus, the local peri-urban land holders' ability to use their land for agricultural, residential or other uses depends more on the rate of urban population and spatial expansion and the resulting demand for urban purposes than the local peri-urban communities' ability and interest to keep and use their land. This evidenced the fact that local peri-urban farmers are holding their land temporarily as a result they are experiencing drastic reduction in the amount of land at their disposal (Adam, 2014).

2.3.3. Actors in the Peri-urban Land Transformation and Conflict

Although the state has monopoly power over land in Ethiopia, the transformation process of urban fringe zone into urban use involves both government, in theory representing public interest, and informal actors. The diverse informal actors emanate from flaws in the land use policy (lack of appropriate land use policy and adequately enforced regulations, lack of definition of peri-urban and its geographic limits), land governance (lack of community involvement and failure of institutional capacity), land administration (lack of up to date spatial and socio-economic data and tenure insecurity due to poor titling of land use rights), and

management of the transformation of the rural production based residents into urban mode of production society (Tesfaye, 2019; Mezgebo, 2014).

The diverse actors with multiple competing interests often lead to conflicts over the peri-urban land (Tesfaye, 2019). Studies identify many common actor in the peri-urban land transformation are briefly discussed here below.

Private or State-Owned Industrial Companies and Real Estate Developers

The actors in this category demand land for commercial use and industrial development. They often receive support from both central and regional governments presuming as priority development and modernization drivers. Because of the national development policy emphasis on shifting from agriculture to industry, large land tracts from peri-urban areas of different regions have been given to potential industrialists and developers. It is encouraged to supply land for this group of actors with the expectation of benefits from the business sector such as creating job opportunities for youth and increasing public revenue. The land consumption by this group of actors is extensive contributing to the expansion of urban boundaries and the conversion of peri-urban land use.

The role and behavior of this group are compatible with the official channel of land transactions and development (Salfarina, et al., 2014). Thus, the sphere of interaction between this group of actors and the government is very wide. The urban development and expansion strategy favors the actors in this category. For instance, the urban land lease system provides them with better bundles of land rights than those held by local peri-urban landholders (Mezgebo, 2014).

In the process of transformation of the rural land and mode of production in the urban fringe zone, this group triggers conflict between the government on one side and peri-urban peasants and other potential demanders for urban land on the other end. First, the government favor of this group causes mass eviction of the usufruct peasant right without appropriate transformation of their mode of production to sustain their living. In other words, the trickledown effect of the return from the industrial and real estate development is far below the usufruct right return. Second, the so called industrialist and real estate developers are motivated by the lucrative speculation over the land rent gap generates. The potential land revenue forgone overrides potential investment spending on infrastructure, which is a public interest. This contravenes the supposedly public interest safeguard role of government from urban side.

Land Brokers and Dealers

Being intermediaries in land transactions, property dealers play probably the major role in the transformation of the urban fringe zone into urban (Hamore, 2019). They exploit loopholes in existing regulations to facilitate informal land sales. They have strong connections with local communities and play a significant role in converting farmland into built up property. Property dealers are well equipped with information about the loopholes in existing regulations. Although secondary market and private market is prohibited by the law, land transactions through illegal sales are common in the peri-urban through fake allocation and donation, and inauthentic certification of titles.

Their connection to the local community, the local land administration structure, and the demand side make them most beneficiaries of peri-urban land development and land transactions (Bayuma and Abebe, 2023). Their connection to the supply side, demand side, government structures, and local community offered them with monopoly of detailed local information regarding land transaction and the behaviors of other actors such as the personal characteristics of landholders/owners who want to sell their land, locations, price, and legal issues to bypass or override with ease.

The conflicts associated with the brokers and land dealers are operation of secondary market while prohibited by law, determination of local land prices, and evading the land rent gap created by operation of multiple land rights on one side and population pressure and economic growth on the other side. Land rent gap, in theory, is public claim.

Farmland holding peasants

Residents of peri-urban areas are agrarian communities. These communities have usufruct right for an unlimited period as a means of obtaining a livelihood. Although these smallholder farmers have a longstanding attachment to their land and a strong interest in keeping it for its existing use of farming, the land is also in high demand by government and private-sector actors for urban development. Consequently, the usufruct land right of farmers within the peri-urban is subject for termination due to government expropriation anytime, for public purpose leading to tenure insecurity and the informal sale of land (Melanie, 2015).

The conflicts associated to the formal process of urbanizing the peri-urban zone include, transformation of the rural production mode peasants to urban mode production requiring transition of skills and knowledge with lower likelihood of success rate, interpretation of the context of compensation within the constitutional provision regarding the time unbounded

income generation and use right and inheritance. On the flip side, peasants have no right of changing land use and transacting their usufruct right in any mode except inheritance to close relatives but actually peasants subdivide their farm holdings and sell.

Residential landless residents

This category includes landless individuals from local communities and outside settlers seeking land for residential purposes. They face challenges in acquiring land through formal channels and often resort to informal transactions, contributing to the expansion of informal settlements (Hailu, 2016). The nature of the land tenure system and the inefficiency of the formal and legal land acquisition and delivery system make it difficult to obtain land. The process of bidding for a land lease is highly competitive and unaffordable to this group of actors.

The second category of landless residents is next generations of peri-urban rural communities. This second generation of the peri-urban farm communities is inheritance right on their families' farm and right for residential land as per the rural regime. Thus, local landless young people prefer to buy plots of land informally/illegally at low prices, compared to the official auction market, from the local peri-urban communities (Hailu, 2016).

The conflicts associated to the actions of the land less include, violation of constitutional provision regarding secondary land market and termination of inheritance rights. In summary, the conflicts of peri-urban land conversion involve multiple actors with diverse interests. The substance of the conflicts may include, informal actors overriding government authority over land administration and management, overriding public interest such as claims on land rent gap by private actors, inappropriate compensatory mechanisms of lifetime income generation and inheritance rights of peasants upon conversion of the peri-urban area into urban use. At the other extreme end, there exists a theoretical argument that the involvement of citizens in informal land acquisitions and occupations is an extra-legal action to secure their constitutional right of accessing shelter, which requires a serious attention.

However, existing studies are too shallow to address the constitutional and theoretical grounds of the land conflicts in Ethiopia. Existing studies often describe the practice, the scale, and the processes informal settlement development without giving due consideration to the legal and theoretical grounds rationally.

2.3.4. The Peri-Urban Land Transformation in Land Governance Legal Framework

The overall mandate to enact laws for the utilization and management of land and other natural resources in Ethiopia is given to the federal government while the responsibility to administer

land and other natural resources is given to regional states within their jurisdictions (FDRE, 1995).

The 1995 constitution

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution has established a non-flexible land policy in the country. The constitution has paved the way for developments of land administration legal frameworks at federal and regional levels.

Article 40(3) of the constitution provides that land is a common property of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia and shall not be subject to sale or to other means of exchange. Individuals shall have use right under varying modalities of access for urban and rural lands. As per Article 51(1) providing federal government's exclusive right for issuance of laws regarding the utilization and conservation of land and other natural resources, Article 40(4 and 5) provides peasants and pastoralist are entitled to obtain land without payment and are protected against eviction from their possession. Acquisition of land by investors is provided in Article 40(6). This provision governs both conventional entrepreneurial investment in agricultural, industry, and real estate and private investment on housing property. The land demand for shelter housing by urban residents is addressed in Article 91. Furthermore, the Civil Code and the Lease Law govern land right transfer.

However, some authors argue that Article 40(6) correlates urban dwellers, whose primary motive for land is residential housing, with investors whose motive for land is for business (Wabelo, 2020). This argument suggests that the constitution does not provide the means by which urban dwellers could obtain land for residential housing, which in practice should share larger portion of total urban land. In fact, the resources availability conditioned responsibility of government regarding provision of shelter to the citizenry makes this argument more sounding. If this argument is valid, it would follow that illegal land transactions emanate from the gap in the constitution regarding residential land or shelter supply.

The rural land administration and use law (Proc. 456/2005)

As per the provision of Article 51(5) of the FDRE constitution, the federal government enacted rural land administration and use law (Proc. 89/1997 amended by Proc. 456/2005) that elaborates the rights and responsibilities of rural land users and the government. The elaboration of the land rights include, determination of terms of farm land leasing, inheritance rights to be exercised, and irrigable land redistribution among existing community where irrigation structures might be constructed. Objective wise, as stipulated in its preamble, the rural land

administration and use law was issued for the purpose of ensuring tenure security, strengthening property rights of farmers, sustainably conservation and use of natural resources, strengthening land administration through establishing land database. The law echoes the constitution regarding payment of compensation to displaced/evicted land holders.

Without prejudice to the rural land administration and use law, Proc. 455/2005 (amended by 1161/2019) was enacted to operationalize expropriation of land use right (and landed private property) up on compensation for public purpose. Regions issue their own laws that detail the national law and customize to local context for implementation ease and clarity to ensure fairness but should be consistent to the context of the national laws. In cases conflicts exist, the Federal Constitution supersedes (Alemu, 2015; Daniel, 2020).

Resettlement and rehabilitation are recognized civic rights in the Ethiopian constitution provided in Article 44 (Alemu, 2015). The power of expropriation vests in the hands of rural districts or urban administrations (Hailu, 2016). The interpretation of public purpose provided in the constitution remains vague in the rural land administration and use, the expropriation and compensation, and the urban land lease laws. Very often it is narrated as public utilities and social services or private developments that invest better capital. Studies however suggest clarification to what “commensurate” means defined in the constitution (Alemu, 2014).

The land right expropriation law (Proc. 455/2005 and its amendment Proc. 1161/2019) is a key in the land governance framework of Ethiopia. This so because it this law that mainly governs the transformation of rural land, mode of production, lifestyle, social fabric, etc. of peri-urban zones into urban use of land, mode of production, lifestyle, societal make up. Accordingly, a key substantive interpretation of constitutional provisions of expropriation, compensation, and resettlement within the land expropriation and compensation is imperative in framing the peri-urban land conflict. The central concern is that, regardless of the tremendous improvements Proc. 1161/2019 introduced (Wabelo, 2020), the law does not address the constitutional spirit provided in sub articles 4 and 5 of Article 40 in terms of securing rights of peasants. One cannot provide legal ground to justify the 10 year or 15 years product value displacement calculation.

Non-participatory land governance is at least partially responsible for the unjustified compensation framework. Even though Ethiopia's 1960 civil code established mandatory legal procedures to ensure a transparent and participatory process of expropriation and compensation,

the government is still the only entity that determines the compensation framework, which may indicate that the procedure has an impact on the substantive context.

Regions are responsible for enacting laws related to management and administration of land and natural resources reflecting the context of the federal laws. The land governance legal framework of Tigray Regional State constitutes, the Regional Constitution, which outlines the principles and governance framework; the Rural Land Administration and Use Proclamation No 239/2014 and Revised Rural Land Administration and Use Regulation No 85/2014 (amended by 4/2016), which defines the legal basis for rural land administration and utilization; Tabia Rural Land Adjudication/Judicial Committee Proclamation No 240/2014 that establishes grassroots-level institutions such as Tabia Rural Land Adjudication Committees, which play a role in adjudicating land disputes and overseeing local land management practices (Wabelo, 2020).

In principle, regional provision shall not contravene the national provisions. This indicates that the problems of land governance legal environment of the national laws are also problems in the regional laws, though certain variations may exist.

2.4. Empirical Literature

Per-urban land conflicts are prevalent in both developing and developed nations, especially those with weak land administration systems, complex land tenure systems involving the coexistence of multiple tenures, and ineffective formal land supply for urban development, such as Ethiopia. The specifics of the dispute's context, the actors involved in the peri-urban land use transformation along with their respective roles, and the dispute resolution mechanisms vary widely between nations.

2.4.1. Empirical Literature in Developed Countries

Land in peri-urban disputes are increasing in Cambodia due to a number of factors, including rising land values, inefficient law enforcement, a lack of legal understanding in the community, and ambiguous authority roles (Lavinia, 2010). Legal framework changes brought about by economic liberalization in Mexico resulted in conflicting claims and disagreements over peri-urban land governance practices. In particular, disagreements between ejidatarios, original purchasers, and present residents are reflected in conflicts in Santa Lucia, which are made more difficult by overlapping legal and governance frameworks (Melanie, 2015). The importance of legal and administrative impediments throughout Latin America and the Caribbean is highlighted by Raquel and Luisa (2017), who assert that disputes in peri-urban areas are caused by several claimants for the same parcel of property and conflicting land rights. This includes

conflicts between private owners and tenants, which are made worse by large-scale development projects that don't have adequate resettlement plans. Conflicting interests over land usage, ambiguous ownership, and boundary disputes within and between communities are the main causes of disputes in Zanzibar's peri-urban areas (Muhula, 2011).

International literature indicates the peri-urban land conflicts affect urban development in various ways. Gehrman (2017) asserted that loss of property for one several conflict parties eventually creating homeless, poverty, famine; loss of homeland, physical injury or death; high costs for attempts at conflict resolution, delayed land development, reduces investment, reduces confidence in the state, social and political instability. Peri-urban conflict in Latin America disrupt income generating activities, social relation and networking, psychological trauma related to threat of being evicted, arising from discriminatory inheritance laws and practices, and development projects (Lasisi, et al., 2017).

2.4.2. Empirical Literature in Developing Countries

According to Magasi (2013), peri-urban land conflicts in developing nations are caused by elements including economic distress, injustice, ethnic prejudice, poverty, corruption, and poor governance, all of which have a detrimental impact on housing availability. Peri-urban land use conflicts arise in developing nations as a result of growing infrastructure projects and urban development, which create rivalry among stakeholders for divergent interests.

With certain differences in viewpoint related to public land ownership, the local literature reflects the global practice. Unauthorized property transfers, disputes over access, and substandard peri-urban Ethiopia were documented by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (2017). Due to urban sprawl, administrators and illegal home builders clash in major cities including Addis Ababa, Hawassa, Bahir Dar, and Assosa. Growing land values draw a variety of players, escalating conflicts. Expropriation and unstable tenure for peasants are consequences of urban growth. Informal land sales are caused by the government's forced conversion of usufruct rights to leasehold systems, as well as insufficient compensation and revenue-generating initiatives.

In Shire Indaselassie city, North Western Tigray, Gidey et al. (2023) examined the spatiotemporal trends of urban and peri-urban growth and its effects on arable land. Reportedly, urban and peri-urban lands increased by 7.5 km² (22.1%) and 1.0 km² (2.9%) while arable land decreased by 0.1 km² (0.2%) during 1976 – 2019. Mehari (2011) investigated the effects of

built-up development on farm communities in Mekelle's peri-urban districts, highlighting legal concerns with agricultural expropriation and compensation. According to the author, the Ethiopian national constitution (specifically Article 40(4 and 8)) requires fair compensation for farmland that has been taken away, but due to inadequate administration and budgetary limitations, this has resulted in displacement without adequate compensation. In addition, demographic changes, and rising land prices exacerbate the conflict.

Melak and Gela (2012) looked into how land certificates affected property disputes in Northern Gonder, Ethiopia. They found that improper parcel registration, squatting, illegal land transfers, institutional interests, and inheritance disputes were all sources of conflict. Unmarked boundaries, speculative purchases, various land authority, community land grabs, and bad governance are important conflict characteristics that call for more action. Due in part to improved plot boundary demarcation and the renewal of witnesses to plot border locations, land registration and certification are likely to have decreased the number of border disputes. District courts, families, kebele shengo, and local leaders all participated in conflict settlement.

Muhabaw and Gashu (2019) analyzed peri-urban informal land market and tenure security status and its implications in peri-urban land use planning around Gondar city of Ethiopia, showing that a plot acquisition from peri-urban areas passes through its own stages, which mainly start to identify a plot for sale, and ends with the confirmation of letter of agreement signed by transacting parties without legal ground to do so. The main actors in the peri-urban informal land market constitute, land brokers, local peri-urban landholders, social and religious relations, traditional social institutions (Idir, equb etc.) through processing peri-urban informal settlements.

Agegehu et al. (2021) find higher incidents of land tenure disputes in peri-urban and rural kebelles of Debre Markos town of Ethiopia. Disputes included boundary trespassing, landholding, land rent disagreements, divorce-related land disputes, bequeath disputes, parcel exchanges, and land use conflicts. Shafi (2021) assessed the impact of spatial expansion of Ethiopia's Harar City on peri-urban agricultural farming communities, indicating higher natural population growth, rural to urban migration, and spatial urban development as major factors contributing for rapid urban expansion of the city. Urban expansion program around the city was not participatory, people were not given awareness, and the dislocated households did not have opportunity to bargain in the determination of the amount and kind of compensation and

calculating the value of assets. The compensation package provided failed to capacitate the dislocated farming community around the city, entailing the need for urban expansion, displacement and compensation program to involve the community adequately and the need for compensation both in kind and amount.

According to a recent study done in the cities of Injibara, Burie, and Gish Abay, farmers who were evicted saw a significant drop in their annual income of 9202.36 (26.73%) Ethiopian Birr compared to those who were not. Additionally, it verified that if non-evicted farmers had opted to be evicted, their revenue would have dropped by 4666.78 Birr. Kinfu et al. (2018) examined the origins of peri-urbanization in Hawassa, Ethiopia, emphasizing the factors of urbanization and policy that propelled the phenomenon. Different dispute resolution processes are reported by empirical investigations, depending on the type of tenure system. Gehrman (2017) describes alternative dispute resolution techniques used in Ghana, including informal arbitration by reputable individuals, state-sponsored alternative dispute resolution to promote out-of-court settlements, a special committee at the land administration, informal land conflict settlement by land management specialists, informal land conflict settlement by state officials, including elected officials and religious courts, and settlement by professional mediators and arbitrators at a private mediation center based on international standards.

Burundi addresses two formal systems for conflict resolution of land disputes – customary system of Bashingantabe and the formal judicial system. Bashingantabe relies on convention and customary regulation while the later bases itself on the legislation of the state. In addition to these actors of conflict resolutions Burundians' approach representatives of local authorities, or structure established by NGO or churches, to amicably arrive at the resolution of their disputes, or to acquire consultation on how to proceed in the informal system (Melak and Gela, 2005).

Ethiopia also has both statutory and informal approaches for resolving disputes involving peri-urban land. Local organizations in Mekelle mediate disputes (Mehari, 2011). Formal judicial proceedings as well as informal alternative conflict resolution techniques like negotiation, mediation, and arbitration of which mediation was especially important were used at Debre Markos. According to Muhabaw and Gashu (2019), traditional social institutions (Idir, equb, etc.) in Gondar resolve land-related disputes outside of the official system by, for example, imposing social sanctions. However, Ethiopia's alternative conflict settlement system requires careful consideration. The battle over land during the transition from peri-urban to urban areas

partly deals with the public interest, governmental control over land on one side, and citizens' extralegal rights to shelter on the other.

2.5. Theoretical Framework of the Research

Conventional theories that offer a basis for comprehending the study problem make up a theoretical framework. To put it another way, it provides a foundation for conducting research, explains why the research problem exists, and places the investigation within the context of current knowledge. In essence, it shows how the researcher frames the study by applying and modifying a theory, which helps to define its emphasis and guarantees that the research is based in a distinct and cohesive academic setting. In quantitative research, theoretical frameworks are commonly employed to guarantee that the investigation is based on accepted scientific principles. It was built in this study by defining and identifying the main ideas and theories that underpin the investigation. The researcher then explains how these components relate to the particular study by establishing logical connections between them. It essentially shows how a researcher incorporates and uses a theory into their research, providing direction and clarity to the design and interpretation of the study.

Hence, in this research, the researcher was studying peri-urban land conflicts and its practices. Theory of uneven development and displacements was used to analyze practices of displacement and development in motivating conflicts in peri-urban area. Using a theoretical framework, the study could explore how farmers were displaced and informal settlements were emerged. In this case, uneven development and displacement theory would serve as the theoretical framework through which the researcher interprets the relationship between farmers and vulnerability in the workplace.

Then, the review in above sections 2.3 through 2.5 can be aggregated into structured conceptual frameworks so as to guide the current research. The peri-urban land conflict can be investigated through the lens of Uneven Development and Displacements, Political Economy Approaches to Land Market, Institutional Approach for land conflict resolution, and Constructive Conflict Resolution theory for land conflict resolution. The former two address the context of the land conflict while the latter two addresses conceptual ground upon which to resolve the conflict.

2.5.1. Theory of Uneven Development and Displacements

The theory of uneven development explains how economic development and globalization drive urban expansion, leading to uneven benefits and displacing vulnerable communities. Uneven development refers to a situation where market forces combined with policies displace the poor, exacerbating conflict.

This theory highlights the role of globalization in local and national conflicts, with roots traceable to the work of Harvey (2006) from the early 1970s as his discussions apply to Chinese economy where land conflicts emerged due to foreign investors' demand for land. The Chinese command economy shifted from planned to market following subsequent stagnation and political uncertainty. The shift was in hope of fostering growth and reduces uncertainty. The introduction of market pricing led to a rapid devolution of political-economic power to regions and localities. However, this move was expected to result in certain tolerable inequalities. The Chinese, nevertheless, discovered that market forces unaccompanied should not transmute the economy without simultaneous changes in class relationships, secluded property, and other official arrangements emblematic of an operational entrepreneurial economy.

The state's oversight role was diminished by the tense and long procedure. During the evolution, community leaders expelled numerous individuals of their land, a situation referred to as uneven development, when acquisition occurs through eviction. Due to the process's lack of sufficient institutional reforms, party leaders and the general public were uncertain, which resulted in widespread unemployment in the early stages. An informal land and property market formed in the urban periphery, described as original accrual. Here, commune leaders asserted de facto possessions rights to public land and properties in discussions with foreign investors, which were later certified as belonging to them independently (Harvey, 2006).

Peri-urban areas in Mekelle are under increasing pressure as a result of increased land claims, frequently at the expense of indigenous farmers and societies, as the city expands and draws investments. Mekelle deals with the effects of globalization, market forces and dislocation, and social and economic inequalities. Mekelle is under a lot of pressure from market dynamics since urbanization and economic growth are driving demand for peri-urban land. This often results in the forced relocation of locals who rely on this property for their livelihoods.

The migration of small towns as a result of land purchases by more powerful entities is one of the effects that uneven development theory emphasizes. Mekele City's increasing urbanization and land demand may worsen already-existing inequities in underprivileged regions. Mekelle has to deal with social and economic injustices, unemployment, displacement, and the rise of unofficial marketplaces. Informal land and property markets may become even more troublesome if formal markets and institutions are unable to meet the requirements of displaced people. If appropriate measures are not taken, land disputes have the potential to worsen already-existing injustices, as well as to foment social unrest and economic inequality.

2.5.2. Political Economy Approach

By avoiding traditional neoclassical monetary models and concentrating on the political economy in which land production occurs, political economy approaches study land markets from an actor-centered perspective. According to neoclassical views, the possibility of producing inexpensive housing is increased by effective land-market operations. These methods are predicated on the idea that land markets are competitive land distribution systems where pricing and land usage patterns are determined by user rivalry. Land should be distributed through market operations based on cost and financial capability (Melanie, 2012).

This straightforward perspective is opposed by political economics theories, which support addressing justice through progressive redistribution and more government engagement. Political economy approaches look at historical dynamics as well as the political, economic, and ideological facets of land and property markets. This entails considering not only microeconomic shifts, land prices, and real estate markets, but also the ways in which certain individuals impact market circumstances. Elements including corporate sector choices, government processes, and local political influences are also evaluated (Melanie, 2012).

As a result, the political economy emphasizes the necessity of policies that specifically address land distribution disparities. Mekelle policies that prioritize inclusive development and fair land distribution could lessen conflict and guarantee that the advantages of urban expansion are distributed more widely. By looking at historical processes and structural elements, officials can effectively comprehend the underlying causes of land conflicts and create solutions that solve these problems. Resolving inequities, doing operational and historical background studies, and obtaining a thorough grasp of the dynamics of the land market are all frequently aided by political economy methodologies.

2.5.3. Institutional approach

According to the institutional approach, regularization and titling of land need the creation of procedures to resolve disputes over land rights. Local consensus is necessary to settle conflicts. Instead of intricate and costly legal frameworks, formal laws must be incorporated into routines and behaviors. Institutional frameworks which encompass both legal boundaries and common social ties and customs determine land rights. This implies adaptable and dynamic reactions to local legal frameworks. Local institutions play a crucial role in settling conflicts over land and natural resources, which are often in competition.

The legal framework and formal and informal organizations involved in dispute resolution at the macro (laws and regulations), local (norms), and individual group (organizing practices) levels are what Melanie (2012) defines as institutions. Inadequate or inaccurate institutional and legal frameworks often exacerbate land disputes. The institutional approach emphasizes the need for robust, context-specific institutions to manage land rights and conflicts. Strong institutional structures are necessary for managing land rights and resolving conflicts.

In the subject region, where formal and informal institutions interact in complicated ways, their impact on settling peri-urban land conflicts has not yet been investigated. To effectively implement them in land governance, this entails modifying local circumstances and legal systems. Mekelle can obtain clarity on land ownership and use by fortifying both formal and informal institutions, which will lessen the possibility of disputes. Incorporating indigenous norms and traditions within the institutional and legal framework may help resolve conflicts. The institutional approach promotes flexibility and adaptation in institutional responses to local reality, ensuring that policies are sensitive to the many dynamics and requirements of peri-urban populations.

In general, the creation of indigenous agreements, institutional involvement, and flexible and self-driven solutions are crucial. Strong institutional and legal frameworks, as well as local cooperation and adaptability, are also necessary. When using this theory, keep in mind that it frequently puts market transaction efficiency ahead of power dynamics, equity, and distribution. In order to address resource access in an economy, structural theory requires an understanding of power dynamics.

2.5.4. Constructive Conflict Resolution Theory

Cooperative approaches to conflict resolution with an emphasis on long-term results and mutual gain are highlighted by constructive conflict resolution theory. The nature of the dispute and each party's objectives are important considerations when deciding how to resolve disputes. The "fighting" or competitive method of resolving conflicts promotes personal aggression while eroding empathy for others. This strategy, which is typically viewed as harmful, entails utilizing force, threats, or dishonesty, escalating hostility and mistrust, and creating power disparities within oneself while resolving disputes (Mbilikita, 2016).

On the other hand, cooperative conflict resolution seeks solutions that are advantageous to both sides. Because it sees disagreement as a creative chance to discover win-win solutions, this approach calls for assertiveness and empathy. Shared attitudes and beliefs, helpfulness, open communication, and an emphasis on building mutual power rather than power imbalances are all factors that promote cooperation. Cooperative methods are favored over competitive ones when resolving land use conflicts.

In research areas where there are conflicts between the needs of indigenous society, the government's development strategy, and the interests of the private sector, a collaborative approach can help resolve issues and promote consensus. Constructive conflict resolution techniques can support inclusive growth and long-term stability in peri-urban communities by encouraging communication and cooperative decision-making. The competitive mentality commonly observed in land conflicts may lead to increased tensions and mistrust. Encouraging cooperative tactics can lessen hostility and increase stakeholder trust, resulting in more inclusive and sustainable urban growth. By integrating indigenous values and practices into official and legal frameworks, conflict resolution initiatives can be reinforced and policies can be made more sensitive to the particular needs of peri-urban communities.

By using these theoretical frameworks, Mekelle stakeholders can gain a better grasp of the intricate dynamics of peri-urban land conflicts and create management and resolution strategies that are more successful. To find fair and long-lasting solutions, resolving these disputes calls for an all-encompassing strategy that incorporates aspects of political economy, institutional analysis, and constructive conflict resolution.

2.6. Research Gaps

Peri-urban vicinity issues in Ethiopia, such as land management and organizational circumstances that result in urban-edge disputes, have been defined empirically (cf. van Mathijs and Linda, 2005; Muhula, 2011; Mehari, 2011; Melak and Gela, 2012; Joe, 2013; Gehrman, 2017; Lasisi, et al., 2017; Kinfu et al., 2018; Agegnehu et al., 2021; Shafi, 2021; Gidey et al., 2023; Alamneh, et al., 2023). The compensation and resettlement of peri-urban people during the urbanization of peri-urban areas, as well as the exploration of the roles as a process, are the main focus of existing studies, with little attention paid to substantive concerns. Additionally, the majority of research blames public land ownership for unlawful property transactions and settlements without providing logical empirical support.

The study of peri-urban land conflict needs to be analyzed from structural causes in reference to the theoretical premise of the public ownership of land and interpretation of securing public purpose. Existing studies (Kinfu et al., 2018; Tesfaye, 2019; Gidey et al., 2023; Alamneh, et al., 2023) have not thoroughly address in light of structural issues. The scope of peri-urban land conflict also needs to be analyzed along the continuum of land rights. The involvement of informal actors has to be examined from constitutional provisions of land transaction and public interest. The space between public responsibility of government and social responses need to be analyzed considering social contract theory in regard to land rights in the peri-urban zone. The peri-urban land conflict has to break the government and residents of peri-urban relational boundary. The conflict involves entrepreneurs' peri-urban residents. Finally, the effect of peri-urban land conflict on urban development needs appropriate investigation. Embedding these dimensions within the designed theoretical framework discussed in the above section shall ensure the current study's comprehensiveness in scope and sounder in scientific foundation.

2.7. Conceptual Framework for Peri-urban Land Conflicts

A conceptual framework for peri-urban land conflicts illustrates that rapid, unplanned urban expansion drives disputes by bringing competing interests (urban vs. rural) into contact with weak institutions, leading to tenure insecurity. Key drivers include conflicting interests over land value, power imbalances, and overlapping legal frameworks

According to a conceptual framework for peri-urban land conflicts, tenure insecurity results from competing interests (urban vs. rural) coming into interact with weak institutions due to rapid and unplanned urban expansion. Conflicting land value interests, power disparities, and

overlapping legal systems are important motivators. Hence, accordingly, the variables and actors of peri-urban land conflicts were mapped in conceptual frame work (Figure, 2.2). Accordingly, variables and actors are explained as follows:

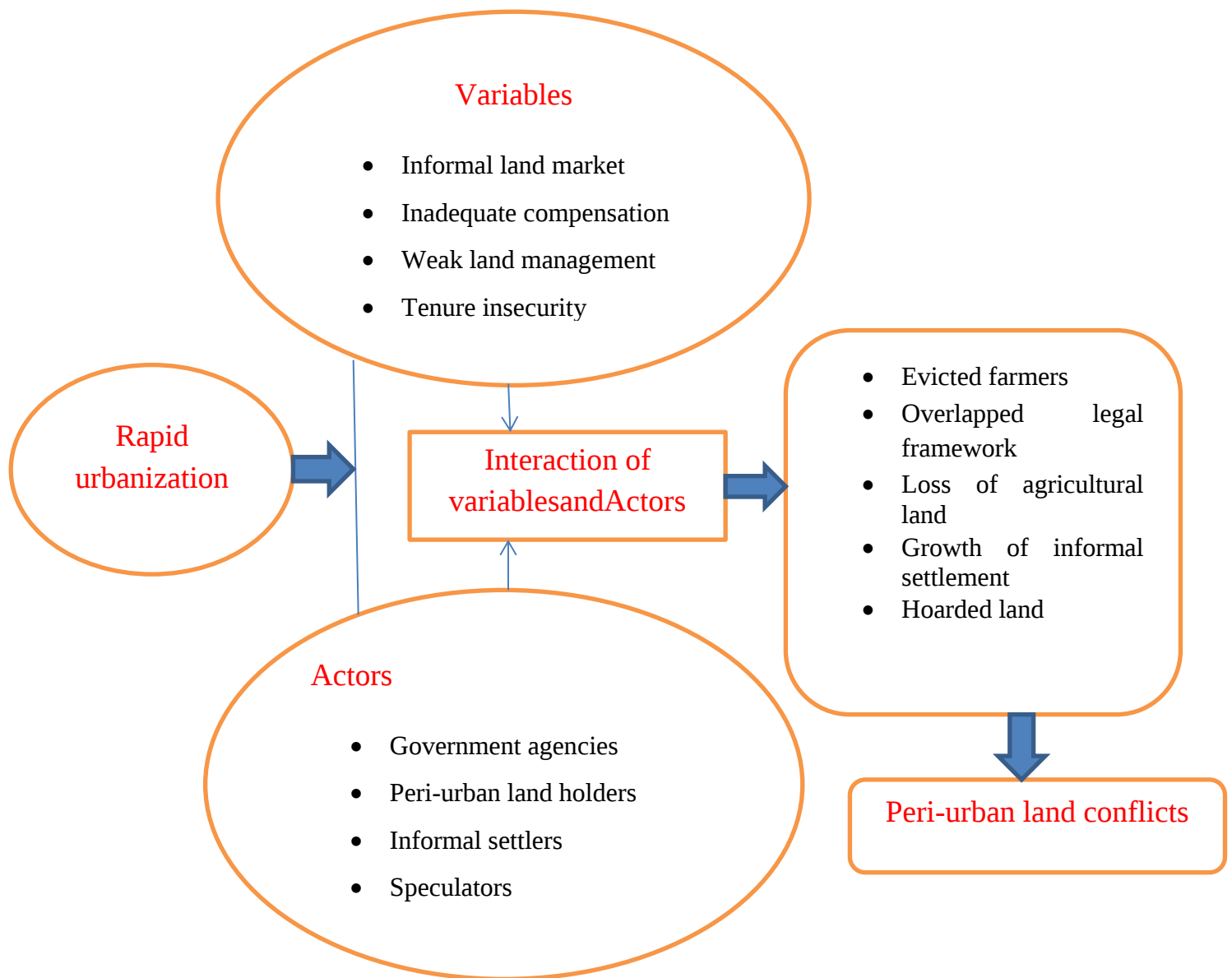
Key variables

- **Inadequate Compensation and Land Grabbing:** One of the main causes of conflict between residents and developers/government agencies is the involuntary relocation of farmers without prompt or equitable compensation.
- **Informal Land Markets and Speculation:** The proliferation of "brokers" who manipulate the land market to profit from growing land values and frequently result in multiple sales of the same plot, illicit land sales, and undocumented transactions
- **Tenure Insecurity:** Traditional owners are at risk of being evicted since they do not have official landholding credentials.
- **Weak land management:** This seriously jeopardizes the stability of ecosystems, food security, and agricultural economic bases due to inadequate land-use planning, weak institutional capacity, and unstable tenure.

Key Actors

- **Governmental Agencies :** Municipalities, urban planners, and rural management offices that frequently intend to swell city boundaries or offer infrastructure, regularly participating in property expropriation
- **Peri-Urban Landholders (Land Losers):** Indigenous farmers, rural communities, and indigenous people who often experience disruptions to their livelihoods due to land being sought after for development.

Figure 2. 2: Conceptual framework summarizing the relationship between variables and actors



Source: Developed by the Author from the review of the literature, 2025

- **Speculators:** Intermediaries who support and frequently encourage illicit and unofficial land transfers.
- **Informal settlers:** Persons who live in housing that is typically located on unoccupied, dangerous, or unlawfully inhabited land and without formal planning, legal tenure, or essential services. These settlements (slums, shanties), which are prevalent in growing urban regions, are fueled by poverty, fast urbanization, and a shortage of reasonably priced.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

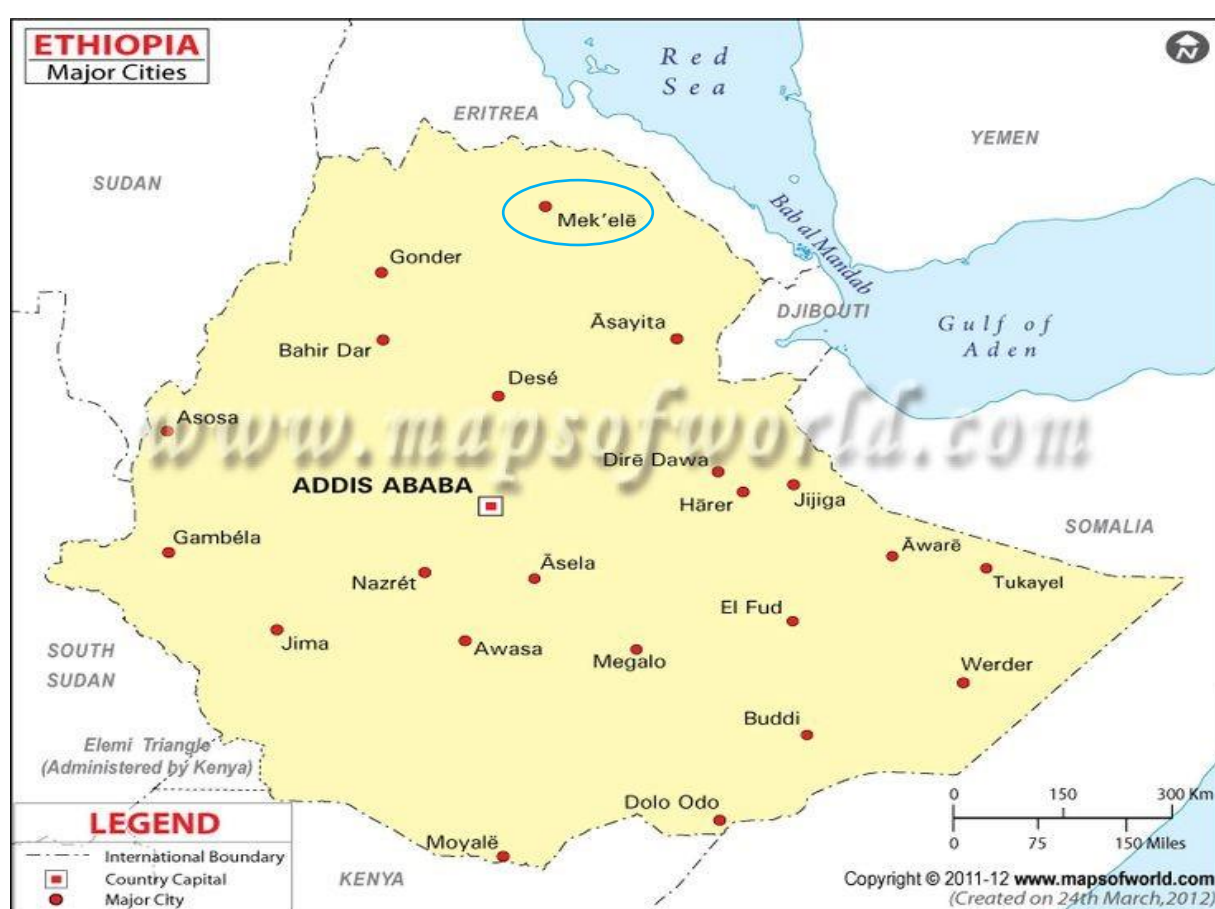
3.1. Description of the Study Area

3.1.1. Natural Conditions

Geographic Location

Mekelle is the second largest city in Ethiopia and serve as the political, economic, and socio-cultural center of the Tigray Regional State. Geographically, the city is situated between $13^{\circ} 18' 30''$ and $13^{\circ} 39' 52''$ North latitude and $39^{\circ} 22' 30''$ and $39^{\circ} 39' 33''$ East longitude. It lies approximately 783 kilometers north of Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3. 1: Location of Mekelle City in Ethiopia



Source: Google maps, 2025

Altitude

The altitude of Mekelle ranges from 2200 to 3000 meters above sea level, classifying the city within the temperate agro-climatic zone. This elevation influences the city's climate, vegetation cover, and agricultural potential, which in turn influence patterns of land use and resource competition (Mehari, 2011).

Weather and Climate

The weather in Mekelle is rather moderate, with highs of 28°C during the day and lows of 10°C at night. The city normally receives 500–700 millimeters of rainfall per year during the rainy season, which lasts from June to August, with an average of 618.3 millimeters of precipitation. Peri-urban land use and conflict dynamics are significantly impacted by agricultural methods, land productivity, and seasonal land demand, all of which are significantly influenced by these climatic circumstances (Mehari, 2011).

Topographic Features

The Mekelle region's terrain is made up of both undulating mountains and level plains. With the Giba River Gorge to the northwest and the Mesebo Plateau to the north, Mekelle is a mostly level city. The Quiha sub-city and the main city proper are separated by the Endayesus Escarpment. The Ellala and Aynalem streams flow through the city from east to west before emptying into the Giba River, a tributary of the Tekeze River. These geographical features not only shape the physical environment of Mekelle but are also essential to urban and peri-urban farming operations. Topography plays a key role in the formation and dynamics of peri-urban land conflicts because variations in elevation and land accessibility lead to unequal land usage and assessment

Demographic Characteristics

Over the past thirty years, Mekelle's population has grown rapidly. The city's population has grown rapidly from 96,000 in 1994 to an estimated 637,000 in 2025, reflecting sustained annual growth. Specifically, the metropolitan population rose from 544,000 in 2021 to 587,000 in 2023, 612,000 in 2024, and 637,000 in 2025, with an annual growth rates ranging between 3.8% and 4.3% (Macrotrends, 2025). This demographic expansion has created substantial demand for land the urban development requires, particularly for housing with a current estimated need of 130,240 units which is approximately 2,411 hectares (Table 3.1). At the national level, Ethiopian urban centers population size is estimated to be doubled after 15 years on the average

(2000 – 2030) whereas Mekelle is estimated to double in 10 years under the assumption that present situation would continue with constant trend.

Table 3.1: Population and Housing Needs

Year	Population	No. of household	Growth rate (%)	No. of house units	Household to House Unit ratio	Backlog	Future need
2019	505,000	128,974	4.26	105,999	1.22	22,975	8,550
2020	524,000	138,131	3.89	119,751	1.15	18,380	9,157
2021	544,000	147,938	3.86	134,153	1.10	13,785	9,807
2022	565,000	158,442	3.82	149,252	1.06	9,190	10,504
2023	587,000	169,691	3.76	165,096	1.03	4,595	11,249
2024	612,000	181,739	3.48	181,739	1.0	-	12,048
Total (2024)							130,240

Source: Mekelle City Planning Project Office, 2024

3.1.2. Political and Administrative Status

Administratively, Mekelle is organized as zone (county) status government further divided in seven sub-cities with district administration status (Daniel et al, 2017). The city operates under a council-mayor governance system introduced by proclamation No 65/2003. This administration structure includes a council, the mayor, a cabinet called mayor's committee, municipal manager, and the city court, with clearly demarcated municipal and state functions supervised by the mayor and manager respectively (Mehari, 2011). In the context of urban growth into peri-urban areas, this administrative framework is especially important for land management. Understanding the administrative framework is essential to comprehending the dynamics of peri-urban land issues since the city council, mayor, and other municipal authorities are important players in the negotiation and resolution of land conflicts.

Socio-economic Condition

Mekelle is an important economic hub in Tigray, with investments spanning agriculture, industry, and services. The population of the city is employed under numerous public organizations, private organizations, and the majority of the population is engaged in many small-scale private operations mostly semi-informal sectors. Regional and federal organizations oversee infrastructure services, whereas municipalities are in charge of developing physical infrastructure (Mehari, 2011).

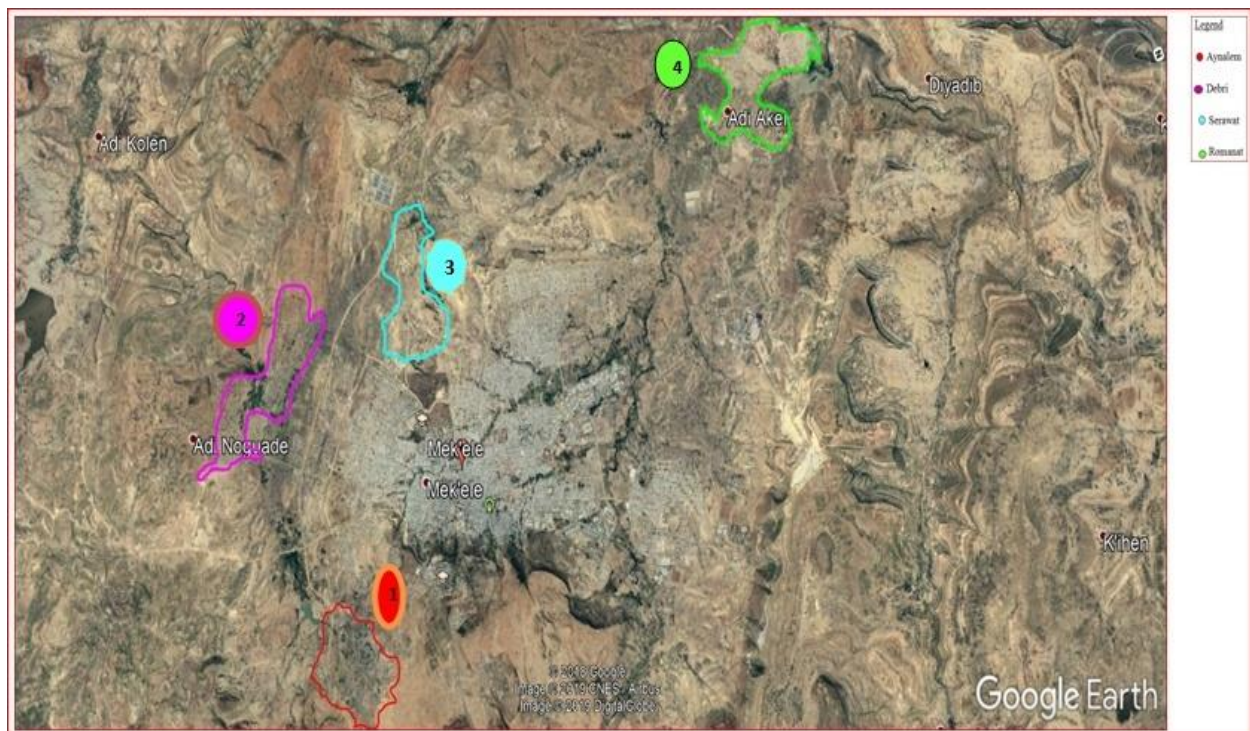
The city still has a lot of socioeconomic problems despite its economic expansion, including as high land demand, poor infrastructure, and social conflicts over land use. Conflicts over land ownership, use, and management have arisen as a result of the city's fast growth, especially in peri-urban areas where residential and agricultural interests intersect (Araya and Birhanu, 2025).

Spatial Growth and the Issue of Peri-Urban

Mekelle city has witnessed tremendous spatial expansions since its foundation as an built-up epicenter in the late 19th era among 1869 and 1873 during the reign of Emperor Yohannes IV (Daniel et al., 2017). In 1984, the city's land area was 16 km². According to existing land use data, the current planning and administrative extent of the city covers 25,995.16 hectare, of which 20.13 % (5233.03 hectare) is designated for residential purposes, with prospects of incorporating urban agriculture into the urban matrix.

The rapid population increase, coupled with limited land availability, has intensified conflicts over peri-urban land as urban expansion competes with agricultural and residential uses in the surrounding areas (Mehari, 2025). The city has expanded into adjacent agricultural lands and villages a process that has emerged as a key driver of peri-urban land conflicts (Woldearegay, 2023). Mekelle city is bounded by a rural district called Enderta, where the city expands itself. Eight of the 17 local administrations locally known as 'Tabias' of Enderta district bound the city. Among which the conflict intense areas are Debri, Aynalem, Serawat and Romanat, which have recently been included into the administrative /planning/ territory of the city (Figure 3.2). Mekelle's roles as an administrative, commercial, and industrial center continue to drive population growth, further intensifying the demand for land for various uses. The rising pressure on land is likely to expand the scale of peri-urban conflicts thereof. Intensification of the existing and newly emerging peri-urban challenges likely affects the overall development of the city.

Figure 3.2: Peri-urban land conflict intense areas of Mekelle City – subject of this study



Source: Googel Earth, 2025

3.1.3. Land Use Categories

According to Mehari (2025), the research conducted following Mekelle's growth from the early 1992's through the 2010s and 2020s, the city has rapidly urbanized, drastically altering its land use classifications. One of the main themes is the enormous growth of populated regions at the expense of barren and agricultural land. Significant land use classifications and their dynamics since 1992 embrace:

Urban Features: This category, which includes residential, commercial, industrial, and transportation infrastructure, has experienced the most significant growth. As the city grew into the periphery, the built-up area increased dramatically a reported six fold rise between 1984 and 2014.

Agricultural Land: There has been a noticeable decrease in agricultural land. Particularly on the outskirts of the city, vast tracts of agricultural land, including farmland and grazing pastures, were transformed into populated regions.

Unused Land: A large amount of land that was once considered bare land has been converted into urban features. However, other research also shows that bare land increased as a result of land degradation in particular times or regions like the 1992–2024 analysis.

3.2. Research Design

3.2.1. Research Paradigms

Scholars delineate three pivotal components that shape methods, including philosophical worldview, research design, and specific methods. Research philosophy serves as a framework for researchers, shaping their worldview and methodological choices. It encompasses the orientation, roadmap, and lens that steer the research conduct. Researchers select approaches based on their philosophical worldview, which mirrors their beliefs about knowledge development. There are four positivism, pragmatism, interpretivist, and constructivism research world view philosophies (Pavan, 2014).

The positivist expectation has characterized the traditional form of research and is mainly applicable for quantitative research. The problems studied by post-positivists imitate the need to categorize and assess the reasons or causes that influence the outcomes in a study, for instance found in an experiment. It is also called as reductionist in that the aim is to lessen the concepts into a small, discrete set to test, for example the variables that encompass the hypotheses and research questions in the study (Phillips and Burbules, 2000).

Constructivism research is based on fact which is supposed to be a product of human intelligence, interacting with practice in the actual world. The opinions of this philosophy are closely associated with pragmatism (Graue, 2015). Interpretivist and realism examines the feature of objective reality of a particular research area. The author of this philosophy acknowledged that, scientist cannot evade affecting those phenomena they explore. As a philosophical basis for mixed methods studies propose its significance for concentrating on the research problem in social science research and then applying pluralistic approaches to develop knowledge about the study problem.

Pragmatism believes on various ways of interpreting the domain and which assumes research as a single viewpoint that gives the whole image of authenticity in the study. Pragmatists do not perceive the world as an absolute. It arises beyond actions, circumstances, and consequences rather than antecedent conditions (Creswell, 2009). It is a problem-focused view that does not worry about the methods. Instead, researchers underscored the research problems and questions, which in turn, there are a concern on the application of all possible interventions and solutions to the problems, and used all possible methods at hand to understand the problem (Creswell, 2014).

Depending on the kind of research questions, pragmatism can support both positivist and interpretivist viewpoints (Elden and Levin, 1991). According to the pragmatic research philosophy, researchers are free to select the methodologies, processes, and strategies that best suit their goals and preferences. Research always takes place in social, historical, political, and other contexts, according to pragmatists. Therefore, pragmatism as a philosophy opens the door to multiple approaches, various worldviews and presumptions, as well as various techniques of data collection and inquiry, for the mixed methods researcher.

Based on the understanding on each research perspective evaluated above, this research sees Pragmatism best fit the research issue at hand as it is strengthening the reliability of the study results by linking the two research approaches (Elden and Levin, 1991). Pragmatic paradigms are not just theoretical concepts, but they emphasize problem-solving, understanding the importance of context in interpreting phenomena, and the application of research findings. Applied research frequently links with it, aiming to produce knowledge that can promptly tackle particular issues or enhance circumstances. The pragmatic paradigm prioritizes the practical implications of research and aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice, contrasting with more theoretical or abstract paradigms. Its reality exploration nature and plurality scope allows the use of mixed methods for triangulation from positivist and interpretive elements (Creswell, 2009).

3.2.2. Research Type and Design Strategy

Scholars categorize social science research methods as quantitative, qualitative, or mixed approach the nature of the research problem. The choice of research approach is guided by the nature of the research problem which is expected to be addressed, personal experiences of the researcher, and the intended audience.

Quantitative research involves experimental designs measuring quantity of a phenomenon, while qualitative research explores meaning mainly through non-numerical methods like narratives, ethnographies, grounded theory, and phenomenological interpretations. However, it is common knowledge that neither qualitative nor quantitative method may stand in its own to fully understand the problem in hand.

Unless grounded theory, which entirely delves into philosophical aspects, mixed method is preferred in social sciences. Studies suggest that the use of mixed methods approach strengthens reliability of the findings. The limitations of either one will be resolved by the other one

(Rodrigue, 2016). Quantitative results need qualitative reasoning and qualitative claims require quantitative indicators of degree of support. Mixed methods combine both approaches within different phases of the research process. Applying a mixed research approach has its own advantage in areas of social science studies. It delivers a better consideration on a given research and it offers more sureness on the study findings due to the triangulation advantage. Consequently, the conclusion drawn will be credible (Mckim, 2017).

The study of peri-urban land conflict in Ethiopian context involves philosophical contemplation and practical implementations of economic, sociopolitical, and human-ecological dynamics. This dual perspective has attracted considerable attention due to its direct relevance to urban development planning and managing transformation rural communities into urban. The peri-urban land conflict spans exploration of the entanglement of land rights versus causes of the conflict; the actors versus authoritative responsibility and roles; rights of citizens on land versus government responsibility, effects of the conflict on urban development. These issues require qualitative explorations, interpretations, and reasoning.

The magnitude of the conflict involving costs incurred by certain actors and gains of other at the expense of the losing counterparts requires quantifications. In particular, the public purpose rational for public ownership of land, economic losses of evicted peri-urban peasants, and land-based economic gains of the so called investors (entrepreneurs), economic losses of the city due to illegal land transactions and occupations and costs of spatial restructuring of settlements evolved through informal processes have to be quantified. The quantitative results shall rationalize the qualitative exploration.

The mixed research design may change based on the type of research problem. Different designs that may incorporate both theoretical frameworks and philosophical presumptions are used in mixed methods. Sequential explanatory, sequential exploratory, sequential transformative, concurrent embedded and concurrent transformative mixed method design techniques are identified by Creswell (2009). The mature level of the study subject at hand largely dictates the design option, while chronology, relative weights of the quantitative and qualitative components, mechanisms of integrating the two components, and theories driving the research undertaking also play a role.

The peri-urban land conflict problem in the context of Ethiopia involves exploration of the politic (polity and political governance) environment of the land policy embedded in public purpose theory and its governance embedded in social contract theory. This politic environment

is the least explored in Ethiopian context, both in breadth and depth. This politic is manifested in social process that can be assessed through quantitative methods.

Since both aspects integrate into a whole interpretation of the peri-urban land conflict, both types of data can be collected simultaneously concurrent mixed design. According to Creswell (2009), concurrent mixed methods design is in which the researcher converges or merges quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. In this design, the investigator collects both forms of data at the same time and then integrates the information in the interpretation of the overall results.

3.3. Types of Data

3.3.1. Qualitative Data

The qualitative data include ,but not limited to the nature and extent of the peri-urban land conflict, its sources, the actors involved and their roles, the social and legal spaces of the conflict, the interaction between informal processes and legal authority in peri-urban areas, the understanding and interpretation of public ownership of land, the interpretation and fulfillment of public interest on land, perceptions among various classes regarding public versus private ownership of land, and assessments of the conflict's effects on the development of the city are just a few examples of the qualitative data.

3.3.2. Quantitative Data

The quantitative data included trends in land conversion, patterns of eviction and the resulting income losses, land price fluctuations in both formal and informal markets and their implications for wealth distribution and rising conflicts, trends in informal land transactions and the expansion of informal settlements, and other quantitative indicators reflecting the effects of peri-urban conflicts on the city's development.

3.4. Sources of Data

The current peri-urban land conflict involved philosophical contemplations embedded in government policies and practical implications on peri-urban rural communities and urban residents. The study has warranted analysis of policy environment, assessment of the opinions of authorities responsible for policy design and implementation, and examination of the experiences of peri-urban and rural societies, as well as urban residents. It also has required quantitative performances associated to policy outcomes/effects. Consequently, the study has depended on both primary and secondary data sources. Use of multiple data collection strategies

warrants advantage than relying on a single data collection strategy in research work, it allows the researcher to combine the strengths and correct some of the deficiencies of any one source of data.

3.4.1. Primary Sources

Primary data sources were peri-urban farm households whose land has been expropriated, benchmark farm households outside of the official city territory (who have not experienced expropriation), pertinent experts and officials working in relevant government departments at the regional, city, and sub-city levels, and a policy research expert.

3.4.2. Secondary Sources

Documents and databases were the secondary sources; the specifics are listed in Table 3.2. Based on official government policies, the peri-urban land conflict's dynamics and political and development environment were examined. In light of citizen rights and governmental obligations, the FDRE's constitution, urban development frameworks, and other laws were specifically analyzed. Authoritative translations of the policy context can be found in the legal frameworks (expropriation and compensation, rural land legislation, urban land lease holding).

Table 3.2: List of key sources of secondary data sources

Item	Relevance	Issues of the research
Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia	- Intent of public ownership of land tenure as a basis for citizens right on land and land governance	- Government and people duality of right with people devoid of space in the land governance as a core cause of the peri-urban land conflict - Context of public ownership and interpretation of the share of individual rights within the public purpose as a major source of conflict - Ineffective land administration (constitutional responsibility) of government as a source of peri-urban land conflict at operational level
Urban development policy, land management and development policy, urban housing	Reflect and interpret the constitution	- Land supply response for urban development - Conceptualization of urban expansion/growth and the peri-urban zone.

strategy		
Rural land use and administration law (Proc. 456/2005 of FDRE and Proc. 239/2014 of Tigray regional state)	Operationalize the constitution regarding land use and administration	- Duties, responsibility, and rights on land use - Government responsibility of land administration - Land-use planning
Land use right and private property expropriation and compensation law (Proc. 611/2019 and its predecessor Proc. 455/2005)	Key legal framework operationalizing the public purpose and governing the peri-urban land use transformation	- Scope of application of public purpose and its development disparity effect as a critical source of the peri-urban land and conflict
Urban land lease holding law (Proc. 721/2011 and its predecessors)	Operationalize public ownership of land and public purpose context in the urban setting	- Conflicts of land value capture and land value sharing in the peri-urban transformation - Generating development disparity among various interest groups
Adjudication documents, LDP documents	Actionable documents operationalizing the peri-urban zone transformation	- Illegal land transaction and settlement - Urban versus rural conflict of interest
Annual reports	Performance trend of the peri-urban transformation	- Scale of the peri-urban transformation, complexities, challenges, effects, etc.
Satellite image	Visual inspection of the spatial changes	- Scope of the transformation of the peri-urban areas

Source: Author's Compilation, 2024

Analyzing these documents provided how the rights of citizens and responsibility of government are contextualized in the peri-urban transformation. Furthermore, analyzing the policy context facilitated exploring the insights why conflict on the peri-urban land.

Government documents, particularly reports and adjudication documents were consulted for information regarding the number of peasants evicted, scale of illegal land occupations, acquisitions, and allocations, court cases, etc. The study also utilized satellite images. Satellite images helped visual study of expansion of the city and growth of informal settlements.

A major element of the peri-urban land conflict is related to government biasness in favor of the urban, particularly the so called entrepreneurs at the cost of the peri-urban residents. This uneven development was analyzed rationally land value data drawn from auction database of the Land Development and Management of the city.

3.5. Sampling Design

In this study, how a subset of respondents is chosen from a broader population to represent the entire population in a study is determined by the sampling design. The aim was optimizing representativeness while controlling resources. It entails identifying the target population, choosing a probability or non-probability sampling technique, figuring out the sample size, and creating a sampling frame.

3.5.1. Sampling Techniques

This study involved both survey and qualitative data. Consequently, probabilistic and purposive sampling techniques were applied to select samples. Survey respondents, which constituted peri-urban farm households and benchmark rural households, were selected applying simple random sampling applying the standard sample size determination formula. Random sampling gives each household in the target population an equal chance of being included in the sample, which minimizes bias.

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

Where N = denotes population size (evicted peasants), 1 refers to the probability of the event occurring, e stands for tolerable error level, and n refers to required sample size of the research. After the list of expropriation subject households was acquired from local administrative units, actual sample representatives were selected randomly. Python script was applied to generate random numbers length n : $n_i \in N$ where n and N denote sample size and target population were generated to pick the representative households.

For the FGD participant farmers, their encounters with government departments related to the expropriation and compensation and their influence within their village were taken into

consideration. To this end, local authorities were involved in the identification of potential participants. KII in government departments were selected based on their position (due official job responsibility), knowledge about the study issue (due analytical capacity), and relevance position they hold in the department.

FGD and KII participants were key primary data sources. In depth exploration of a research issue with a few participants must at least equate information collected from large sample through questionnaires. Accordingly, participants were selected based on their relevance and richness of information.

3.5.2. Sample Population

The population of the study constituted a peasant household in the peri-urban zone of Mekelle spanning four local constituencies making up 5970 households (Table 3.3). Among which, 1972 households make the target sample population. These households encountered expropriation of their lands partially or in full.

Table 3.3: Sampling population of peri-urban farm households

Constituency	Total population	Total number of households	Expropriated households
Debri	12232	3598	1025
Aynalem	5961	1154	231
Serawat	5495	1218	716
Total	23688	5970	1972

Source: Field Survey, 2024

3.5.3. Sample Size

Applying the standard formula for determining sample size out of a large population, the sample size of expropriated households within the selected urban areas was determined to be 336 households. The sample size was distributed to the three target areas based on the share of expropriated households. For a fair comparison of results, the rural control group households were also determined to be 336 regardless of the size of the total households. For the KII and FGDs, the sample size was determined purposively considering the representation of the content of the research idea rather than relying on number. Table 3.4 provides the details.

Table 3.4: Target populations and samples

Target population		Sample size
1	Survey	672
1.1	Peri-urban farmers	2097
	Tabia Debri	1067
	Tabia Aynalem	273
	Tabia Serawat	757
1.2	Farmers outside the city territory (non-evicted)	336
	Tabia Romanat	-
	Tabiya May Anbessa	-
2	FGD	27
	Tabia Debri	12
	Tabia Aynalem	7
	Tabia Serawat	8
3	KII	20
3.1.	Bureau of Land Administration and Mines	16
3.2	Bureau of Urban Development and Construction	12
3.3	Mekelle city	-
3.4	Sub-cities: Hadnet,A di-Haqi, Ayder	-
3.5	Mekelle LDP Project office	12
3.6	Policy Studies Institute, FDRE	8

Source: Author's Compilation, 2024

3.6. Methods of Data Collection

Depending on the nature and source of data, questionnaires, KII, FGD, desk work, and field observation were utilized for collection.

3.6.1. Questionnaires

The primary subjects and inevitable actors of the peri-urban transition are peasant societies living within the zone. They are both the primary right holders and subjects of the expropriation. Household data including incidences of land expropriation and income loss, involvement in land transaction, opinions towards compensation and resettlement practices, opinions regarding the land tenure, etc. In general, the conventional assertions regarding

farmers' involvement in illegal land transactions require testing their validity, which requires household survey.

To this end, this study administered mixed (close-ended and open) questionnaires to two groups of sample households. One group was representatives of peri-urban farmers who relinquish their farm land due to expropriation of urban expansion. This group is the study case. The second group involved representatives of farmers outside the urban fringe zone but bordering the peri-urban zone. This group is used to compare the economic status and evaluations of the peri-urban zone residents against their previous rural status through their counterparts. Data from the two groups has provided a comparative perspective regarding the peri-urban conflict from the side of the rural based community.

Likert scale, binary agreements, respondent prompt answers, open-ended questions that solicited opinions, and the selection of legitimate options for respondents were all incorporated in the questionnaires. Before the full-fledged survey was released, the questionnaires were piloted and translated into Tigrigna while being sent to respondents. Under the careful supervision of data-experienced staff, trained enumerators distributed the questionnaires door-to-door. The researcher then used an app called Geo Tracker to track the data collectors' visits to residences in real-time.

3.6.2. Focus Group Discussion

Focused Group Discussion (FGD) is a planned, structured, and flexible tools designed to elicit a range of feelings, opinions, and ideas, understand differences in perspectives uncover and provide insight into specific factors that influence opinions (Catherine, 2007). It is also essential in triangulating ideas of different informants.

In the peri-urban land conflict research, residents of the peri-urban zone represent one side of the conflict as opposing the government theoretically assuming public interest but presumed biased towards the urban side. The rural production mode peri-urban residents have a major stake in the land conflict. Three FGDs were convened to explore how peri-urban residents explain the conflict and evaluate how they have been affected by the urban expansion; why they involve in informal land transaction; how they involve in managing the transformation of the peri-urban zone.

In this regard, three FGDs (one in each Tabia) were conducted each involving seven to 12 participants. The participants involved ordinary farmers and members of their institutionalized organizations (representatives from members of farmers associations, youth association, and of

women's associations). While representatives of members of the associations were selected in consultation with local authorities, participants of ordinary residents were selected based on seniority and encounter of the situation. The composition of the FGD participants ensured a nuanced discussion that helped to uncover the reality with better details.

3.6.3. Key Informants Interviews

Interview is particularly suitable for intensive investigations. In social sciences research, interview is the primary qualitative method for gathering primary data (Clark, 2005). It offers access to the context of people's perceptions, views or behavior, and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that perspective, view and behavior, and allows researchers to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action (Seidman, 2006).

Accordingly, this study conducted Key Informant Interviews (KII) to collect and analyze the understanding of relevant government departments regarding the inherent peri-urban land conflict and its nature and dynamics in the study area as well as government policy. KII involved a total of 20 participants drawn from regional and city level pertinent departments (Table 3.4) through semi structured interview. Semi-structured interview is perhaps most commonly utilized in qualitative social research (Catherine, 2007). It remains flexible so that other important information can still arise. The researcher enjoys freedom to ask supplementary questions or at times may omit certain questions if the situation so requires (Kothari, 2004). Iterative interviews were also conducted with a relevant policy researcher at Policy Studies Institute, FDRE, who is a reference person in matters of urban development, urban planning, and land governance.

3.6.4. Personal Field Observation

Field observation was another primary data collection tool utilized in this research. As a way of investigator's own observation without interviewing the respondents, the investigator observes what is currently happening in the study area (Kothari, 2004). Field visits were undertaken to the informal settlement areas where unauthorized subdivision and transaction of land is prevalent.

3.7. Data Analysis and Presentation

3.7.1. Quantitative Data Analysis

As the study employs qualitative and quantitative data, appropriate analysis methods for each data type were used. Indeed, quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, with the help of SPSS version 20. Descriptive results are interpreted in terms of measures of central tendency, variations, and percentages. Inferential statistics were carried out to test variations of behaviors (items of interest) between the two respondent groups. SPSS software was used for the analysis.

3.7.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data/information collected from KII, FGD, and documents was analyzed using fact narration, content thermalizing, and interpretation of contexts. Before formal analysis, data/information/ collected through KII and FGD was transcribed verbatim and studied carefully before identification of themes and contexts. Then, initial codes were developed and data were clustered into categories and documenting similar patterns.

3.7.3. Data presentation

Results of the analysis are presented in tables, charts and text narrations. Quantitative outputs results are presented in the form of frequency and percentage tables and charts. Facts and context explorations are discussed in thematic contexts.

3.8. Operationalization of the Research

Table 3.5 cascades the objectives into major issues, related variables/factors and methods to operationalize the research. The operationalization has facilitated the determination of the contents of the data collection tools.

Table 3.5: Key issues of research objectives and method cascading

Research questions	Issues	Variables (and/or Indicators)	Data source	Respondents	Analysis
What core issues define the conflict between peri-urban residents and government over land use? How governments uphold usufruct rights of the peri-urban society?	Loss of means of life	Expropriated land and loss of crop income	Survey	Evicted and non-evicted farmers	Descriptive and inferential statistics
	Compensation	Type and adequacy	Survey; FGD	Evicted and non-evicted farmers	Descriptive statistics; fact narrations
	Access to residential land	Right to land under the rural regime	FGD; pertinent laws	Evicted and non-evicted farmers	Fact narrations
	Transfer of government political and legal responsibility by community moral social responsibility	Residential land access by adult filial generations	FGD; pertinent laws; survey	Evicted and non-evicted farmers	Fact narrations and interpretation
		Effect on lifestyle and demographic changes			
	Illegal land subdivision	Size and trend of the illegal land subdivision	Survey; Reports; Satellite image	Evicted and non-evicted farmers	Descriptive statistics
How is public interest on land upheld	Public ownership of land	Positive or negative evaluation	Survey; KII	Evicted and non-evicted farmers; Relevant government	Descriptive and inferential statistics;

in the peri-urban zone of Mekelle; how does the outcome shape the peri-urban land conflict?				departments	Thematic analysis; Interpretative
	Interpretation of public interest in regard to land	Fulfillment of citizens demand for land	KII	Relevant government departments	
	Rural versus urban development disparity	Residential land supply for peri-urban	Survey	Evicted and non-evicted farmers	
		Installation of basic infrastructure	KII	Relevant government	
		Land right tenure (in)security	FGD	Evicted farmers	
		Wealth distribution variation effect	Auction land price database	Mekelle Land Development and Management Office	Descriptive statistics & Interpretative
Who involve in the illegal land transaction in the peri-urban zone of Mekelle and what is the interaction	Illegal land transaction and expansion of illegal settlements	Size of illegal land transaction, occupations, allocations	Satellite image; Adjudication documents	Mekelle Land Development and Management Office	Spatial statistics & Descriptive statistics
		Land area occupied by illegal settlements by land cover type	Reports; Satellite image	Mekelle Land Development and Management	Spatial analysis & Descriptive statistics
		Understanding/opinion of farm holders regarding land use	Survey	Evicted and non-	Thematic analysis
		Farm holders' understanding /opinion/ regarding	Survey		Thematic analysis

mechanism?		Farmers preference regarding compensatory	Survey;	evicted farmers	Narration
	Public claim on land	Right on land rent improvement up on use conversion	Survey; KII	Evicted and non-evicted farmers; Government departments	Narration Interpretative narration
		Undermine potential land value up on use conversion	Survey; Auction land price database	Evicted and non-evicted farmers	Descriptive statistics
					Descriptive statistics
	Interaction of the informal actors	Behavior of the informal process	Survey;	Evicted farmers Non-evicted	Descriptive statistics Narration
		Social process that back illegal land transaction and illegal settlements	KII	Evicted farmers Non-evicted farmers	
What are the various formal and informal actors involved in Mekelle's peri-urban land	Residential land supply scale for urban	Number of residential plots released through various modalities	Reports	Mekelle city administration	Descriptive statistics
	Growth of informal settlement	Costs of residential land supply delay	Auction land price information	Auction land database of Mekelle	Interpretation & Descriptive statistics
	Effect on land with eco-environmental	Sensitive land covers and size converted to construction land	Satellite image	Google Earth	Spatial statistics

conflicts and their roles?	Appropriation of public claim on land value by	Foregone land revenue	Auction land Price information	Auction land database of Mekelle	Descriptive statistics
		Area of land affected	Satellite .	Google Earth	Spatial statistics
How does the land governance system and its execution contribute in resolving the peri-urban land conflict else aggravate the conflict?	Inherent nature of the land tenure	Government monopoly on land governance	KII; FGD; Survey	Government officials Local leaders/ community organizations/	Fact narration & Thematic interpretation
		Rule of law	KII; FGD; Survey	Evicted farmers Non-evicted farmers Non-evicted farmers	

Source: Author's own development, 2024

3.9. Validation and Reliability

3.9.1. Validation

To ensure the study's rigor, dependability, and trustworthiness, a number of validity enhancing strategies were employed. In keeping with the mixed-methods form of the study and its connection to intricate institutional and legal procedures, these strategies addressed concerns of interpretative credibility, construct validity, and content validity.

Construct validity through theoretical framing:

Because the study examined several theoretical frameworks, it also used construct validity tests. These included the public interest idea, legal pluralism, land rights, and the social compact theories. Each framework offered a conceptual viewpoint for examining various facets of peri-urban land disputes, such as the function of community rights and state power, overlapping tenure laws, and governance shortcomings. In order to achieve conceptual consistency and explanatory robustness in its research of conflict drivers, actor behavior, and governance gaps, the study triangulated empirical data with these well-established theoretical categories.

Content validity through rapid assessment:

Residents of the three selected peri-urban villages were surveyed briefly before the structured questionnaire was created to find out more about their actual experiences, land-related worries, and the kinds of conflicts they had with government organizations. The researcher was able to obtain early knowledge of important community issues such as diminishing agricultural viability, unfair compensation for land expropriation, and the lack of land access for young people by employing this technique. The information obtained from this evaluation was used to improve the questionnaire, making it more conceptually consistent with the larger body of literature and more locally grounded. By showing that the survey instrument covered the whole range of peri-urban land disputes as they were practiced by the impacted people, this strategy greatly increased the content validity of the instrument.

Interpretive validity through peer debriefing:

Peer debriefing was utilized to test new findings and analytical interpretations along the course of the study. Draft findings from each topic area were shared with a practicing policy expert from the Urban and Infrastructure Development Department of the Policy Studies Institute (PSI). Confirming the consistency of interpretations, investigating alternative hypotheses, and incorporating critical input on the practical effects of land governance measures were the main goals of the debriefing meetings. The research's interpretive validity was reinforced by an external expert evaluation, which shed light on institutional issues, implementation limitations, and the form and content of land-related laws.

Respondent validation:

Following the transcription and topic analysis of the FGDs, a member verification procedure was carried out to further assure the authenticity and trustworthiness of the qualitative data. Three participants one from each study village was asked to review the key issues and overarching themes that emerged from the conversations in which they had taken part. The chosen people attested to the correctness and applicability of the combined results, pointing out that their viewpoints and experiences had been fairly represented.

3.9.2. Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha and inter-item correlations were used in internal consistency testing to verify the dependability of the quantitative survey data. The degree to which several items assessing the same underlying idea yield consistent results is evaluated using this statistical method. The test was carried out for important claims that were essential to the analytical goals of the study:

1. Willingness of farmers to abstain from land subdivision: This item cluster investigated whether farm households would abstain from farmland subdivision in exchange for better remuneration packages. It comprised various items assessing the relevance of land-based livelihoods, perceptions of pay fairness, and conditional willingness to retain agricultural land use.
2. Options of recompense kind: This hypothesis unhurried family choices for numerous recompense options

3.10. Ethical Consideration

The researcher obtained complete ethical approval under reference number EiABC/GPD/156/2020 from the Postgraduate Directorate Office of the Ethiopian Institute of Architecture, Building Construction, and City Development (the current School of Built Environment) before beginning data collection. The clearance letter, related to academic establishments, was officially communicated to the Mayor's Office and pertinent Tabias, with copies provided to the researcher, data collectors, and supervisors. Its aim was to collect the required data and information and ensure that government agencies were fully aware of the research's goals and objectives.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4. 1. Results

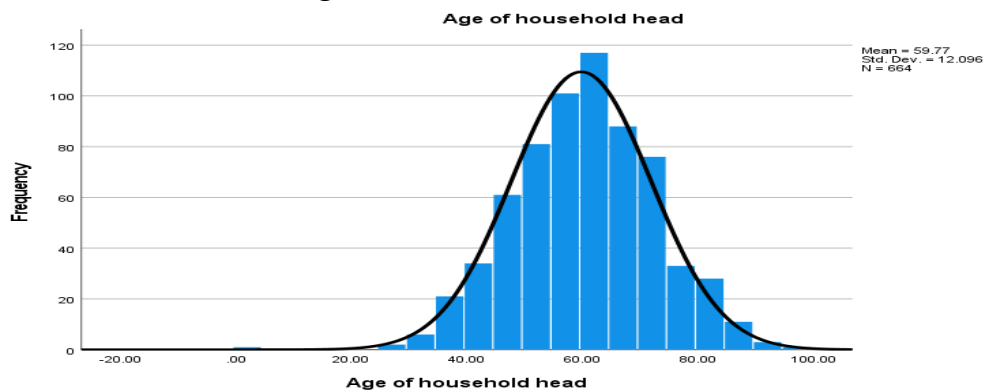
In this chapter results found from collected data was analyzed and presented in the form of Tables, Figures, Line charts, Maps, Histograms and etc. In addition, the findings found were related to the existing literature whether it has harmonized or deviated from the existing empirical and theoretical findings. As explained in the result chapter most of the findings are related to the existing finding which demonstrated the gaps and the recommendations to be considered at the city, regional and national level.

4.1.1. Response Rate of the Respondents

Data collected from the respondents demonstrated that two groups of respondents were participated in this study: a benchmark group, which included households outside of Mekelle City's peri-urban area that had not been subjected to eviction or land expropriation, and a target group, which included peri-urban peasant households whose land had been either fully or partially expropriated. As stated in the methods chapter, 672 households in total were polled for both groups.

Male-headed households accounted for about 81% ($n = 544$) of the respondents, with female-headed households making up the remaining percentage. The majority of household heads were single, with about 85% ($n = 571$) being married. With a mean age of 59.8 years and a standard deviation of 12.1 years, the ages of household heads varied from 26 to 95 years (Figure 4.1).

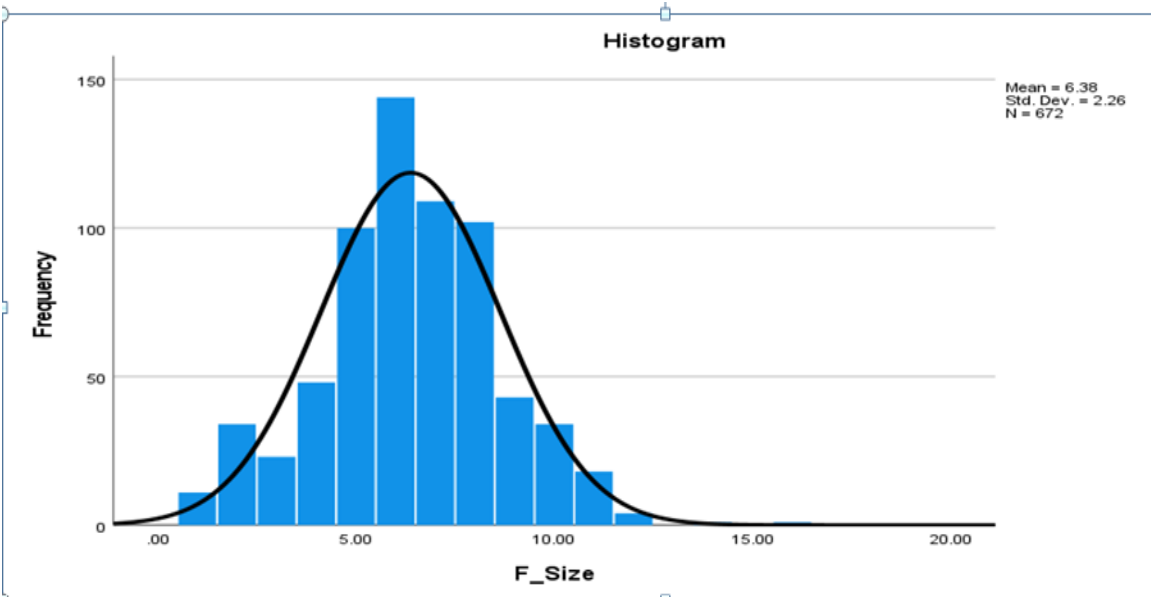
Figure 4.1: Household head age distribution



Source: Field Survey, 2023

The average household size was 6.6 (median = 6.0), with a standard deviation of 2.3 and a range of 1 to 16. The majority of households (67.7%) consisted of five to ten people (Figure 4.2).

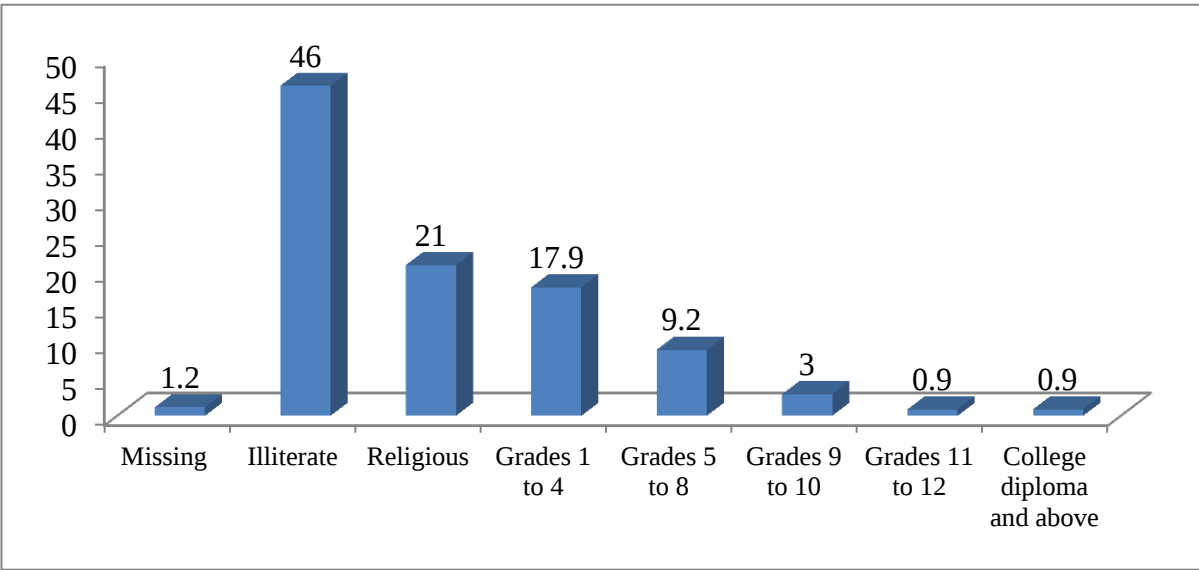
Figure 4.2: Family size of respondents



Source: Field Survey, 2023

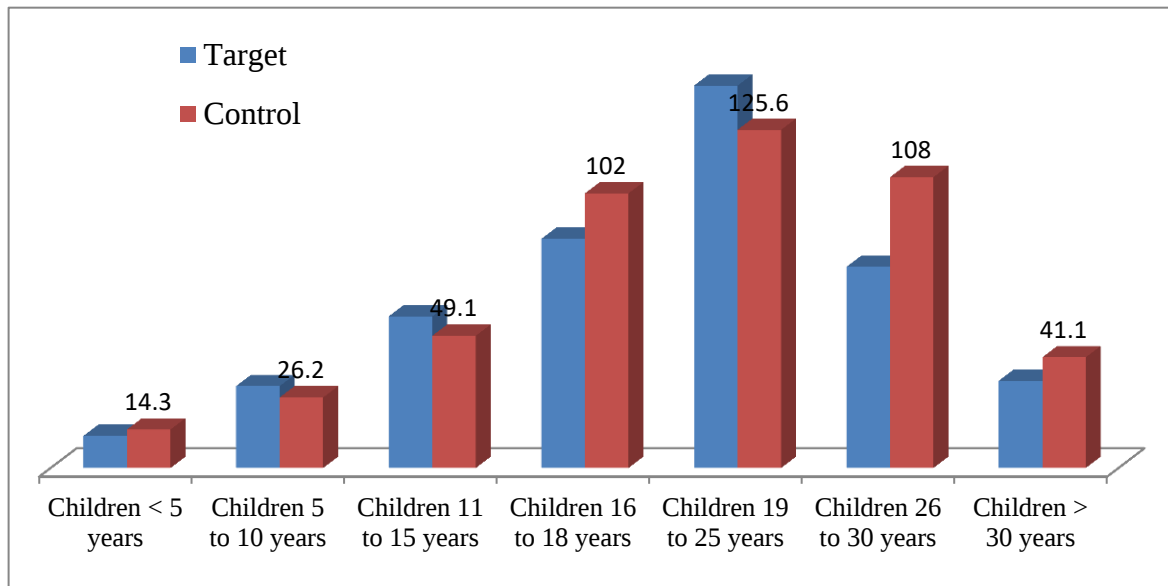
In terms of educational attainment, 21% of respondents had received non-formal or religious education, and 46% were illiterate. The greatest level of education acquired was a college degree, with only 1.8% having completed high school or above (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3: Educational attainment of respondents



Source: Field Survey, 2024

Figure 4: 4Age distributions of family members of study households



Source: Field Survey, 2023

These socio-demographic traits, which are listed in Table 4.1, are necessary to comprehend the study's conclusions. The demographic profiles of the benchmark and target groups are similar, which is an important aspect of the data. This closeness is essential since it guarantees that background differences won't affect any comparisons between the two groups. Therefore, rather than being due to differences in demographics, any observed differences in outcomes can be more reliably linked to the variables being studied. For example, the groups' similar age distribution and family size indicate that disparities in labor availability cannot account for differences in economic activity or income diversity. So, the socio-economic profiles of the respondents are very strong and relevant to answer research questions.

Table 4:1.Socio-demographic features and their relevance for interpretation of results

Variable	Characteristics	Importance
Age	26 to 95 years (average 60)	Information richness due to long time encounters of the peri-urban dynamics; Helpful in interpretation of entrepreneurship and life transformation experience and prospects
	Normally distributed	Randomness of the sample (ideal representation of the population)
Family size	Large (average = 6.6, median = 6)	Interpreting results regarding effects of expropriation on life of evictees, pressure of families to secure residential land for their children.
	Normal distribution	Randomness of the sample (ideal representation of the population)
Family members age structure	58.3% are above 18 years of age	Helpful while interpreting results regarding effects of expropriation on life of evictees; pressure of families to secure residential land for their children (social responsibility of families)
	Normal distribution	Randomness of the sample (ideal representation of the population)
Educational level	Low attainment (98.2% are at most high school graduates)	Helpful while interpreting peri-urban residents' capacity of securing their rights on land; Prospects of entrepreneurship and life transformation
All socio-demographic variables	Same pattern for both groups	Guarantees fair comparison of results between the groups.

Source: Field Survey, 2024

4.1.2. Analysis of Quality of the Collected Data

In order to ensure both excellent data quality and wide participation, the survey was carried out through door-to-door visits by trained enumerators under strict supervision. Consequently, all relevant questions had a 100% answer rate. The two columns of question kinds are shown in Annex 6. A total of 672 replies to questions about demographics, land size, tenure evaluations, and opinions on urban development and expropriation are listed in the first column, "Included." Questions about crop harvests in a given year, land expropriated during a specific time, or land transfers are examples of questions that only related to select respondents and are included in the second column, "Not Applicable." The percentage of respondents for whom each question was

irrelevant is displayed in this column. Therefore, the response rate is adequate for measuring engagement of respondents and data quality for result presentation and analysis.

Figure 4.5: Enumerates taking training



Source: Field survey, November, 2023November, 2023

Reliability: Internal Consistency of Survey Data

Before the formal analysis, the internal consistency of the survey replies was assessed. The questionnaire was carefully designed with cross-checks across related topics to ensure data accuracy. Some questions were expected to show negative correlations, while others were expected to show positive correlations. For example, it was expected that respondents who stated negative experiences or views regarding urban expansion and land expropriation would be more likely to favor alternative plans for land replacement, select compensation over land subdivision, and move outside of the peri-urban area. On the other hand, the opposite preferences were anticipated for more positive attitudes toward urban expansion.

Spearman's rank correlation for Likert-scale responses and cross-tabulations of percentage distributions were used to assess internal consistency. Table 4.2 presents a sampling of these findings, including questions reflecting conflicting expectations between households in peri-urban areas and those that may be impacted. The Spearman rank correlation coefficients were statistically insignificant at the 0.01 level, as expected, confirming the data structure's reliability.

Table 4.2: Internal consistency assessment (rank correlation sample illustration

			Farmers will not subdivide their farm holding if			
			Compensate d for life time income	Compensated for bequeath right	Transformative programs /project implemented	Children get land for free for residence
rho	Lifetime income	Rho	.355**	.185**	.152**	.134**
	loss	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	10/15 years	Rho	.136**	.102**	.123**	.086*
	compensation	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.008	.001	.026
	Uncompensated	Rho	.160**	.167**	.154**	.096*
	bequeath right	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.013
	No life	Rho	.182**	.150**	.186**	.109**
	transformation	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.005
	Uncompensated	Rho	.211**	.184**	.190**	.159**
	children	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	life time income	Rho	1.000	.550**	.445**	.480**
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
	If bequeath right	Rho	.550**	1.000	.347**	.409**
	compensation	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
	If life	Rho	.445**	.347**	1.000	.476**
	transformation	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
	If children get	Rho	.480**	.409**	.476**	1.000
	residential land	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Consistent trends concerning the peri-urban land setting are reflected in the survey results shown in Figure 4.6. Based on their own experiences, the questions were intended to elicit comparable opinions from responders. Two primary question categories were examined:

Four questions in the first category examined the circumstances in which farmers might choose not to divide their land:

- (i) Compensation equal to their lifetime income;
- (ii) Compensation permitting the transfer of legal inheritance;
- (iii) Execution of projects or programs that bring about transformation; and
- (iv) Free residential land for their children

Cronbach's Alpha, an alternate reliability test, further validated the variables' positive correlation (Table 4.3). The expropriated per-urban respondents have an acceptable Cronbach's Alpha score

of 0.722. Even though Cronbach's Alpha tends to decrease with fewer items, a score of over 0.7 with just four items still suggests that the scale is sufficiently trustworthy for use in research. The value for the benchmarked rural respondents is 0.905, which is very high.

Table 4.3: Reliability statistics for items indicating better compensation

Respondents	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
Peri-urban	.704	.722	4
Rural benchmark	.904	.905	4

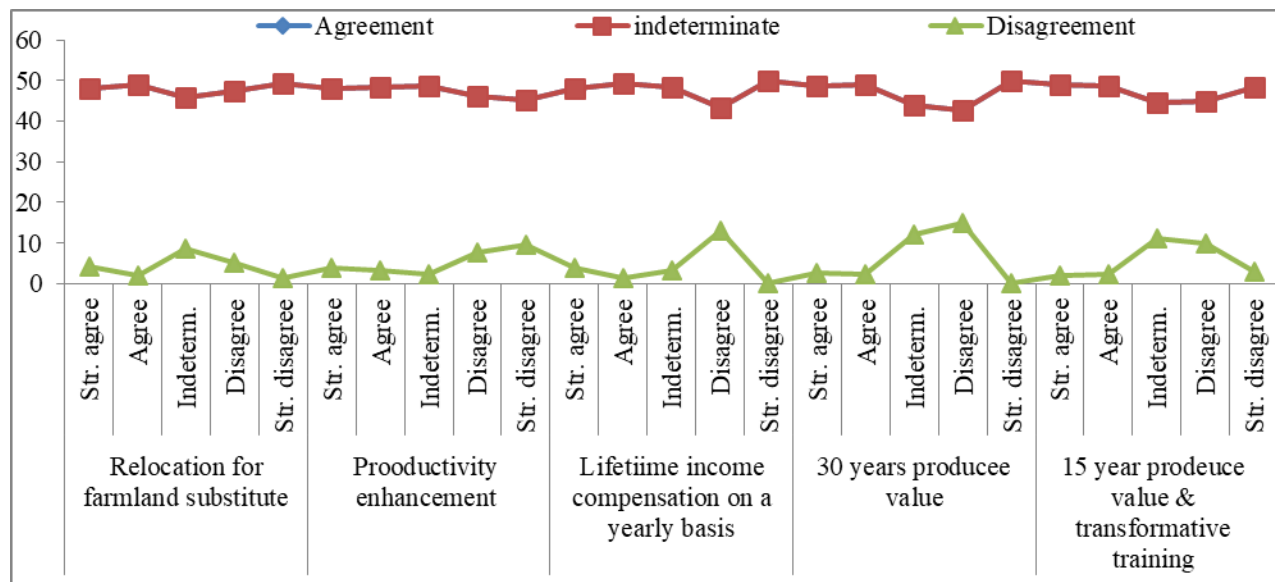
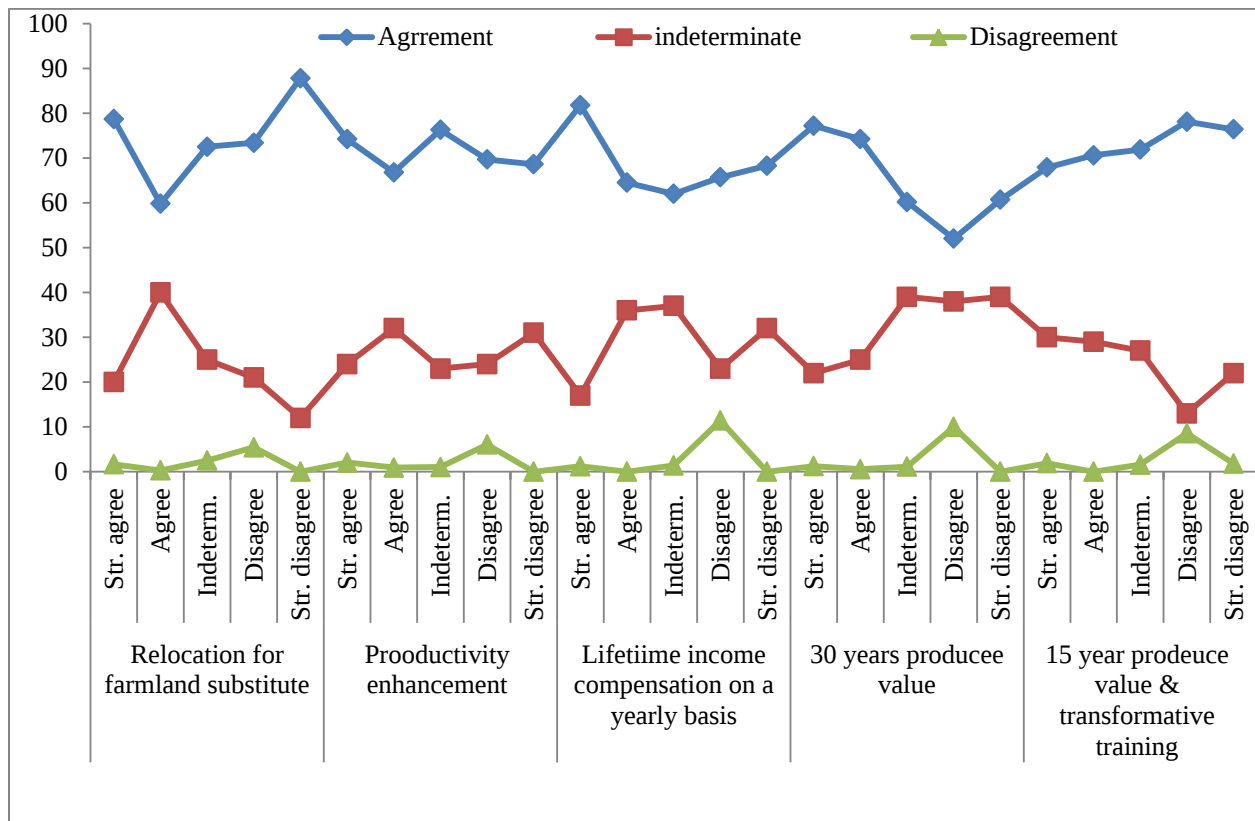
Source: Field survey, 2025

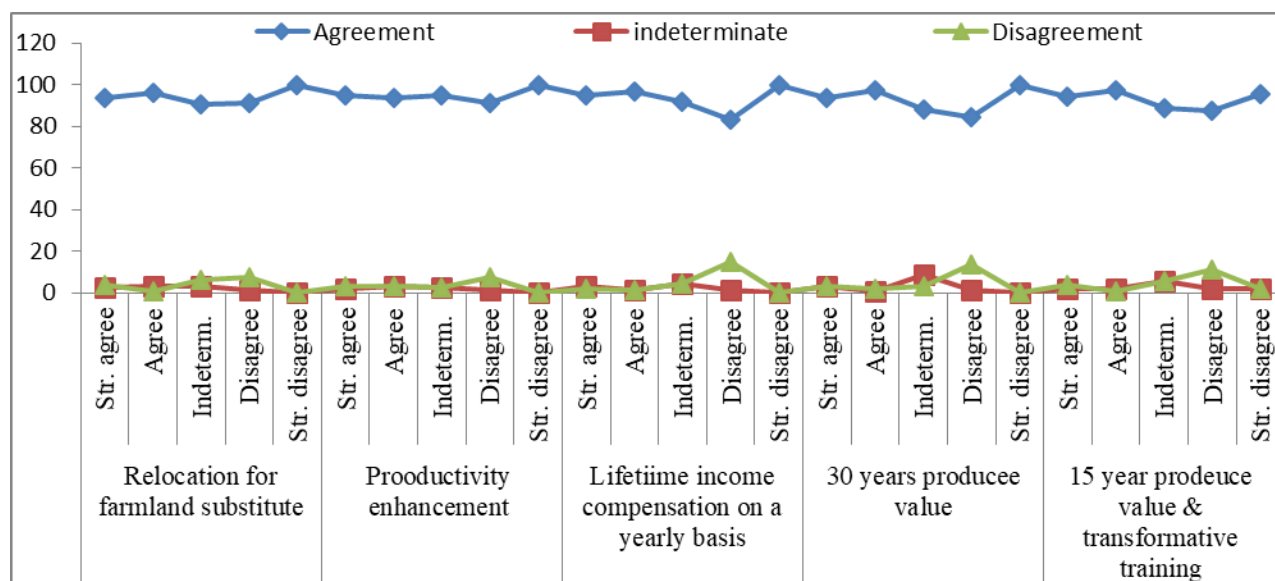
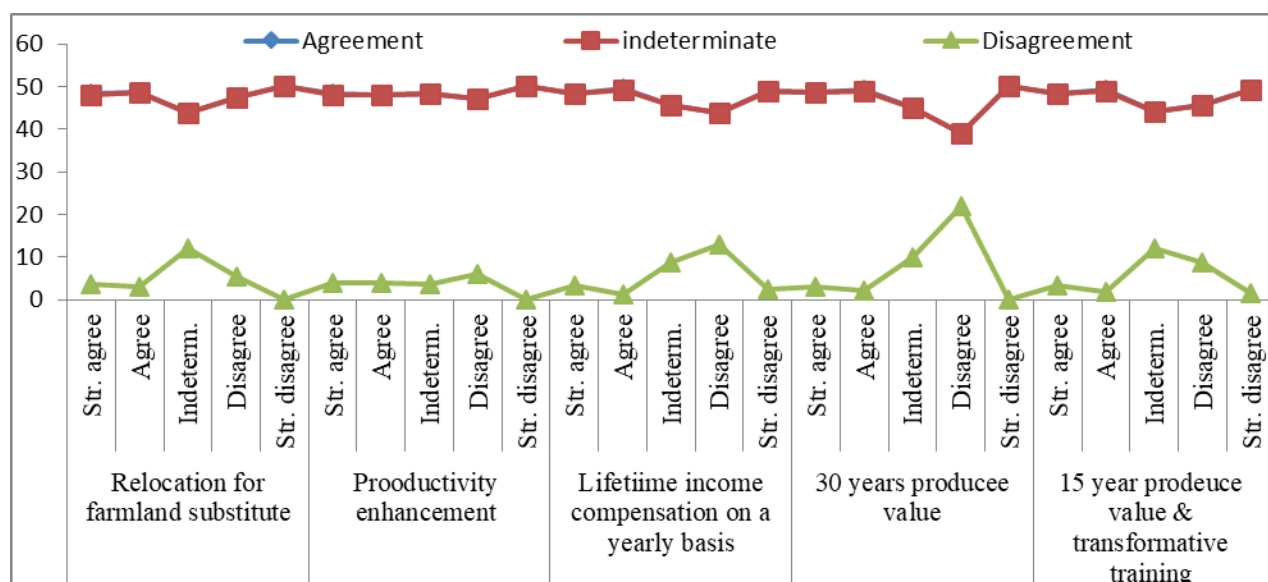
The second five questions measuring farmers' preferences for alternate compensation plans, assuming such choices were made accessible:

- (i) Moving to an area outside of the peri-urban area with similar farmland,
- (ii) Increasing productivity through research and technology to offset losses from partial expropriation,
- (iii) Receiving yearly compensation equal to lifetime income,
- (iv) A one-time payment equivalent to thirty years' worth of output value, and
- (v) A one-time payment for fifteen years' worth of production value and instruction meant to successfully transition livelihoods into urban life

The popular assertion that farmers frequently divide their land because current compensation systems are inadequate and do not meet their long-term livelihood demands serves as the justification for these inquiries. Consequently, if compensation schemes were planned to be more safe and forward-looking, it was estimated that respondents could narrate optimistic outlooks toward them. As expected, the attitudinal scores showed at least 50% alignment with the anticipated responses for each item, reinforcing the internal consistency and reliability of the information collected. Given the full response rate and the strong consistency across related items, the data is considered robust for subsequent analysis and interpretation.

Figure 4. 6: Sample of internal consistency assessment





Note: Agreement and indeterminate score in the two middle figures overlap.

Source: Field survey, 2023

The Cronbach's Alpha value for the expropriated peri-urban respondents was 0.685, while it was 0.763 for the rural benchmark respondents (Table 4.4). Although the reliability coefficient for the peri-urban respondents is slightly below the ideal benchmark, it is still acceptable in practical social research. This is so because the qualitative data and the rating scores (Figure 4.6) supported it.

Table 4.4: Reliability statistics for items indicating Reliability statistics for items indicating better compensation

Respondents	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
Peri-urban	.685	.685	5
Rural benchmark	.646	.763	5

Source: Field survey, 2025

4.1.3. Document Analysis

Document analysis was carried out in 2023 and focused on key legal and policy instruments, including the 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (Proclamation No. 1/1995), urban development and planning policy documents, and federal and regional rural land administration and land use laws.

Table 4.5: Core contents of the relevant policy documents analyzed in this study

Policy document	Focus in this study
1. Proc. 1/1995 (Constitution of the FDRE)	- The political environment of land governance (public ownership of land, government responsibility for land administration) - Citizens' rights to shelter and safe living environment
2. Urban development policy documents	
National Urban Development Policy	Urban development facilitating rural development (Rural urban linkage peri-urban zone)
Urban land Development and Management Policy	Sustainable land supply for urban development at affordable price
Urban Housing Supply Strategy	Wealth distribution through landed properties (treatment of the urban and peri-urban residents)
Urban Planning Strategy	Rational land use allocation (conversion of per-urban areas of various functions into construction land)
3. Rural land administration and use laws	- Rights and duties of government and landholders in land administration - Translation of constitutional spirit into operational provisions
4. Urban Land Lease Holding Law	- Land value capture and the question of expropriation subject farmers - Wealth distribution implication

Source: Document review, 2024

For the purposes of this study, content most relevant to land rights and urban transformation in peri-urban areas was extracted and synthesized.

4.1.4. Key Informant Interviews and Focused Group Discussions

The KIIs and FGDs were conducted following the document analysis but prior to the household survey. Insights gained from the document review informed the design and focus of the interviews and discussions, particularly in relation to land rights and urbanization dynamics in peri-urban zones. Three FGDs were conducted involving a total of 27 participants. All participants represented households affected by land expropriation in peri-urban areas. In accordance with ethical requirements, the identities of FGD participants are not disclosed in this report.

The KIIs were conducted with a total of 20 informants, selected based on their professional and responsibility relevance to the study themes (Table 4.6). By ensuring that representatives from all important institutional actors participated, the selection process allowed for an inclusive and comprehensive assessment of the topics under study. The KIIs adopted a pragmatic strategy. Technical experts and officials were interviewed in the first step to obtain baseline information and expert opinions. These results then served as guidance for the second step, which comprised speaking with members of regional councils. To summarize and put the previous conversations in context, a senior policy research specialist was interviewed for a last, decisive interview.

Table 4.6: List of KII participants

KII Participants	Interview date
A) Bureau of Land Administration and Mines	
Cadastral Survey and Registration Directorate Director	23 Dec 2024
Urban Cadaster Registry Senior Expert	01 Dec 2024
Land Administration Directorate Legal Service Team Leader	09 Dec 2024
Performance Auditing Senior Expert	09 Dec 2024
Compensation and Resettlement Directorate Director	19 Dec 2024
Land Administration Directorate Director	11 Dec 2024
B) Bureau of Urban Development and Construction	
Urban Plan Preparation and Execution Directorate Director	16 Dec 2024

Urban Plan Preparation Senior Expert	15 Dec 2024
Senior surveyor	15 Dec 2024
C) Mekelle Land Development and Management Office	
Land Bank Senior Expert	10 Dec 2024
Coordinator, Land Development and Management department	11 Dec 2024
D) Mekelle Municipality	
Urban Plan Evaluation Senior Expert	10 Dec 2024
Senior Surveyor	10 Dec 2024
E) Mekelle City LDP Project Office	
GIS Senior Expert	04 Dec 2024
Head of the project office	08 Dec 2024
F) Sub-cities	
Head, Land Development and Management Office (Ayder)	09 Dec 2024
Act. Head, Building Regulation (Ayder)	09 Dec 2024
Head, Land Development and Management Office (Adi-Haki)	09 Dec 2024
G) Members of the ex-regional council (parliamentarians)	
Chair, Budget and Auditing Committee	24 Jan 2025
Member, Governance and Administration Committee	24 Jan 2025
H) Senior policy research expert, FDRE	01 Feb 2024

Source: Compiled by the author's, 2024

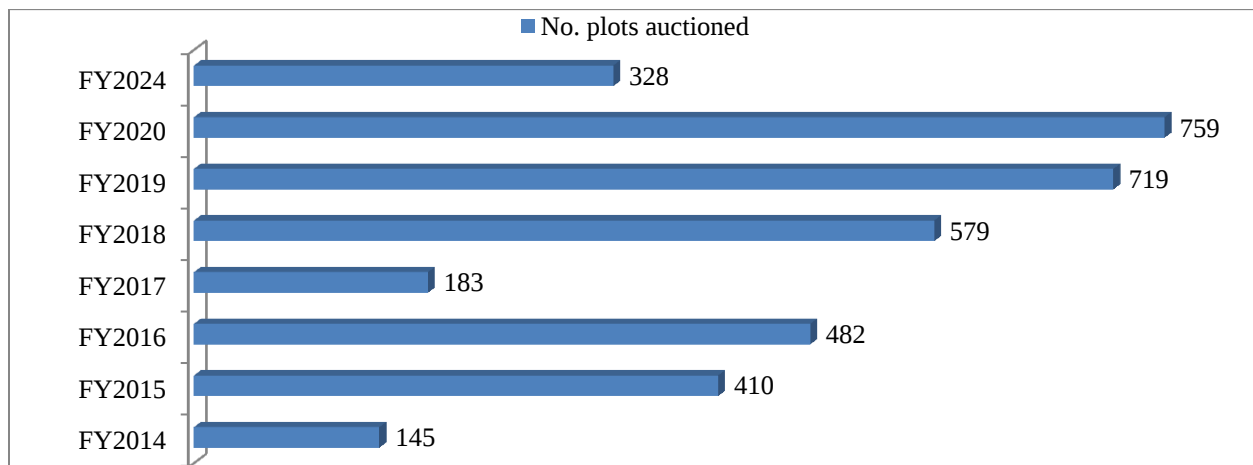
4.1.5. Causes and Consequences of Peri-Urban Land Conflicts via the Lens of Policy Framework

Data obtained from FGD, document analysis and interview with expertise demonstrated that peri-urban land disputes are a critical interface where urban expansion, agricultural interests, and ineffective governance meet. They are caused by the quick, frequently chaotic conversion of rural landscapes into metropolitan regions. Due to the strong demand for land in these areas, ownership conflicts, changes in land use, and compensation are common.

4.1.5.1. Auction Land Price Dataset

Analysis obtained from document review and policy framework of land showed that land is the scarce and expensive resource to be controlled and properly managed. Hence, two main concerns are examined in this study using data from land auctions: (i) the flow of wealth from rural society to urban areas, and (ii) the affordability of land in metropolitan areas. Despite implementing a land auction system in the early 2000s, Mekelle City has only reliably had access to systematically documented transaction data since 2014. There are still some incomplete records, especially when it comes to price data, which is crucial to this analysis. As a result, 3,602 plots containing reliable price data information make up the final dataset. Figure 4.7 shows that 61.2% (n = 2,206) of these were set aside for residential usage, with the remaining portion going toward commercial development. This information is crucial for analyzing how land commodification processes and price hikes affect the peri-urban periphery.

Figure 4.7: Plots auctioned from the year 2014 - 2024



Source: Survey, 2025

4.1.5.2. Land Rights, Restrictions, and Responsibilities

To understand the scope and complexity of Ethiopia's peri-urban land conflict, it is essential to recognize an analysis of the rights, obligations, and limits placed on different players, individual residents, local communities, the government, and the general citizens. This section describes the tenure system that leads to peri-urban land disputes, as well as the legal ambiguities and contradictions that make conflict worse. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's 1995 Constitution, which outlines its unique land tenure structure, is the main source of land disputes

in the nation. It is unclear what the Constitution means when it states that "all land is the collective property of the public." Later declarations are unclear about whether "the public" refers to the people or the government. For the purposes of this provision, it is temporarily acknowledged that the public and the government are one and the same. However, critically analyzes the broader implications of this uncertainty.

Systematic review of documents demonstrated that Ethiopian law distinguishes between two main categories of land users: individuals (households) and communities. Federal and regional laws, including Proclamations No. 89/1997 and No. 456/2005 at the federal level and Proclamations 136/2008 and No. 239/2014 issued by the Tigray Regional State, specify the rights, obligations, and restrictions governing these user categories. Under this legal framework, rural households enjoy usufruct rights to farmland. The earnings from the cultivation and use of the land for agricultural purposes, as well as the extraction of particular natural resources like sand and gravel, belong to the holders of these rights. Nevertheless, usufruct rights are non-transferable rather than proprietary. As a result, land cannot be sold, mortgaged, or otherwise alienated because ownership remains vested in the state on behalf of the people. To ensure the continuation of agrarian livelihoods within family lineages rather than allowing the commodification of farms, inheritance is allowed, but only within the boundaries of lawful heirs, who are usually immediate family members or near relatives.

Ethiopia's tenure system acknowledges communal land rights in addition to private holdings, especially for residential and pastoral purposes. The FDRE Constitution does not specifically mention communal use rights, but Tigray's rural land administration regulations do. For their mutual advantage, these provisions grant local populations access to grazing land, forest products, and water supplies. The fact that these lands are regarded as indivisible and are not paid when they are transformed for urban use is at the heart of many peri-urban land disputes. This legislative silence at the federal level in contrast to explicit recognition at the regional level has become a major topic of debate, especially in peri-urban areas where rural–urban interfaces give rise to contradictory claims.

The government's vast jurisdiction extends well beyond usufruct rights, as it serves as the public's guardian of the land. These powers include enacting land use plans, controlling holdings allocation and redistribution, enforcing land conversion decisions, and expropriating land for public uses. But because "public purpose" has such a vague definition, its use is highly arbitrary and politically sensitive. Once the expropriation process begins, the state seizes any undeserved increases in land value and terminates individual usufruct and community access rights. The structural differences between urban expansion coalitions and agricultural households have gotten worse as a result of this dynamic, which has made it simpler for rural users to transfer wealth to urban actors.

It is the responsibility of usufruct holders to preserve the quality of the land and follow its approved agricultural use. According to the law, they are not allowed to change the use of land, especially by turning farms into non-agricultural uses without formal permission. Crucially, neither communities nor individuals are given direct control over land governance or decision-making procedures. According to constitutional mandates, these powers are exclusively granted to government entities that are thought to represent the public interest. According to this definition of the public interest, the state has the sole right to distribute land, determine land value and value increases, impose environmental regulations, and oversee the construction of infrastructure. However, when the roles as specified by law and the actual practices differ, conflict would be the end results. On the one hand, local communities and authorities may reallocate farmland for private use, or individual peasants may trespass on communal lands or unlawfully turn it into construction land. Officially, the acts are presented as land use plan violations and state authority violations.

On the other hand, the government may also violate its duties by violating people's usufruct rights or communities' collective rights. Expropriations conducted without following the proper procedures, failure to make up for lost common land, and inability to provide promised public services after expropriation are a few examples. These government-driven initiatives are a major source of complaints among peri-urban dwellers and violate the development rights of rural households and communities. Intergovernmental tensions give rise to a third layer of conflict that is frequently disregarded. Inconsistencies in law enforcement, compensation processes, and the

perceived legitimacy of state acts can result from local government organizations implementing methods that differ from or even contradict regional or federal directions.

Lastly, the socio-spatial dynamics of peri-urban areas are not adequately reflected in the official definitions of land rights and obligations. Intimate settlement growth, rapid urbanization, and urgent local socioeconomic needs create complicated and frequently conflicting land claims. FGD, observation, document analysis and interview with key expertise showed that peri-urban land conflicts are primarily caused by overlapping legal and governance frameworks, a range of property rights claims, local power dynamics, and self-serving individual interests. Poorer tax revenue for the state or municipality, increased expenses, hindered investment, and conflicts are the consequences of peri-urban land conflicts

4.1.6. Peri-urban Land Conflict within the Context of Illegal Land Transaction

4.1.6.1. Magnitude of Illegal Farmland Subdivision by Per-Urban Farmers

The state has sole control over the distribution, redistribution, expropriation, and planning of Ethiopia's publicly held land. Therefore, any autonomous land-related activities carried out by people or groups, including land subdivision, transfer, or possession, are regarded as unlawful. However, there are several informal communities in the peri-urban areas around Mekelle; most of them are the result of land subdivisions started by farmers. The conflict between formal legal requirements and regional socioeconomic reality is the cause of these phenomena. Because they are aware that expropriation may occur without prompt or sufficient compensation, farmers on the outskirts of cities frequently live in fear. They react by dividing and reallocating land to save their families' livelihoods or to benefit from the rising land values brought about by urbanization. These actions reveal systematic contradictions between legal frameworks and the real experiences of rural households on the edges of cities, blurring the line between "illegal" and "survival-driven" conduct.

Empirical evidence from the field investigation supports the magnitude of these unapproved practices. Table 4.7 shows that whereas 35.1% (n = 118) of peri-urban respondents (n = 118) reported presenting land as gifts to their children, 39% (n = 134) of them said that inheritance or dowry served as the basis for land transfer. Respondents in the rural benchmark were demonstrating similar trends.

Table 4.7: Number of plots transferred to third party through illegal mechanisms

	Category of respondents	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Gift to children	Target peri-urban	118	2.0339	1.55213	.14288
	Benchmark rural	135	2.2593	1.20300	.10354
Inheritance to children	Target peri-urban	37	1.5676	.68882	.11324
	Benchmark rural	31	1.2581	.51431	.09237
Dowry to children	Target peri-urban	93	1.4946	.71663	.07431
	Benchmark rural	45	1.4667	.72614	.10825
Gift to relatives	Target peri-urban	4	1.2500	.50000	.25000
	Benchmark rural	14	1.1429	.36314	.09705
Sell	Target peri-urban	67	1.6866	1.10384	.13485
	Benchmark rural	45	2.2444	1.40058	.20879
Total	Target peri-urban	336	1.6518	2.15397	.11751
	Benchmark rural	336	1.5685	1.93663	.10565

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The survey results, however, appear to significantly underestimate the true scope of informal land transfers, according to information gleaned from KIIs and FGDs. Concerns about potential legal repercussions were the main reason why respondents frequently indicated a hesitancy to reveal the full scope of such activities. According to the qualitative data, many people suppress information from official surveys out of fear of administrative consequences and state reprisals. Documentary data supports these qualitative conclusions. As will be covered, administrative records from the 2011 land adjudication procedure show a noticeably increased prevalence of informal transactions and illegal land subdivision in the sample villages. When taken together, these triangulated sources clearly show that peri-urban farmers' illegal land subdivisions are significantly more widespread than survey data alone can show.

4.1.6.2. Farmers' Involvement in Illegal Land Subdivisions

Effective resolution of peri-urban land conflicts requires an understanding of their underlying causes, especially those that aid in unlawful land subdivision, unrestrained settlement growth, and informal land occupancy. These disagreements typically appear along two interconnected

characteristics, according to analysis. First, they violate the government's land power, which is intended to advance the benefit of all. Second, they show the continuous struggle for land resource allocation and control, as local organizations and farmers claim property rights that often violate the law. The state, which purports to act on behalf of the people and private landowners who want to maintain control over their properties in Mekelle's peri-urban areas, could be seen as at odds with one another.

The behavior of farmers who illegally split their land is studied under three basic assumptions. However, there needs to be empirical evidence. These assumptions attribute such acts to economic opportunism and a lack of governmental forethought. In the next subsections, these assumptions are critically examined using empirical data from Mekelle's peri-urban setting. It will introduce fresh alternative hypotheses that require further investigation in the broader context of peri-urban land disputes.

4.1.6.3. Peasant Speculation Hypothesis

Policymakers often attribute the expansion of informal settlements in the peri-urban area of Mekelle on usufruct landholders' speculative activities. This view, which is represented in both official discourse and scholarly literature, holds that farmers have been illegally subdividing and selling their land informally in order to profit from rising land values, especially in response to in-migration and urban pressure, because the formal urban land lease system is unable to meet the growing demand for housing. This thesis questions the validity of that supposition through survey analysis and triangulated qualitative data. Respondents were asked a hypothetical question: if both options were legally available, would they prefer to continue farming or subdivide and convert their land? As shown in Table 4.8, a clear majority 87.8% of peri-urban respondents and 83.0% of rural benchmark respondents preferred they would continue farming, even when aware of the potential profits from subdivision.

Table 4.8: Preference of the respondent if he/she was entitled to choose either cropping or subdivide sale his/her farm holding

	Target group		Benchmark group	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Continue cropping	295	87.8	279	83.0
Subdivide and sell	40	11.9	57	17.0
Missing	1	.3	-	-
Total	336	100.0	336	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2025

To test for significant differences between the two groups, an independent sample t-test was conducted (Table 4.9). The results indicate no statistically significant difference: $t(663) = 1.348$, $p = .178$ at the 95% confidence. Effect size metrics also showed negligible variation between groups (Cohen's $d = .154$; Hedges' $g = .154$; Glass's $s = .105$). These findings suggest that the speculative motivation is neither dominant nor unique to peri-urban areas. Only a minority of respondents, 10% in peri-urban areas and 17% in rural areas, indicated a speculative intent. Even within this subgroup, the average age was almost identical (60.3 years in peri-urban areas, 59.0 years in rural), suggesting that age is not a driving factor. This points instead to contextual variables such as exposure to expropriation threats or prior displacement experience as main reasons for the involvement of farmers in the illegal subdivisions of landholding.

Table 4.9: Independent Samples Effect Sizes for age of the respondent

		Point	95% Conf. Interval		
		Standardizer	Estimate	Lower	Upper
Age of household head	Cohen's d	12.292	.105	-.048	.257
	Hedges' correction	12.306	.104	-.048	.256
	Glass's delta	12.287	.105	-.048	.257

a. The denominator used in estimating the effect sizes.

Cohen's d uses the pooled standard deviation.

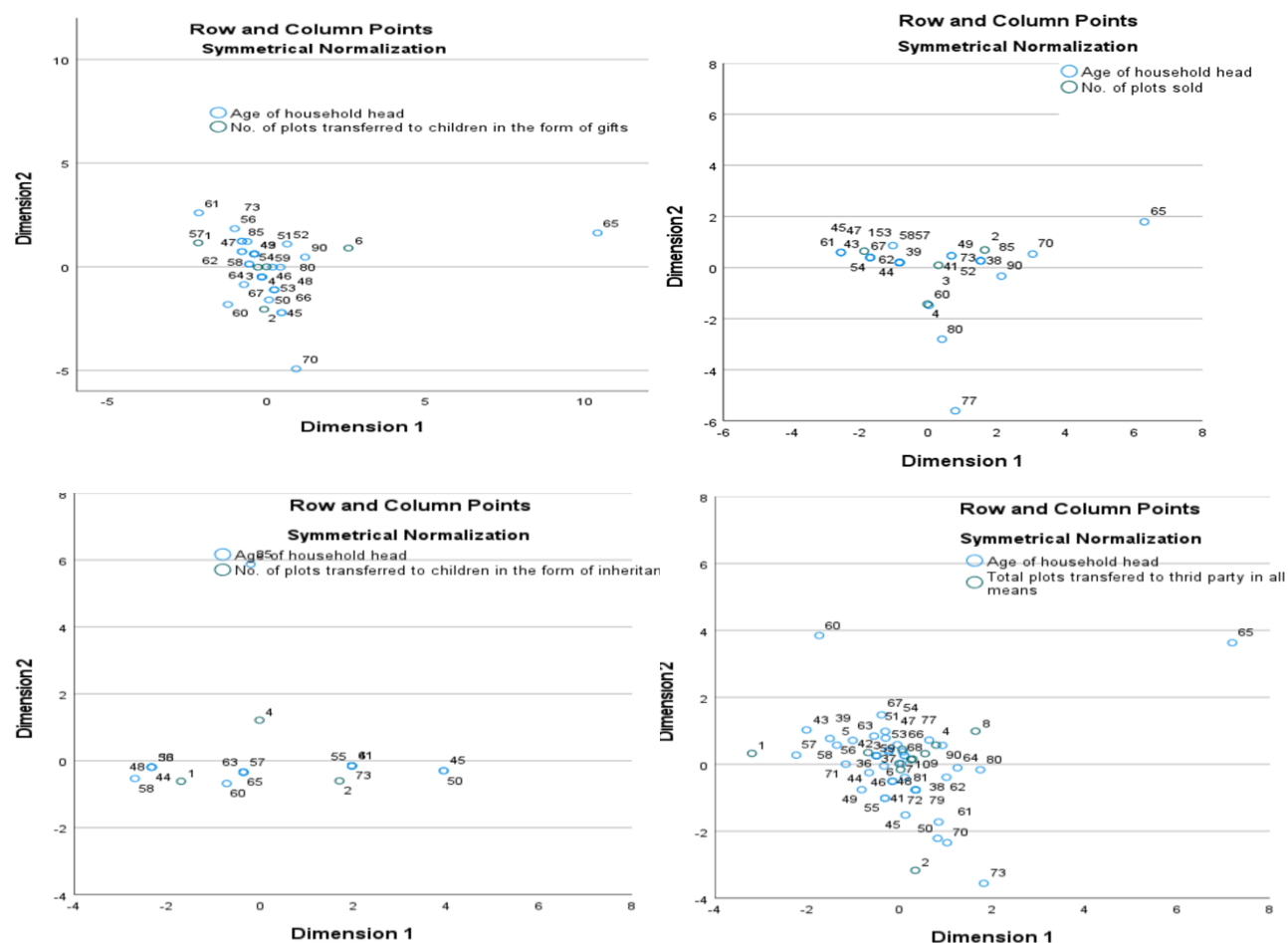
Hedges' correction uses the pooled standard deviation, plus a correction factor.

Glass's delta uses the sample standard deviation of the benchmark group.

Source: Survey result, 2024

A correspondence analysis (Figure 4.8) was conducted to examine associations between age and the method of land transfer (gift, sale, or inheritance). Results revealed a modest correlation between younger household heads and higher likelihood of land sale or gifting. However, inheritance patterns appeared to be age-neutral. This further supports the view that speculation, when it occurs, is a context-specific and limited phenomenon. Additional survey items assessed how landholders might respond to improved compensation schemes. As shown in Table 4.10, 96.5% of peri-urban respondents and 92.2% of rural respondents indicated that they would be deterred from informal subdivision if better alternatives were available. When asked about compensation preferences, both groups showed broad agreement over 60% supported all proposed options with mean approval ratings of 79.2% (peri-urban) and 76.4% (rural).

Figure 4.8: Correspondences between age of households and land sale rate trend



Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 4.10: Respondents' agreement to be refrained from subdividing their farm holdings if better compensation is provided and their preference to suggested compensation alternatives

		Responses					
	Category	Str. Agree	Agree	Indif.	Disagree	Str. disagree	N
Evaluation item 1: Farmers may not subdivide their holdings if:							
They are compensated for life time income	Target	40.2	56.8	1.2	1.8	-	336
	Benchmark	77.4	15.8	3.6	3.3	-	336
Compensated for inheritance rights	Target	56.5	40.5	1.2	1.5	.3	336
	Benchmark	69.9	22.0	4.8	3.3		336
Life transformative programs	Target	58.9	37.2	1.8	1.8	.3	336
	Benchmark	76.8	14.6	3.9	3.9	.9	336
Their flails get land for free	Target	53.3	42.6	1.8	2.1	.3	336
	Benchmark	74.7	17.6	3.0	4.5	.3	336
Overall	Target	52.2	44.3	1.5	1.8	0.3	336
	Benchmark	74.7	17.5	3.8	3.8	0.6	336
Evaluation item 2: Alternative compensation preference							
Relocation outside of the peri-urban for substitute	Target	28.6	44.9	3.9	18.8	3.9	336
	Benchmark	45.2	15.2	5.7	25.0	8.9	336
Product. compensation (tech. & research)	Target	33.9	42.9	11.3	8.0	3.9	336
	Benchmark	44.9	25.3	11.6	14.9	3.3	336
Yearly basis Lifetime income compensation	Target	33.0	44.9	10.4	7.4	4.2	336
	Benchmark	50.9	23.5	3.6	17.6	4.5	336
One-off pay of 30 years produce value	Target	32.1	39.9	11.3	13.1	3.6	336
	Benchmark	44.0	43.2	5.1	6.3	1.5	336
15 years produce value & transformative training	Target	34.5	44.9	6.8	8.6	4.8	335
	Benchmark	31.5	33.3	7.7	19.3	8.0	336
Residential houses and work premise	Target	38.4	45.8	4.2	3.6	8.0	336
	Benchmark	51.2	38.1	3.6	5.4	1.8	336
Plots for sale	Target	43.5	47.3	6.0	1.2	2.1	336
	Benchmark	47.9	40.5	4.5	4.8	2.4	336
Overall	Target	34.9	44.4	7.7	8.7	4.4	336
	Benchmark	45.1	31.3	6	13.3	4.3	336

Source: Field survey, 2025

FGDs and KIIs also provided qualitative validation of these findings. Participants in three separate FGDs consistently rejected the speculative label, framing land subdivision as a defensive strategy rather than an opportunistic one. Most explained that they divided and allocated land to their children to safeguard their household's future in anticipation of government expropriation. A particularly telling KII with a municipal official revealed that in 2021, 116 farmers outright refused compensation and rejected replacement plots during expropriation. Additionally, in one sample region, more than 200 households violently regained land that had previously been expropriated by the government. These behaviors show a strong skepticism of state-led land transfers and demonstrate resistance to urban encroachment.

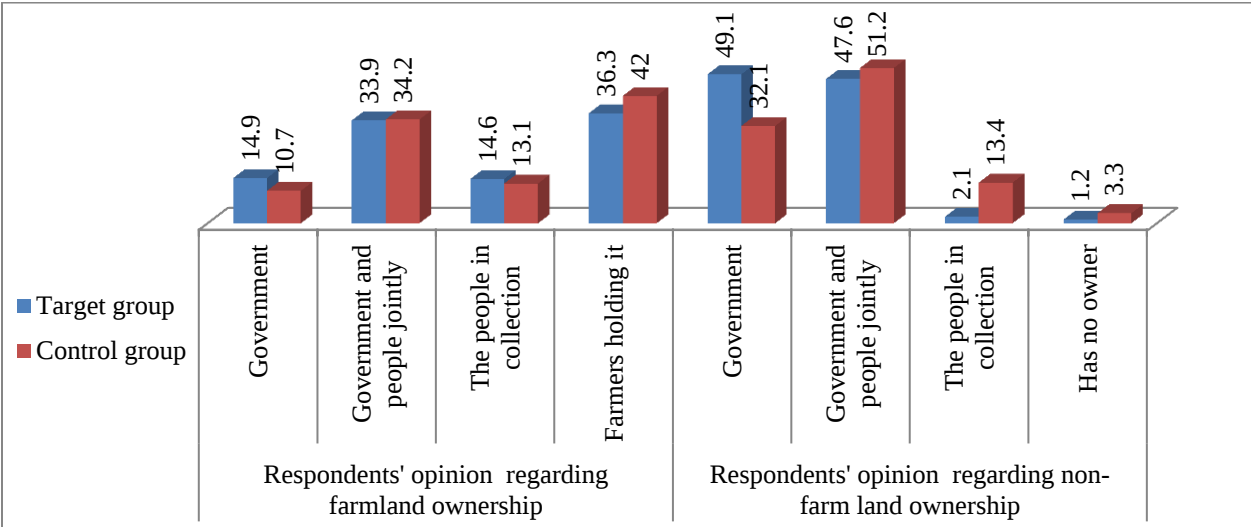
This mistrust is made worse by the bad experiences of prior farmers who were relocated. Discussions in focus groups revealed that many households that received compensation had serious challenges following their relocation. As a result, local officials and community leaders are increasingly opposing requests for border expansion at the municipal level. In conclusion, it is evident from triangulated data from surveys, KIIs, and FGDs that speculation is not the main driving force behind illegal land subdivision among peri-urban farmers in Mekelle. Rather, fear, uncertainty, and attempts to safeguard family incomes in the face of growing threats of land loss due to urbanization are the main factors influencing these actions.

4.1.6.4. Tendency to Tenure Type Change Hypothesis

Most peri-urban (56.8%) and rural (56%) respondents concur that farmers have the right to divide and sell their farmland, with only minor differences. This pervasive opinion could be explained by a number of causes, including (i) a lack of public knowledge regarding the legal definition of public land ownership, (ii) a propensity to make ultra-legal or de facto claims, and (iii) the normalizing of land subdivision through common practice. A significant proportion of respondents, 36.3% in the peri-urban sample and 42% in the rural benchmark group, believe that farmers possess exclusive ownership rights over their land (Figure 4.9). In contrast, only 14.9% of peri-urban and 10.7% of rural respondents acknowledges government ownership of farmland. Roughly similar proportions in both groups believe that land belongs collectively to the people. Notably, these views show no meaningful correlation with respondent age; the distribution of opinions mirrors the overall age structure of the sample. This implies that support for land

subdivision is a reflection of ingrained ownership ideas rather than generational aspirations for wealth creation.

Figure 4.9: Respondents’ opinion regarding the ownership of arable and non-arable land



Source: Field survey, 2025

A more revealing pattern emerges when linking perceptions of land ownership to support for subdivision rights. Among those who assert farmers' rights to subdivide land, 57.7% also believe that farmers exclusively own the land, while 15.1% associate this right with collective ownership by the people. These figures suggest that at least three-quarters of land subdivision behavior stems from perceived ownership entitlements rather than speculative motives aimed at exploiting public resources. In contrast, only 8.7% of respondents could be seen as engaging in subdivision with an informed understanding of land as publicly owned.

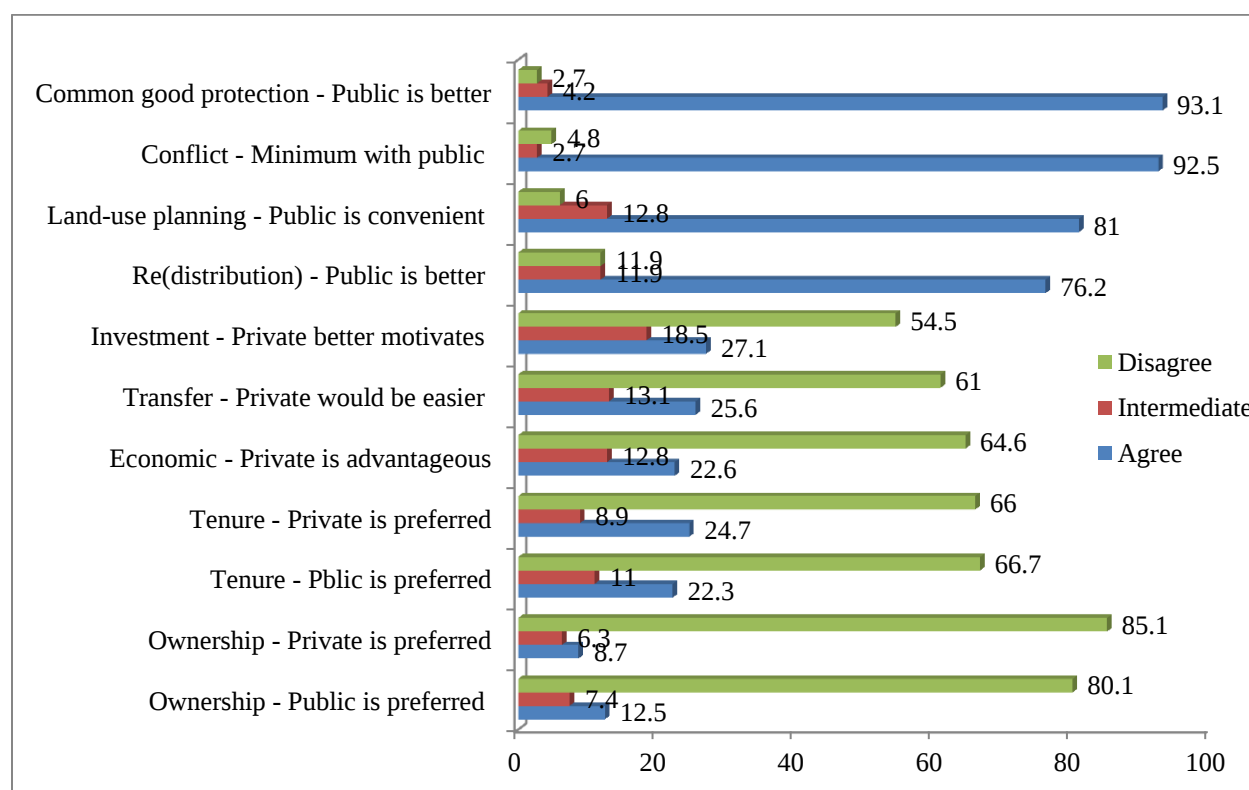
Further comparison between the two respondent groups shows that a slightly higher share of peri-urban respondents (by 4.2 percentage points) recognize government ownership of land, while a smaller share (by 5.9 percentage points) claim exclusive farmer ownership. This divergence may be attributed to peri-urban residents’ greater exposure to government interventions in land administration, which may have reshaped their understanding of ownership and rights through direct experience.

To probe whether land subdivision behavior reflects a deeper push toward private ownership, respondents were asked a series of Likert-scale questions assessing their preferences for public versus private tenure arrangements. As presented in Figure 4.10, 63% of peri-urban respondents

favor the benefits of public ownership, while only around 20% prefer private tenure. Comparatively, 30.4% of rural respondents are against private tenure benefits, whereas 50.4% support them.

Respondents rated four advantages of public ownership favorably: (i) protection of communal interests (such as ecological preservation); (ii) fewer land-related conflicts; (iii) ease of coordinating land-use planning; and (iv) the potential for equitable land redistribution when necessary. Surprisingly, over 71% of both groups rejected the claim that private land ownership is necessary to reap these benefits. However, opinions differed on four important characteristics of private tenure: (i) capital investment incentives; (ii) ease of transferring land rights (such as inheritance, pledge, and sale); (iii) improved tenure security; and (iv) individual liberty in land usage. Additionally, peri-urban respondents frequently disagreed with the favorable evaluations provided by rural respondents.

Figure 4.10: Assessment of respondents' tenure preference and perceived advantages



Source: Field survey, 2025

Results demonstrated that, rural respondents' support for the benefits of private tenure is primarily aspirational. And the ability for capital investment is severely limited in Ethiopia's rural economy, thus the alleged financial advantages of private ownership are essentially speculative. Furthermore, individual landholders rather than the larger community benefit most from the economic utility of land, whether it is for production or sale. Legal rights, not ownership structure, determine the ability to transfer land, and tenure security is more dependent on institutional enforcement than on the tenure type.

Overall, the favorable opinions of private tenure expressed by the rural respondents seem to be based more on imagined future advantages than actual experiences. On the other hand, peri-urban dwellers' mistrust of private tenure seems to stem from personal experiences with its drawbacks and hazards. This discrepancy between theoretical anticipations and firsthand knowledge highlights how differently rural and peri-urban environments are exposed to the structural effects of land tenure regimes.

4.1.7. Public Interests, Actors and their Roles in Peri-Urban Land Conflict

4.1.7.1. Peri-Urban Land Conflict through the Public Interest

Tensions between the government and peri-urban peasants are the main subject of the majority of research on peri-urban land dispute in Ethiopia. This framing usually focuses on the government's control over land management and the legally recognized land use rights of peri-urban peasants. Although the conflict can be simplified with this binary viewpoint, its complexity is not fully conveyed.

Instead, some studies draw attention to the issue of illegal property transactions from the standpoint of land administration. This point of view holds that only the government has the authority to create and defend land rights and regulate how land is utilized. Under this system, peasants are permitted to use land, but they are not permitted to transfer it or alter its use through market-based or capital contributions. Anyone who buys land outside of the official system is considered to be outside the primary land rights regime.

These analytical methods, however, frequently fail to determine whether the central issue of the peri-urban land dispute should be only articulated in terms of the administrative power of the

government. Peri-urban land conflict arises as a structurally rooted problem that goes beyond straightforward administrative classifications in situations where land is owned by the government, like Ethiopia. In addition to governing land, the government has a significant influence on how land-based economic resources are distributed more broadly. The government uses land to affect development results in a variety of sectors and spatial zones, including between urban and peri-urban areas and among diverse social groups that make up the urban fabric.

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's Constitution (Proclamation No. 1/1995) states in Article 40(3) that the state and Ethiopian people alone have the right to own land and natural resources. Peasants, semi-sedentary pastoralists, and pastoralists are guaranteed usufruct rights to land by the Constitution, free of charge and for an infinite amount of time. Additionally, these groups are protected by the constitution from being evicted unless there is a public interest and then only after receiving just compensation. On the other hand, rural and urban land set aside for investment reasons must be held under leasehold, meaning that rent must be paid.

The goal to improve the wellbeing of all Ethiopian people, whether urban and rural, across all social categories, is the main justification for public land ownership. The policy argument for granting unrestricted land use rights to peasant, semi-sedentary, and pastoralist communities is based on the nation's socioeconomic structure. At the time the Constitution was passed in 1995, over 85% of Ethiopia's labor force was capital constrained and dependent on agriculture and animal husbandry. According to Ethiopia's Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI) strategy and associated sectorial policies, free access to land was meant to facilitate initial capital accumulation by mobilizing rural labor and land as core assets.

The goal of this policy orientation was to promote low-cost domestic agricultural output, guarantee reasonably priced food supplies for urban consumption, and supply necessary inputs for industrialization based on agro-processing. It was anticipated that rural households would participate in activities that would increase productivity by eliminating the requirement for capital expenditures in land acquisition. Some contend that Ethiopia's public land ownership system offers a novel model for inclusive capital production due to the widespread participation

of the rural populace, despite the fact that this strategy is still controversial among academics and international development organizations.

Public land ownership is meant to support infrastructure investment and urban growth by providing an efficient supply of land, strengthening the city's position in promoting wider socioeconomic development. It is anticipated that urban land will generate enough revenue to cover the expenditures of purchasing land and building infrastructure in rural areas. In theory, however, the production of land-based revenue shouldn't pose a danger to the socioeconomic growth of metropolitan regions. Specifically, access to industrial investment and household housing shouldn't be hampered by the cost and distribution of land. Urban public land ownership is further supported by the natural depreciation of landed estates. When physical structures deteriorate and the value of built land falls below that of similar vacant land, urban rehabilitation becomes necessary. As a result, capital investment must be renewed, and lease terms must also be renewed, usually by future generations.

A key component of this land governance system is the concept of public interest, which was initially introduced in the Constitution and subsequently expanded upon in subsequent legislation. Despite its ambiguity and potential for many interpretations, the public interest serves as the legal and policy basis for public property ownership in Ethiopia. According to Article 2(5) of Proclamation No. 455/2005, the use of land designated as such by a competent authority in order to provide "direct or indirect benefits from the use of the land" and to further "sustainable socio-economic development" is considered to be in the public interest. The amended Proclamation No. 1161/2019 (Article 2(1)) echoes this definition.

Given that it directly addresses the differences in wealth distribution and growth between urban and peri-urban areas, this term has important ramifications for peri-urban land conflict. The term makes the implicit assumption that land use in cities is more productive than in rural areas. Although this might hold true in some economic models, Ethiopia's actual transition from rural to urban land usage is fraught with difficulties. In reality, as cities have grown, the rights of peri-urban peasants who own individual farms and collective community land have been mainly disregarded. The original landholders have been rendered poorer as a result of this process, which has involved the transfer of land from peasants to urban players. The fundamental purpose

of public land ownership, which is to promote equity and the general benefit, is in direct opposition to such a result.

Social fairness is incorporated into urban land lease laws, especially Proclamation No. 721/2011. According to Article 4(4), land distribution should support sustainable national growth, equitable access for all residents, and quick urban development. Self-help housing (Article 12(1c)), large-scale real estate development (Article 11(7)), manufacturing, star-rated hotels, infrastructure, and social services are among the land uses that the legislation specifies as public purposes (as supported by both Proclamations No. 455/2005 and No. 1161/2019).

On the other hand, the practical implementation of public purpose has been hampered by conceptual and operational problems. In the present period, it is not economically justified to assign property to commercial real estate developers at cost-recovery rates. Additionally, the legal system often gives preference to large corporations over smaller ones. Although commercial real estate and housing cooperatives are recognized as serving the public interest, other housing forms, particularly those that service private residences, have been neglected. In reality, real estate companies now have easy access to property, but cooperative housing projects have taken a long time, and private homebuilders' access to land through auction markets has been severely restricted.

In conclusion, there are both theoretical and practical obstacles to the transformation of peri-urban land into urban usage and the operation of the urban land market. The fundamental rationale for public land ownership is undermined by these, which include inconsistent policy concepts and poor implementation. Within the larger framework of public purpose, the next section critically analyzes the Mekelle peri-urban land conflict in light of development inequities.

4.1.7.2. Urban Versus Peri-Urban Development Disparity Effect of Public Interest

Through a useful division of economic labor, Ethiopia's peri-urban zone is structured by its constitutional and policy frameworks, which are supported by supplementary legislation and national development plans. Four main interest groups are distinguished within this division: the government, investors, common urban citizens, and the peasant community. The ensuing

subsections examine how these groups interact and have competing interests in the setting of Mekelle City.

4.1.7.3. The Loosing Peri-Urban Peasant Society

Government policy particularly in terms of land-use restrictions often compels peri-urban communities to remain in their rural mode of production and traditional societal structures. According to the Tigray Regional State's rural land-use policies (Proclamation No. 136/2008 and its 2014 amendment, Proclamation No. 239/2014), usufruct rights holders are obliged to preserve the natural state of the land (Proc. 1161/2019; Art 31(1)). Furthermore, the regional executive has issued directives prohibiting the establishment of new settlements under the rural land regime within peri-urban zones. In some cases, peri-urban societies themselves may choose to retain their rural identity due to actual or perceived limitations such as inadequate technology, knowledge, or capacity to transition into an urban lifestyle and economic model

The government has a major role to play in both situations. It is the responsibility of the state to assist the conversion of these rural livelihoods into urban-oriented economic systems when city borders grow and engulf rural populations. But the government has consistently failed to take the economic upheaval that peri-urban villages are experiencing throughout this shift seriously. No official initiatives have been established to support the socioeconomic transformation of the affected populations, despite the fact that the compensation provided by current land expropriation procedures is equivalent to ten years' worth of agricultural output (it has been extended to fifteen years starting in 2019). Compensation by itself does not guarantee integration into the urban economy. A comprehensive transformation program that includes employment restructuring, skill development, and social inclusion must be put into place. This should include planned settlement integration, the supply of essential infrastructure, the preservation of social values and community cohesion, and the reduction of the intergenerational social duties of the host communities.

Significant financial investment is required for such change, but the government has continuously opposed it due to the hefty expenses. But there are two important things to note. First, citizens hold the government legally and politically responsible. Supporting peri-urban communities in a transformative way is required by the constitution and the social compact, not a

voluntary act of kindness. It must be acknowledged that helping these communities integrate into urban culture is a basic state duty rather than a humanitarian endeavor.

For instance, over the past decade, land sales from 3,602 plots were expected to generate ETB 16,345,390,752 (adjusted to 2024 prices using inflation data from the World Bank). Adjusting the compensation rate per square meter (ETB 23.23 before 2020 and ETB 439 thereafter) and the benchmark sale prices (ETB 1,501 before 2020 and ETB 5,000 since then) into 2024 equivalents, the compensation paid for farmland acquisition constituted only 0.91% of total land revenue, while development costs accounted for 11.81%.

When uncollected land revenue is included, compensation drops to 0.27% and development costs to 3.47% of the total potential revenue (Table 4.11). According to these numbers, the city took an estimated ETB 53.6 billion worth of land from peri-urban communities.

Table 4. 11: The potential of land revenue in Mekelle adjusted to 2024 prices

	Plos sold	Area sold (m ²) (a)	Sale price (b)	Collected revenue (million) (c)	Acquisit ion cost (million) (d)	Developme nt cost (million) (e)	Surplus revenue (million) (f = c - d - e)	Future revenue (millions) (f =(a*b)– c)
2014	145	34,429	13661	176.833	4.558	50.878	121.397	293.476
2015	410	108,847	19688	771.483	13.480	160.851	597.152	1,371.510
2016	483	114,155	27108	1,064.47	12.904	168.695	882.868	2,030.039
2017	183	57,625	37702	712.584	6.109	85.157	621.319	1,459.993
2018	578	167,876	67503	3,528.28	16.077	248.082	3,264.068	7,803.982
2019	715	194,323	78986	4,543.11	16.349	287.165	4,239.648	10,805.568
2020	759	212,598	72472	4,314.03	15.445	314.171	3,984.438	11,093.360
2024	329	123,712	46201	1,234.53	63.814	615.686	555.083	4,481.035
Tota	360	1,013,5						
1	2	65		16,345.391	148.734	1,930.684	14,265.972	39,338.964

Source: Author's computation based on land auction database of Mekelle city, 2025

According to constitutional rules, this revenue essentially belongs to the people, even though the local administration may justify its expenditures as meeting a social duty.

The results of field-based focus groups (FGDs) demonstrate that peri-urban populations have a keen understanding of the land's economic potential. During the process of converting their peri-urban land into urban usage, participants specifically requested a portion of the land value.

The findings offer compelling evidence that the government has failed to uphold the principle of public interest in the peri-urban zone particularly from the rural community's perspective. Significant economic and legal disempowerment of the local community is one of the effects of peri-urban land conversion, which goes far beyond the exploitation of local resources to sustain urban expansion.

The suspension of Local Development Plans (LDPs) has had notably negative consequences, according to focus group discussions (FGDs). In addition to denying peri-urban people of vital urban infrastructure, this prohibition resulted in a block on building licenses. As a result, residents have been unable to improve or expand their residential homes. This has significant implications because it is anticipated that building costs would increase significantly with the eventual use of LDPs. In actuality, between 2017 and 2023, construction expenses rose by over 172%, which would cause future growth to soar.

Furthermore, the suspension of residential plots' property titling effectively puts a stop to these properties' legal and economic worth. Residents cannot use their residences for legal transactions, financial security, or even simple tasks like serving as guarantors if they do not have legal ownership. A participant from the Serawat region articulated the common frustration: Almost 25 years have passed since we were incorporated into the city. We haven't benefited from it, though. Title deeds for our holdings are still pending. Therefore, even in emergency situations such as police or court proceedings, no one is permitted to utilize their residential property as surety.

Public safety and environmental vulnerability are two further detrimental effects of urban growth into peri-urban areas, in addition to social and economic marginalization. Participants in the Debri FGD brought attention to a concerning hazard: potentially fatal floods brought on by inadequate urban design. They specifically identified six flood drainage outlets that were put in place inside a recently constructed housing cooperative site (the blue-bordered region in Figure 4.11). These drainage systems now pose a serious risk of flooding by directing runoff straight

into the original peri-urban community's (green-bordered region) long-standing residential neighborhoods.

Sadly, six people have already died as a result of these flooding episodes, based on community accounts shared during the focus group discussions. This highlights a significant breakdown in risk reduction and planning. It illustrates how urban growth can create new kinds of risk and vulnerability if it is not properly synchronized with the realities of peri-urban settings, transforming development into an existential threat rather than an opportunity.

Figure 4. 11: Housing cooperatives site (blue color bounded) versus Debri original settlement (green color bounded)



Source: Google Earth Map, 2024

4.1.7.4. The Loosing Ordinary Urban Residents

In Ethiopia, housing continues to be the top worry for urban dwellers of all income levels. In the local context, housing is the main source of family-level investment in addition to being a basic necessity. Although the population of Mekelle has increased dramatically over the last three decades, from about 16,000 in 2007 to an expected 612,000 in 2024, a conservative assessment shows that there is a housing shortage of at least 74,603 units. The government's inability to match the availability of land and housing with the rate of population growth is mostly to blame for this growing disparity. The government's failure to accomplish its own goals as outlined in national Growth and Transformation Plans (GTPs) is also reflected in it.

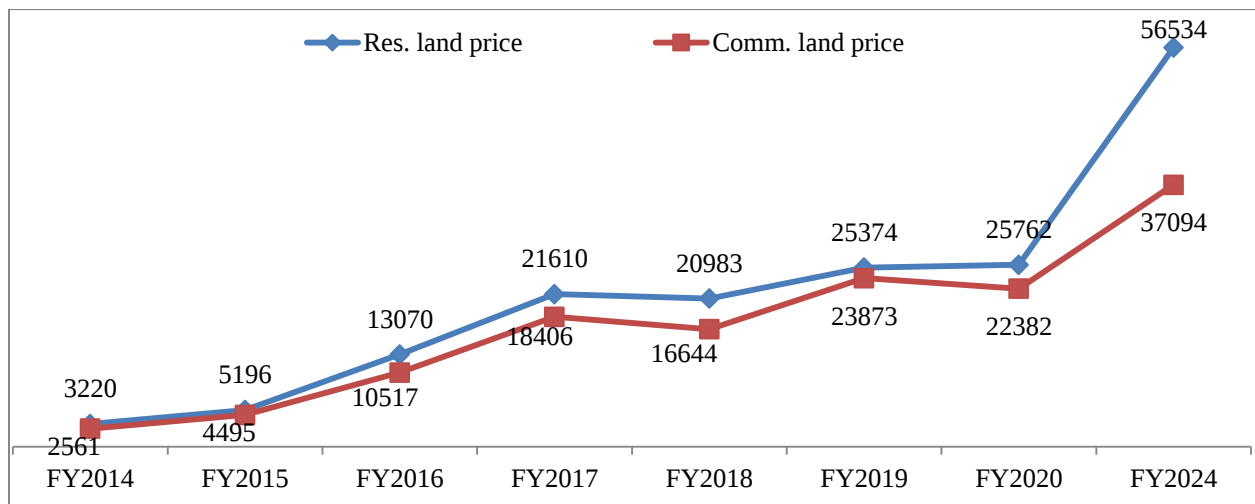
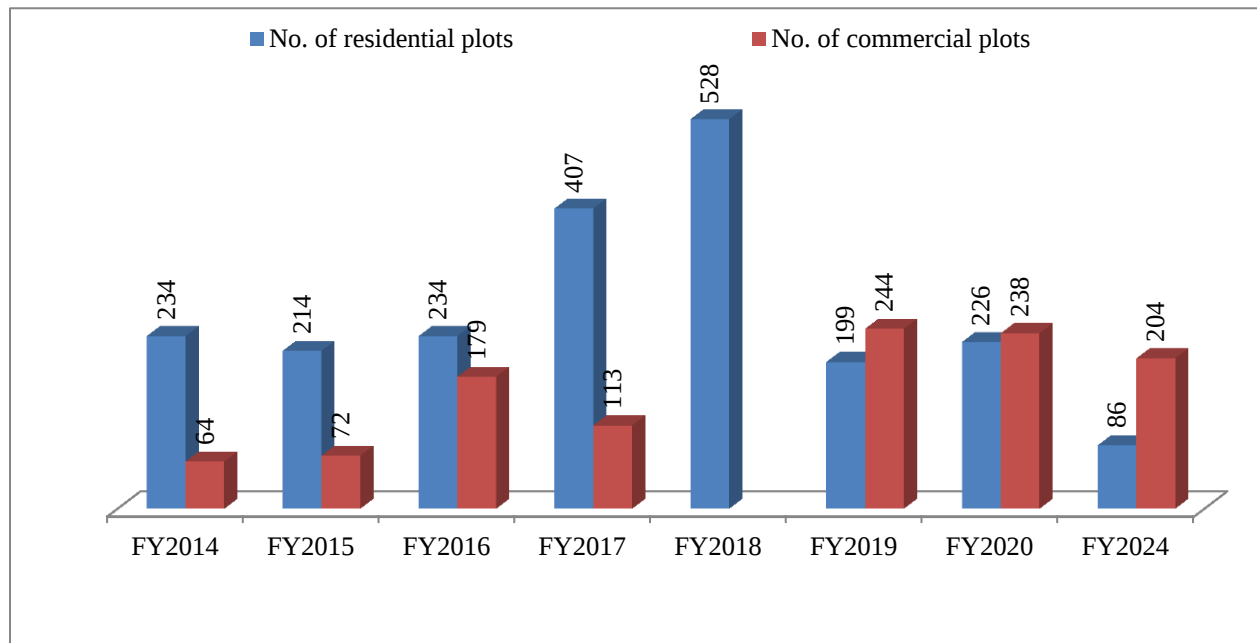
Even while national development frameworks and pertinent legislative documents specifically describe housing as a matter of public interest, public auctions, the main method of allocating land, have continuously performed poorly. The auction system has not only failed to satisfy the yearly growth in housing demand, but it has also failed to remove the historical backlog of homes.

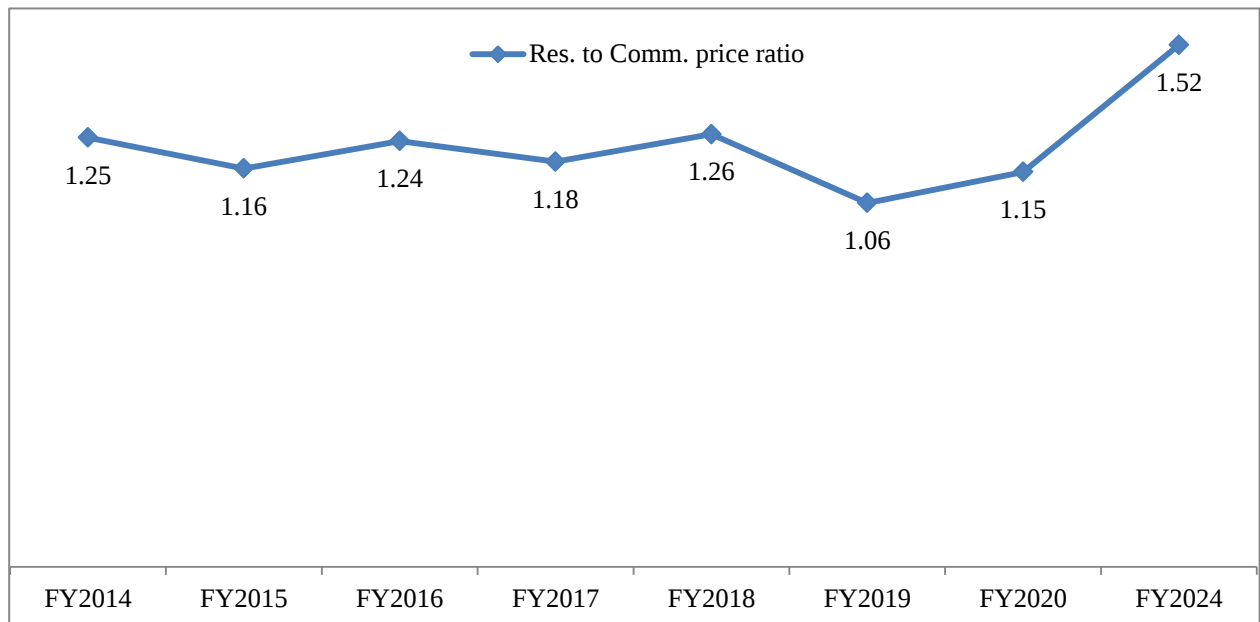
Only 2,486 plots were made available by public auction between 2007 and 2013, with an average bidder competition per plot ranging from 4 to 19. There were only 2,044 plots sold at auction between 2014 and January 2020 (Figure 4.12). The city's consistently low homeownership rate which is still the lowest among Ethiopia's cohort cities has been barely impacted by this constrained availability. The 2018 PSI study states that just 33% of Mekelle's population is homeowners.

Even though residential land usually makes up the majority of urban land use, there hasn't been a disproportionate amount of it available at auction in Mekelle. The amount of residential land offered in a number of auction rounds, especially in 2024, was either comparable to or much less than that of commercial land. This undersupply, coupled with high demand, has led to severe price inflation in the auction land market.

Indeed, residential land prices in Mekelle have consistently surpassed those of commercial plots by margins of 15% to 52% (Figure 4.12). The average auction price per square meter in 2013 was ETB 3,220. By January 2020, this had risen to ETB 25,762, and by December 2024, it had surged further to ETB 61,020 (Figure 4.12, middle). This exponential price increase has effectively excluded the majority of urban residents from participating in the land market.

Figure 4. 12: Supply of plots through the auction market (top), price (middle), and residential to commercial land price ratio





Source: Field survey, 2025

Between 2013 and 2020, the residential land prices increased by a factor of 14.2. Even among the top income quantile, up to 68% of household gross income was required to afford land acquisition in 2020. Consequently, only those capable of making an advance payment of at least ETB 3,935,818 were able to access residential land via auction—and this threshold has risen further by 2024. Meanwhile, most urban residents have experienced stagnant nominal incomes and declining real purchasing power. In light of this, it is clear that the great majority of urban dwellers have been disproportionately impacted by the urban land sector's raging inflation. It is necessary to do a more thorough analysis of how auction-based land price increases affect affordability. To this end, an affordability index (π_t) was formulated to capture the evolving relationship between auction land prices and general consumer price trends over time. The model is represented as below:

$$\pi_t = \rho_t / \alpha_t$$

Where π_t stands for land affordability index of cohort t . The terms ρ_t and α_t are auction land price in year t per square meter and household consumption expenditure quantile in year t : $\forall_t = \{2013, 2014, \dots, 2020\}$ respectively.

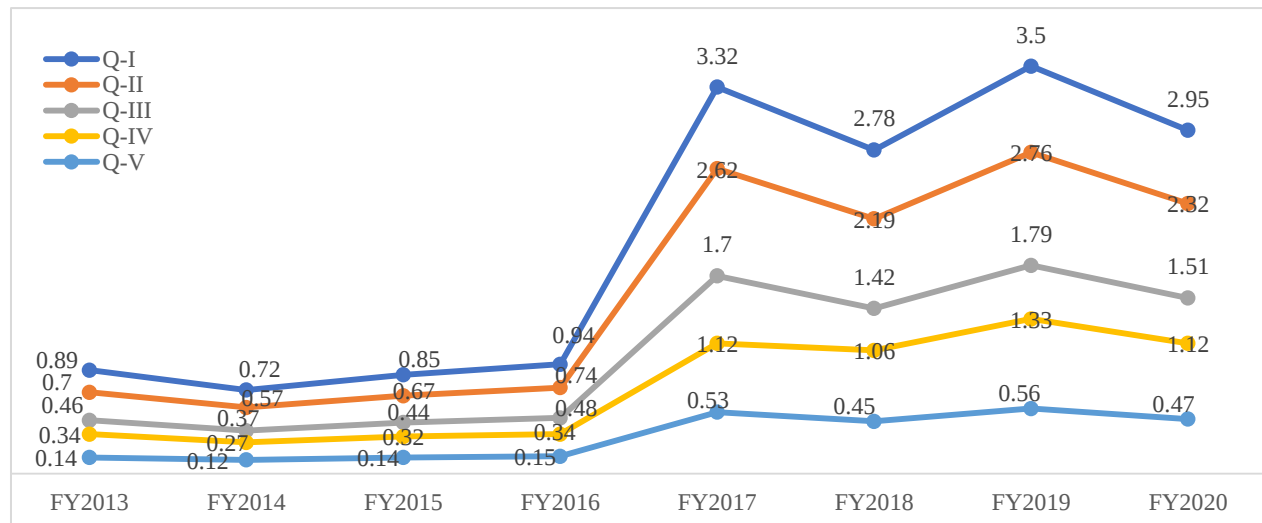
The interpretive framework for this model is as follows:

- If $\pi_t < \rho_t / \alpha_t \pi_t$, land prices are increasing more slowly than general prices, indicating improved affordability for later cohorts.
- If $\pi_t > \rho_t / \alpha_t \pi_t$, land prices are rising faster than general prices, indicating declining affordability.
- If $\pi_t = \rho_t / \alpha_t \pi_t$, land prices and general prices grow at the same rate, suggesting no significant change in affordability.

Based on this model, the ratio of residential auction price to household income consumption expenditure (HICE) for the years analyzed ranged from 0.14 for the highest income quintile (Q-V) to 0.89 for the lowest income quintile (Q-I). This suggests that until 2015, the growth of land prices was slower than that of general prices, maintaining a relatively stable affordability index (Figure 4.13).

However, from 2016 onward, auction land prices began outpacing general price trends. As a result, affordability declined sharply. For example, compared to the 2016 cohort, the affordability index for bidders in 2019 fell by as much as 26.9%. A key element of the public interest, equal access to housing, is severely impacted by this trend, which points to an increasingly exclusive urban land system.

Figure 4. 13: Residential land price unaffordability curves in Mekelle City



Source: Survey, 2025

Despite the stated objectives of the lease law (Proc. No. 721/2011), which states in its preamble that it is committed to protecting the public interest in urban land, the majority of urban residents have been essentially excluded from the market because of the continuous underperformance of the auction-based land supply system. This outcome directly contradicts the law's public interest argument. Furthermore, the increase in auction land prices has caused significant harm to both prospective homeowners and rent-dependent households. Tenants are increasingly bearing the burden of homeowners' growing land and construction costs. Housing inequality is exacerbated by the cascade effect, which disproportionately impacts households with lower and moderate incomes.

Both the lease law and the urban development policy framework declare that providing residential land for low and middle-income households at cost-recovery rates is in the public interest when it comes to land allocation. According to this idea, between 2017 and 2019, the Tigray Regional Government used housing cooperatives to provide 22,422 households in Mekelle with access to residential plots. But in the run-up to the 2020 national elections, this intervention was brief and generally seen as politically motivated. The cost-recovery land supply through housing cooperatives was abruptly stopped after the elections.

The cumulative housing demand as of 2024 reveals a significant shortage in supply, with conservative projections showing a 74,603 unit gap. According to other estimates, the number might reach 180,000 units. Despite meeting strict and frequently exclusionary eligibility requirements, over 60,000 cooperative members are currently on a waiting list, according to an interview with the head of the Regional Housing Agency. This suggests that actual demand may be much higher than publicly recognized. The severe lack of available rental accommodation in Mekelle makes matters worse. The market lacks both fairly priced rental options and rental stock in general, even for those who are able and ready to pay higher costs. The median rent was ETB 1,000 in 2018, according to PSI (2023), while current market assessments indicate that it has climbed fivefold. According to a 2018 PSI assessment, Mekelle's rental housing dilemma is primarily caused by unavailability rather than unaffordability. This disparity between the supply and demand for housing is currently the main driver of informal settlements and illegal land

transactions. According to the research, the main cause of illegal land acquisition is not speculation but rather a pressing need for refuge.

Thus, Mekelle's total housing situation is defined by a highly limited and overpriced rental market and a low homeownership percentage, which was estimated to be only 33% in 2018. When weighed against the public interest standard, this reality calls into question the validity of public property ownership. Such a situation, where the majority of citizens cannot afford to own or rent suitable homes and where the prices of property at auction are discriminatory, calls into question the entire justification for the state's monopoly over land in a democracy.

Therefore, in these circumstances, the frequently cited defense of public land ownership becomes less credible. The public interest in urban housing, as stated in the Constitution, the legislation pertaining to land expropriation, and the lease proclamation, has been clearly not upheld by the government. Many locals have been compelled by this failure to look for alternate options, mostly through illicit land markets. Although the government regularly accuses these tactics of compromising the public interest, this argument is illogical. On the contrary, the public interest in land has been jeopardized by the state's own actions or lack thereof.

The second biggest problem for average urban dwellers, after housing demands, is the need for land for commercial space. Commercial land, on the other hand, has comparable systemic issues. The overall costs are still unaffordable even though commercial land auction prices are still somewhat lower than residential land prices (range from 65.6% of residential prices in 2024 to 94.1% in 2019; see Figure 4.18, center). Consequently, the cost of renting a workspace is likewise very high. The monthly rent for a four-square-meter shop unit in Kedamay Weyane's central business center in 2024 ranged from ETB 15,000 to ETB 20,000 or ETB 3,500 to ETB 5,000 per square meter.

When considered collectively, the price and land supply data do not offer compelling proof that land has been successfully mobilized to promote more extensive urban expansion or to ease the transition from an agrarian to an industrial economy. The crucial relationship between land, labor, and capital in the construction of homes and workspaces has been mainly ignored by the government. Land and labor resources should be carefully used to lessen reliance on limited capital for development and building in an emerging country with limited capital, such as

Ethiopia. Rather, the incredibly scarce and erratic supply of land has compelled private capital to be overinvested in land acquisition, which has fueled speculation and driven up land prices. The creation of workspaces and homes has become less economically viable as a result of this distortion. The result widespread exclusion, speculation, and unofficial land a market further supports the idea that Mekelle City has failed to protect the public interest in land.

4.1.7.5. Land-Based Wealth Capitalizing Investors

The concept of public interest in land governance is recognized by the national development framework, which includes the Constitution and urban development laws. However, a broad and nebulously defined definition of both investment and public interest has been embraced in the interpretation and operationalization of this principle, especially in legislation such Proclamation No. 455/2005, No. 1161/2019, and No. 721/2011. These laws all share the fundamental premise that any financial infusion that surpasses the present economic value of land and property is an investment and, thus, serve the public interest. Based on this, over the past 20 years, the regional government has allotted a sizeable amount of urban land, especially in peri-urban areas, to the real estate and manufacturing industries at cost-recovery rates. Consequently, industrial land, which includes manufacturing and associated storage, currently makes up around 12.56% of Mekelle's total built-up area. Residential land predominates at 70.3%, while commercial land makes up 8.1%.

However, the practical application of this investment-led land distribution policy has put both the general concept of public interest and the welfare of peri-urban rural communities in particular at risk. First, the process presents an issue with distributional equality since, even when investors receive peri-urban farm property at below-market prices; the anticipated beneficiaries' urban residents are often limited to low-wage manufacturing jobs. Second, the manufacturing returns and the long-term worth of agricultural produce have not been compared through a cost-benefit analysis. Most investment appraisals have focused on flimsy measures like paid-up capital and the number of promised employment rather than assessing the genuine comparative advantage of manufacturing over agriculture.

Empirical data indicates that the investment approach has failed even within its own limited definition, which exacerbates the theoretical shortcomings in policy design. Only 27.11% of Mekelle's 4,170 jobs were in manufacturing, and 6.9% were in hotels and tourism, according to a 2017 official employment inventory. This means that 34.01% of Mekelle's jobs were in industries that were qualified for cost-recovery land access under investment provisions. Furthermore, 86.6% of these manufacturing businesses are small-scale, employing 6–30 people, 12.93% are medium-sized (31–100 people), and only 0.45% are large-scale (more than 100 people). The majority of hotels are family-run businesses with minimal formal employment opportunities.

Furthermore, the rate at which licensed investments are turned into active businesses is still quite low. With the exception of large-scale EFFoRT firms, only 1,074 (32.8%) of the 3,279 licensed investments made during the Growth and Transformation Plan I (GTP-I) period went into operation. There were only 644 businesses (19.6%) in the manufacturing sector. Only 35.7% of the 4,053 licensed investments realized during the first half of GTP-II, following a similar pattern. Only 412 of the manufacturing projects were completed and put into service

Furthermore, a 2017 study conducted by the Policy Studies and Research Center (PSRC) discovered that Mekelle's operational manufacturing businesses operate at a rate that is far lower than their installed capabilities, with the agro-processing sectors running at an efficiency of 6% to 57%. A net negative economic return was found in a later PSRC (2019) research assessing industrial industries held by foreigners. There isn't much proof that these results have improved, especially since 2019, when the political and economic climate has been getting worse. Interestingly, the studies also revealed that manufacturing occupations had some of the lowest average salaries, which undermines the industry's contribution to the development of a middle-class society.

It is evident from this data that the policy goal of creating middle-class jobs through manufacturing-led employment has not been achieved, either in terms of the number or caliber of jobs created. The public interest mandate that supported these investments has been flagrantly violated by the inability to convert land allocation into significant economic rewards. Additionally, employment creation in medium and large-scale manufacturing remains

disproportionately low when compared to small-scale enterprises, despite the former receiving the bulk of industrial land allocations.

Despite these failures, the government continues to promote manufacturing investments and to convert peri-urban land for that purpose. In 2017 alone, 41.32% of the 2,076 hectares allocated to economic sectors was designated for manufacturing. Yet, both Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) revealed that many investment projects awarded land had not materialized. Instead, large swaths of land remained vacant and fenced, signaling speculative land holding rather than productive use. These claims were confirmed through field observations conducted by the author, including at the Hamiday investment site where, even after two decades, less than one-third of enterprises had completed construction let alone commenced operations (Figure 4.14).

Figure 4. 14: Land provided to nominal manufacturing investors in Mekelle City, Hamiday site



Source: Google Earth Map, 2023

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) further revealed that a substantial share of land allocated for investment purposes has either been transferred to third parties at significant premiums or is being kept idle – fenced and held in anticipation of future speculative gains. This trend suggests

that, despite being presented as serving the public interest, the investment strategy has been subtly created to help politically connected elites amass wealth. It is indicative of a more serious structural problem in which land, a vital public resource, has been used for profit-seeking.

Numerous Regional Council audits and independent assessments conducted by the Policy Studies and Research Centre (PSRC) between 2017 and 2020 have demonstrated this use. This analysis identified several abnormalities, including underutilization, unlawful property transfers, and speculative hoarding. In response to the council's and the research institutions' recommendations for remedial action, the regional administration strangely stayed silent, indicating a lack of institutional capacity and political will to confront the widespread misuse.

The disproportionate amount of land controlled by non-performing or underperforming investment projects, in contrast to their negligible contribution to employment and public goods, highlights the erosion of public interest, even though current land value data and investment return figures are not easily accessible to quantify the full extent of capital accumulation made possible by these projects.

The second significant investment area that the regional administration has formally approved is real estate. Since 2009, the Tigray Regional Government has supported real estate development by giving land to ostensibly established businesses with limited financial and technical resources at cost-recovery rates, which in reality amounted to almost zero cost. The majority of real estate ideas were small-scale before the urban land lease statute was re-enacted in 2011. However, by requiring the building of 1,000 or more housing units per authorized project, the new lease structure recognized large-scale commercial real estate as a component of public interest. However, compared to manufacturing or hotel investments, this classification of commercial real estate under the public interest mandate is rife with conceptual errors and execution problems.

Conceptual flaws in defining public interest in real estate:

Three main problems could render the public interest defense of commercial real estate investment untenable:

- i. **Lack of economic and social justification for subsidization:** There is no solid basis for the government's subsidization of land for commercial real estate. Mekelle's and Ethiopia's housing market is still in dire straits. However, public funds have been diverted

to private entities that do not clearly benefit society. The urban land market has become even more fragmented as a result of these actors' speculative and exclusive actions.

- ii. **Exclusion of small-scale developers:** The policy has disadvantaged small-scale builders and cooperatives by favoring large-scale operators, which has led to land concentration and raised the possibility of monopolistic behavior in the housing market.
- iii. **Discriminatory treatment of private household investment:** The same reasoning should hold true for private household investments in personal housing if commercial housing investment is considered to be in the public interest. The exclusion of the latter undermines any coherent justification for public land subsidization to commercial developers. These contradictions illustrate that the inclusion of commercial real estate in the public interest domain lacks support from both economic theory and social welfare principles.

Implementation failures in real estate projects

On the ground, real estate investment projects have demonstrated persistent underperformance. Before the re-enactment of the urban land lease law in 2011, the city had already supplied a substantial, though unspecified, amount of land to several nominal companies. Following 2011, only two companies received land through formalized channels. During field investigations, seven project sites were visited (Table 4.12), and none of the projects had been completed by 2024 (Figures 4.15–4.17).

Table 4. 12: Sample real estate investments in Mekelle City

Company	Land (ha)	Year of allotment	Building permit
Dora Real Estate	3.32	2009	2009
Professional Housing PLC	1.85	2011	2011
Kalamino Real estate	5	2018	2018
Sur Construction Company	100	2018	2018

Source: Adopted from PSI, 2023

Figure 4. 15: Gezana Real estate Serawat site development status in 2011 (left) & in 2025 (right)



Source: Google Earth Map, 2025

Figure 4. 16: Professional Real Estate – Diaspora site project construction status



Source: Field photo, 2025

Figure 4. 17: Sur Construction Company Serawat site project development status



Source: Google Earth map, 2025

KIIs with officials from the Land Development and Management departments at both city and sub-city levels confirmed that none of these projects were completed according to plan. Informants at regional and municipal levels emphasized that most proposals approved prior to 2011 were not genuine investments, but rather land grabs by unqualified and non-professional entities. These nominal companies subdivided the land and sold it at premiums, despite receiving it at near-zero cost.

For instance, in 2009, some of these companies sold undeveloped plots at ETB 1,600 per square meter a vast premium over their acquisition price. According to a 2023 PSI report, only Professional Housing PLC succeeded in constructing approximately 51–60% of its proposed units by 2017, which were subsequently sold to beneficiaries (Figure 4.16). Despite public awareness of the speculative behaviour and underperformance of these entities, the regional government approved additional projects in 2018, including the Kalamino Real Estate project another nominal company resembling its predecessors in both form and behaviour.

Public resource loss and opportunity cost

The financial repercussions of this defective policy are quantifiable. In addition to uprooting local peasants, the land given to these corporations cost the city possible income. While the

average 2013 residential land auction price was ETB 3,220, reflecting lost revenue of ETB 3,216 per square meter, the land was transferred in 2009 at ETB 4 per square meter. According to this disparity, a total of ETB 166.27 million in public resources were wasted to just two businesses.

This pattern intensified by 2018. Two real estate companies were given 105 hectares of urban property in total. The public resource transferred to these two companies is estimated to be ETB 22.032 billion; using the average residential land auction price (ETB 20,983) and the maximum benchmark price (ETB 1,501) as references (Table 4.13). The magnitude of public wealth plunder under the pretense of investment is strikingly illustrated by these data, which run counter to any idea of public benefit.

Table 4. 13: Amount of public wealth appropriated by sample real estate companies in Mekelle

Company	Land (ha)	Appropriated wealth		Note
		ETB	USD	
Dora Ral Estate	3.32	106.77	3.194	2013
Professional Housing PLC	1.85	59.500	5.731	2013
Kalamino Real estate	5	1,049.150	38.248	2018
Sur Construction	100	20,983	764.965	2018
Total	110.17	22,198.42	812.138	-

Source: Author own computation, 2024

The government enabled a scenario in which commercial real estate corporations appropriated ETB 20,149 per square meter (about USD 737) of land value, according to the sample data. This number represents the discrepancy between market value and purchase cost. Furthermore, the investment agreements gave the local government control over the provision of infrastructure, resulting in additional public spending on projects with low social benefits.

Thus, land has served as a major means of capital accumulation by small elite, the majority of whom are politically connected people and organizations, such as the Sur Construction Company, associated with the ruling party, according to Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

The bulk of land plots assigned to investment projects are still undeveloped and walled, with some remaining undeveloped for more than ten years, according to empirical data from PSI research (2017). According to current laws, these studies suggested ending lease agreements.

Concurrently, the public and local and regional councils have advocated for the reclamation of underutilized investment land on numerous occasions, but little has been done about it. Conversely, despite abundant evidence of speculative misuse, land distributions persist, frequently in an excessive manner. The government's continued inaction in the face of growing land abuse makes it abundantly evident that the true goal of investment-driven land transfers is private capital accumulation, not the public interest, and is coordinated by a network of politically connected public and private sector actors.

Political capture and institutional erosion

This viewpoint is supported by interviews conducted at various levels of government. At the municipal and sub-city levels, informants from the Land Development and Management Department publicly voiced their displeasure at the way that administrative and political actions have weakened their institutional independence and proficiency. Informants at the regional level also disclosed that political leadership has consistently obstructed decisions pertaining to the recovery of land from non-performing investors. Speaking with two previous Regional Council members also showed that the Council lacked the political space and the ability to hold the executive branch responsible. Two critical problems were highlighted:

- (i) A lack of knowledge among most lawmakers about the widespread abuse of investment land and its wider ramifications;
- (ii) The systematic suppression of opposing viewpoints inside the council. According to one informant, the office of the ruling party shifted her to a position that completely prohibited her from bringing up the investment land issue.

These observations paint a picture of a political capture-depleted governance system in which institutions, laws, and development rhetoric are repurposed to further elite interests while ostensibly serving the public interest.

Public interest as a cloak for capital accumulation

When taken as a whole, the findings provide compelling evidence that the institutionalization of elite enrichment and rent-seeking has compromised the public interest. Instead of serving as a guideline for sensible land use or just development, the public interest has been deliberately

invoked to support significant transfers of public assets to parties with political standing. The expropriation and leasing regulations, which prioritize equitable development and the general welfare, as well as the spirit and intent of the Ethiopian Constitution, are obviously at odds with this circumstance. Instead, expropriation powers and investment facilitation mechanisms intended to advance societal welfare have been reversed to divert public funds and exacerbate inequality. In general, even under the state's own limited definition of encouraging capital injection, the examination of investment, especially in the real estate industry, shows that the practice does not serve the public interest. The findings are clear-cut:

- Investments in manufacturing have not resulted in appreciable increases in employment, revenue, or industry.
- The development of urban infrastructure, housing supply, and affordability has not been met by real estate investments.

Rather, both industries have turned into instruments for the consolidation of power and wealth, escalating socioeconomic disparities and threatening legal and constitutional norms. Ordinary people in the city must contend with an exclusive and expensive real estate market where obtaining housing is contingent upon winning at speculative auctions. Peasants in rural areas are forced into extreme poverty without proper compensation or other means of income due to expropriation, which results in the loss of farmland, community resources, and access to residential plots. In the end, land, a public resource with enormous developmental potential has been appropriated in the public interest as a means of elite accumulation, so sustaining injustice and undermining the legitimacy of the development process.

4.1.7.6. The Predicament of Vaguely Defined Public Ownership of Land

The vague constitutional definition of public ownership of property in Ethiopia is at the heart of the ongoing government-led misuse of land rights in favor of a politically connected urban minority, frequently in the name of furthering the public interest. The right to ownership of rural and urban land is exclusively vested in the State and the peoples of Ethiopia, according to Article 40(3) of the Ethiopian Constitution. Both the "State" and the "peoples" (Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples, or NNPs) are said to hold land, according to this phrase, which suggests a dual

ownership structure. Nevertheless, there are no explicit definitions or procedures to operationalize the governments and the people's separate roles and rights in conjunction with this dual ownership. This ambiguity has important governance ramifications and allows for speculative interpretations:

- It's not clear if this dual ownership refers to distinct land types (individual vs. communal, for example) or if it denotes joint ownership and decision-making.
- Neither the Constitution nor later laws include the process by which the peoples (NNPs) exercise ownership, especially when it comes to expropriation or the distribution of community land.
- Regional states are given the authority to administer land under Article 52(2) (d), but it is unclear what exactly this entails and whether it includes the authority to expropriate land with little to no public scrutiny.

Due to this legal ambiguity, arbitrary land appropriation decisions at the regional and local levels have flourished, frequently at the expense of rural households' and communities' usufruct rights. This opinion is supported by interviews with two previous regional council members. The majority of regional council members mistakenly believe that the public and the government are one and the same, according to both informants. According to this viewpoint, the government has complete and unrestricted control over land issues, including land expropriation. The Ethiopian constitutional principle of dual land ownership and the idea of the state as a custodian of public assets are at odds with this view, even if it is consistent with public choice theory, which sees the state as an assembly of self-interested actors.

A further interpretation difficulty is also presented by Article 40(6), which both authorizes the government to support private investors' land use and reiterates that land belongs to NNPs. This clause establishes a conflicting hierarchy of interests, with private investors' rights apparently taking precedence over those of regular people or local communities. The peri-urban land disputes examined in this study, where government actions continuously favored private investors over local citizens in the guise of "public interest," provide factual support for this view, despite the fact that it is hypothetical. Notwithstanding these inconsistencies, the state has been allowed to function as a client list allocator of land-based rents because to the dearth of

thorough scholarly criticism of the dual ownership model and the lack of political discussion around governmental power over property. Public land has been used for elite enrichment and regime consolidation rather than as a tool for inclusive urban and rural development through land administration.

Therefore, rather than serving as a steward of the public interest, this legal uncertainty offers the state political cover to allocate land to politically connected persons under the guise of development and investment. The ambiguous definition of public land ownership in Ethiopia's Constitution has detrimental effects since it makes it hard to discern between public ownership and governmental power, which encourages abuse, elite capture, and social inequality. This ambiguity really supports the misuse of urban land resources, the takeover of rural property, and the marginalization of peasant populations in the absence of robust checks and balances. By transforming what should be a cornerstone of equitable development public land into a means of accumulating wealth and gaining political favor, it threatens the rule of law and the constitutional guarantee of collective ownership.

4.1.7.7. Loss of Livelihood without Transformative Compensatory Programs

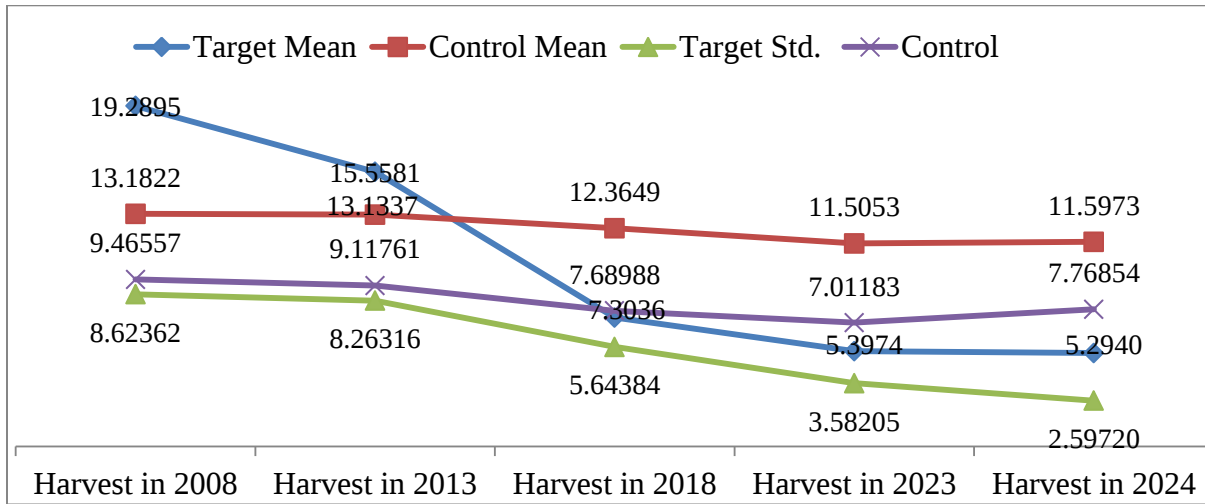
It is common to depict peri-urban land conflict as a struggle between the preservation of peri-urban livelihoods and state-led urban expansion. This contradiction is engrained in developmental paradigms that, in the case of Mekelle, encourage urban growth, frequently at the direct expense of rural peri-urban areas. Although the forced relocation of rural livelihoods into urban economic institutions and inadequate compensation are the main causes of this conflict, transformative initiatives have never been taken into consideration. The sharp drop in household agricultural productivity after farmland expropriation is a notable aspect of rural areas becoming urban areas. Between 2008 and 2024, a majority of the sampled peri-urban households lost part or all of their agricultural land holdings (Table 4.14). This has translated into a sharp reduction in average crop yields, from 19.3 quintals per household in 2008 to only 5.3 quintals in 2024, marking a 72.5% decline. Moreover, the standard deviation of harvests also shrank by 30%, indicating a homogenization of output decline across affected households (Figure 4.18).

Table 4. 14: Land expropriation (ha) trend (target samples)

	N	Min.	Max.	Sum	Mean	Std.
Before 2008	48	0.0000	2.0000	48.1000	1.0021	0.69435
2009 – 2013	44	0.0000	1.7500	36.5000	0.8295	0.33573
2014 – 2018	266	0.0000	2.0000	203.1500	0.7637	0.54078
2019 – 2023	2	1.0000	1.0000	2.0000	1.0000	0.00000

Source: Field survey, 2025

Figure 4. 18: Crop production trend between 2000 and 2024 in quintals



Source: Survey, 2025

Table 4. 15: Independent sample t-test statistical results for each sampled year

	Category	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. error
Crop harvest in 2008	Target	114	19.2895	8.62362	.80768
	Benchmark	258	13.1822	9.46557	.58930
Crop harvest in 2013	Target	129	15.5581	8.26316	.72753
	Benchmark	258	13.1337	9.11761	.56764
Crop harvest in 2018	Target	112	7.3036	5.64384	.53329
	Benchmark	296	12.3649	7.68988	.44697
Crop harvest in 2023	Target	151	5.3974	3.58205	.29150
	Benchmark	283	11.5053	7.01183	.41681
Crop harvest in 2024	Target	193	5.2940	2.59720	.18695
	Benchmark	275	11.5973	7.76854	.46846
Allocated land in hectares	Target	336	1.4866	.53863	.02938
	Benchmark	336	1.3348	.48317	.02636

Family size during land	Target	312	5.5737	2.27690	.12890
allocation	Benchmark	297	3.2054	1.63830	.09506

Source: Survey, 2025

Statistical analysis using an independent sample t-test confirms that the observed difference in harvests between affected and benchmark groups are highly significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Glass's delta, Cohen's d, and Hedges' adjustment are complementary effect size metrics. It indicates the magnitude of declination (Tables 4.15 and 4.16). This decrease is not only statistically significant but also very large.

Table 4. 16: Independent Samples Effect Sizes for farm harvest of target and benchmark groups

			Point	95% Confidence Interval	
		Standardizer	Estimate	Lower	Upper
Crop harvest in 2008	Cohen's d	9.21660	.663	.437	.888
	Hedges' correction	9.23533	.661	.436	.886
	Glass's delta	9.46557	.645	.417	.872
Crop harvest in 2013	Cohen's d	8.84270	.274	.062	.486
	Hedges' correction	8.85997	.274	.062	.485
	Glass's delta	9.11761	.266	.053	.478
Crop harvest in 2018	Cohen's d	7.18857	-.704	-.926	-.481
	Hedges' correction	7.20188	-.703	-.925	-.480
	Glass's delta	7.68988	-.658	-.881	-.434
Crop harvest in 2023	Cohen's d	6.04562	-1.010	-1.218	-.801
	Hedges' correction	6.05614	-1.009	-1.216	-.800
	Glass's delta	7.01183	-.871	-1.081	-.660
Crop harvest in 2024	Cohen's d	6.18580	-1.019	-1.214	-.823
	Hedges' correction	6.19578	-1.017	-1.212	-.822
	Glass's delta	7.76854	-.811	-1.007	-.615
Allocated land (ha)	Cohen's d	.51165	.297	.145	.449
	Hedges' correction	.51222	.296	.144	.448
	Glass's delta	.48317	.314	.161	.467
Family size during land allocation	Cohen's d	1.99124	1.189	1.017	1.361
	Hedges' correction	1.99370	1.188	1.015	1.360
	Glass's delta	1.63830	1.446	1.248	1.642

Source: Survey, 2025

These results demonstrate the direct relationship between declining productivity and landholding loss, in contrast to other variables like as weather and input and labor availability, which remained mostly unchanged during the study period.

The impact of declining land resources was exacerbated by a 44.3% increase in household size among peri-urban families at the same time. The poverty in Mekelle's peri-urban outskirts has worsened due to the inverse link between landholding and household size. Describes a proxy poverty index that measures the socioeconomic impact of this shift by capturing the dynamics of poverty in the agricultural sector, which has historically been the main source of income for rural communities.

$$1 - \left(k * \frac{x}{100 - x} \right)$$

Where k is the proportion of residual cropland and k is the net population growth rate. Accordingly, since 2008, the intensity of proxy poverty has grown by 83.3%.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) with former farmers in Mekelle's peri-urban area provide evidence of the disastrous social and economic effects of land expropriation. All of the participants said they had been forced into a position of chronic poverty and left landless. Numerous people have sold their farming equipment, signifying the demise of their farming livelihoods as well as the general decline of rural life. As one participant put it: *We increasingly rely on everyday work to survive. For those who constructed on our former land, some of us serve as gatekeepers.*

Former landowners now serve people who are occupying their expropriated land, an ironic reversal that highlights the extent of their isolation and lack of power. One farmer's story of losing almost two hectares of land was especially poignant shown below:

I possessed almost two hectares of agricultural land. In the past, I harvested 20 to 35 quintals of grain, mostly barley and wheat. I was compensated 0.2 ETB per square meter for the 1.75 hectares I lost during the first wave of expropriation. I lost an additional hectare in the second round. Since the payment was made in one lump sum, it appeared appropriate at the time. We purchased urban furniture, particularly a set of sofas. We discovered subsequently that the rate was almost zero. Our land was actually stolen for nothing.

Despite the fact that compensation plans are often presented as generous due to lump-sum benefits, this study shows that they can be quite deceiving. The initial financial boost masks the long-term loss of livelihood, food security, and land-dependent social position.

My elderly parents were once well-off farmers. But when their land was taken, they became entirely dependent on me. I now provide for all their needs.

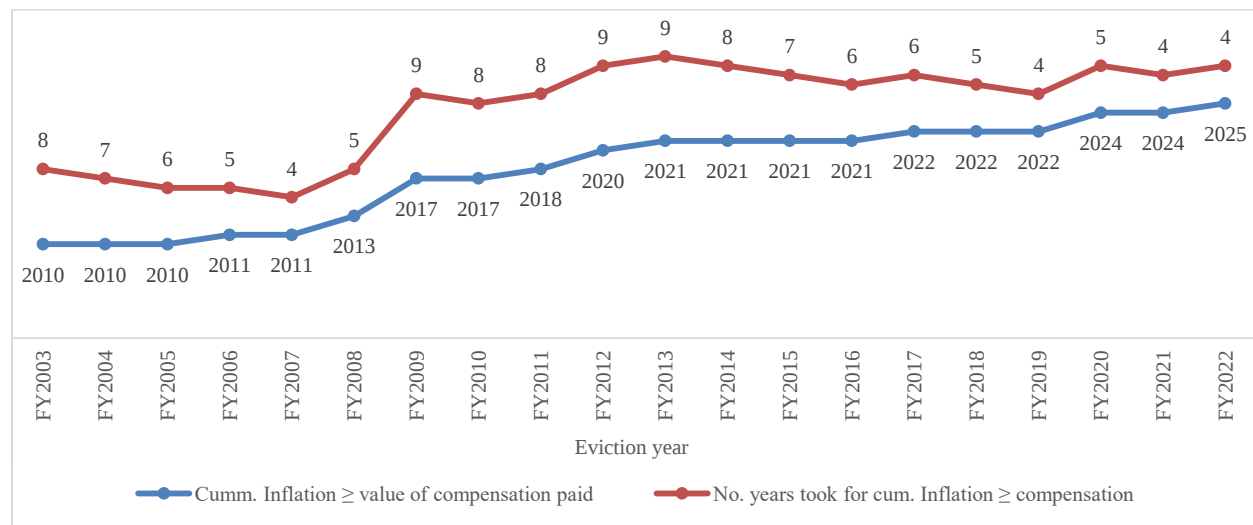
This example highlights the extended burden expropriation places on younger generations, transforming them from economically active individuals into the sole providers for displaced families.

There also exist a serious cost of acquisition of future produce at current price and uncounted cost of inflation on the compensation. In addition, to the irrational 10(15) years produce value compensation rate; the rampant inflation has severely affected economic status of the expropriated households even within the time covered by the compensation. Figure 4.19 illustrates the time when net value of paid compensation would be zero due to inflation. Over the past decade where expropriation has been implemented, the compounded inflation μ was doubling every four to nine years suggesting a net loss equivalent to compensation share of one to six years. For instance, the value of the compensation paid to farmers expropriated in 2003 would decline to zero by 2010. Likewise, the loss of farmers expropriated in 2018 would amount to half the amount they were paid.

$$\mu = \prod_{i=1}^n (1 + r_i) - 1$$

Where r_i and n stand for the inflation rate for year i and the number of years for which inflation is compounded and $\prod$ multiplies all the yearly factors together.

Figure 4. 19: Inflation cost paid compensation incurs



Source: Survey, 2025

In addition to the cost of expropriation of future produce in current prices that costs expropriated farmers, the compensation rate computation adds another cost factor. During 2005 – 2019, the unit relocation compensation rate of current year i was average price of the current and previous two years. Considering annual average inflation of 14.42 during that period (Equation 4.4), the shadow inflation cost of expropriated farmers is about 30.9% of the compensation amount. Consequently, the overall inflation cost government transfers to farmers is about 3.78 – 7.24 years crop value. This illustrates that 10 years produce value has never been paid to farmers. The relocation compensation has remained to be as low as 2.76 year produce value and at most 6.22 year produce value. This finding suggests that the real economic value of the relocation compensation is more concerning than the number of years compensation is paid for. This critical issue has got little attention, if any at all.

However, crop farming is only part of the livelihood equation in rural Tigray. Animal husbandry, despite its traditional and small-scale nature, remains a crucial livelihood source. Particularly in Mekelle's command districts, about 25.1% of the families polled have switched to raising cattle primarily (fattening, dairy, or small-scale herding). However, the ongoing urban encroachment poses existential concerns to this sector as well.

One of the biggest issues with Ethiopia's expropriation legislation is the absence of suitable compensation techniques. First, according to Proclamation 455/2005, the compensation would be

equal to the worth of agricultural products for a decade. The valuation was extended to fifteen years by the amended Proclamation 1161/2019; however the community still mostly disapproves of it. Just 30.1% of the 336 peri-urban respondents claimed that moving to the city had improved their financial situation. On the other hand, 69.6% of the benchmark group who do not reside inside Mekelle's municipal limits said they would like to live there, mostly in order to have access to the city's infrastructure and services (Table 4.17).

All of these stories support the larger claim that expropriation in Mekelle's peri-urban periphery is a structural process that upends rural lives, redistributes labor and wealth to urban elites, and solidifies systemic poverty rather than just being a land transfer. The testimonials also show that compensation systems are woefully inadequate in terms of both form and value, as they do not take into consideration the socio-economic and cultural importance of land to rural people.

Against the above evidences and discussion illustrating the severe consequences of expropriation on peri-urban peasants, some minority of the peri-urban respondents reported betterment after expropriation. Their positive reflections regarding economic status after the expropriation require justification. A cross tabulation of the positive response and reasons shows that 75% of among those reported economic improvement were those who subdivide their farm holdings for sale while 69% of the benchmark group mentioned anticipated access to improved infrastructure and services, rather than direct economic gain.

Table 4. 17: Reasons for getting better off: actual (target group) or perceived (benchmark group)

Ranks in % of respondents						
	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Target group						
Sale value of land	75.0	13.0	12.0	-	-	101
Infrastructure	19.4	65.7	14.8	-	-	
Income diversification	5.6	22.2	72.2	-	-	
<i>N</i>						
Benchmark group						
Sale value of land	56.2	14.7	29.0			234
Infrastructure	26.7	68.7	4.6			
Income diversification	17.1	17.1	65.9			
<i>N</i>						

Source: Field survey, 2025

The restructuring of employment patterns further illustrates the forced transformation of peri-urban livelihoods. Only 53% of expropriated households continue subsistence farming on residual plots, while 30% rely on casual labor, and 12% depend on semi-skilled or seasonal employment. By contrast, 86% of the benchmark group remains engaged in traditional crop farming, with only 12.7% reporting reliance on casual or seasonal work (Table 4.18). According to this disparity, non-farm labor among expropriated households is more important for survival than for gaining economic mobility. Ethiopia's compensation plan does not, in fact, cover income losses from non-farm sources. Since restitution is directly related to their land ownership, it is frequently refused to landless peri-urban people.

The perception that informal land subdivision is fueled by inadequate remuneration is further supported by survey data. Five Likert-scale items measuring views of remuneration fairness received similar responses from respondents in the target and target groups (Table 4.18). It's interesting to note that the target group was marginally more unhappy, suggesting that future expropriations in these regions would face more opposition.

Table 4. 18: Rank of current income means by their relevance

	Ranks (in %)					
	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Target group						
Cropping	52.7	31.0	11.0	3.1	2.2	17.5
Animal husbandry	25.1	64.0	4.6	4.2	2.1	19.6
Casual labor	30.4	13.7	30.4	20.7	4.8	8.6
seasonal semi(skill)	11.8	9.9	30.0	38.4	9.9	11.4
Construction materials extraction	7.6	2.2	6.5	14.1	69.6	19.8
N	319	239	227	203	184	
Benchmark group						
Cropping	85.8	10.4	1.9	.3	1.6	26.3
Animal husbandry	8.2	84.4	4.3	1.6	1.2	25.8
Casual labor	8.0	10.3	54.0	14.8	12.9	13.6
Seasonal semi(skill)	4.7	3.1	25.5	58.3	8.3	17.5
Extract construction materials	.5	2.2	17.7	14.5	65.1	18.4
N	318	256	263	196	186	

Source: Field survey, 2025

Both parties put forward what they believed to be a reasonable rate of compensation, which is equal to 40 years' worth of agricultural output. The benchmark group respondents' suggested that compensation periods had a standard variation of 17 years, while the target groups' was 15.3

years. Levene's test for equality of variances showed homogeneity of variance between the two samples (significance level =.144; $t = -1.254$), and an independent sample t-test verified that these differences were statistically unimportant. We used further correlation analysis to examine whether respondent age or the age of their children had an impact on these compensation estimations. Suggested compensation amounts are more representative of a normative sense of justice than life-cycle considerations, according to the results, which did not reveal any statistically significant relationship at the 99% confidence level (2-tailed).

Overall, this section's data argue on the notion that peri-urban farmers mostly subdivide their land illegally for financial gain. Contrary to popular belief, 89% of respondents said they would prefer to keep farming if allowed. The majority of respondents (almost 80%) said that if fair or revolutionary compensation systems were available, they would avoid informal trades, even though younger respondents showed a little more susceptibility to speculative activities.

The majority of respondents preferred replacement land or livelihood restoration initiatives over monetary compensation or marketable urban plots, and a sizable portion (36–42%). Also respondents stated that a sense of ownership over their land despite lack of official title.

Table 4. 19: Peri-urban peasants' degree of agreement to variables that negatively affect them due to expropriation

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Relocation compensation doesn't cover lifetime income	Target group	31.5	58.9	0.6	8.0	0.9
	Benchmark	66.1	15.5	3.3	14.6	0.6
Relocation compensation is limited to 10/15 years	Target group	53.3	33.6	2.7	9.2	1.2
	Benchmark	60.7	20.8	3.9	14.3	0.3
Relocation compensation doesn't account inheritance right	Target group	40.2	44.6	5.7	8.6	0.9
	Benchmark	57.1	23.8	3.6	14.0	1.5
Unavailability of life transformation of package	Target group	43.5	35.1	6.0	11.3	4.2
	Benchmark	64.9	15.2	3.6	15.8	0.6
Relocation compensation doesn't consider children's right on land	Target group	43.2	31.5	2.4	10.7	12.2
	Benchmark	60.7	18.5	3.3	16.4	1.2
Mean	Target group	42.3	40.7	3.5	9.6	3.9
	Benchmark	61.9	18.8	3.5	15.02	0.8

Source: Survey result, 2025

Overall, the results suggest that illegal land subdivision is justified by survival-driven. Informal land transactions are not opportunistic, as evidenced by the sharp decline in crop yields (from 19.3 to 5.3 quintals per household), the 83% increase in poverty intensity brought on by declining crop production as a result of expropriation, and the 70% of peri-urban residents who report a decline in their quality of life since being brought under the city's jurisdiction. Instead, they are reactive tactics used in reaction to insufficient institutional compensation frameworks and livelihood destruction brought on by the state

4.1.7.8. Fragmentation of Original Residents' Social Fabric

Concern over the original peri-urban residents' social fabric becoming more fragmented has grown over time. Over the past three decades, Mekelle City has grown substantially, mostly as a result of peasant displacement and agricultural confiscation. Local communities' identity and cohesiveness have been gradually eroded as a result of this urbanization trend. Following expropriation, many landless households were compelled to relocate in pursuit of rented farmland or employment possibilities in more remote rural areas during the earlier periods, especially during the first fifteen years of fast urban expansion. At the same time, existing villages were swallowed up by the growing metropolitan border, causing their long-standing social ties to break down.

In addition to the economic effects of land expropriation, residents of the Enderta district, which has long preserved a unique local identity and cultural legacy, have voiced their displeasure with the pervasive social unrest. Local communities contend that urban expansion has eroded familial relationships, fractured their communities, and reduced their historical coherence, according to FGDs and KII.As FGD participants in Deбри discussed the concern of original residents regarding their social fabric is a serious matter. If the government modifies its policy to accommodate the demand for residential land by the child adult generations of the peri-urban communities, they are also worried about where their adult children will settle.

The socio-cultural and historical significance of pre-existing rural settlements has continually been overlooked in both local development plans and the city-level structural plan (master plan), which is a significant contributing element. These planning techniques have prioritized physical and economic development over the preservation of community networks, cultural assets, and

the intangible economic and social capital embedded in these communities. As a result, socio-cultural structures have been methodically destroyed and their economic significance has been weakened by the execution of urban development projects.

The expansion of informal settlements has made the situation even worse. New settlers and displaced villages have contributed to the growth of informal land transactions as a result of ongoing expropriation and eviction. Prior to official expropriation procedures, these transactions entail the takeover of common lands and the division of farm and residential properties. The expansion of informal settlements is not just confined to nearby communities. Land speculators, Mekelle city inhabitants looking for residential land, and migrants from other parts of the region are also involved. About 26.44% of the buyers in the 87 illicit land sales that were revealed in the household survey were locals living in the same district.

Since they are already a part of the local social fabric, this group often poses little cultural challenge. But almost 30% of the purchasers were either Mekelle migrants or urban dwellers, and because of their disparate religious, moral, and professional backgrounds, their presence is seen as a serious threat to the integrity of the local communities (Table 4.20). Only over 44% of all transactions were completed by local buyers, meaning that almost half of the new landowners are not from the neighborhood.

Table 4. 20: Identity of land buyers in the peri-urban zone of Mekelle City

	Local residents	residents of Enderta district	residents of Mekelle City	Others
N	38	23	12	14
%	43.67	26.44	13.79	16.09

Source: Field survey, 2025

The ongoing expansion of informal settlements within pre-existing villages due to unregulated land transactions is expected to worsen community fragmentation and undermine the Enderta district's traditional societal structure as urbanization increases. Additionally, this brings about a fundamental shift in the social and economic dynamics of these regions, which frequently leaves the original inhabitants feeling unstable and frustrated. Local communities have taken proactive measures to maintain their social cohesion in response to this issue. In the original town, for example, Deбри people only distribute their landholdings among close family members and

relatives, many of whom now live in Mekelle City, according to KIIs. They hope to preserve the uniqueness of their community and keep outsiders from upsetting its social cohesiveness by doing this.

Additionally, when the city government presented a Local Development Plan (LDP) for their neighborhood, the residents of Debri set a condition: the plan could only be approved if it included the unofficial landholdings acquired through intercommunity agreements such as sales, pledges, and inheritance. Supporting evidence was provided by focus group discussion (FGD) participants, who emphasized that their children and other community members should receive any land that becomes available in the village before immigrants are permitted. One of the main reasons the LDP hasn't been implemented for almost ten years is the strong community position, which is based on the desire to preserve local continuity and identity. The resistance demonstrates how social cohesiveness and community identity are strong factors influencing how peri-urban land governance and urban growth develop.

4.1.7.9. Government Transferred its Official Responsibility into the Community

The number of informal communities in Mekelle's peri-urban area has skyrocketed. There is a deeper aspect to this problem, even though many illicit property transactions take place for financial reasons, such as land sub dividers' speculative gains or the rise in residential demand. In these regions, a sizable section of the populace believes that providing land is a basic duty of the state.

Table 4. 21: Respondents' knowledge regarding government responsibility for land supply versus actual land acquisitions by the flails of the peasants

	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
	Responsibility of providing residential land to children of peri-urban peasants		Actually who provides residential plots to children of peri-urban peasants	
Parents	30	9.0	93	27.7
Government	298	88.7	174	51.8
Themselves	8	2.4	69	20.6
Total	336	100.0	336	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 4.21 shows that 51.8% (n = 174) of respondents in rural areas and 88.7% (n = 289) of respondents in peri-urban areas expressly comprehend and agree that the government is in charge of providing land.

However, the actual situation on the ground presents a different image. In order to accommodate their offspring, parents are usually forced to divide their landholdings, especially in peri-urban areas. The government's protracted slowness in awarding residential land in certain zones is the direct cause of this behavior. Because the government has failed to give peri-urban inhabitants with access to formal residential land or alternative housing developments for over 20 years, the situation has reached a crisis stage.

Even while residential land is relatively accessible beyond the city's administrative boundaries, the peri-urban zone presents a different scenario, with local rural authorities controlling land allotment. Here, access to land is very restricted. Residents of these transitional zones find it almost impossible to obtain land for housing due to systemic neglect. Parents in peri-urban areas have separated farmlands to create space for their children. This is both a powerful critique of state failure and a socioeconomic coping strategy.

The absence of housing efforts sponsored by the government and the ongoing limitations on the transfer of residential land demonstrate a glaring lack of accountability. It illustrates the way in which the government is not carrying out its end of the bargain. A policy vacuum is created by the state's persistent failure to meet the fundamental housing demands of both urban and peri-urban areas, which also violates residents' constitutional rights to housing and shelter. Conversely, the efforts of peri-urban households, particularly those of parents who assist their children through informal land subdivisions, show a remarkable transfer of social responsibility from the local government to the neighborhood. This grassroots endeavor assumes that local actors are actively fulfilling the social responsibilities that the government has neglected, filling the gap left by the government.

This dynamic is further supported by survey data. According to cohabitation data, 3.4 families on average share a housing unit in the peri-urban zone, whereas 11.3 families do so outside of the urban buffer zone (Table 4.22). These numbers show how much parental space and comfort are

being sacrificed in order to house their children under one roof, frequently for several generations. Furthermore, it seems that familial responsibilities rather than speculative aspirations are the driving force behind informal land subdivisions. The data paints a complex picture when examining whether the subdivisions were motivated by a desire for personal financial gain or by concern for the children. About 25% of respondents think parents want to give their kids a portion of the money from land sales, whilst 61% think this desire is moderate (Table 4.23).

Table 4. 22: Age structure of family members

	Target peri-urban group		Benchmark rural	
	Num. households	Num. dependents	Num. cases (HH)	Num. dependents
<5 yrs	28	40	35	49
5 to 10 yrs	80	104	65	339
11 to 15 yrs	141	196	120	630
16 to 20 yrs	182	292	230	1058
21 to 25yrs	249	485	234	1415
26 to 30 yrs	136	254	172	947
>30 yrs	46	109	68	376
Total	1480		4814	

Source: Survey, 2025

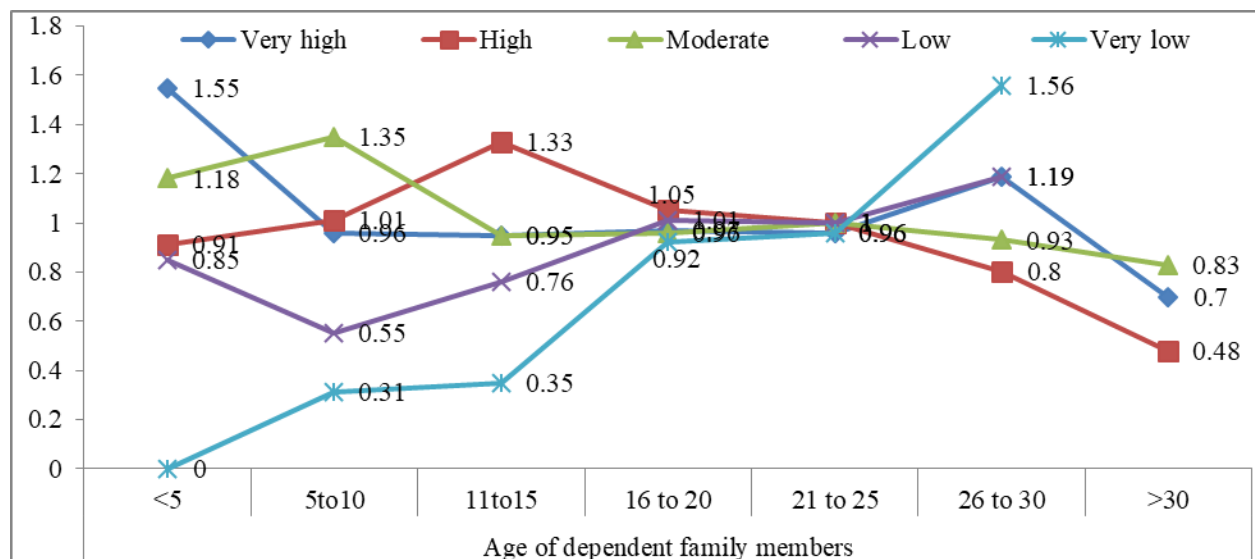
Table 4. 23: Evicted parents' willingness to share land sale revenue with their children

Scale	Respondents' opinion toward the tendency to share land revenue with their children		Evaluation of respondent's own desire to share land revenue with their children		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Very high	24	7.2	31	9.3	55	0.01
High	56	16.8	120	36.0	176	8.3
Moderate	205	61.6	120	36.0	325	26.5
Low	38	11.4	51	15.3	89	48.9
very low	10	3.0	10	3.0	20	13.4
Total	333	100.0	333	100.0	665	3.0

Source: Survey, 2025

45.3% of respondents ranked their own behavior as high and 36% as moderate in a linked question that asked about their willingness or behavior, suggesting a generally good attitude toward helping the younger generation.

Figure 4. 20: Relationship of willingness to share land revenue with children versus age of dependent family members



Source: Survey, 2025

The number of dependent children living in the home is also associated with the propensity to divide land or its profits with children. Parents who had younger children were more anxious about their children's future, but parents who had older children were less concerned, as found in this study. The assumption that many informal transactions are driven by familial responsibilities rather than speculative intent is supported by this generational shift in concern, which implies that land subdivision motivations have a temporal component. In conclusion, this context greatly shifts the social function of housing provision from the government to the peri-urban communities themselves. This tendency not only draws attention to the flaws in the current urban land governance system, but it also emphasizes how tenacious and united these communities are in spite of institutional failure. More importantly, it raises urgent questions about the state's obligation to provide for the basic necessities of its citizens, the future of peri-urban governance, and the protection of constitutional rights.

4.1.7.10. Displacement of Government Responsibility Scaled to Intergenerational Conflict

i) Effects of Cohabitation on Hosting Parent Family's Wellbeing

The ability of rural administrations to distribute land to locals was abolished after rural communities were incorporated into the city government. Despite this administrative shift, land development and reallocation have not yet occurred in the majority of the officially designated urban expansion areas, which are anticipated to remain predominantly rural in terms of production systems, community lifestyle, infrastructure, and governance (excluding land). As a result, for as long as 20 years, people of legal age in these places have been excluded from residential land. After reaching legal age after 2012, these younger generations have been compelled to live with their parents. The extent of this reliance is shown in the survey data from this study in the Table 4.24. A total of 316 households reported having 1,135 family members of legal age living with them.

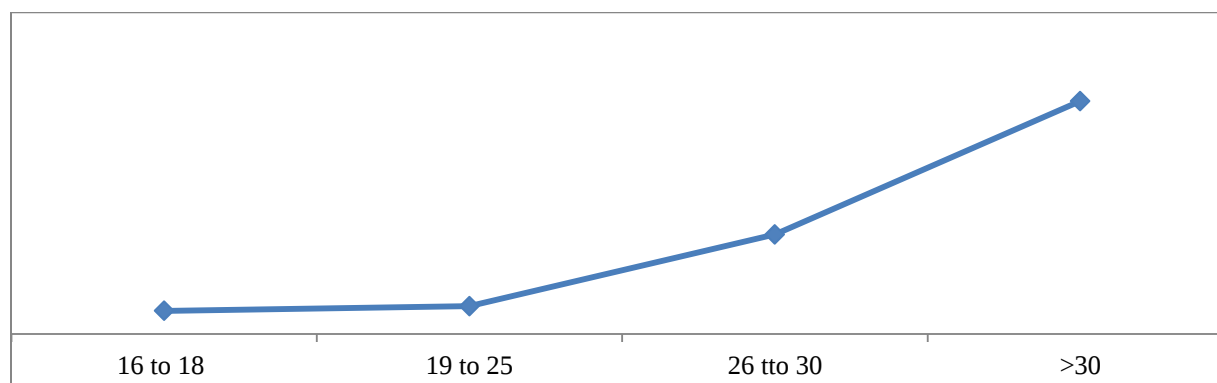
Table 4. 24: Number of adult families cohabiting with their parents

Hosting parent families		Average number of cohabited adult child families
Frequency	%	
316	94	1.9
21	6.7	1
62	19.7	2
103	32.7	3
53	16.85	4
34	10.8	5
42	13.3	6 to 10

Source: Survey, 2025

In Aynalem and Debri, where many homes house four or more family, this tendency is especially noticeable. In Aynalem, the researcher came upon a remarkable situation while conducting fieldwork: a single-parent household was home to four child families and two grandparent families. A generational pattern of dependency is also suggested by survey data, which show a positive, if modest, association between the number of cohabiting child households and the age of the parent family head.

Figure 4. 21: Correlation of parent household head age and the number of cohabited adult children



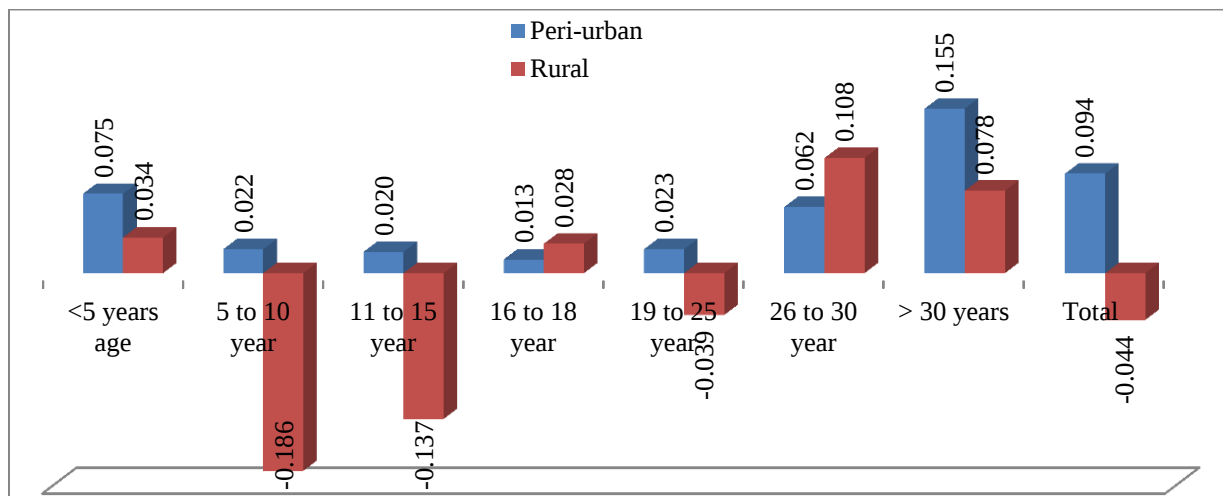
Source: Field survey, 2025

Lack of institutional accessibility to residential land led to this widespread cohabitation, which shows up as intergenerational conflict at the family level. Both host and hosted families' quality of life is negatively impacted by overcrowding, which results in limited interior space, tense common courtyards, and diminished In terms of finances, having child generations that are usually unemployed or underemployed puts additional burden on the parent households' resources because it restricts their potential to produce rental revenue.

ii) Family formation and household size

Homelessness has a significant impact on family size and formation, as FGDs have repeatedly shown. Participants reported that because of the poor chances of obtaining residential land, their legal-age children are becoming less eager to get married. In addition to being a shelter concern, the cost of housing takes up a significant amount of their income, which discourages marriage. By contrasting the relationship between the age of family heads and household size for respondents from peri-urban and rural areas, this story was experimentally tested. The data show a distinct pattern, despite the weak correlations: family formation is considerably delayed in peri-urban locations, most likely as a result of housing insecurity. In contrast, there is less of a correlation between age and family size in rural areas, which may indicate that earlier family formation and growth are made possible by comparatively greater land availability.

Figure 4. 22: Correlation of household head age and family size



Source:Field survey,2025

iii) Intergenerational relations at community level

Intergenerational conflict extends beyond the family level and into the community, especially when it comes to land distribution and value. By sheltering their child generations, many families have formally assumed the government's role, but this approach is not long-term viable. For a number of reasons, child generations' need for residential land has surpassed parent families' ability.

- Not all parents are willing or able to host adult children.
- Plot size limitations restrict the ability of some parents to accommodate additional households.
- Landless parent families cannot offer any shelter to their children, leaving the younger generation entirely vulnerable.

The impact of these restrictions on society is more extensive. Some young people without land resort to illegally converting common lands for development projects and squatting in their desperation. By blocking important access points within the settlements, adjacent sources of building materials, and grazing grounds, this behavior jeopardizes the interests of the entire community.

The exacerbation of the situation has led to intergenerational conflict at the level of organized communities. According to a focus group discussion in Aynalem, youth organizations have

officially petitioned landholding families within their local administrative units (Tabia). A formal social mobilization around land rights was shown by the utilization of public forums to discuss the issue. Focus group discussions (FGDs) in Debri and Serawat, where young people particularly acknowledged their resident rights over properties owned by older generations, confirmed similar experiences.

This coordinated demand signals a change in the way social duty is defined. The younger generation has institutionalized the transfer of governmental contractual social duty into moral standards imposed by the community by turning what began as household-level coping methods into a collective moral demand. As the collapse of formal institutions prompts the creation of new, informal social contracts between generations, it marks a turning point where the legitimacy of state control over property and citizenship rights is questioned.

4.1.7.11. Magnitude of Illegal Land Holding in the Peri-Urban Zone of Mekelle

The previous section examined the conflict between farmers with usufruct rights and their descendants on one side, and the government on the other. It analyzed how land rights held by both the government and society are being violated by each other. In contrast, this section shifts focus to explore illegal land transactions occurring outside the direct interface of government versus the farm society land rights conflicts. This section treats these transactions as exogenous to the formal land rights framework. Before discussing the actors of the illegal land transactions and how they cooperate and collaborate and the enabling environment, this section discusses about the magnitude of the illegal land transaction within the peri-urban zone of the city.

The scale of illegal land acquisitions, occupations, and transactions in Mekelle's urban fringe is far more expansive than the conventional narrative of illegal farmland subdivisions by local farmers. It also encompasses the squatting of communal open lands, the unauthorized allocation of such lands in contravention of formal urban land allocation regimes, and the direct conversion of farmland into residential plots by local administrative units. These illegally obtained or allotted plots are titled using a variety of semi-formal or extralegal methods that essentially circumvent the official planning and cadaster processes.

Administrative adjudication records from 2011 highlight the pervasiveness of these activities in selected villages (Table 4.25). In just three traditional settlements, 118 households had

constructed homes on their farmland for personal residence. In the meantime, more than 2,280 instances of illicit land acquisition were reported in four villages, and 908 people were discovered squatting on community land. For instance, farmers in GefihGereb separated 34.8 hectares of their farmland into unofficial residential holdings, while 13.2 hectares of land had been unlawfully occupied in Dngur alone.

Table 4. 25: Illegal land occupation and acquisitions in sample villages within the peri-urban zone of Mekelle

Form of illegal land occupation /acquisition/	Sample villages	Num.
Settle on own farm for residence	Dngur, Hiroshma, Adi-quolqual)	118
Squatting on communal land	Dngur, Lanchilanch, Gefihgereb, Mekayh, Mykeyah, ShibtaMekayih	908
Transfer through fake pledge/gift	Adihawsi, Mykeyah,	118
Transfer through sale	Dngur, Adihawsi, Lanchilanch, Gefihgereb	2280

Source: Compiled from 2011 adjudication documents, 2025

According to more recent inventory data gathered by the regional land management department, there have been 4,794 instances of illegal land acquisition and occupation throughout the estimated 473.8 hectares of Mekelle's urban periphery, with Dngur, Aynalem, Debri, Mariam Dhan, and Enda Abune Argawi serving as notable hotspot areas. Both the 2015 and a more recent 2024 studies indicate that the extent of informal settlements substantially surpasses official estimates, despite the lack of a thorough census of unlawful landholdings. This claim is supported by field observations, as many of the ancient communities have experienced several stages of spatial growth caused by unofficial building.

The scope and velocity of illicit development are eloquently demonstrated by the Debri case. A 2015 Local Development Plan (LDP) found that just 11% of the population (n = 342) had lawfully bought property and constructed homes. Nevertheless, 256 residences were found when a group of specialists later examined Debri and the nearby village of Dur. The population grew significantly in just one year, turning the region into a densely populated settlement on par with the city center. Satellite photography shows continuous and extensive development, indicating

that large-scale unlawful land occupation is still going strong even though new demographic data is still unavailable.

According to the 2011 census, there were 2,300 households in Dngur and 650 in Debri. The scope of illegal holdings was calculated using satellite data and a methodology based on observed construction density. 2013 data on the average size of original household plots (412 m²) were used in the estimation computation. In 2014, the city government adopted an inventory to determine the average size of unlawful holdings. The inventory indicates that the average size of unlawful land holdings varies from 58 m² in central regions to 172 m² on the outskirts.

$$(\mathbb{Y} - \mathbb{B})/\mu$$

Where:

- $\mathbb{Y}$ = Total area covered by high-density construction from satellite imagery
- $\mathbb{B}$ = Average holding size of original residents
- μ = Average size of illegally occupied holdings

Using this method, 10,967 unlawful properties totaling approximately 188.64 hectares were found in Debri and Dngur alone. In-depth field observations attest to the rapid, widespread proliferation of these peri-urban villages, and this number far exceeds official forecasts. Similar trends can be seen in other fringe towns along the Mekelle border. The scope of illegal land acquisition and the expansion of settlements suggest that the issue extends beyond the usual setting of confrontation between the peasantry and the government. Rather, it reveals a deeper structural disintegration in the urban land market and governmental structure. The section that follows discusses the structural elements that have caused and exacerbated the illegal land occupancy situation in the peri-urban area of Mekelle.

4.1.7.12. The Illegal Land Deal Ecosystem

By definition, peri-urban land conflict is more than a straightforward rivalry between peri-urban residents with land-use rights and the government, which is meant to act in the public good. Instead, a wide variety of actors with different objectives are involved. This section looks at the roles of demand-side actors and intermediaries. Additionally, the actors operate in formal, semi-formal, and informal institutional frameworks

4.1.7.12.1. Major Demand Side Actors

Both directly, through its constitutional mandate for land governance and administration, and indirectly, through its failure to stop farmers from illegally subdividing land, the government is responsible for the supply side of the informal land market in Ethiopia's context of public land ownership. This subsection, however, focuses on the demand side of the illegal land market. The primary actors here are ordinary residents in search of residential land and land speculators.

Before delving into why ordinary residents resort to the informal system, and to what extent speculative motives dominate the illegal land market, we begin by distinguishing between necessity-driven and speculation-driven demand for land in the city. Based on local knowledge, peri-urban households were asked to estimate the motives behind illegal land purchases. According to the survey responses, about 68% of illegal land buyers are driven by a necessity for residential land (Table 4.26), while the remaining 32% are speculators. Furthermore, 44% of those who bought land had already constructed dwellings and were living on the plots.

Table 4. 26: Respondents' local knowledge-based estimates of the motives of land buyers

	N	Share
Share of land buyers for personal/family residential purpose	333	68.0
Share of land buyers for trading/profit/ purpose	335	29.4
Share of land buyers currently using it	299	44.0
Valid N (pairwise)	296	

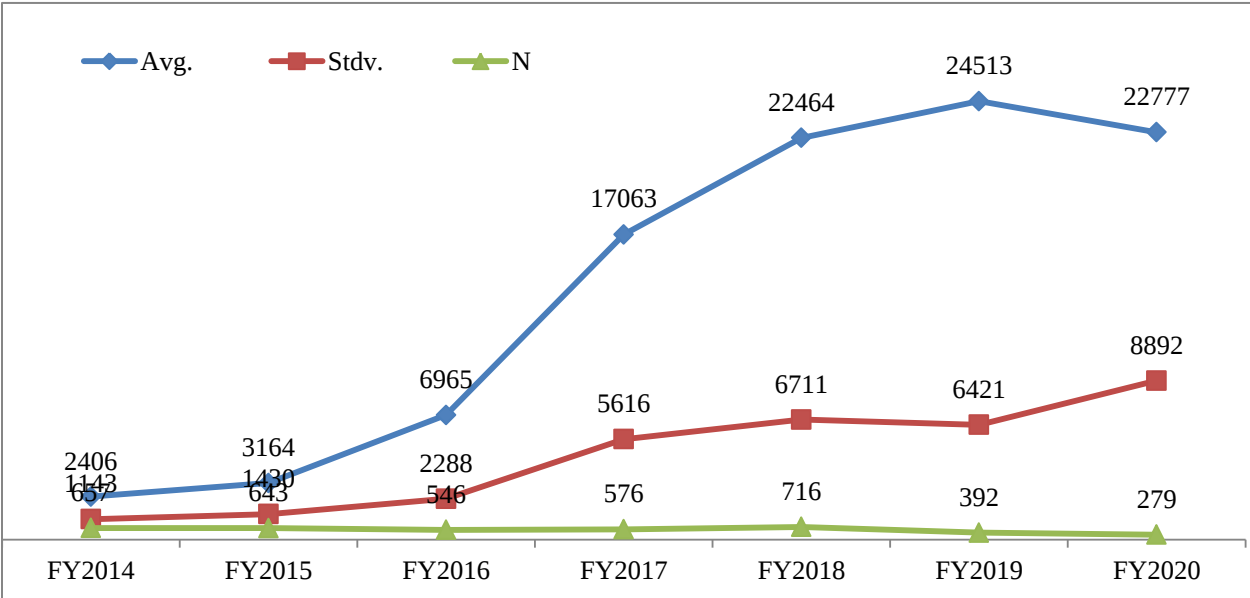
Source: Field survey, 2025

Land supply through administrative allocation was discontinued by the regional government in the early 2000s and remained suspended until intermittent interventions between 2017 and 2019. Since then, public auctions have served as the primary formal land allocation mechanism. However, the auction system has failed to keep pace with the rising demand. This assessment takes into account both the absolute number of plots made available, which has stayed incredibly low, as well as the mismatch between supplies and rising demand. As a result, regardless of their financial situation, many locals are forced to use alternate, frequently unlawful, means of obtaining land. The city's land prices have been rapidly rising due to a shortage of residential plots, especially since 2013. Residents who might otherwise be able to afford property if there

were enough plots available at each auction have been shut out of the formal land market due to the steady rise in auction prices.

For example, when adjusted to 2020 prices, the nominal price of residential land at auction increased from ETB 2,406/m² in 2014 to ETB 22,777/m² in 2020, a 9.5-fold increase in real terms. Simultaneously, competition intensity increased by 7.8 times. As of 2024, nominal auction prices soared further to ETB 56,534/m² (standard deviation: ETB 24,045). This level of price inflation has effectively priced out a large majority of residents. By January 2020, even households in the top income quartile were devoting up to 68% of their gross income just to acquire land through auction. The informal, or illegal, peri-urban land market has thus emerged as the main alternative for those excluded from the formal system. Survey data confirm that the majority of buyers in this market are necessity-driven, motivated by the need for affordable residential land.

Figure 4. 23: Residential plots released and auction prices during 2014 – 2020 (Prices are 2020 equivalents).



Source: Compiled from filed survey, 2025

From the supply side, the survey reveals that only about 10–17% of farmers who subdivide land illegally do so for speculative reasons. The survey data, however, indicates that about 30% of the demand side actors (land buyers are speculators). This speculative demand is largely

driven by the rent gap the price disparity between land acquired through the public auction and land under the rural regime (which is administratively priced at nearly zero).

This dual land tenure system enables the parallel market to flourish. In theory, both leasehold and quasi-freehold systems coexist in peri-urban zones. Prices in the public auction are determined by the competition in the market. In contrast, land prices for rural tenure are frequently administrative or symbolic. The secondary market was selling land purchased under the rural regime in 2016 for ETB 400–600/m². However, according to 443 plot records, the average price of auctioned land was ETB 5,644/m², meaning that the price of land under the rural regime was only 7–10.6% of the formal auction price.

Surprisingly, this pricing difference has remained constant for the past ten years. According to 86 plot records, auction prices reached ETB 56,534/m² by 2024. Meanwhile, survey data showed that the average price in the parallel market rose to ETB 4,000–6,000/m², or roughly 8.4–10.6% of the legal auction value. This suggests that rather than expanding independently, the informal land market expands alongside the official one. The spatial patterns of recent illegal colony expansions, which are described here, provide support for the assertion that speculative actors are increasingly dominating the illicit market, even though prices in the unauthorized market are somewhat lower. As prices have increased over time, even the unofficial land market is starting to drive out residents with modest incomes.

Historically, areas designated for Local Development Plans (LDPs) have seen an increase in illegal settlements. For example, the initiation of the Debri-Dngur LDP triggered a surge in illegal land transactions and settlement activities. This resulted in widespread construction in areas like Debri, Dngur, and GefihGereb. Settlements expanded further southeast along the transnational highway corridor, driven by proposed developments such as a national railway station and an industrial park. These developments have also catalyzed illegal settlement along the May-Umeri–Serawat strip. Table 4.27 presents representative sites of such intensive illegal settlement growth.

Table 4. 27: Illegal settlement intensive representative area

Area	Triggering factor
Shafat-Dagia	• Close to a site where the national rail station (which was under construction till 2018)
Debri-Dngur area	• Initiation of LDP • Mekelle – Samre road was upgraded to 30 meters wide paved asphalt grade • The area was included in the first phase implementation plan of New York University urban expansion initiative for 2040
May-Umeri	• Mekele industrial Park borders the site
Serawat	• Immediate expansion of Adihakisubcity • Preparation of LDP for the area

Source: Compiled from 2011 adjudication documents and satellite image, 2025

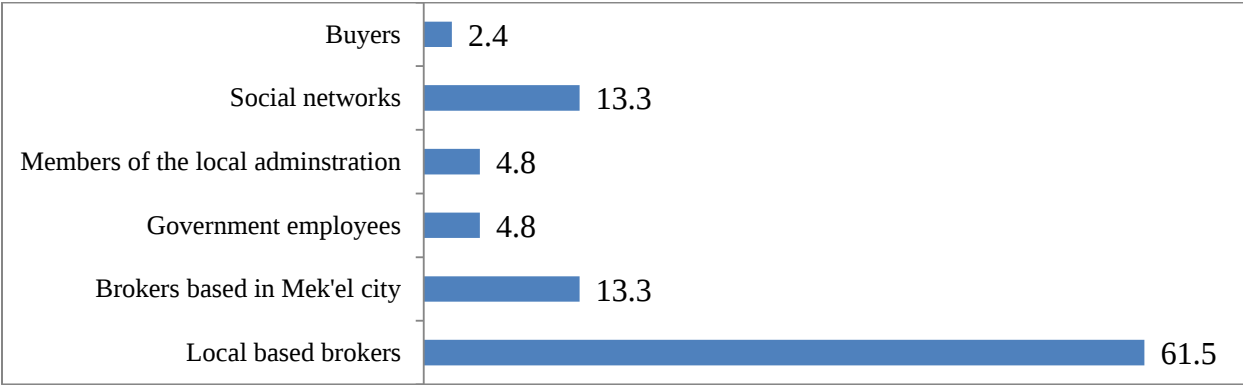
4.1.7.12.2. Actors of the Transaction Mediation

Given the public ownership of land in Ethiopia, a land rights-based analysis of peri-urban land conflicts identifies two primary actors: the government (which defines and administers land rights) and individuals or citizens who hold these rights. Other entities involved in these conflicts can be regarded as intermediaries, since they lack legitimate grounds for inclusion in the core framework of land rights-based conflict. This subsection examines the roles of these intermediaries both formal and informal in facilitating illegal land transactions, from information gathering and deal mediation to the certification of illegally acquired land.

4.4.7.12.3. Informal Actors

The ecology of informal actors involved in illegal land deals includes land brokers, members of adjudication committees, land administration officers, private legal advisors, and translation service operators. According to KIIs, brokers are essential in negotiating agreements, supplying information on illicit land transactions, and assisting in the certification of holdings obtained unlawfully through a variety of means. Among respondents who reported illegal land subdivision for sale, 84.4% (n = 83), indicated that brokers mediated the transactions, typically charging 20% of the transaction value as commission (Figure 4.24).

Figure 4. 24: Actors of illegal land deal mediation and their distribution (%) Land brokers



Source: Survey, 2025

Social networks (e.g., family, relatives, and friends) rank second in mediating land deals in the parallel market, accounting for 13.3% of reported cases, often without any commission. Government employees in land administration departments and members of local rural authorities each accounted for 4.8% of the mediation cases. Informants from regional, city, and sub-city levels noted that land administration staff often collaborates with brokers on a commission basis, while local rural officials accept bribes.

KIIs revealed that brokers in the peri-urban zones and those based in the city often collaborate but have distinct roles. Brokers in the peri-urban zones are primarily responsible for identifying potential land sub-dividers, persuading farmers to subdivide land before expropriation at government rates, and lobbying local authorities for falsified titling.

Box 4.1. An illustration how a broker based in the city influenced the expansion of Dngur

Illegal land deals in Dngur have mainly been under the command of a single broker. The guy insists peasants to subdivide their holdings at better prices before the city's actual taking. He further pretentiously persuades the youth sell their residential plots in the name of huts built. The broker buys the plots in the name of individuals living abroad. The guy is financially well equipped by capital remittance from Saudi Arabia. In order to draw remittance capital, the guy persuades the individuals abroad that he is establishing a mono-religion neighborhood. The guy had no any fear of losing his capital he spent on land purchase. He used to expect at least a compensation for the huts he bought at appreciated values and a replacement for the plots.

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Their city based counterparts complement the other half portion of the process by identify potential buyers, track price trends, determine market prices, and coordinate with networks inside the land administration offices to prepare fraudulent documents such as site plans, fake auctions, and titles. This division of labor is strategically designed. Peri-urban brokers, being local community members, leverage social ties to build trust between buyers and sellers.

i) Members of adjudication committees

A 2011 directive issued by the regional government established adjudication committees to formalize residential and investment land holdings under rural tenure. These committees include members of the rural administration, municipal government, justice department, and representatives of peri-urban communities poised for urban incorporation. Nonetheless, these committees have become complicit in illegal land acquisition. KIIs from land administration departments reported that representatives of local residents frequently falsely attest that illegal landholdings meet the legal requirements outlined in the adjudication directive. While local administrations are well aware of land conditions, they often manipulate the process in favor of illegal occupants.

Box 4.2. Illustration of temporal growth of Dingur settlement through illegal land transaction

the case of Dngur

As of 2013, there were only 256 housing units when a survey crew visited the settlement to enumerate base map data to prepare Local Development Plan. During the months the crew was engaged in surveying, residents insisted them to enumerate data for vacant plots occupied on open public land and farm subdivisions. Key informants recall even there were incidences that armed individuals tried to terrorize the crew. Furthermore, informants recall rural authorities officially insisted the crew to side in favor of those illegal occupiers and farm subdivides. In general, a rampant illegal occupation and subdivision quadrupled the size of settlement in the past three years.

Source: Field Survey, 2025, 2025

Often in reoccurrence for bribes, city land administration officers who are responsible for technical oversight, specifically, using satellite images to confirm the existence of constructions within the deemed qualifying time for titling also fall short of their duties. Informants emphasized that this misconduct is not motivated by personal gains. Members of local

administrations reportedly believe that urban expansion has historically undermined the rights of local residents, and they thus support illegal land claims by these local residents out of sympathy or political alignment.

ii) Employees in the land management department

Every illegal holding typically passes through collusion and document fraud orchestrated by employees in the land administration offices. Staff members responsible for surveying, documentation and archiving, and title approvals collaborate to issue titles for illegally acquired plots, circumventing formal procedures. According to the KIIs, the public widely recognizes these collusive networks comprising land administration staff and brokers as Informal Municipalities, with such individual teams having designated names. One such group is known as Gashena.

Although unauthorized land allocations have long existed, a 2018 government-wide evaluation and reform initiative revealed the widespread and systemic nature of the practice. In some instances, even paper allocations were fabricated, leading to prosecutions of implicated employees. In one case, as in informant in the LDP project office discussed, a land administration employee in Hadnet Sub-City forged documents (site maps and building permits) for a vacant plot and sold it multiple times. The first two buyers did not complete official title transfers. When the third buyer attempted a title transfer, it was discovered that the documents were fraudulent, resulting in a loss of ETB 3 million.

Additionally, employees of the Land Development and Planning (LDP) project office were identified by informants from regional offices as important participants in illicit land deals. Although preparing LDPs, evaluating public property for development, and strengthening land banks are the LDP's formal responsibilities, some staff members allegedly participated in the registration of unauthorized tenants for their own benefit. Though LDP employees claimed they were simply documenting illegal occupants to avoid confrontation with local communities while enumerating land holdings, other informants strongly argued that their actions were driven by self-interest. Then Table 4.28 summarizes illegal land transactions facilitated by these actors, based on samples drawn from 2011 adjudication documents.

Table 4. 28: Illustrative manifestations of malpractices by members of adjudication committees and local administrations (2006-2008)

Illegal activity	No.
Local authorities abused their official responsibilities	36
Members of the adjudication committee abused their responsibilities by favoring their relatives	60
Fake divorce with intention adjudicating two plots	134
City residents for whom plots adjudicated in villages	2
Titling holdings above low prescribed maximum area	279
Illegally bought plots adjudicated as if were rural allocations	386

Source: Compiled from Mekele City Cabinet Minutes, 2025

iii) Private attorneys and legal advisors

Private legal advisors and attorneys play two major roles: (1) representing defendants in court cases involving illegal land holdings and (2) advising clients during the illegal transaction process. Their most critical role is to redirect court deliberations away from the illegality of the landholding and toward the property (i.e., the building). This strategy often leads courts to rule in favor of the illegal landholders that makes the city, in theory the public, a loser in the court litigations. According to KIIs, the state's monopoly on land administration is seriously threatened by the rise in this legal wrangling in recent years, which also threatens the idea of public land ownership.

4.1.7.12.4. Formal Institutions

A change from rural to urban land rights regimes is necessary for the conversion of peri-urban areas into urban zones. Formal institutions are usually involved in this conversion, including legal (public attorneys, social courts, and regular courts) and administrative (adjudication committees, land-use planning offices, and titling authorities). Although these organizations are supposed to make it easier for land rights to be converted legally and smoothly, in reality, they frequently act against their stated goals. This section looks at how each organization has facilitated unlawful land transfers, which has exacerbated land conflicts.

i) Adjudication committees

Officially, adjudication committees are responsible for examining legal documentation of land holdings under the rural regime or in compliance with the regularization directive's qualifying requirements, as well as for performing public scrutiny as required. A participatory governance model is meant to be reflected in its institutional framework, which includes delegates from women's associations, land management offices, elders, and youth.

But there have been serious problems with the adjudication procedure. Numerous landholdings were suggested for titling under the urban regime without the supporting documentation mandated by the adjudication order, according to documentary research. Adjudication panels have mostly been symbolic, according to KIIs carried out at the city and sub-city levels. According to informants, other members of these committees stayed inactive as long as the local administrative leader assumed authority, and these committees frequently bowed to their choices. The directive's explicit provisions regarding the substantive and procedural requirements of adjudication, such as the ban on legitimizing unlawful holdings, were frequently disregarded (Table 4.28).

ii) Local councils and administrations

According to the constitution, municipal councils are tasked with overseeing public affairs within their borders, including land use decisions. Local councils in Tigray are expressly given the authority to decide how to use common land and to turn degraded areas into conservation areas under the regional land administration law.

However, a number of examples show that Mekelle City's peri-urban municipal councils have made judgments that are blatantly against these laws. The municipal council in Mayanbessa, for instance, turned agricultural lands into homes in 2002. Fifteen farmers were expropriated, and 240 young people received land in exchange. A chain reaction resulted from this action, as nearby farmers divided their own farmland in imitation. More than 3,000 illegal housing units eventually grew as a result of the activity, and they weren't destroyed until 2011.

In order to avoid the city's eventual expropriation, which frequently failed to sufficiently incorporate peri-urban dwellers into the urban fabric, this illegal property conversion seemed to be a calculated maneuver. By granting titles for unlawful holdings under the pretense of current

possession, rural local administrations also participated in the criminal activity. As of 2016, there were 2,510 holdings purportedly permitted by rural permits, 1,189 purported gift-based holdings, and 352 inherited holdings; however, only 587 of these possessed genuine permission records. The cooperation of councils, local governments, and adjudication committees in legalizing unlawful holdings and turning farmland into residential space exemplifies a systemic and institutionalized conflict that places peri-urban communities and their institutions against official urban governance.

iii) Institutions of the justice system

The public attorney's office, ordinary courts, and social courts collectively constitute the judicial infrastructure relevant to land issues. While constitutional principles prohibit collateralizing bare land (i.e., land without permanent improvements), public attorneys routinely issued sureties against such land until training sessions in 2018 attempted to curb this practice.

A training organized by the Regional Department for Urban Development, Trade, and Industry revealed that public prosecutors and courts had misused land right interpretations. According to the training material, courts have argued that use right is transferable while maintaining public ownership of land enforceable under contract law. Similarly public prosecutors have claimed that land use right could be issued surety. While the argument could be debatable in reference to comparing and contrasting the constitution and the civil law, their enforcement of their interpretation has contributed to the exacerbation of the illegal land transaction and thus conflict among the sub-dividers, land buyers, the justice organs, and the regional executive.

KIIs showed that the majority of land-related litigation proceedings and sureties were fraudulent schemes. In these cases, the debtor (land seller) would accept the costs, and the creditor (land buyer) would launch a loan default lawsuit. Land rights would subsequently be transferred by legal decisions if the court decided in favor of the creditor. By awarding compensation relating to land and making decisions that should have been made by land administration authorities, ordinary courts further overreached their jurisdiction. Furthermore, social courts handled property disputes and authorized bare land transactions even though they had no authority over land affairs. According to informants, ordinary and social courts frequently thought they were

redressing injustices brought about by incompetent bureaucracy. They frequently claimed they were defending individual rights by citing Article 27 of the Constitution to support their action.

iv) Mekelle city administration

By allowing unauthorized agricultural subdivisions, the Mek'ele City Administration has significantly contributed to the escalation of property disputes. In May 2012, February 2013, and April 2014, the administration approved the regularization of land obtained through illegal means by executive orders. Notably, the February 2013 decision alone resulted in the regularization of 1,820 second-generation land buyers. These decisions have encouraged the rapid growth of illegal land markets and informal settlements in the peri-urban zone. Figure 4.25 illustrates the expansion and densification of such settlements to the city's west.

Figure 4. 25: Illegal settlement expansion and densification trends of a sample area (Serawat) in Jan 2008 (top) and in Jan 2020 (bottom)



Source: Google Map, 2025

v) Regional government bodies

Established land governance procedures have frequently been compromised by regional authorities, including those in the ruling party office, the regional president's office, and the

Urban Development Department. Their actions, frequently masquerading as political or administrative fixes, have seriously undermined the management of lawful land. Key informants at the regional, city, and sub-city levels unanimously stated that networks of brokers and speculators conspired with land administration employees and took advantage of these officials to meddle in land management. It was common practice to justify illicit land deals and disregard legal requirements by invoking the principles of good government.

The informants' further lament that decisions made by regional authorities frequently interfered with the equitable and uniform application of land laws. These actions frequently made legal restrictions meaningless and gave land administration staff members the confidence to commit fraud. Organized community pressure, though not frequently, has also influenced regional authorities to contravene legal frameworks. One senior official from the Regional Urban Development and Construction Department recounted a specific case:

When I worked for the Hawleti Sub-city Municipality, we attempted to demolish illegal farm-to-residential conversions in Momona. During our intervention, residents pleaded for a three-day delay, promising to secure alternative authorization. As promised, the city administration soon issued a regularization order legitimizing the illegal constructions. It was obvious that the city authorities' endorsement was made according to consent of regional authorities.

In general, this section demonstrates that formal institutions have played central roles in institutionalizing illegality through systemic collusion and political interference that have transformed a legal and administrative transition into a contested and disorderly terrain. Consequently, it is fair to argue that the involvement of non-institutionalized actors and their scale of involvement have been contingent upon the institutionalized actors, particularly the regional and city level executives overriding the land administration law.

4.1.8. Land Governance Institutional System and its Application in resolving the Land Conflict in Peri-urban Area

4.1.8.1. Dual Land Regimes Generated Rent Gap

Since the supply of land through the auction system is minimal, homeowners with freehold rights tend to peg the value of their properties to the prevailing auction rate. Therefore, in practice; freehold land's market price equals the auction value during private transactions, even if it theoretically has no economic value. Illegal land acquisition is significantly encouraged by this dynamic. Illicit land buyers who later receive certification under the rural landholding system essentially seize riches equal to the official auction value. Unauthorized land purchase and occupation are the main ways that this activity exacerbates peri-urban land conflicts.

For example, in 2015, there was an unearned wealth disparity of ETB 309,960 between those who owned 140 square meters of unlawful land and those who did not. By 2020, the difference had grown to ETB 3,188,780, and by December 2024, it had increased to ETB 8.54 million. The wealth disparity between landowners and the landless increased by a factor of 27 over a ten-year period.

Both experienced and inexperienced landlords were increasingly involved in illicit land deals as word spread about this possibility. The traits of the actors engaged are revealed by field observations and unofficial interviews carried out in three villages (Debri, Dungur, and Genha). Generally speaking, residential buildings owned by original residents and illegal occupiers driven by necessity adhere to formal construction regulations. Larger built-up areas and building heights, the use of long-lasting building materials, and well-planned spatial arrangements inside residential compounds are a few examples. Some of these residences are on par with the city center's buildings. Speculators' land, on the other hand, is either empty or has shoddy, usually unused buildings.

4.1.8.2. Failure of Land Administration

The managerial system of Mekelle City extended meaningfully over past two periods. In 2004, the territory grew from 10,240 hectares to 21,000 hectares with the incorporation of Quiha and Aynalem municipalities, previously independent, and seven rural villages from Enderta district,

adding 6,000 households to the city. By 2011, an additional 18 villages (comprising 12,198 households) were annexed, further extending the administrative area to 26,444 hectares. Consequently, an urbanized area increased to 65.5% (about 17,321 hectares) of the city's total territory (Table 4.29). To manage the expansion, twelve Local Development Plans (LDPs) were prepared in 2008 to establish an urban land management framework, but implementation remained largely ineffective. Six additional LDPs were studied in 2013, yet the realization of these plans also remained elusive.

Table 4. 29: Total administrative territory and built-up area of Mekelle City 1994 – 2024

	1994	2004	2006	2014	2019	2024
Built up area (ha)	2,600	10,240	10,240	10,240		10,271
Expansion area (ha)	-	-	10,760	16,204.4		16,173.5
Total (ha)	2,600	10,240	21,000	26,444.4	26,444.4	26,444.4

Source: Author computation based on 2016 structural plan, New York University Initiative 2040, and land market data, 2025

Key informants refer budget constraint claims by the city authorities for implementing the LDPs as a major reason. However, closer look into the land revenue position of the city invalidates the claim. Based on 2014 revenue data, even after adjusting for cumulative inflation since 2008, the cost of implementing an LDP in 2008 could be covered by the sale revenue of just 240 plots (8.23 hectares). Furthermore, land revenue collected over 2014–2015 would have been sufficient to finance the six LDPs studied in 2013. The cumulative revenue from land sales in 2019 (Table 4.30), amounting to 2,514 plots (86.5 hectares), could finance all 13 LDPs. This evidence corroborates with key informants arguing for the bottleneck was not fiscal but lack of political will was cited repeatedly as the ultimate reason for the failure to implement LDPs and land management infrastructure.

At a strategic level, the failure of land administration can be analyzed in several ways. First, incorporating expansion areas that effectively tripled the size of the city without ensuring commensurate administrative capacity or planning mechanisms was ill-considered. Second, the land revenue figures invalidate the insufficient budget claim for LDP implementation. Third, the government's unwillingness to complete landholding adjudication and create land-use plans for the expansion areas tasks that call for little administrative investment cannot be justified.

The government's hesitancy was most noticeable during the 2015–16 rural land adjudication process, when the issuing of fake rural land titles and land abuse were made possible by the lack of a systematic adjudication process for landholdings. Individuals who claimed to have been disqualified from the 2015–16 adjudication process filed 1,624 applications in 2018 alone.

Table 4. 30: Land sale revenue 2014 – 2024 (ETB)

	Number of plots sold	Total area sold (m ²)	Average auction price	Advance collection (20%)	Collection of period installment	Cumulative revenue (collected)
2014	145	34,429	2,397	16,504,706	14,524,631	31,029,337
2015	410	108,847	3,693	80,395,382	64,315,520	175,740,239
2016	483	114,155	5,571	127,182,610	91,577,880	394,500,729
2017	183	57,625	8,262	95,214,813	60,940,512	550,656,054
2018	578	167,876	16,374	547,960,035	307,865,782	1,406,481,871
2019	715	194,323	21,809	847,580,706	406,847,070	2,660,909,647
2020	759	212,598	23,174	985,342,013	394,139,685	4,040,391,345
2024	329	123,712	39,320	972,879,189	77,829,693	5,091,100,227

Source: Compiled from auction documents of Mekelle City, 2025

Even a more straightforward strategy involving adjudication and mapping would have been adequate, even though complete land administration usually includes land-use planning, adjudication, and mapping. Even though these systems have been officially acknowledged since 2008, Mekelle does not yet have a working land bank or cadastral system. KIIs categorically blamed this on willful government indifference rather than skill- or technical-based constraints. They assert that the government has never been dedicated to creating a working cadastral system or land bank.

Officials from the cities of Adigrat and Aksum publicly acknowledged the government's lack of interest in developing trustworthy urban land information systems in a regional public media broadcast on December 12, 2024, endorsing the KIIs' viewpoints. These discussions indicate that widespread corruption in the land sector is one of the primary reasons for the failure to establish an operating land bank and cadaster. Interestingly, a rural cadaster, which was introduced later, has been successfully implemented in 53 rural districts, whereas the urban cadaster has always

failed. The claim that the government has purposefully disregarded urban land administration is further supported by this disparity.

The failure is not limited to the cadaster system. The land bank, which requires relatively simple infrastructure (say, GIS-based mapping of public lands), is also non-functional. Despite being institutionally organized at both sub-city and city levels, one could hardly find organized data on public land. While some sub-city informants cited staffing limitations as the reason for the land bank's dysfunction, most informants particularly at city and regional levels argued that the malfunctioned of the land bank is deliberate decisions of officials at all levels. Officers responsible for the land bank are frequently reassigned to unrelated daily service tasks by their supervisors, indicating a lack of institutional commitment.

Moreover, the unavailability of data handed over by the Land Inventory and LDP Project Office to sub-cities and the central land administration department offers factual evidence of deliberate obstruction of the land bank system. The Project Office had identified and mapped vacant lands and transferred the data to six sub-cities and the central office (See Annex). Nonetheless, officials at Ayder Sub-City and city-level planning officers continue to claim that systematically organized data on vacant public land is lacking. This incongruity reinforces the perception that land administration structures intentionally avoid organizing a functional land bank.

Finally, the dual land administration structure divided between rural and urban systems has posed significant challenges to the consolidation of land-related information and the effective administration of land. Before the institutional merger of rural and urban land administration under a single department in 2020, the peri-urban fringe served as a contested zone. On one side, rural administration and their adjudication committees sought to assert control, while on the other, urban land management authorities, in alliance with land dealers, brokers, legal attorneys, and speculators, pursued their own claims. People competing for unlawful land acquisitions and titling in both rural and urban land management systems did so out of personal benefit, frequently at odds with their official mandates. These actions were frequently excused under the guise of formalizing pre-existing assets, which served to conceal wrongdoing under a facade of respectability.

4.1.8.3. Government Complicity and Legal Vacuum Regarding Peri-Urban Land

The regional government is constitutionally mandated to represent the public interest and manage land as a common resource on behalf of the people, but it has largely done nothing in the face of the growth in illegal land transactions, unauthorized occupations, and informal settlements in Mekelle. Years of widespread land grabs in peri-urban regions were made possible by this silence. In many cases, enforcement actions against illegal settlers appeared to penalize residents who were seeking houses in the face of an inaccessible official land market. These government responses deflect attention from institutional flaws while punishing those who suffer from policy inaction.

The regional government has not held pertinent departments responsible for their failure to uphold their obligation to protect public land in spite of these pervasive infractions. Moreover, the limitations against title-holding farmers subdividing their properties in the constitution and supplementary laws have not been implemented. Instead, disproportionate enforcement proceedings have been directed toward those who buy subdivided land, many of whom are forced to do so by high auction prices and exorbitant rental charges. Those that address housing shortages while defending the actual causes of land illegality are effectively penalized by this distorted responsibility. Thus, it could be argued that the regional government has failed to fulfill its constitutional obligation to administer land for the benefit of all. By ignoring its own failures and placing the responsibility on the people, the government has positioned itself not just as a passive supporter but possibly as a major actor and collaborator in the illegal land grabbing and settlement operations.

Informants repeatedly reiterated this opinion, pointing out that the government's deliberate creation of an urban-rural divide in the absence of a clear development strategy has made mass land appropriation easier. "The lack of significant reform or remedial measures points to a lack of political will to make effective use of the land that is available for urban expansion," they said, referring to the government's continued refusal to investigate the breakdown of the Mekelle cadastral system despite multiple opportunities and indications of malfunction. Moreover, the government has not retrieved land that was given to nominal investors who abandoned it, sometimes for speculative reasons. By allowing these parties to withhold land to productive use without suffering consequences, the government has purposefully contributed to the breakdown

of land governance and encouraged rent-seeking conduct. These patterns unequivocally demonstrate that the executive branch of the regional government contributes to the cycle of illegal land transfers.

Legally speaking, Mekelle's urban periphery has been essentially left without a distinct administrative body for more than 20 years. Due to this legal void, networks comprising speculators, land administration specialists, and government representatives have been able to systematically misuse land resources. Without an organization with clear accountability, there is no efficient way to safeguard land against illegal activity or discourage abuse. Additionally; the state has started to lose legal battles in cases where land has been unlawfully occupied for more than ten years without any opposition or administrative pre-emption. According to key informant interviews from the regional land administration department, there have been instances when long-term unlawful occupiers have been given possession rights by court rulings. Such court rulings run the risk of legalizing illegal land possession and could unintentionally encourage more encroachment.

4.1.8.4. Spatial Development Model Perused

The city has adopted an in situ development paradigm for peri-urban communities, whether by purpose or by accident. This strategy is suitable and justified for the current generation since it permits current residents, whose livelihoods are strongly correlated with their local resources, to stay in their original neighborhoods. However, there is no strong argument for applying the same strategy to the second and following generations from the standpoint of spatial development. These people's livelihoods are not based in the local context of the annexed rural villages, and they usually do not own residential property. Opportunities for exploitation were created by forbidding their integration into the city center while permitting them to stay and establish themselves in the annexed villages.

Specifically, this circumstance made it possible for previous land administration personnel and rural authorities to fraudulently assign land under the rural land regime by abusing the system through document fraud. Instead, the cycle of fraudulent land distribution might have been broken and the growth of illegal settlements might have been deterred if the second and following generations had been methodically incorporated into the urban proper. By effectively

preventing their integration into urban regions and providing them with informal housing in peri-urban areas, land administration personnel were able to engage in corrupt practices, especially by former rural authorities who are now working in sub-city departments.

4.1.8.5. Conflict Resolution Practice and Institutional Competency

This section describes the practice of peri-urban land expropriation before delving into the disputes that occur between landholders and the government, including the relevant legal frameworks and the government's dispute settlement strategy. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) held in three Tabias served as the basis for the conversation. Three primary questions were the focus of the assessment:

- Whether formal discussions were held prior to land acquisition, and the content of those discussions
- Whether consensus was reached between affected communities and the government
- Whether sufficient time was given to residents before the actual taking occurred

The FGDs revealed that the manner and substance of discussions varied over time and across Tabias. Local Tabia officials used to start conversations with communities in the early 2000s. These conversations were generic in character, mainly notifying rural inhabitants that their farms and villages had been set aside for urban growth, which was presented as advantageous to them. Besides, their villages would be incorporated into the city through appropriate spatial design and enhanced access to urban infrastructure and services (particularly roads, piped water, telecommunications, and electricity), urban expansion was presented as an opportunity. Additionally, urbanization was portrayed as a means of converting rural communities into more productive members of the metropolitan economy.

But the details of this change were still unclear. Local officials stressed that compensation, which would be paid for expropriated farms and was decided by the government unilaterally, would be given even though villagers seemed open at the time. However, neither the future of their livelihoods nor the real rates of compensation were clear to the people. The effects of the initial expropriation round, which left almost all impacted households without suitable alternatives, led to a great deal of discontent and sparked worries in later rounds. Residents expressed serious

grievances on the lack of future employment opportunities and the appropriateness of compensation, according to FGD participants.

Lack of residential property rights for future generations, inadequate compensation capped at 10 (or later 15) years of agricultural output value, and limited access to urban facilities after incorporation into the city limits were their main concerns. Community concerns grew more tangible and vocal as the detrimental effects of uncontrolled rural-to-urban conversion became more apparent. Authorities responded by moving away from ambiguous pledges and toward more dishonest communication tactics, which changed over time and depending on the locality. Participants in Serawat clarified how local officials misrepresented the preservation of rural land rights and production systems, including residential land allocations under the rural land regime and access to agricultural extension services. They were informed that their land would not be taken away and that the only reason they would be incorporated into the urban administration was to modernize the administrative system and build better infrastructure.

Despite legal frameworks explicitly capping compensation at a one-time payment equal to ten years of produce value, FGD members in Aynalem said that officials promised ongoing compensation every ten years.

In general, the conversations with communities lacked true participation. Instead, they were carried out only to notify locals of choices that the city or regional authorities had already chosen. Local people's complaints were not taken seriously by either level of authority. Although they are rarely used, Local Development Plan (LDP) studies provided little more than lists of land uses and facilities. The socioeconomic circumstances, production systems, social structures, needs, goals, and vulnerabilities of impacted populations were not evaluated. The date of the actual land expropriation was also capricious. The municipal government could issue a land-taking order at any time after people were informed, even if there was no agreement reached. According to the participants, they were essentially informed that unwillingness to comply would result in forcible eviction.

4.1.8.6. Framing the Taking Practice through Participatory Governance Principles

Through the viewpoint of participatory land governance, the peri-urban land expropriation procedure in Mekelle, as previously detailed, displays significant institutional flaws. The

community participation process and the content of government communications are two crucial elements that stand out. Meaningful participation, accountability, transparency, and inclusion in land-related decision-making are the cornerstones of participatory land governance (FAO, 2012; ILC, 2022). However, the majority of community involvement in Mekelle's peri-urban setting was instructional rather than consultative. There were no procedures for communication, compromise, or collaborative decision-making; residents were only notified of decisions that had already been made by local authorities. In the planning and compensation stages, local opinions were ignored, demonstrating a tokenistic approach to involvement (Arnstein, 1969).

The fundamental tenet of participatory governance Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is violated by such unilateral decision-making, particularly when rural or indigenous landholders are involved. Communities were reduced to passive recipients of revolutionary policies that drastically changed their livelihoods, tenure security, and generational land rights in the absence of real dialogue. Apart from procedural exclusion, authorities frequently gave false, misleading, or intentionally misleading information. Promises of continuous livelihood systems, preservation of rural rights, or recurring payments were frequently at odds with subsequent actions. Administrators in other cases deceived residents into thinking there would be no expropriation at all.

A key component of sustainable land governance, transparency, is violated by such actions, which also erode institutional confidence (UN-Habitat & GLTN, 2014). The disconnect between official rhetoric and real results is indicative of a governance by ambiguity strategy (Zoomers et al., 2016), in which resistance is stifled and top-down control is facilitated by using ambiguous or conflicting messaging. In conclusion, the following characteristics characterize the land-taking process in Mek'ele's peri-urban areas:

- Procedural exclusion: Landholders were not actually involved in choices about compensation, planning, or negotiation.
- Informational manipulation: Through erratic, ambiguous, or dishonest communication, communities were misinformed.
- Institutional asymmetry: With little accountability, the state used its excessive authority to reclassify land, expropriate rights, and supersede local agency.

Therefore, the foundation for a protracted peri-urban land war was laid by this twin failure, both procedural and substantive, which not only exacerbated local concerns but also solidified institutional illegitimacy and mistrust.

4.1.8.7. Conflicts and the Practice of Conflict Resolution

Four main areas of conflict in Mekelle's peri-urban land conversion process were identified by FGDs and KIIs. Contestation over the conversion of agricultural land into urban land is the main cause of conflict. Concerns over the continuation of life and livelihoods are raised by the compensation mechanism, which is restricted to the equivalent of ten (later increased to fifteen) years' worth of agricultural produce. Consequently, opposition to expropriation has grown stronger over time. Resistance developed through group or individual deterrence efforts in regions where local councils and executive entities complied with central decisions. However, the methods used to handle conflicts have always been coercive. In certain instances, actual violence was used to enforce forcible land takings, along with political pressure and intimidation. A region known locally as Hiroshima was the site of a particularly instructive episode. The landowners in this instance were unwilling to give up their farmland, which was designated for investment. Residents were not convinced despite the efforts of technical specialists and civic officials. Additionally unsuccessful was the regional land affairs department. In the end, the government turned to politicizing the opposition and initiating an intimidation campaign. The landowners were labeled by local and regional authorities as acting against the public interest, as though their defense of their property went against the law. Government-affiliated media outlets labeled the farmers as belonging to opposition political groups. The fact that their resistance was explicitly called a terrorist act a term that many participants considered absurd was even more troubling. Due to this intimidation effort, most farmers withdrew from their resistance, leaving five people including one woman in the court battle. Lawsuits were eventually brought against the remaining individuals.

More covert types of intimidation against farmers who resist were also brought to light by FGDs. Through grassroots networks, local authorities allegedly disseminated allegations that noncompliant landholders' land would be classed as waste. Local cadres worked with city officials to dump solid garbage onto opposing farmers' fields at night. The farmers would then be

approached by these same people, or their associates, who would advise them to drop their objections because their land had already been turned into a landfill. The forced land-taking techniques were even compared to devilish deeds by certain individuals. Despite the present government's self-promotion as pro-social justice, they have expressed a preference for the land policies of the former regime.

Crucially, disputes for restitution and the restoration of livelihoods are not limited to expropriations that are now taking place. Unresolved grudges are still triggered by past expropriations. For example, 42 people in Debri who lost their land 15 years ago have petitioned for their compensation to be reconsidered on multiple occasions. Even though the local administration has repeatedly denied their accusations, they have taken the matter to the regional government and have continued to file complaints, particularly when a new mayor was elected. Residential land rights under the rural regime before the implementation of urban land laws are at the heart of the second significant controversy. Four interconnected arguments are made by peri-urban communities:

- Their children have a legitimate right to inherit residential land subject to expropriation.
- Adult children have been denied residential land for nearly two decades.
- The lack of opportunity has caused a significant exodus of youth from the area.
- Every adult citizen has the right to access a place to live a fundamental right that has been denied.

The assertions made during FGDs are much less than what is supported by constitutional protections. However, the government has consistently responded with either silence or outright rejection, frequently claiming that once lands are classed as urban, the urban lease regime will be enforced. Organized public opposition, particularly among young people, has grown as a result of this continuous disregard for the citizens' legitimate and reasonable concerns. Youth organizations have occasionally banded together to stop expropriations, leading to direct conflicts with law enforcement or the military. Throughout the current year, physical injury reports were documented. Organized community opposition has been successful in preventing expropriation in several cases.

Claims to development priorities give rise to a third source of conflict. Participants in all three focus group discussions voiced their dissatisfaction at never being given the chance to develop their own property in accordance with the city's objectives. Their assertions were frequently disregarded or denied. One Debri FGD participant shared a personal story: he filed to develop his property in accordance with the city's land use plan after discovering that it had been set aside for use as a fuel station. In addition to having his application denied, local cadres intimidated him for supposedly opposing the public interest.

The 2019 change to the expropriation law (Proc. 1161/2019), which gives landholders the chance to take part in development projects either alone or in collaboration with investors, made this tension worse. The regional authority and the city have not put this legal provision into effect. By selling land to investors under the guise of venture capital contributions, farmers have occasionally taken matters into their own hands, which skew the law's original aim.

Government policies regarding unlawful landholdings and informal settlements are the subject of the fourth significant conflict. Here, there is a strong gap between local players who support regularization (such as land buyers, informal sub-dividers, and supportive local officials) and the government, which opposes all unlawful land acquisition. According to FGDs and KIIs, regularization advocates base their claims on the legal and political obligations of the government, as well as the social justice and usefulness of the informal land supply in resolving housing shortages.

The government's reactions to this problem have been erratic and driven by politics. The government has taken tough measures during times of political stability, such as in 2003, when more than 3,000 homes were demolished. However, authorities often delay enforcement during periods of perceived political risk. Furthermore, there is proof that the administration has mobilized political support by using evicted individuals as tools. In 2020, for example, in the face of impending confrontation with the federal government, the local authorities met with those who had lost their houses ten years prior and pledged to return land to them.

4.1.8.8. Reflections on Conflict Handling Theoretical Implications

The fundamentals of governance and conflict resolution are incompatible with Peri-urban Mek'ele's dispute resolution procedures. A lasting resolution requires constructive participation,

cooperative discussion, and respect of varied interests, according to Conflict Transformation Theory (Lederach, 1997). The authoritarian attitude of Mek'ele, in sharp contrast, has been characterized by the politicization of dissent, stringent enforcement, and a disdain for the concerns of the populace. This suggests a type of government that prioritizes control over inclusive problem-solving.

Furthermore, the conflict-resolution procedure is ineffective when considering legal variety. The legal frameworks that govern Ethiopia's peri-urban land governance overlap and are frequently unclear, especially when it comes to the rights of rural and urban tenure. This legal uncertainty rejects valid rural claims while upholding urban leasing norms, impeding hybrid or flexible institutional remedies that exacerbate conflict. By ignoring these interconnected dynamics, the state exacerbates normative illegitimacy and opposition. Both FGDs and KIIs demonstrated a systematic inability to provide procedural justice from the standpoint of governance, including a lack of accountability, openness, and citizen participation. The lack of execution of development priority rights under Proc. 1161/2019 is a particularly obvious example, highlighting the disconnect between administrative practice and legislative purpose.

Table 4. 31: Governance framework summary

Governance Dimension	Observed practice in Mek'ele
Conflict Resolution Style	Coercive, punitive, and politicizing dissent; Transformative approaches absent
Interface of Legal Systems	Overlapping rural-urban urban laws create ambiguity and exclusion, empowering state over local customary rights

Source: Field survey, 2025

4.1.8.9. The Gap in the Institutional Framework

The land expropriation practice and conflict resolution techniques in Mekelle's peri-urban areas were described in the previous two sections. According to fieldwork, these behaviors are not only non-participatory but also frequently coercive and essentially unfair. The institutional foundations of these failures are examined in this and the following section, with particular attention paid to flaws in the architecture of conflict resolution and the larger land governance system.

Legal instruments and their limitations: A number of important tools influence the institutional and legal structures controlling peri-urban land expropriation and dispute settlement:

- Federal Expropriation and Compensation Laws: Proclamation No. 455/2005, its successor Proclamation No. 1161/2019, and the recent amendment, Proclamation No. 1336/2024.
- The Regularization Directive of the Tigray Region (2003): Regulating the handling of unofficial or unlawful residential landholdings

The 2003 Regional Regularization Directive recognizes landholdings that were obtained informally before to 1987. Nevertheless, its factual basis is disengaged from local circumstances, and its normative underpinning is limited. There is no obvious justification for the arbitrary time limit. After the Derg regime fell, the TPLF-led regional government nullified the previous administration's landholding rights without putting in place a strong and open land administration system of its own. Consequently, a large number of residential allocations and transactions, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas, went unrecorded.

Significant societal inequities were caused by this disregard for informal and customary tenure. Legitimate land claims were rejected to thousands of people living in peri-urban areas. The directive is a prime example of positivist legal theory, which prioritizes state law over societal consent and customs as the only source of legitimacy. Plural and community-based landholding systems are marginalized by a legal centralist approach (Griffiths, 1986; Meinzen-Dick & Pradhan, 2002).

The institutional setup of regularization and its shortcomings: An adjudication committee made up of the following members oversees the regularization procedure under the regional directive:

- Municipal specialists, mostly surveyors,
- A mayor, who frequently lacks professional experience,
- Representatives of the local administration, usually cadres with party affiliations,
- Members of associations for women, youth, and peasants (usually with similar political views),
- The elders' representatives from the area.

Although the committee seems to have a diverse membership, its true function is primarily symbolic. In terms of decision-making, the majority of members have minimal influence. The committee's scope is limited to reviewing applicants' documents for regularization; it is not empowered to render judgments or verify prior claims based on custom or community knowledge. This structure undermines procedural justice, undermines meaningful representation, and strengthens institutional illegitimacy (Gisselquist, 2012). Furthermore, it increases the general public's skepticism of the official government system, especially among those whose land rights are not documented by official procedures.

Complaint mechanisms under federal law: Proclamation No. 455/2005 created an administrative committee to handle complaints against land expropriation. Anyone dissatisfied with the committee's decisions could appeal to the regular courts. However, the scope of acceptable complaints was strictly limited to compensation valuation, leaving out a wide range of significant issues, such as requests for development priority, participation in local planning processes, access to infrastructure and public services, and protection of intergenerational residential land rights.

Because of these omissions, the legal solution process frequently ignored the most significant problems that peri-urban communities face, particularly those pertaining to equitable inclusion, livelihood continuity, and generational well-being. Furthermore, because state actors still had total control over the complaint mechanism, its impartiality and accessibility were gravely threatened. Due to the narrow scope of judicial review and the absence of third-party control, the system was insufficient as a platform for substantive remedies. By providing more channels for appeal and acknowledging landholders' rights to development priority, Proclamation No. 1161/2019 signaled a change in federal land governance and brought it more in line with international norms (e.g., ILC, 2021). This promise hasn't been realized in reality, though. The regional and local administrations have either disregarded or applied these new requirements inconsistently, according to FGDs and KIIs.

Despite the fact that the statute created a conflict hearing body with legal dispute resolution authority, the organization functions under a highly politicized and centralized control framework. Decision-making is still dominated by state-appointed actors, and community

representation is either weak or performativity. This damages the process' credibility and breeds distrust, especially in regions that are politically or economically vulnerable (Zoomers et al., 2016).

In conclusion, there are four major shortcomings in the institutional framework for conflict resolution in Mek'ele's peri-urban transition:

- i) **Formalism without functionality:** Although there are legal procedures, they are either unenforced or have an excessively limited influence.
- ii) **Social legitimacy is excluded:** Local norms, informal claims, and customary land rights are ignored.
- iii) **Lack of impartiality:** State and party players control decision-making bodies, which reduces confidence and fairness.
- iv) **Lack of procedural protections:** Communities have little to no chance to contest state acts or engage in meaningful participation. These institutional flaws are a reflection of a larger governance failure, where conflict, animosity, and resistance thrive due to disconnect between the law and lived reality.

4.1.8.10. The Gaps in the Land Governance Environment

The institutional structure and practical implementation of land expropriation and dispute resolution in peri-urban Mek'ele have been shown to have serious flaws in the aforementioned parts. Rather than being isolated administrative mistakes, these are serious problems with Ethiopia's broader land governance system.

The ambiguity of land ownership: Government vs. Peoples: The constitutional framework, in particular Article 40(3) of the FDRE Constitution, which states that land is publicly owned, largely shapes the relationship between the Ethiopian state and its population regarding land issues. The meaning of "public," however, is still rather unclear. Although it might imply that the people own the land, in reality, the government, acting as the state's agent, has sole control over its administration, usage, and expropriation.

The land is, however, clearly owned by Ethiopia's Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples (NNPs), according to Article 40(6). This implies that there are two distinct ownership structures: the

centralized state and the sociopolitical organizations that make up the federation. This duality, meanwhile, is still purely hypothetical. The Constitution and subsequent legislation actually do not grant the NNPs any real authority over land control. Most substantive powers remain in the hands of the federal and regional governments, particularly those related to compensation, expropriation, and land use regulation. There is no legally enforceable procedure for the NNPs to engage in decision-making.

There is a structural contradiction in this constitutional design. There are no legally binding guarantees, despite Article 89(5)'s need that land be handled in the peoples' best interests.

Given the current state of violence in Tigray, future studies can look at the restructuring of land governance throughout the post-conflict recovery phase, including the reintegration of displaced peri-urban people, reparations, and institutional restoration.

Participatory deficit and the role of political representation: The NNPs are further marginalized in land governance due to their lack of true political representation. Representative systems may allow communities to have a say in policy decisions, but in practice, elected officials usually prioritize party loyalty over constituent concerns. When political loyalty takes precedence over representative accountability, as has been the case in Tigray for the past three decades, this dynamic is most apparent in single-party dominant systems (Aalen, 2011).

Throughout Tigray, land governance has been greatly impacted by two major socioeconomic groups: the ruling elite and the peasantry. Both are present in the political landscape, but the privileged have a disproportionate amount of power. Through legal and economic disputes, they have gradually increased the amount of land they possess, mostly to obtain more money. Proclamation No. 721/2011's Article 10(7 and 8) institutionalizes the change in land leasing from communal benefit to private-sector preference, thereby reorienting land policy in favor of elite-led investment. As an indication of a broader tendency, land governance has evolved from a public good to an instrument of elite-driven development. Through selective legal changes and the employment of state machinery, the ruling class has increased socioeconomic inequality by denying the peasantry access to the benefits of urban growth and peri-urban transition.

Dual role of executive and representative authority: The merger of legislative and executive power is a glaring indication of growing accountability erosion. Executive branch employees,

such ministers or regional administrators, frequently also serve on regional councils or in the House of Peoples' Representatives. This conflict of interest makes it possible for the same people to suggest and approve land policy, making it difficult to distinguish between legislation and governance. As a result of this convergence, democratic checks and balances are diminished, essentially transforming representative councils into tools for furthering the executive's agenda. Theoretical debates in public forums frequently result in predetermined issues and judgments that support elite agendas, especially when it comes to capital projects and land leases. Public trust declines, institutional legitimacy deteriorates, and marginalized populations' resistance rises as a result.

Structural features undermining equitable land governance: A larger trend of systemic exclusion and elite capture is reflected in the institutional and legal framework of Mek'ele's peri-urban land governance. The main structural elements that support these difficulties are as follows:

- Constitutional ambiguities that permit conflicting interpretations of property ownership and allow the government to overreach;
- Legal centralism, which excludes NNPs and local communities on a systematic basis and monopolizes land governance;
- Policy changes influenced by the elite, such as specific legal changes and lease arrangements intended to reallocate property for capital accumulation;
- Legislative and executive branch merging, which restricts civic supervision and democratic accountability

Together, these factors create a governing context that supports increasing socioeconomic disparity, repression of dissent, and dispossession. The land governance system has been used to further elite interests at the expense of local communities and peasants, rather than serving as a platform for equitable development. This has undermined the idea of public interest, which is the legal basis for expropriation and land policy.

4.2. Discussion

Ethiopian public land ownership is primarily justified by the desire to advance the welfare of all citizens, whether urban and rural, across all society groups. The policy argument for granting unrestricted land use rights to peasant, semi-sedentary, and pastoralist communities is based on the nation's socioeconomic structure. At the time the Constitution was passed in 1995, over 85% of Ethiopia's labor force was capital-constrained and dependent on agriculture and animal husbandry. According to Ethiopia's Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI) strategy and associated sectorial policies, free access to land was meant to facilitate initial capital accumulation by mobilizing rural labor and land as core assets.

Promoting low-cost domestic agricultural output, ensuring affordable food supplies for urban consumption, and providing the ingredients required for agro-processing-based industrialization were the objectives of this policy direction. By removing the need for capital expenditures in land purchase, it was expected that rural households would engage in activities that would boost production. Although this approach is still debatable among scholars and international development organizations, some argue that Ethiopia's public land ownership system offers a fresh model for inclusive capital generation because of the substantial engagement of the rural community.

By offering an effective supply of land, public land ownership is intended to encourage infrastructure investment and urban growth, enhancing the city's role in fostering broader socioeconomic development. Urban land is expected to bring in enough money to pay for the costs of buying land and constructing infrastructure in rural areas. Theoretically, however, the socioeconomic development of urban areas shouldn't be threatened by the generation of land-based income. Specifically, access to industrial investment and household housing shouldn't be hampered by the cost and distribution of land. Urban public land ownership is further supported by the natural depreciation of landed estates. When physical structures deteriorate and the value of built land falls below that of similar vacant land, urban rehabilitation becomes necessary. As a result, capital investment must be renewed, and lease terms must also be renewed, usually by future generations.

It is true that peri-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. Land disputes particularly arise when there is an opportunity to acquire land for nothing, regardless of whether it is state, common, or private property. The most common cause of neighborly disagreements and inheritance issues is land. People gladly seize land if their position permits it or forfeit land, if they are in a poor position during post-conflict or early economic transition periods when regulatory institutions, restrictions, and penalties mechanisms are not yet in place as indicated in Araya, N & Girma (2026) and Shafi (2021).

Finding demonstrated that metropolises have grown and the demand for land in peri-urban areas has increased due to the rapid increase in urban population. These areas are frequently the subject of mandatory land acquisition to support urban development processes. A practice like this results in broad changes to land tenure in a particular system of rights, connections, and institutions that run counter to the idea that land is a finite and necessary resource. The possibility of land tenure disputes, which are frequently complicated and result in violent, unstable, and insecure disputes, is constantly increased by these changes in peri-urban areas. There is still a significant knowledge vacuum regarding land tenure-related disputes in peri-urban areas, despite numerous attempts made to explain them and scholars' varied perspectives on the peri-urban land conflicts.

Olga and Darya (2018) and data obtained from FGDs and KIIs identified four primary areas of conflict in the peri-urban land conversion process which is mostly caused by disputes over the conversion of rural land into urban area. The compensation method, which is limited to the equivalent of ten (later expanded to fifteen) years' worth of agricultural produce, raises concerns about the continuation of life and livelihoods. As a result, resistance to expropriation has been more vocal over time. In areas where local councils and executive entities followed central decisions, resistance grew as a result of collective or individual deterrence efforts. Nonetheless, coercive techniques have always been employed to resolve disputes. In other cases, political pressure and intimidation were combined with actual violence to enforce forcible land takings.

The resources and energy provided by peri-urban areas at the expense of their natural or semi-natural land are what are driving this change (Olga and Darya, 2018). Urban and rural elements

with inner and outer limits make up peri-urban areas, which are dynamic transitional zones between a city or town and rural countryside. The inner boundary represents pre-existing settlements that had limited access to farmland, were formally under urban development plans, and were absorbed into urban administration as a result of urban expansion. However, the outside limit is officially under rural development planning, has more access to farmland, and is increasingly influenced and pressured by the city (Mezgebo, 2014).

As ideologies, plotting the locations of the interactions between rural and urban institutions are very important. The procedures include the exchange of goods and services between rural and urban areas in both directions (Yanti and Vidya, 2015). Consequently, as pointed out in this study, peri-urban landscapes conceptually and physically illustrate the ways in which rural and urban forces interact to shape land development and resource exchange (Venkatesh, 2012). Conflicting claims of power, overlapping governance institutions, and legal frameworks make it challenging from an institutional perspective to develop unambiguous institutional arrangements for peri-urban property (Rahayu and Mardiansjah, 2018). The regions experience fierce competition for property rights and swift shifts in who may access resources and power. The continuous presence of bush/fallow agricultural land and competition for land for non-agricultural uses are criteria for defining a village as peri-urban (Arko, 2011).

Reviewed document showed that unauthorized land transfers, informal settlements, and regular disputes over access and property valuation are all part of Ethiopia's peri-urban land conflicts. Besides, civilians have frequently clashed over hundreds of thousands of informal houses in towns including Addis Ababa, Hawassa, Bahir Dar, and Assosa as indicated by Tesfaunegn, (2017). There have also been reports of illegal land occupations in Adama, Dire Dawa, and Gondar, which occasionally result in violent altercations with local authorities. Due to their ineligibility for compensation upon eviction, informal market participants experience tenure insecurity (PSI, 2023). So do Mekelle City.

Mehari (2011) and Araya, N & Girma (2026) examined how farm communities in Mekelle's peri-urban regions were affected by built-up growth, emphasizing legal issues with agricultural expropriation and compensation. The author claims that although the Ethiopian national constitution (more especially, Article 40(4 and 8)) calls for just compensation for farmland that

has been taken away, poor management and financial constraints have led to displacement without sufficient compensation. Furthermore, the issue is made worse by shifting demographics and growing land costs.

Melak and Gela (2012) and key informant interview found that erroneous parcel registration, squatting, illegal land transfers, institutional interests, and inheritance disputes were all sources of conflict. Unmarked boundaries, speculative purchases, various land authority, community land grabs, and bad governance are key conflict traits that call for additional action. Due in part to improved plot boundary demarcation and the renewal of witnesses to plot border locations, land registration and certification are likely to have decreased the number of border disputes. District courts, kebele shengo, local leaders, and family members were all involved in conflict resolution.

Moreover, international research, peri-urban land disputes have a variety of effects on urban growth as key expertise pointed out in the study area. Further they claimed that when one or more conflict parties lose their property, it can lead to a number of negative outcomes, including: loss of homeland, physical harm or death; high costs for conflict resolution efforts; delayed land development; decreased investment; diminished trust in the state; and social and political instability. And peri-urban conflict disrupts development projects, social relationships and networking, psychological trauma from discriminatory inheritance laws and practices, and income-generating activities

On the other hand, peri-urban agricultural farming communities show that spatial urban development, rural-to-urban migration, and higher natural population increase are the main causes of the city's rapid urban expansion. People were not informed, the urban expansion program surrounding the city was not participatory, and the displaced households were not given the chance to haggle over how much and what kind of compensation they would receive or how much their possessions would be worth. The dislocated farming community surrounding the city was not fully accommodated by the compensation package offered, necessitating urban expansion, displacement, and a compensation program that would adequately involve the community and provide both in-kind and monetary compensation.

Understanding the underlying causes of peri-urban land conflicts is essential for their effective resolution, particularly those that support illegal land subdivision, unchecked settlement growth, and informal land occupancy. Analysis shows that these conflicts usually occur along two related criteria. They first infringe against the government's land power, which is meant to further everyone's interests. Second, while local groups and farmers assert property rights that frequently break the law, they depict the ongoing struggle for ownership and distribution of land resources. The state, which purports to act on behalf of the publics and private landowners who want to maintain control over their properties in Mekelle's peri-urban areas could be seen as at odds with one another.

FGD, expertise opinion and Aalen, 2011 demonstrated that the growths of informal settlements in Mekelle's peri-urban area are frequently attributed by policymakers to the speculative actions of usufruct landholders. This view, which is reflected in both official discourse and academic literature, maintains that because the formal urban land lease system cannot keep up with the increasing demand for housing, farmers have been illegally subdividing and selling their land informally in order to profit from rising land values, particularly in response to in-migration and urban pressure. This thesis uses triangulated qualitative data and survey research to challenge that assumption. Respondents were asked a hypothetical question: if both options were legally available, would they prefer to continue farming or subdivide and convert their land? As the finding found in this study shown a clear majority 87.8% of peri-urban respondents and 83.0% of rural benchmark respondents preferred they would continue farming, even when aware of the potential profits from subdivision.

Respondents rated four advantages of public ownership favorably: (i) protection of communal interests (such as ecological preservation); (ii) fewer land-related conflicts; (iii) ease of coordinating land-use planning; and (iv) the potential for equitable land redistribution when necessary. Surprisingly, over 71% of both groups rejected the claim that private land ownership is necessary to reap these benefits. However, opinions differed on four important characteristics of private tenure: (i) capital investment incentives; (ii) ease of transferring land rights (such as inheritance, pledge, and sale); (iii) improved tenure security; and (iv) individual liberty in land

usage. Additionally, peri-urban respondents frequently disagreed with the favorable evaluations provided by rural respondents.

And results demonstrated that policies which connect customary and legal tenure are necessary to resolve peri-urban land conflicts, guaranteeing equitable compensation, inclusive spatial planning, and the restoration of displaced farmers' livelihoods. Important ramifications include the pressing need to establish decentralized, participatory land governance structures to control increasing urbanization, enhance legal frameworks to prevent elite land grabbing, and formalize informal land markets. Besides, by exposing the shortcomings of formal tenure systems in rapidly changing areas, underlining the failure of binary rural-urban planning, and illustrating the power disparities between customary holders and state-driven development, peri-urban land conflicts advance urban land planning theory. These disputes cause scholars to change their focus to a "polity-based" analysis that emphasizes the necessity for inclusive land readjustment processes, institutional fragmentation, and legal diversity

In general, peri-urban areas in Mekelle face increasing tension as a result of increased land claims, frequently at the expense of indigenous farmers and cultures, as the city expands and draws investments. Besides, societal and economic inequality, the impact of globalization, and market forces and displacement are widely seen and rise steeply. That is under a lot of strain from market dynamics because urbanization and economic growth are the main drivers of demand for peri-urban land. This often results in the forced relocation of locals who rely on this property for their livelihoods.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Summary

Peri-urban land conflict is a complex issue that results from the intersection of challenged property rights, quickly expanding metropolitan areas, and shifting political institutions. The research that is currently available often addresses issues like compensation, resettlement, and tenure insecurity, but it usually focuses on a few of these characteristics rather than the complex interplay of legal, institutional, social, and economic factors that define peri-urban transition. Moreover, the number of empirically based research that critically analyzes public land ownership regulations and their relationships to illegal property transactions is quite small. This study fills up these gaps by providing a thorough analysis of the peri-urban land conflict in Mekelle City, Ethiopia, which is impacted by a contested governance environment in addition to a number of institutional and legal frameworks.

Finding out how illegal land transactions frame peri-urban land conflict by identifying actors, analyzing the conflict between peri-urban communities and the government from the perspective of land rights and responsibilities, determining the applicability of the public interest concept in relation to land conflict, and determining how governance responds to these goals were the four main objectives of the study. Using an integrated analytical framework that integrates concepts of the public interest, social contract, and land rights, the study goes beyond binary state-community narratives. In addition to offering potential applications for land governance change in peri-urban settings, the study contributes a fresh viewpoint to academic discussions by offering empirical evidence in favor of these processes. The primary findings, grouped in accordance with the study's primary objectives, are as follows:

5.1.1. Conflict between Government and Peri-Urban Peasants and their Consequences

Peasants highlight their usufruct rights under the public land ownership system, while the government highlights its legal control over property allocation and use. This fundamental misunderstanding is the source of conflict between the government and peri-urban peasants. This tension increases when the government violates its constitutional duties.

Normal narratives that depict peasants as speculative agents are contradicted by the data: 98% of respondents stated they would not subdivide if sustainable compensation was offered, and 83% stated they would prefer to continue farming rather than selling the land. In both FGDs and KIIs, respondents reaffirmed their views that 40 years of support was fair remuneration. It is likewise unjustified to say that peri-urban peasants want private land ownership. Because it promotes equitable land usage and the protection of the common good, a sizable majority (76.2%–93.1%) supported public land ownership, whereas 54.5%–85.1% had an unfavorable opinion of private ownership. Remarkably, respondents from rural areas expressed comparatively greater support for private tenure than those from peri-urban areas; this is probably due to ambitions rather than actual experience. Since of the perceived hazards, people in peri-urban areas were more wary of privatization since they had firsthand experience with tenure insecurity.

Rather, as livelihood conditions deteriorate, land subdivision becomes a response. 83% of expropriated farmers are now living in crop poverty as a result of the dramatic drop in agricultural production from 19.3 to 5.3 quintals per hectare between 2008 and 2024 brought on by shrinking plot sizes and inadequate compensation. Additionally, when adjusted for inflation, the compensation only covers 2.76 to 6.22 years of produce value, which is significantly less than the necessary 10-year criterion. It also does not account for losses from non-farm income. Furthermore, many respondents shared profits with their children, and 81.3% of respondents stated that their main motivation for subdivision was worry for their children's future.

These findings indicate a pattern of the state's disregard for land rights and livelihood protection. Insufficient compensation and a lack of procedures that allow the expropriated to integrate are two characteristics of government actions that directly contravene public land ownership rules. The state has become a major cause of conflict in Mekelle, undermining its own legal and constitutional commitments rather than acting as an unbiased defender of the public interest.

Furthermore, the primary causes of peri-urban land conflicts are conflicting legal and political frameworks; diverse property rights claims, local power dynamics, and self-serving human interests. Peri-urban land disputes also resulted in decreased municipal tax collection, increased costs, hindered investment, and caused conflict.

5.1.2. The Peri-Urban Land Conflict within the Context of Illegal Land Transactions

Illegal landholdings are prevalent in the peri-urban districts of Mekelle. According to adjudication statistics, at least 4,051 illegal schemes had been found by 2016, however only 587 of them had supporting documentation. An analysis of satellite imagery conducted in 2024 revealed that 10,967 illegal properties were spanning 188.64 hectares in Debri and Dngur alone, highlighting the systematic extent of irregular land acquisition.

These unlawful transactions are not isolated occurrences; rather, they are a reflection of a well-established and structured informal land market that is supported by networks of individuals operating in both the formal and informal spheres. In 84.4% of deals, brokers mediated disputes between purchasers and farmers and organized forgeries. Local officials and members of adjudication committees frequently manipulated authorizations, and land administration employees enabled fraudulent documentation. What is known locally as a "Informal Municipality" system was created by private legal experts who also helped to reroute disputes to legal gaps. The study reveals that official institutions directly support informal markets, which goes against the notion that they discourage illicit activity.

While city and sub-city land offices manipulated site plans and committed title fraud, adjudication panels were reduced to rubber-stamping organizations. Unauthorized sureties and skewed constitutional interpretations were used by justice institutions, including as courts and social tribunals, to justify unlawful transfers. Furthermore, unlawful landholdings have been aggressively legitimized by regional and local governments. The Mekelle City Administration, for example, legalized 1,820 informal buyers in 2013, and regional players have obstructed official land procedures in the name of good governance.

In contrast to the battle between the government and peri-urban peasants over land rights, the larger ecology of unlawful property transactions is based on structural issues, primarily speculative rent gaps, legal voids, and widespread state cooperation.

Rent gap: The dual existence of rural and urban land regimes has created a massive rent gap, incentivizing informal transactions. Although not legally marketable, real value of rural holdings becomes equivalent to urban auction prices once titled.

Land administration breakdown: The city expanded its administrative boundaries from, yet land governance systems did not scale up accordingly. Important projects like the land bank and the Local Development Plans (LDPs) remain unfinished despite sufficient revenue from land sales to support both. The cadastral system has collapsed but because of institutional neglect and political interference as confirmed by key informants.

Legal vacuum and state complicity: In the city's perimeter, institutional and legal deficiencies have allowed for long-term land misuse. Due to the lack of clear administrative authority granted to the transitory zone more than 20 years ago, it is susceptible to organized fraud by brokers, speculators, and public employees.

It is a deliberate breach of duty for the government to selectively enforce laws against land buyers while avoiding penalties for brokers, speculators, and complicit public officials and authorities. The state no longer acts as an impartial steward of public property, but instead plays a significant role in maintaining land conflict through cooperation and inaction.

5.1.3. The Public Interest Guise in Shaping the Peri-Urban Land Conflict by Identifying Actors

This section examined the ways in which the Ethiopian land governance framework's public interest concept has influenced and occasionally distorted the peri-urban land conflict and types of actors. According to the findings, the public interest is frequently misconstrued, used inconsistently, and left legally unclear, even though it is commonly used by authorities to defend expropriation and urban growth. It is therefore a source of both contestation and rationalization, since it has a substantial effect on the distribution of wealth among various urban subsectors as well as between the rural and urban sectors. Besides, data obtained from focus group discussion and key expertise showed that friends, relatives, neighbors, community based groups, and their immediate networks are informal actors. Besides, institutions, officials, and government appointee that establish laws and regulations were also recognized as formal actors. Hence, accordingly, the best knowledge of the outcomes of this dynamic can be obtained by analyzing the various effects on the three primary groups:

Peri-urban communities are net losers

The main losers in the urbanization process are peri-urban communities, who have been progressively disempowered by Mekelle's conversion of agricultural terrain into urban territory.

Structural confinement and exclusion from urban opportunity: Even after being included in urban administrative limits, peri-urban populations are still considered rural by government land-use rules. Under rural regimes, these laws forbid the construction of new settlements and require communities to preserve the land's natural condition, thereby impeding development or adaptation.

Massive land value extraction with minimal return: There is no merit to the economics argument against peri-urban transformative programs. The worth of the land that was taken from peri-urban areas over the last ten years has been ETB 53.6 billion, and the compensation paid amounted to 0.91% of the actual land revenue.

Legal disenfranchisement: The suspension of Local Development Plans (LDPs) has had cascading effects. It froze the issuance of building permits and left communities without legal title to their residential properties. The absence of title deeds means residents cannot use property as collateral or security; legal transactions involving property are impossible, the economic and legal value of property is locked.

Exposure to new hazards: Urban expansion without coordination or risk assessment has also introduced life-threatening environmental vulnerabilities. In Debri, urban housing cooperatives redirected floodwater through newly installed drainage channels that now flood older, original peri-urban neighborhoods.

The findings powerfully reveal that peri-urban areas have been reduced to resource extraction zones for urbanization and the communities' custodians of resources for urban extraction. The peri-urban extractive policies delegitimize the notion of 'public interest' in the eyes of those most affected.

A) The losing urban majority through exclusion from housing and policy betrayal

Despite extravagant urban expansion and dispossession of peri-urban communities in favor of urban development, ordinary urban residents of Mek'ele have become increasingly marginalized in the housing and work premise. The land system in practice has instead leaves the urban majority on the losing end of an exclusionary process.

Deepening housing crisis and failure to meet demand: The peri-urban land conversion contributed little to the residential land or housing supply. The primary land allocation tool, the auction system, has proven grossly inadequate; say only 4,530 plots were supplied during 2007 to 2020. With intense bidder competition and disproportionately high prices has excluded most residents from market access. Auction residential prices jumped from ETB 3,220/m² in 2013 to ETB 61,020/m² in 2024 indicating a 14-fold increase in a decade. Even the highest-income households struggle by 2020, they had to spend up to 68% of their gross income just to afford land.

Ineffectiveness of alternative housing strategies: Despite housing cooperatives is recognized public purpose in the lease law, one justification for expropriation of peri-urban land, the city's brief attempt to provide cost-recovery land through housing cooperatives (22,422 plots between 2017 and 2019) ended abruptly after the 2020 national election leaving the fate of over 60,000 eligible cooperative members on waiting lists subtle.

Commercial land and workspaces: Access to commercial land and affordable workspaces has also deteriorated. Even though commercial plots cost slightly less than residential land, the actual prices remain prohibitively high. The prohibitively high land price transcends into prohibitive work premise rental price. In 2024, a modest 4m² retail space in central business district rented for ETB 15,000 to ETB 20,000 per month, a rate accessible only to a select few. In general, the auction-based system's inability to provide reasonably priced land access has not only directly supported illicit land markets and informal settlements, but it also violates the normative goal of public land ownership.

B) Land as a vehicle for elite capital accumulation

Although the legal and policy frameworks of Ethiopia state that the public interest serves as the guiding principle of land governance, the reality in Meke'le shows that politically connected investors in the manufacturing and real estate sectors are systematically capturing land under the

guise of encouraging investment through cost-recovery land transfers, allowing for massive capital accumulation due to the vague and expansive definitions of investment and public interest, almost any money infusion can be considered an investment. This ambiguity has been used as an excuse to provide investors, especially those in the manufacturing and real estate industries, vast parcels of peri-urban property, frequently at almost no cost.

Low returns, high land capture manufacturing investment: Manufacturing occupies 12.56 percent of Mekelle's built-up area, but its real economic contributions are still quite little. Only 27.1% of jobs in the city are derived from manufacturing; 86.6% of manufacturing businesses are small-scale, providing few, low-paying jobs; the majority of projects run well below capacity, with agro-processing facilities operating at only 6–57% efficiency; project realization has remained low, at most 20%; and the majority of sites are fenced and idle. Land transfers to manufacturing investors persist in spite of these drawbacks, showing elite privilege rather than public need.

Real estate investment: Speculation disguised as development: Real estate investment projects have performed even worse. None of the seven major real estate sites visited had been completed as of 2024. Then sector is dominated by amateurs and the party affiliated companies both of which are speculative. The financial opportunity cost the public (the city or the peri-urban communities) loss is staggering. The investment land allocation in Mek'ele suggests that government has promoted speculation and rent-seeking as the dominant investment model justified by government failure to revoke underutilized leases, underscoring lack of political will and intentional state complicity in elite enrichment.

5.1.4. Management of Peri-Urban Land Conflict

Although peri-urban land conflict is a normal occurrence, how it is handled and resolved is important. However, the study shows that Mek'ele dispute resolution practices are marked by normative contradiction and power imbalance, which impede fair and efficient results.

Governance and interpretive failure in expropriation: Without any real consultation or negotiation, choices were communicated to impacted communities after the fact. Local authorities frequently made ambiguous, untrue, or contradictory promises, such as ongoing

compensation or the protection of rural land rights. Because of the state's dominance over decision-making, a lack of institutional accountability, and a lack of community agency, conflict has continued in peri-urban areas.

Power asymmetry and procedural weakness in conflict resolution:

Periurban conflict Coercive governance, power imbalances, and procedural flaws are the main causes of Mekelle. When people protest unfair treatment, they frequently face intimidation, violence, or political designation. Repression, deceit, and symbolic legal procedures are used in conflict resolution processes instead of communication, which runs counter to the ideas of legal pluralism and conflict transformation theory. The state's top-down, political strategy erodes institutional legitimacy and encourages ongoing resistance by disregarding competing legal standards and community views.

Limitations of the institutional framework: Although there are federal and regional laws, they are either poorly executed or have a limited scope. Complaint procedures are not only restricted to compensation issues, but they also lack impartial oversight and procedural protections. In addition to silencing local voices and serving as an example of needless formality, the system maintains a governance gap that breeds distrust, unfairness, and conflict.

Shortcomings from land governance: The peri-urban land governance condition of Mekelle is defined by structural exclusion and basic flaws that arise from Ethiopia's political and constitutional structure. Although public land ownership is declared in the constitution, in practice, all power is held by centralized state actors. There are still no legally mandated avenues for co-ownership or local involvement. This top-down system is typified by party allegiance taking precedence over accountability, elite interests controlling land policy through specific legislative measures, and lack of true political representation. Thus, these interactions result in a government structure that promotes expropriation, suppresses criticism, and undermines equality and the concept of public interest.

5.2. Conclusion

This study not only challenges the conventional concepts of land conflict between the government and peri-urban society, but it also challenges the ways in which unlawful land transactions in peri-urban areas are operating. And the structural and fundamental history of land conflict in peri-urban areas is also examined. Recently, Mekelle peri-urban land conflict is an example of a broad structural issue with Ethiopia's land governance regime. Contrary to appearances, the war may be a struggle between peri-urban peasants asserting their land rights and the government operating in accordance with the constitution. This study, however, demonstrates that the discussion transcends a simple hierarchy of rights and authority. Rather, it is shaped by a complex interplay between normative legal ambiguity, institutional failure, political capture, and a developmental philosophy that prioritizes rapid urban growth above equitable change.

The findings explain prevalent narratives that depict peri-urban farmers as illegal actors motivated by speculation or a desire for privatized land tenure. Instead, the analysis reveals that the systematic deterioration of individual and communal usufruct rights, which are protected by the spirit of Ethiopia's constitution, is the main cause of subdivision and informal land claims. The government has often shifted its responsibilities, such providing housing for filial generation, onto already precarious peri-urban families, infringing on both collective land rights over communal and residential claims and individual rights to lifelong income from farming.

The collective rights of peri-urban communities over community property and their individual constitutionally guaranteed rights to a stable income from land use are both violated by the government's activities. Thus, farmers' involvement illegal landholding or subdivision, where it occurs in peri-urban Mekelle, these actions should not be seen simply as violations of the law, which is a normative discourse. Such actions shall be framed as expressions of extra-legal rights rooted in unmet obligations and survival imperatives, which, in theory, shall be the basis of the normative analytical discourse.

Informal practices arise in these situations not in opposition to governance but rather as a reaction to its shortcomings. They both critique and modify a system that has denied equitable access to land, housing, and urban benefits to peri-urban dwellers. Consequently, the study

advocates for a more complex and equitable method of land governance that acknowledges the validity of local claims, integrates many ethical frameworks, and reestablishes the public interest as a concept of social justice, accountability, and equality.

Even more significant, this analysis shows that the state-community dichotomy cannot adequately describe the peri-urban land conflict. Beyond this line, a more extensive and formalized network of illicit property deals takes place, made possible by a deeper lack of peri-urban land governance as well as community disobedience. Even though the government holds the constitutional monopoly on land management, it hasn't created an effective legal and administrative framework to handle land migrations from rural to urban areas. Informal players have been able to take up land governance responsibilities due to this operational and legal gap, creating a parallel system that is both efficient and dishonest.

The conflicts at the core of state power are exposed by the selective application of land laws and the scapegoating of land purchasers. The systemic causes of illegal transactions, including as institutional involvement, political influence, and government ineptitude, continue unchecked while buyers who participate in them are regularly punished. Accordingly, criminal activity is more often a response to a government system that lacks legitimacy and ability than it is to any other situation. Land-based rent-seeking's political economics are closely linked to the state, which is by no means an unbiased regulator.

A basic example of the government's failure to carry out its constitutional duty to manage and administer land is the illicit property transaction that predominates in Mek'ele City's peri-urban land conflict ecosystem. The dispute is primarily caused by the state's persistent disregard for its governance responsibilities, even though it is typically framed as the product of individual misconduct, especially by farmers who illegally split rural land and land buyers for any motive, regardless of moral justification. A clear, enforceable, and transparent framework for peri-urban land regulation has not been established or maintained by local or regional governments.

There are serious legal gaps in the areas of managing individual and community rights when land is transformed from rural to urban, as well as in balancing the rights of new urban settlers and

host communities. Because there are no clear legal documents or operational rules, the governance gap has been filled by opportunistic individuals and informal processes.

Ongoing political and administrative interference that hinders the use of essential land administration mechanisms like the Cadaster system, Land Bank, and Local Development Plans (LDPs) exacerbates the legal vacuum. This has made land administration more vulnerable to manipulation, inefficiency, and corruption. Illicit land markets have flourished due to a network of brokers, complicit authorities, and even legitimate institutions that have gone above and beyond their authority. Where enforcement has occurred, it has usually been arbitrary and reactionary, punishing land buyers or selectively regularizing informal holdings on behalf of farmers who divide and transfer land without a formal claim.

The broader system of illicit land transactions and the expansion of informal settlements in peri-urban Mekelle are mostly the result of the government's disregard for its constitutional role, even though land-subdividing farmers and other private actors are held legally accountable. This failure encompasses the lack of a well-defined legal framework as well as the institutional reluctance or inability to execute efficient, responsible land governance. As a result, the state is at the core of a land conflict ecosystem that it was required by the constitution to control, safeguard, and manage for the benefit of the general public.

The peri-urban land dispute has its roots in the vague constitutional and legal definition of public land ownership and public interest. Land is a public asset that is jointly owned by the state and Ethiopia's peoples, according to the Constitution.

Nevertheless, this idea has not been put into practice in institutional frameworks that provide participatory government. It is now public ownership that allows unchecked state authority. The laws that implement this concept, particularly those that deal with expropriation, leasing, and compensation, don't produce the collective advantage that the Constitution aims for. Because of vague and malleable definitions of "public interest," state actors have been able to take property for development while giving the benefits to politically connected investors and urban elites elsewhere. Consequently, constitutional values are appropriated for accumulation that is centered on the regime.

In a similar vein, the exclusive power of the government to regulate land has influenced the resolution of conflicts. With no appropriate system in place to divide ownership, the state has positioned itself as the final arbiter of disputes and an interested party. Therefore, government objectives are reflected in conflict resolution rather than in justice or community involvement. The criminalization of legitimate concerns and the suppression of contestation by political pressure or designation preclude the possibility of revolutionary discourse and negotiated solutions.

Looking at the Mekelle peri-urban land question as a whole, it is more than just a localized property conflict. The long-lasting effects of the EPRDF–TPLF developmental state model are demonstrated by the replacement of elite brokerage, centralized authority, and an ideological commitment to rapid urban progress with rural justice, participatory governance, and legal clarity. The battle demonstrates how contestation and inequality along the rural-urban boundary are sustained by political opportunism, institutional dysfunctions, and legal ambiguities. So, Mekelle's research provides important new information about Ethiopia's problems with democratic accountability, land governance, and fair development.

Besides, by emphasizing the fierce rivalry between agricultural and urban growth, which leads to tenure instability, unofficial transactions, and intricate power dynamics between local farmers, governments, and private developers, the finding of this study greatly advance urban planning knowledge. It contributes to our understanding of how agricultural land is transformed into built-up regions due to rapid urban growth, which frequently results in chaotic land use patterns. Peri-urban farmers frequently face extreme tenure insecurity, which results in distressed land sales, fear of eviction, and unofficial land transactions.

5.3. Recommendations

5.3.1. Recommendations to Mekelle City

The following points are recommended to Mekelle City administration:

- i. **Develop a long-term, inclusive expansion and development program:** Urban expansion areas that are now bounded should be given a complete development framework. Public service corridors, livelihood support initiatives, comprehensive land-use zoning, and infrastructure plans that complement the city's structural plan must all be included in this plan. It is imperative that the strategy be people-centered and include peri-urban dwellers into the urban economy rather than pushing them to the periphery.
- ii. **Implementing key planning policies:** Tenure instability, fragmented governance, and fast urbanization are common causes of peri-urban land conflicts. To handle these problems inclusive planning, land readjustment planning, formalizing land use planning, strengthening tenure security and multi-scalar governance were the actionable planning to be implemented accordingly.
- iii. **Conduct systematic adjudication and enforce LDPs within one year:** The administration of Mekelle City ought to give top priority to a thorough adjudication procedure that covers all peri-urban villages and informal settlements. This procedure, which must be finished within a year, will acknowledge the peri-urban populations' legal land rights and be in line with local development plans (LDPs). In order to ensure fairness and discourage future informal transactions, a transitional mechanism should be developed to either (i) integrate land buyers who have obtained plots unlawfully into formal housing cooperative schemes or (ii) regularize their holdings at average auction values. The integrity of city planning, the interests of purchasers, and local people should all be balanced in this decision.
- iv. **Enforce sustainable and strategic land use planning:** The city should conduct a systematic study of land cover and land use in the peri-urban area. A long-term, legally binding land-use plan needs to be based on this study. Important agricultural lands, particularly irrigable areas in Aynalem, Dngur, Debri, Momona, and AdiWelele, should be protected by the constitution from being converted to urban or speculative uses. In

addition to meeting the needs of sustainable land governance and food security, this encourages a more balanced urban-rural interface.

- v. **Reinstate and enforce a functional cadaster system within one year:** Due to political interference, a lack of institutional coordination, and corruption, previous cadaster implementation initiatives failed, necessitating audits and public disclosures. A revitalized cadaster system must include transparency and participatory mapping of each plot, registration of legitimate claims, and digital connectivity with urban land governance systems. Supported by anti-corruption oversight systems and statutory protections, the system must be up and running within a year.
- vi. **Resume idle or underdeveloped land and reallocate based on demand:** Plots that were awarded under the pretense of investment or public interest but have not yet met development criteria should be located and recovered by the City immediately, as should any underutilized or underdeveloped land. Verified demand organizations that should reclaim these lands include self-help housing cooperatives and small-scale developers. This would provide more equitable access to urban land, reduce speculation, and increase land-use efficiency.
- vii. **Design and implement a life restitution program for displaced peri-urban farmers:** A coordinated life restitution program must be put in place in order to integrate expropriated farmers into urban livelihood networks. A comprehensive feasibility study that considers their demographic, educational, and economic traits should serve as the basis for this. Provisions for urban agriculture, small-scale business spaces, vocational training, and land-based income replacement schemes are some potential options. In addition to being a moral obligation, restitution is a governmental obligation founded on the constitution's values of justice and equitable.

Apart from addressing past injustices, these city-level changes will create the foundation for Mekelle's urban development to become more sustainable, inclusive, and law-abiding. Restoring public confidence and securing the institution's long-term viability need the open execution of these reforms with active community involvement.

5.3.2. Recommendations to the regional government of Tigray

Since regional states are constitutionally empowered to manage and administer land, the Tigray Regional Government must put the following policies into place in order to alter the peri-urban land regime and reduce conflict:

- i. **Elaborate the peri-urban zone and its tenure regime:** In addition to defining the specific land tenure regime that will be in place during the transitional period, the area must legally define the peri-urban zone. It is important to clearly define the rights and obligations of both individual farmers and community members. Affected populations must be given complete access to urban services, infrastructure, and land market rights after rural land is reclassified as urban, guaranteeing fair integration as opposed to exclusion.
- ii. **Provide for a long-term transformation program for peri-urban areas, particularly Mekelle:** Lawmakers should establish a comprehensive transformation program for peri-urban settlements that is in accordance with the city's larger socioeconomic and spatial development strategy. Demographic forecasts, infrastructural development, livelihood restructuring, and focused assistance are all necessary to make sure that peri-urban dwellers gain from urbanization rather than lose it.
- iii. **Align actual expropriation to the limit of the structural plan:** A policy for urban growth that is based on structural and spatial planning should be implemented by the regional administration. In contrast to ad hoc decisions, urban land-use designation must be founded on a forward-looking development strategy. Following the reclassification of peri-urban land, land-use assessments and community consultations ought to be carried out as soon as possible in order to direct development that is socially responsive and orderly.
- iv. **Provide for the resuming idle or underdeveloped land for redistribution:** A special order will be issued by the regional government to conduct a comprehensive audit and to reclaim undeveloped and underdeveloped investment land in accordance with the lease agreement.
- v. **Implement land value sharing for peri-urban communities:** The regional government should establish a land value sharing system as it is aware that the value of land increases

dramatically when it is converted from rural to urban use. Not only should farmers who lose their usufruct rights be given life reparation schemes, but peri-urban residents should also benefit from increases in land value. The study's estimated 15% of net development value should be set aside each year and used to fund social services and basic infrastructure in peri-urban areas.

- vi. **Enforce a functional and transparent cadaster system:** Without delay, a completely digital and legally binding cadaster system that complies with national land administration regulations must be put into place. Integration with land leasing, registration, and taxation systems, careful parcel mapping, and verification of public documents should all be part of this. Both independent oversight and legislative protections are necessary to prevent systemic manipulation.
- vii. **Refrain from political and administrative interference in land governance:** In particular, the regional administration must pledge not to obstruct the city's land administration operations, such as cadastral registration, adjudication, and the implementation of urban development plans. Political engagement has historically hurt openness, institutional legitimacy, and informal land markets. In the future, legal enforcement and administrative neutrality must be the norm.

5.3.3. National policy and legal framework amendment

Like in many other Ethiopian districts, Mekelle's peri-urban land dispute is caused by the central state's political economy, which includes the constitutional monopoly on land, ambiguous legal definitions, and an urban bias in development planning. The following actions by the federal government are necessary to resolve these systemic problems:

- i. **Revise the expropriation and compensation law:** The constitutional spirit that acknowledges the lifetime usufruct rights of peasants over land is not reflected in the contemporary legal system. Compensation should include short-term payments based on agricultural production as well as long-term income streams, social security benefits, and generational inheritance rights. A modified law must also offer economically and socially feasible compensation packages and transformation packages to affected communities.

- ii. **Define public interest precisely and transparently:** The government should define public interest clearly in connection to urban growth and land expropriation. Determining whether expropriated land is actually benefiting society as a whole requires a list of qualified public interest activities and particular performance criteria. Land transactions driven by politics or arbitrariness would be avoided in this way.
- iii. **Reform the lease law to mandate inclusive access to urban land:** In order to require that a certain percentage of urban property be distributed to self-help housing cooperatives and through public auction, the lease law must be changed. In addition to democratizing access to land, this will reduce elite-dominated and speculative land hoarding.
- iv. **Exclude commercial real estate from public interest classification:** In particular, when it comes to large-scale initiatives by politically connected companies, commercial real estate should not be covered by the lease law's definition of public interest. It is not economically or socially acceptable to assign public land to private enterprises that are not subject to competition or accountability. These transfers jeopardize equality and exacerbate exclusion in urban land markets.
- v. **Introduce a public ownership principle in expropriation practice:** Instead of being only a legal concept used to allocate usufruct rights, public land ownership must be seen as a common interest among all citizens. According to this broader perspective, compensation plans ought to cover landless peri-urban communities that, despite not being registered right-holders, depend on rural land-based economies for their subsistence and socioeconomic integration. It is necessary to apply the improvements made to economic loss compensation in Proclamation No. 1161/2019 to unregistered economic interdependence.
- vi. **Enforce a Nationwide, Mandatory Cadaster System and Audit Framework:** When enacting legislation requiring all cities to use a cadastral system, the federal government ought to give priority to primary and secondary metropolitan centers. In order to guarantee openness, prevent corruption connected to land, and enforce adherence to national standards, a regular auditing system for land governance and administration must also be established.

5.4. Limitations and Avenue for Future Research

5.4.1. Limitations

Even though it offers a thorough and multi-layered analysis of the peri-urban land conflict in Mekelle, it is crucial to recognize the limitations of this work and pinpoint areas for additional research. Initially, the politicization and misreading of public interest are still examined at the aggregate level using a broad framework that contrasts rural and urban regions or sectoral distinctions like household needs against investment. This broad paradigm ignores the influence that misguided perceptions of the public interest have on urban dwellers.

Second, the politically sensitive nature of land issues especially those involving informal land markets and institutional collusion restricted access to comprehensive data. A number of significant informants may have provided selective narratives or insufficient institutional insights due to their reluctance to disclose accurate details. Third, by focusing only on the years 2008–2024, the analysis largely covers the patterns of peri-urban transition prior to and during the Tigray conflict. In particular, the ongoing reconstruction efforts and the institutional disruptions brought about by the conflict are not adequately taken into account in the conclusions.

These limitations do not detract from the study's main findings, despite their significance. Instead, they emphasize how an interdisciplinary, multi-scale, and ongoing strategy is required to address the changing dynamics of peri-urban land governance in Ethiopia and elsewhere.

5.4.2. Directions for future research

Even though this dissertation provides a basic understanding of peri-urban land conflict in Mekelle through institutional, legal, and sociopolitical lenses, future research should enhance its intersectional analysis and expand its spatial scope to support evidence-based land governance reform in Ethiopia. A few potential study themes are as follows:

1. **Comparative studies across regions and cities:** Comparative studies of peri-urban land dispute in other Ethiopian cities, such as Dire Dawa, Bahir Dar, Adama, and Hawassa, should be the focus of future research. This will provide a more comprehensive

understanding of how different land laws, political histories, and governance systems influence land conflict trends and institutional reactions.

2. **Land value capture and equitable redistribution mechanisms:** In order to ensure that host communities benefit from urban growth, future research may look at land value sharing mechanisms such as fiscal instruments, land banking, and urban-rural equality strategies. This is because land appreciation following urban expansion remains a major grievance.
3. **The role of political institutions in land market informality:** Expanding upon the structural political economy lens used in this study, future research might look at how political parties, regional power structures, and institutional hierarchies facilitate or hinder the creation of formal land markets and dispute resolution.
4. **Post-Conflict Land Governance and Recovery:** In light of the ongoing violence in Tigray, future research can examine how land governance is restructured during the post-conflict recovery phase, including reparations, institutional reconstruction, and the reintegration of displaced peri-urban populations.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1: Questionnaire for evicted (expropriated) farmers

Dear Respondents!

This study is being conducted by Negash Araya, a candidate for PhD of in Urban and Regional planning at Addis Ababa University's Ethiopian Institute of Architectural Building Construction and City Development. The main objective of this data collection is to gather information regarding to "Peri-Urban Land Conflicts in Ethiopia: Examining the causes, actors, effects, and legal frameworks of Mekelle city". This comprehensive questionnaire addresses the causes, actors, and legal frameworks with peri-urban land conflicts in Mekelle city and its surrounding peri-urban areas. The questions are designed to guide the research in understanding the complexities of peri-urban land conflicts and to develop effective strategies for managing competing land interests and resolving land disputes in peri-urban areas. The information you provide will be used solely for academic purposes. Therefore, you are kindly requested to complete the questionnaire accurately.

Thank You in Advance for Your Cooperation!!

Part I: Personal Information (Demographic characteristics)

1. Background information

1.1. Gender of household head: A) Male B) Female

1.2. Age of household head: _____ years.

1.3. Marital status of household head: A) Single B) Married C) Divorced

1.4. Educational status of household head:

	Illiterate	Grade 1-4	Grade 5-8	Grade 9-10 grade	Diploma	1 st degree	Master's degree
Response (put ✓)							

1.5. Family members by age category, excluding the parents (Father and Mother)

Age	< 5	5 – 10	11 – 15	16 – 18	19 – 25	26 – 30	> 30
Number							

1.6. Rank the family's economic activities based on its capacity of generating income:

Activity	Cropping	Animal husbandry	Casual labor jobs	Casual skilled or semi-skilled jobs	Extraction and sale of construction materials (stone, gravel, sand, etc.)
Rank					

II. The land conflict issue

2. Land holding information:

2.1.Land holding of the family during the distribution year (1980s) in ‘gibri’

Area /size	0.25	0.5	0.75	1.0	1.25	1.5	1.75	2.0	> 2.0
Response (put $\sqrt{}$)									
Household size (number)									

2.2.Government expropriated area (in ‘gibri’) till this time:

Expropriation year	1996 to 2000 EC	2001 to 2005 EC	2006 to 2010 EC	2011 to 2015 EC	Since 2016 EC
Area expropriated					

2.3.Crop harvest in quintals (average):

Year	2000 EC	2005 EC	2010 EC	2015 EC	2016 EC
Expropriated area					

3. Land transaction:

3.1.Farm land distribution (sale, donation, inheritance) by the holders themselves:

	Responses	Remarks
1. Area sold till this time (in square meters)		
2. Number of plots sold till this time		
3. Number of plots offered (gift) to children for residence		
4. Number of plots inherited for children for residence		
5. Number of plots offered to children as a dowry		
6. Number of plots offered to other relatives for residence		

3.2.Do you think famers have the right to subdivide and sale their farm possession? _____ (Yes/No).

3.3.Price of a plot sold by time:

Year of sale (EC)									
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Price (ETB)									
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3.4.Origin of land buyers: Origin of those who buy land (in number):

	Responses
1. Residents of the Tabia	
2. Residents of Mekele City	
3. Residents of Endertawereda	
4. Residents of other cities or weredas	

3.5.Land transaction network: How did you find a buyer? (multiple responses are possible):

	Responses
1. Broker(s) living in the Tabia	
2. Broker(s) living in Mekele City (including Quiha and Aynalem)	
3. Government employees (regional or Mekele City administration)	
4. Tabia administration authorities	
5. relatives, family members, friends, social affiliates	
6. The buyer him/herself	
7. If other, please mention:	

3.6.Identity of land buyers by purpose

3.6.1. In your observation, experience, or available information, what share people buy land in and around your village for residential use themselves? ____%. What about for profit (resale later)? ____%.

3.6.2. What percentage of those who bought land in and around your village are currently living on the plot/house they bought? ____%

4. If you were allowed, would you prefer continue cropping /farming/ over subdivide and sell your farm land? _____ (Yes/No)

5. Do you think your reclassification into the city administration make you economically better off compared to before? _____ (Yes/No)

5.1.If your answer is ‘Yes,’ rank the following possible reasons:

Presumed reason	Sale value of land is better than value of agricultural produce	Access to infrastructure	Diversify job option and income
Rank			

5.2.If your answer is ‘No’, please rank the following presumed reasons.

	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th
Insignificant compensation to substitute income from agriculture					
Inability to cop up with urban employment (incompetence)					
Loss of land inheritance right to children					
18 year or above age children are not eligible for residential land					
Discomfort with urban lifestyle					

6. Please indicate your level of agreement regarding the reason why farmers subdivide and sell their farm:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Indeterminate	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Government compensation does not cover life time income right					
Government compensation rate is value of 10/15 year agriculture produce					
Government compensation does not account inheritance right on land					
Government does not consider transformation of the life of farmers					
Government relocation compensation does not consider our children					

7. In your opinion, how much do you think is fair compensation? The value of _____ years produce.

8. Please indicate your level of agreement that you may prefer compensation to subdividing and selling your farm if:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Indeterminate	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Government compensate your life time income from your farm					
Your inheritance right is included in the compensation package					
Government considers life transformation of farmers					
Compensation package includes residential plots for your children					

9. Please indicate your level of agreement regarding the following options of compensation for your farm when expropriated:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Indeterminate	Disagree	Strongly disagree
--	----------------	-------	---------------	----------	-------------------

	agree		e		disagree
Farm land replacement with productivity potential equivalent to your current holding productivity regardless of its acreage (area)					
Up front pay of 30 year produce value equivalence					
Annual income equivalent to current year produce value					
Transforming to urban based skill and occupation					
Developed plot (for residential or business use) for income generation					
Developed plot for sale					

10. Who do you think should be responsible for providing residential land or housing for your children? A) Their parents; B) government (Tabia, Kushet, zone, wereda, regional); C) Themselves (buy, occupy vacant spaces); D) I have no idea
11. In your observation in your area, who actually has provided residential land for children of farmers? A) Their parents; B) government (Tabia, Kushet, zone, wereda, regional); C) Themselves (buy, occupy vacant spaces); D) I have no idea
12. From your experience or based on public information, how likely do parents who subdivide and sale their farm share their children from the revenue? A) Very high; B) high; C) moderate; D) less; E)very less
13. How likely will you share the revenue with your children if you subdivide and sale your farm? A) Very high; B) high; C) moderate; D) less; E)very less
14. Test of tenure type: Rate your level of agreement regarding the following issues

	Strongly agree	Agree	Indeterminate	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I prefer private ownership of land over public ownership					
I prefer public ownership over private ownership of land					
Private ownership provides better security tenure compared to public ownership.					
Public ownership provides more community benchmark over land use compared to private ownership.					
Private land ownership leads to greater economic benefits for the household compared to public ownership.					
Private land ownership is easier to transfer (sell, buy,					

inherit) compared to public ownership.					
Private ownership of land provides better incentives for investment in the land.					
Public land ownership ensures more equitable distribution of land resources compared to private ownership.					
Public ownership allows for better land use planning and development benchmark compared to private ownership.					
Public ownership of land is more effective in reducing land-related conflicts.					
Public ownership better protects common goods like water sources, forests, and public spaces.					

Annex 2: Questionnaire for non-evicted (non-expropriated) farmers

Dear Respondent!

This study is being conducted by Negash Araya, a candidate for PhD of in Urban and Regional planning at Addis Ababa University's Ethiopian Institute of Architectural Building Construction and City Development. The main objective of this data collection is to gather information regarding to "Peri-Urban Land Conflicts in Ethiopia: Examining the causes, actors, effects, and legal frameworks of Mekelle city". This comprehensive questionnaire addresses the causes, actors, and legal frameworks with peri-urban land conflicts in Mekelle city and its surrounding peri-urban areas. The questions are designed to guide the research in understanding the complexities of peri-urban land conflicts and to develop effective strategies for managing competing land interests and resolving land disputes in peri-urban areas. The information you provide will be used solely for academic purposes. Therefore, you are kindly requested to complete the questionnaire accurately.

Than You in Advance for Your Cooperation!

Part I: Personal Information (Demographic characteristics)

1. Background information

- 1.1. Gender of household head: A) Male B) Female
- 1.2. Age of household head: _____ years.
- 1.3. Marital status of household head: A) Single B) Married C) Divorced
- 1.4. Educational status of household head:

	Illiterate	Grade 1-4	Grade 5-8	Grade 9-10 grade 11- 12	Diploma	1 st degree	Master's degree
Response (put √)							

1.5. Family members by age category, excluding the parents (Father and Mother)

Age	< 5	5 – 10	11 – 15	16 – 18	19 – 25	27 – 30	> 30
Number							

a. Rank the family's economic activities based on its capacity of generating income:

Activity	Cropping	Animal husbandry	Casual labor jobs	Casual skilled or semi-skilled jobs	Extraction and sale of construction materials (stone, gravel, sand, etc.)
Rank					

II. The land conflict issue

2. Land holding information:

2.1. Land holding of the family during the distribution year (1980s) in 'gibri'

Area /size	0.25	0.5	0.75	1.0	1.25	1.5	1.75	2.0	> 2.0
Response (put √)									
Household size (number)									

2.2.

2.3. Crop harvest in quintals (average):

Year	2000 EC	2005 EC	2010 EC	2015 EC	2016 EC
Expropriated area					

3. Land transaction:

3.1. Farm land distribution (sale, donation, inheritance) by the holders themselves:

	Responses	Remarks
1. Area sold till this time (in square meters)		
2. Number of plots sold till this time		
3. Number of plots offered (gift) to children for residence		
4. Number of plots inherited for children for residence		
5. Number of plots offered to children as a dowry		
6. Number of plots offered to other relatives for residence		

3.2. Do you think famers have the right to subdivide and sale their farm possession? _____
(Yes/No).

3.3.
.....

3.4.
.....

3.5.
.....

3.6. Identity of land buyers by purpose:

3.6.1. In your observation, experience, or available information, what share people buy land in and around your village for residential use themselves? _____%. What about for profit (resale later)? _____%.

3.6.2. What percentage of those who bought land in and around your village are currently living on the plot/house they bought? _____%

4. If you were reclassified into Mekelle City administration, would you prefer continue cropping /farming/ over subdivide and sell your farm land? _____ (Yes/No)

5. Compared to farmers reclassified into Mekele City administration, are you economically better off? _____ (Yes/No)

5.1. If your answer is 'Yes,' rank the following possible reasons:

	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th
Income from agriculture is more than compensation					
Competence on rural-based (agricultural) jobs than urban employment					
Retention of land inheritance right to children					
18 year or above children do not face problem of accessing residential land compared to their counterparts within Mekele administration					
Rural lifestyle is more comfortable					

5.2.....
.....

6. Please indicate your level of agreement regarding the reason why farmers who live within the boundary of Mekele City administration subdivide and sell their farm:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Indeterminate	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Government compensation does not cover life time income right					
Government compensation rate is value of 10/15 year					

agriculture produce					
Government compensation does not account inheritance right on land					
Government does not consider transformation of the life of farmers					
Government relocation compensation does not consider our children					

7. If you were reclassified into Mekele city administration, how much do you think would be fair compensation? The value of _____ years produce.

8. If you were reclassified into Mekele city administration, please indicate your level of agreement that you may prefer compensation to subdividing and selling your farm if:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Indeterminate	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Government compensate your life time income from your farm					
Your inheritance right is included in the compensation package					
Government considers life transformation of farmers					
Compensation package includes residential plots for your children					

9. If you were reclassified into Mekele city administration, please indicate your level of agreement regarding the following options of compensation for your farm when expropriated:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Indeterminate	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Farm land replacement with productivity potential equivalent to your current holding productivity regardless of its acreage (area)					
Up front pay of 30 year produce value equivalence					
Annual income equivalent to current year produce value					
Transforming to urban based skill and occupation					
Developed plot (for residential or business use) for income generation					
Developed plot for sale					

10.

.....

11.

12. From your experience or based on public information, how likely do parents who subdivide and sale their farm share their children from the revenue? A) Very high; B) high; C) moderate; D) less; E)very less
13. If you were reclassified into Mekele city administration, how likely will you share the revenue with your children if you subdivide and sale your farm? A) Very high; B) high; C) moderate; D) less; E)very less
14. Test of tenure type: Rate your level of agreement regarding the following issues

	Strongly agree	Agree	Indeterminate	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I prefer private ownership of land over public ownership					
I prefer public ownership over private ownership of land					
Private ownership provides better security tenure compared to public ownership.					
Public ownership provides more community benchmark over land use compared to private ownership.					
Private land ownership leads to greater economic benefits for the household compared to public ownership.					
Private land ownership is easier to transfer (sell, buy, inherit) compared to public ownership.					
Private ownership of land provides better incentives for investment in the land.					
Public land ownership ensures more equitable distribution of land resources compared to private ownership.					
Public ownership allows for better land use planning and development benchmark compared to private ownership.					
Public ownership of land is more effective in reducing land-related conflicts.					
Public ownership better protects common goods like water sources, forests, and public spaces.					

Annex 3: Focus group discussion questions guide

Welcome to the focus group discussion, and thank you all for your participation. The objective of the discussion is to gather information regarding to “Peri-Urban Land Conflicts in Ethiopia: Examining the Causes, Actors, Effects, and Legal Frameworks in Mekelle City.” All your discussion is only used for the purpose of the study and it will keep confidential.

I. Causes of peri-urban land conflicts:

1. What is the perception of residents of your *Tabiat* towards the expansion of Mekele City that included your *Tabita* into the city administration (positive or negative)? What advantages and

disadvantages are the encounters? Which section of the residents (comparing those having arable land and the landless) are affected more (passively and negatively) by the urban expansion? How?

2. How does Mekele City handle the transformation process of your area into the city administration? Compensation, Resettlement and life transformation, Infrastructure installation, Land-use preparation, Protection of productive farm areas and areas valuable for Eco-environmental sustainability.
3. What major conflicts do residents encounter with government during transformation of your area into the city? What are the main concerns of the residents in the transformation?
4. Why farmers subdivide their farm holdings? Do they perceive that they have the right to sell their holdings?

II. Actors in Peri-urban land conflicts:

1. Who are the key stakeholders or actors involved in land transactions and disputes in peri-urban areas across the Tigray region?
2. How do different actors perceive their roles and responsibilities in managing land conflicts, and what are their respective interests?
3. What strategies or initiatives have been implemented to engage with stakeholders and address conflicting interests in peri-urban zones?

III. Evaluating legal frameworks governing peri-urban land conflicts:

1. How effective are the existing legal frameworks and policies in addressing peri-urban land conflicts and promoting equitable land governance?
2. What challenges or gaps exist in the implementation and enforcement of land-related laws and regulations at the regional level?
3. What recommendations or strategies would you propose for strengthening the legal framework to address peri-urban land conflicts more effectively?

Annex 4: Interview questions for specific offices

Thank you for your willingness and the purpose of the study is to gather information regarding to “Peri-Urban Land Conflicts in Ethiopia: Examining the Causes, Actors, Effects, and Legal Frameworks of Mekelle City”. The questions are concerned with the roles, responsibilities, challenges, and initiatives related to peri-urban land management and conflict resolution.

Tigray regional authorities (officials):

1. How do you explain why land is publicly owned in Ethiopia? How do you explain public purpose on land, particularly urban land?

2. How do you explain public ownership of land realizes common interest of the public /people/? How do you explain individual interest within the common public interest?
3. Can you provide an overview of the regional policies and strategies aimed at managing peri-urban land conflicts and promoting sustainable urban development?
4. How do the various government departments coordinate with local administrations and other stakeholders to implement these policies effectively?
5. What challenges have been encountered in regulating land use and development in peri-urban areas, and how are they being addressed? Can you discuss any specific initiatives or projects undertaken by the bureau to address peri-urban land conflicts within the region?
6. How do you envision the future of peri-urban development in Tigray, and what measures are being taken to ensure equitable and sustainable growth?

Mekelle City administration executive members:

1. What major peri-urban challenges has Mekele encountered?
2. What are the key priorities and strategies of the city administration regarding peri-urban land management and conflict resolution?
3. How does the city administration collaborate with regional and zone authorities to address peri-urban development challenges and promote sustainable growth?
4. Can you discuss any innovative approaches or projects initiated by the city administration to address peri-urban land conflicts?
5. What measures are being taken to ensure transparency and accountability in land transactions and development activities in peri-urban areas?
6. How does the city administration engage with local communities and stakeholders to solicit feedback and input on peri-urban development plans and policies.

Mekelle City senior land experts:

1. What are the main responsibilities and functions of the municipality's land experts in managing peri-urban land conflicts and development?
2. How does the municipality collaborate with other government agencies and stakeholders to address peri-urban land disputes and ensure effective land management?
3. Can you discuss any challenges or bottlenecks faced by the municipality in administering peri-urban land, and how are they being addressed?

4. What strategies are in place to streamline land registration processes and improve land tenure security in peri-urban areas?
5. How does the municipality incorporate community feedback and local knowledge into peri-urban land planning and decision-making processes?

Annex 5: Checklist for Direct Observation Purposes in Peri-Urban Areas

This checklist serve as a guide for conducting direct observations in peri-urban areas to gather firsthand information on land conflicts, development dynamics, and community conditions.

1. Land Use Patterns:

- Observe and document current land use patterns in peri-urban areas (e.g., residential, agricultural, commercial).
- Note any changes in land use over time, including areas under development or subject to disputes.

2. Settlement density and spatial distribution patterns:

- Assess population density and settlement patterns, including the presence of informal settlements or unauthorized developments.
- Identify areas with high population turnover or influx of migrants.

3. Infrastructure:

- Note the availability and quality of infrastructure such as roads, water supply, sanitation, and electricity.
- Identify areas lacking basic infrastructure or experiencing infrastructure strain due to rapid development.

4. Environmental conditions:

- Evaluate the environmental quality of peri-urban areas, including air and water pollution, waste management practices, and natural resource degradation.
- Note any environmental hazards or vulnerabilities exacerbated by land conflicts or unplanned development.

5. Access to services and amenities:

- Assess access to essential services and amenities such as healthcare, education, markets, and public transportation.
- Document disparities in service provision or areas lacking access to basic amenities.

6. Conflict hotspots and resolution mechanisms:

- Identify areas with a history of land conflicts or ongoing disputes, including specific locations or parcels.
- Assess the presence and effectiveness of conflict resolution mechanisms, such as community mediation forums, legal aid services, or formal dispute resolution processes.

7. Infrastructure projects and development activities:

- Document ongoing or planned infrastructure projects and development activities in peri-urban areas, including their potential impact on land use and livelihoods.
- Assess the level of community engagement and consultation in decision-making processes related to infrastructure development.

Annex 6: Response rate of the questions administered

	Included		Not applicable		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Age	672	100.0	0	1.0	672	100.0
Marital status	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Educational level	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Children below 5 years	64	9.5	608	90.5	672	100.0
Children 5 to 10 years	146	21.7	526	78.3	672	100.0
Children 11 to 15 years	263	39.1	409	60.9	672	100.0
Children 16 to 18 years	413	61.5	259	38.5	672	100.0
Cohabited family members 19 to 25 years	487	72.5	185	27.5	672	100.0
Cohabited family members 26 to 30 years	309	46.0	363	54.0	672	100.0
Cohabited family members > 30 years	115	17.1	557	82.9	672	100.0
Cropping	637	94.8	35	5.2	672	100.0
Animal husbandry	495	73.7	177	26.3	672	100.0
Casual labor employment	490	72.9	182	27.1	672	100.0
Seasonal skill and semi-skill	395	58.8	277	41.2	672	100.0
Extracting construction materials	370	55.1	302	44.9	672	100.0
Allocated land (ha)	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Family size during land allocation	609	90.6	63	9.4	672	100.0
Expropriated before 2008	48	7.1	624	92.9	672	100.0

Expropriated 2009 – 2013	44	6.5	628	93.5	672	100.0
Expropriated 2014 – 2018	266	39.6	406	60.4	672	100.0
Expropriated 2019 – 2023	2	0.3	670	99.7	672	100.0
Expropriated after 2023	0	0.0	672	100.0	672	100.0
Crop harvest in 2008	372	55.4	300	44.6	672	100.0
Crop harvest in 2013	387	57.6	285	42.4	672	100.0
Crop harvest in 2018	408	60.7	264	39.3	672	100.0
Crop harvest in 2023	434	64.6	238	35.4	672	100.0
Crop harvest in 2024	468	69.6	204	30.4	672	100.0
Plots given to children	253	37.6	419	62.4	672	100.0
Plots inherited to children	68	10.1	604	89.9	672	100.0
Dowry plots to children	138	20.5	534	79.5	672	100.0
Plots given to relatives	18	2.7	654	97.3	672	100.0
Plots sold	112	16.7	560	83.3	672	100.0
Sale year 1	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Sale price year 1	61	9.1	611	90.9	672	100.0
Sale year 2	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Sale price year	7	1.0	665	99.0	672	100.0
Sale year 3	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Sale price year 3	1	0.1	671	99.9	672	100.0
Sale year 4	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Sale price year	1	0.1	671	99.9	672	100.0
Sale year 5	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Sale price year 5	0	0.0	672	100.0	672	100.0
Local resident land buyers	38	11.3	298	88.7	336	100
Land buyers within the district	23	6.8	313	93.2	336	100
Land buyers from Mekelle city	12	3.6	324	96.4	336	100
Land buyers from other cities and districts	14	4.2	322	95.8	336	100
Local brokers	336	100.0	0	0.0	336	100.0
Brokers based in Mekelle	336	100.0	0	0.0	336	100.0
Government employee brokers	336	100.0	0	0.0	336	100.0
Members of the local administration brokers	336	100.0	0	0.0	336	100.0
Social networks	336	100.0	0	0.0	336	100.0
Buyers themselves	336	100.0	0	0.0	336	100.0
Others (if any)	336	100.0	0	0.0	336	100.0
Land purchase residence	333	99.1	3	0.9	336	100.0

Those who actually build home and live in	299	89.0	37	11.0	336	100.0
Land purchase for profit	335	99.7	1	0.3	336	100.0
Respondents' opinion regarding subdivision right	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Farmers preference for cropping vs subdivision options	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Economic status change (positive) after joining the city	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Reasons for the positive evaluation						
Advantage 1 – Sale value of land over farm produce value	325	48.4	347	51.6	672	100.0
Advantage 2 – Access to infrastructure	325	48.4	347	51.6	672	100.0
Advantage 3 – income (job) diversification	325	48.4	347	51.6	672	100.0
Reasons for disadvantages						
Disadvantage 1 – below agricultural produce value compensation	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Disadvantage 2 – Off farm activities in competitiveness	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Disadvantage 3 – Lost land inheritance right	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Disadvantage 4 – No residential land supply for free to next generations	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Disadvantage 5 – Inconvenient urban life style	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Possible drivers of subdivision of farm holding						
Subdivision driver 1 – discontinue lifetime income right	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Subdivision driver 2 – Fewer (10/15) years of compensation	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Subdivision driver 3 – Loss of inheritance right	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Subdivision driver 4 – unavailability life transformative program/project	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Subdivision driver 5 – Compensation doesn't consider life of offspring	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Fair compensation rate	594	88.4	78	11.6	672	100.0
Farmers may not subdivide their holdings if the						
Option 1 – Compensated life time income	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Option 2 – Compensated for their inheritance right	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0

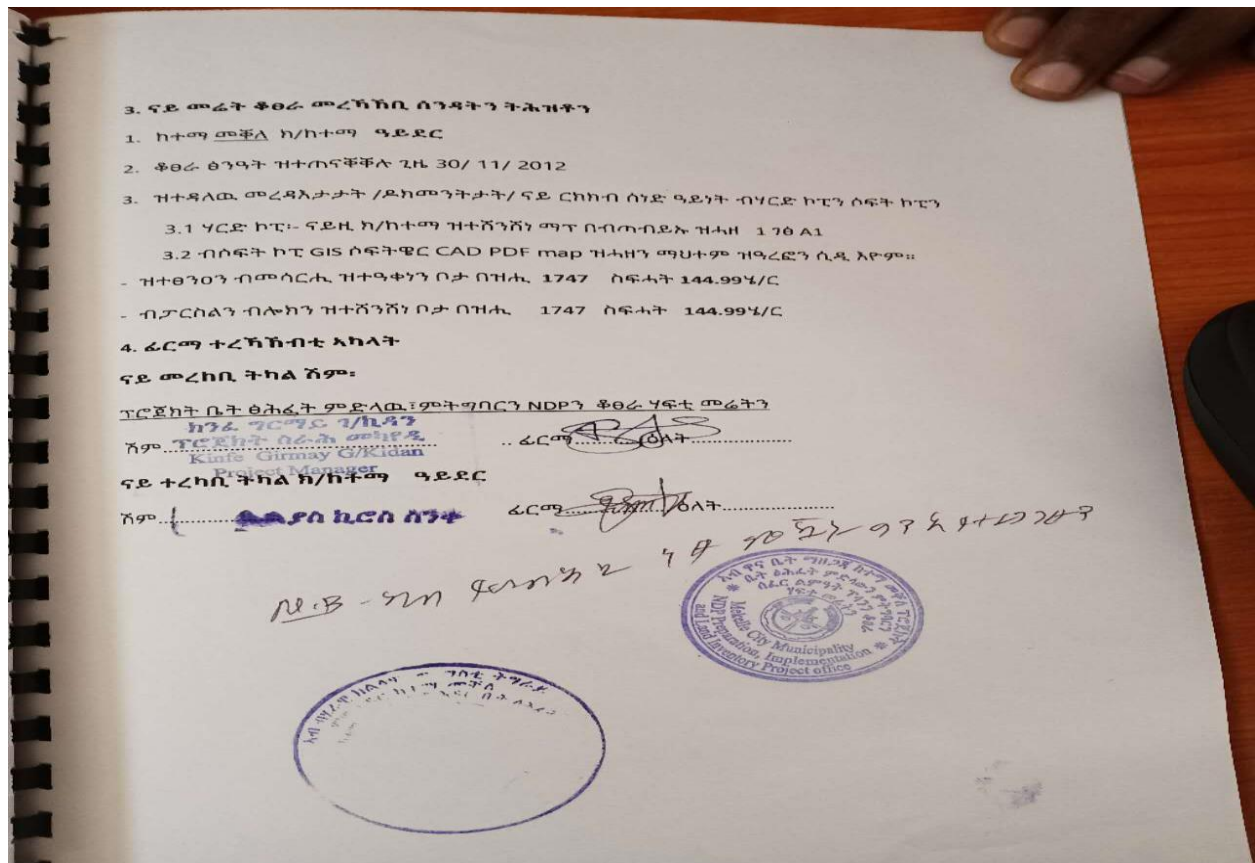
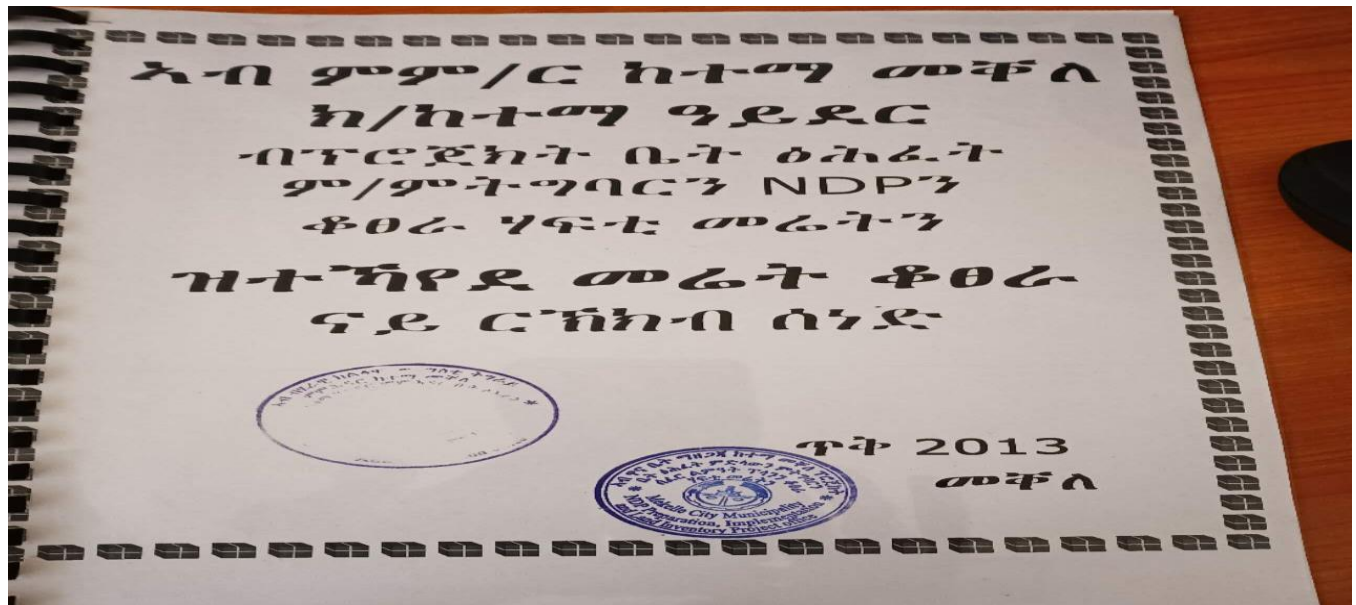
Option 3 –life transformative covered by compensatory programs/projects	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Option 4 – Their children get residential land free of cost	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Preference of compensation						
Option 1 – Relocate for land substitute out of the peri-urban zone	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Option 2 – Productivity enhancement to compensate forgone produce	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Option 3 – Income compensation on yearly basis for lifetime	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Option 4 – One-off pay of 30 years produce value	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Option 5 – One-off pay of 15 year produce value and transformative training	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Option 6 – Residential and work premise houses	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Option 7 – Plots for	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Responsibility of providing residential land to children of peri-urban peasants	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Actually residential land acquisition by children of the peri-urban peasants	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
General tendency of parents to share land revenue with their children	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
The tendency of the respondent to share land revenue with their children	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Evaluation to tenure type (public versus private						
Perception of residents regarding ownership of arable land	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Perception of residents regarding ownership of non-arable land	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Preference of public ownership of land	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Preference of private ownership of land	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Tenure security with public ownership of land	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Tenure security with private ownership of land	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Economic advantage with private ownership of land	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0

Ease of rights transfer on land with private ownership	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Capital investment motivation with private ownership	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Possibility of (re)distribution fairness with publicly ownership	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Secure public interest with public ownership	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Less land related conflicts with public ownership	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0
Better protection of common goods with public ownership	672	100.0	0	0.0	672	100.0

Annex 7: Independent Samples Test

	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tail)	Mean Diff.	Std.	95% Confidence	
							Error	Interval	
								Lower	Upper
Allocated land (ha)	.522	.470	3.845	670	.000	.152	.039	.07428	.2293
Initial family size	37.351	.000	14.671	607	.000	2.368	.161	2.051	2.685
Harvest in 2008							1.037	4.069	8.146
Harvest in 2013	2.198	.139	2.543	385	.011	2.424	.954	.550	4.299
Harvest in 2018			-7.274	271.34	.000	-5.061	.696	-6.431	-3.691
Harvest in 2023	38.760	.000	-10.025	432	.000	-6.108	.609	-7.305	-4.910
Harvest in 2024	82.641	.000	-10.851	466	.000	-6.303	.581	-7.445	-5.162

Annex 8: Land Inventory and LDP Project Office inventory handing over (sample)





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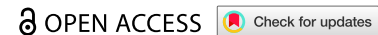


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RESEARCH ARTICLE



The dynamics of formal and informal actors and their perceptions in peri-urban land conflict of Mekelle City, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

Over the past 20 years, the extensive expansions of informal settlements in built-up districts of developing countries have emerged as a major topic of discussion in the field of urbanization. However, peri-urban land use conflicts have resulted from the regional government's lateness in improving informal settlements. Moreover, formal and informal actors in urban fringe land use conflicts have not been clearly identified by a number of authors, despite their exploration of the link between the two. The objective of this study is to identify formal and informal actors in peri-urban land use disputes and to present a comprehensive, cross-sectoral analysis of peri-urban land use conflicts. Key land use actors in the urban-rural outskirts of Mekelle City were participated in 37 semi-structured interviews, which were followed by 12 focus group discussions. Besides, stakeholders' analysis and snowball methods were also used to answer research questions. The findings showed that friends, family, neighbors, community organizations and their immediate networks are informal actors engaged in peri-urban land disputes. In addition, government institutions, officials and authorities that set laws and regulations were identified as formal actors.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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Informal actors; formal actors; land conflicts; urban fringe; informal settlement; Ethiopia

1. Introduction

Land use conflicts have a significant impact on how people live and collaborate in peri-urban areas; they have been identified as a major issue in land use planning (Almeida et al., 2017), and their successful resolution has been called 'crucial' (Tudor et al., 2014). Therefore, monitoring and better understanding a land use conflict in peri-urban areas has been a major and crucial challenge in urban development.

However, despite their established significance, research on the consequences of land use conflicts has only recently started, and the body of literature supporting them is still relatively small. While some authors studied the economic consequences of land use conflicts, others focused on their implications on the environment (Rodrigues et al., 2019). In this endeavor, Peerzado et al. (2019) found that peri-urban land use conflicts may lead to social, cultural and economic instability. Abegunde et al. (2020) observed that there were substantial harmful consequences on local livelihoods. Additionally, Magsi et al. (2017) found that locals were being uprooted. Interestingly, Ooi et al. (2015) discovered that land use conflicts can positively affect social capital growth, hence promoting social capital development.

However, the perspectives of local actors are those who are most directly affected and have rarely been considered in studies of the significances of land use conflicts. Hence, further research is needed to find out how land use disputes impact the day-to-day lives of local land use actors. In these occasions, questions that are more likely rose when dealing with formal and informal actors could be, are they aware of land use concerns in daily operations? Or are the subjects primarily deal with

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knowledge of urban actors? Do they consider land use conflicts to be a burden that makes their job more difficult? Or are conflict can be seen as a regular part of land use activities? So, greater knowledge of these subjects can enhance conflict management and, if needed, assist local players in resolving conflicts. Besides, the authors of conflict studies have emphasized that disagreements, often have a negative effect on the persons involved, even when they serve a society goals (Kurawa, 2012). Conflicts can also result in poorer work performance (Abouraia & Othman, 2017) and decrease societal communications (Vaux & Kirk, 2018).

Moreover, disagreements cause a lot of stress for all parties and can lead to tension, negative reactions, low motivation, emotional exhaustion and less enjoyment (Regnet et al., 2010). Lai et al. (2017) showed how disagreements over the production of unconventional gas have led to psychological stress in rural Australian communities in their seminal study in the field of land use conflict research. According to Yasmi et al. (2013), forest conflicts in Southeast Asia caused dread and anxiety, social division and mistrust and substantial expenses for local community members. However, on occasion, these conflicts also had a positive impact by fostering collective action. However, little is known about how affected actors view land use conflicts across land use sectors and how these conflicts together impact their day-to-day lives.

Furthermore, there are not many thorough, multi-sectoral accounts of conflicts over land use. Most studies concentrate on conflicts that arise within a single land use sector, such as those involving the production of renewable energy (Kienast et al., 2017); conflicts in coastal tourism (Hjalager, 2020) or between small groups of actors; and conflicts between local populations and second-home owners (Farstad & Rye, 2013). These approaches provide useful data, but they prevent us from comparing disputes across various businesses. Although there are some noteworthy exceptions (Steinhäuber et al., 2015); there are currently few indicators of the land use sectors that experience conflicts most frequently. Knowing the issues, local land use actors often face is very important because they are the ones who are directly impacted by land use disputes. Prioritizing future research and effectively allocating limited resources for conflict management could be made easier with this knowledge.

In situations where only official or informal assistance is provided, vulnerable communities usually receive worse support regarding peri-urban land conflicts (Kamalipour & Dovey, 2020). Research indicates that when official and informal care providers specialize in or overlap problems, the vulnerable receive the best support (Lin, 2019; Chappell & Blandford, 2015). When there is overlap, social support—whether from formal or informal sources—seems to be essential for underprivileged people (Goodwin, 2016; Shiba et al., 2016). However, the cooperation of official and informal actors and their networks in support of marginalized groups in peri-urban land conflicts is often overlooked in the policy discourse and intervention inputs. In order to determine how to optimize policy and practice inputs to mitigate the difficulties faced by vulnerable groups in peri-urban land conflicts, more information regarding the cooperation between official and informal actors and actions is therefore required (Chappell & Blandford, 2015).

In order to simultaneously leverage both kinds of actors and networks, additional research on the interactions between informal and formal players and networks in informal settlements is necessary (Dovey & King, 2011). To help the vulnerable people who live and work in Ethiopia's informal settlements, informal actors and their networks have partnered with the government in complementary ways (Habitat, 2015). When it comes to helping the vulnerable, strategic complementarity increases the multiplier impact, benefits, expertise and knowledge (Gupte & Lintelo, 2015).

However, it is unclear how vulnerable populations' health and well-being in informal settlements and peri-urban land conflicts are impacted by the interactions between official and informal actor networks (UN, 2017). Besides, we currently have limited information about which land use actors are most frequently involved in disputes or what types of conflicts are most common, notwithstanding some noteworthy outliers (Martineau et al., 2015). Knowing the issues local land use actors often face is very important to the developing countries, specifically to the study area; because they are the ones who are directly impacted by land use disputes. This information could be used to prioritize future land use plan and effectively distribute limited resources for conflict management. In seeking to address these knowledge gaps, this study aims in identifying formal and informal actors in peri-urban land conflicts and defining actors' local experiences.

2. Literature review

2.1. Towards an analytical framework

As ‘a central element in the varied and complex social relations of production and reproduction within which conflicts between individuals and groups are bred’, land is frequently viewed as a major contributor to structural conflict (USAID, 2017). This results from land's crucial economic and social significance as ‘the foundation of shelter, food, work and a sense of nationhood’. This is especially true in environments marked by great inequality, fast urbanization and colonial legacies.

However, in addition to seeing land as the foundation of livelihoods and a commodity that can be bought, sold and traded, we propose that it is important to focus on its emotional aspect, which is sometimes overlooked in urban environments, and its connection to collective identity. According to Marx and McMichael's contributions in this issue, the emotional significance of land may appear in discussions about national or ethnic identity and indigeneity/belonging in situations when ethnicity is mobilized as a factor in conflict, with specific repercussions in cities (McMichael, 2016).

2.2. Identifying the actors in land conflicts

Land disputes include at least two parties, as do land markets and governmental structures. Traditionally, the market regulates competition for land rights and access. However, due to its geographical fixedness in desirable locations, demand for urban land always outpaces supply; therefore, the market cannot operate satisfactorily without coordinating mechanisms due to the necessity of contract enforcement and the significance of striking a balance between private gain and public goals. When parties have conflicting demands, ambitions, or interests, competition can turn into conflict if there are no coordinating mechanisms in place to uphold formal or informal contracts, settle disagreements and protect the public interest (Marx, 2016).

Both state and non-state organizations and people may be involved in urban land disputes; their disagreements over property reflect not just their local interests, as well as long-term political and economic objectives and the accumulation of old grievances. State agencies, private sector players, locals and leaders and civil society organizations are among them. Both within and between these large groups, conflicts may occur. Political and bureaucratic organizations including the national and local governments, line ministries, autonomous agencies and the courts are examples of state actors. For instance, the interests of individuals who stand to lose by losing their land or having their political influence undermined are frequently at odds with policy makers' ideals of the future metropolis (Hasan, 2015).

2.3. Peri-urban area

As far as the term's origins traced, Smith's 1937 discussion of the ‘urban-fringe’ around Louisiana, which denoted ‘the built-up area just outside the corporate limits of the city’, is when the term ‘urban fringe’ in the sense of peri-urban first originated (Pryor, 1968). In addition to being elusive and complex, the term ‘peri-urban’ is defined differently by many academics. For this reason, different authors use different terms to define peri-urban areas. The term ‘peri-urban’ can refer to a location, a method, or an idea. Peri-urban can also be defined as the intersection of rural and urban activity, the slow transition of rural areas as they acquire more urban traits, or the area between rural and urban zones (Narain & Nischal, 2007).

Due to migration and natural growth, the demand for residential and non-agricultural land rises as the population of metropolitan areas does. Consequently, the boundaries of metropolitan cities physically extend into adjacent rural and peri-urban regions, where agriculture remains a crucial source of revenue. Ethiopia's rapid urbanization, which is expanding urban districts into peri-urban areas within city limits, is significantly increasing the demand for land for housing and other non-agricultural uses (Ayele et al., 2017).

Municipalities compensate evicted agrarian villages financially in reaction to urban expansion. However, this compensation frequently turns out to be insufficient for the evicted individuals' recovery. Conflicts over land arise as a result of the urbanization process's vulnerability to local peri-urban landholders, especially indigenous small farmers. In order to overcome urban housing shortages and

developmental issues, cities must expand into peri-urban areas, but these disputes impede this process (Idris et al., 2017). These difficulties are not unique to Mekelle City, which is located in Ethiopia's Tigray regional state. The city's growth into its peripheries appears to be strained as disputes over peri-urban farmers' discontent with state expropriation tactics have often turned violent between groups of settlers and government officials. The researcher was inspired to carry out the study by the necessity to mitigate peri-urban land dispute in order to ease the current lack of land for housing and other functions.

2.4. Actors

In addressing challenges related to informal settlement, actors may be non-human (invisible) or human (visible). Human actors, sometimes referred to as players or participants, are individuals or groups of people who are active in the establishment of informal settlements and who each play a crucial role due to their specific contributions. On the other hand, non-human actors are invisible entities like government policies, land and building rules, social divisions and legal systems. Besides, according to this study, the growth of informal settlements in the town's peri-urban areas may be influenced by both visible and invisible players, including laws and regulations. In other words, despite the fact that invisible players are not directly responsible for the development of informal settlements, they influence human actors to do actions that they otherwise would not (Cowan, 2008), at least because of legal difficulties, for the benefit of society as a whole (Zhu & Li, 2019).

2.5. Informal settlements

Informal settlements are unplanned communities that do not follow established rules (Satterthwaite, 2018). The widespread growth of informal settlements in developing countries' cities over the last 20 years has become a hot topic in the urbanization debate (Mberu et al., 2016). However, because of the African government's delay in developing informal settlements and at the very least offering the barest minimum of support for goods and services, people has suffered unimaginable suffering and the urban poor have also historically been excluded from the rest of the city's development plan due to the government's disregard for the rise and extension of informal settlements (Mutisya & Yarime, 2011).

2.6. Formal and informal actors in Peri-urban land conflicts

While informal actors lack clear guidelines, formal actors are organizations or individuals with established and structured rules (Liu, 2021). According to Shiba et al. (2016), informal actors are essential to the survival and legitimacy of informal settlements. Community members and traditional local governance organizations are examples of informal actors. They frequently carry out some of the duties that are expected of the state, but they are not well understood, especially in terms of how they support formal actors (Chappell & Blandford, 2015). When discussing social relationships, complementarity primarily refers to the idea that people are drawn to other people who share traits that are different but complementary to their own. Organizational theorists have dubbed this phenomenon 'negative assortative mating' (Chappell & Blandford, 2015). According to philosophers, a community cannot have both formal and informal support networks in a robust manner (Schaaf & Freedman, 2015). The authors of this paper contend and show that such viewpoints overlook the two systems' complementary roles and the fact that both are required to accomplish the majority of tasks, including providing services to vulnerable and marginalized groups.

2.6.1. Formal actors and their role in Peri-urban land administration

The process of obtaining and delivering land in developing nations' peri-urban areas involves a variety of parties (Kedogo et al., 2010; Kombe & Kreibich, 2001; Kombe, 2005). In addition to local communities and private land occupiers, actors include the government and its agencies, the commercial sector, development partners, academia, the media and civil society groups (CSOs). These actors' roles are covered in the ensuing subsections.

2.6.2. Government actors

Political and administrative organizations including the federal and state governments, line ministries, autonomous agencies and the courts are examples of state actors. According to Lugoe (2008), the government and its agencies are referred to as crucial actors since administrative bodies with public authority are required to manage and administer land as property. A organization or individual should not be allowed to dominate land as a public good. The central government is responsible for establishing and carrying out laws, policies and regulations; creating land use plans; managing land development; awarding land certificates; and resolving disagreements over land use (Kombe, 2010a; Nuhu, 2013).

2.6.3. Private sector

Foreign financiers, who finance real estate and infrastructure development, as well as local and foreign businesses and people looking to develop or speculate on land for personal or business purposes, are examples of private-sector actors. They also include experts and middlemen like surveyors, contractors, lawyers and brokers who may incite or worsen conflict by promoting the interests of one or more parties in relation to others. Because land and real estate development can be very profitable, it may draw (and possibly be controlled by) criminals who are willing to use violence to achieve their own agendas (see, for example, Weinstein, 2008 on Mumbai).

To create an electoral power base, political actors may utilize their authority to grant access to land. In some cases, like as in Nairobi, they may recruit private enforcers who are prepared to use violence in order to keep monopolistic control over specific neighborhoods (Nuhu, 2013).

2.6.4. Development partners

Through institutional and legal changes as well as the creation of different frameworks that may be used in the land sector, development partners play a crucial role in enhancing the ability of the government and other non-state actors to enhance land governance (Kedogo et al., 2010; Magigi, 2010). For example, the Land Governance Assessment Framework [LGAF] was created by the World Bank and its partner organizations. This framework is used to assess improvements in land sector governance in different countries using the Food and Agricultural Organization's (FAO) 2007 guidelines on good governance in land tenure and administration. The World Bank has been a key development organization in supporting the legal and policy land reforms in many Sub-Saharan African countries. According to Ravnborg et al. (2016), development agencies like USAID and FAO, among others, have backed a variety of civil society-based projects using the rights-based approach, including creating a gender-disaggregated database and enhancing vulnerable groups' rights to land access, including women. Ravnborg et al. (2016) and Magigi (2010).

2.6.5. Civil society organizations, academics and the media

As pressure organizations for policy advocacy, resource mobilization and land project implementation, CSOs, academic institutions and media outlets are crucial (OECD, 2013; Nuhu, 2013). Through representation and sensitization, CSOs have mostly supported vulnerable communities in their land rights claims (Kedogo et al., 2010; Nuhu & Mpambije, 2017). These players have also played a key role in educating the poor about a variety of topics, such as housing and land acquisition, stepping in to help the informal sector and supporting the poor in their fight against slum upgrading, tenure regularization and forced evictions (Adam, 2014; Nuhu, 2013).

2.6.6. Local communities

Individual land users and non-land occupiers (such as renters of homes or land) who reside in peri-urban settings are considered local communities. Residents and landowners in peri-urban areas are worried about the preservation of their individual rights to use and occupy land as well as to take part in land-related governance issues. Private landowners and communities would like to own and develop their property free from governmental interference. In addition to identifying the root causes of land-use disputes, local people can take part in urban land management and administration (Magigi & Majani, 2006). As witnesses between purchasers and sellers, communities take part in signing paperwork related to

land sales. According to Kombe and Kreibich (2001), these programs are essential for averting possible land-use disputes in their immediate surroundings.

3. Research method

The study area and the procedures for gathering and analyzing data are presented in this section. It offers information on the interviews that were done with the formal and informal players in the study region as well as the stakeholder analysis that was used to identify them. Additionally, the data were analyzed using a qualitative text analysis, which is also covered in detail in this section. For an overview of the methods, see Figure 1.

As indicated in the Figure 1 stakeholder analysis, semi-structured interviews and snowball systems are the key methods of data collection, which was followed by qualitative and evaluative text analysis. In this study, qualitative text analysis was used to elaborate and understand ‘why’ and ‘how’ something is expressed, not just ‘how many’. It was followed by analyzing 14 named conflicts and 10 land use categories (Data obtained from key expertise, 2025). In evaluative approach, the effectiveness and significance of actors were judged.

3.1. Study region

The peri-urban regions of Mekelle city, the capital of the Tigray National Regional State, which is situated in northern Ethiopia approximately 783 kilometers north of Addis Ababa, are included in the research area. Mekelle is located inside the boundaries of the Enderta district, which is in the Tigray Regional State's South Eastern Zone and is where the city grows. According to Daniel et al., the city is officially separated into seven sub-cities: Addi Haki, Ayder, Haddinet, Hawelti, Qedamay Weyyane, Kwiha and Semien. Eight of the 17 kebelles that make up Enderta district connected to the four Mekelle sub-cities of Hadnet, Adihaqui, Ayder and Quiha. Mekelle city contains seven sub-cities, including the conflict-prone areas of Debri, Aynalem, Serawat and Romanat. According to the recently authorized master plan of Mekelle city, these territories were recently included to the city's four sub-cities (Hadnet, Adihaqi, Ayder and Quiha).

Because of their spatial proximity to a city, urban-rural fringes are a particular kind of rural area that combines land uses and characteristics that are typically thought of as rural, like forestry, agriculture and

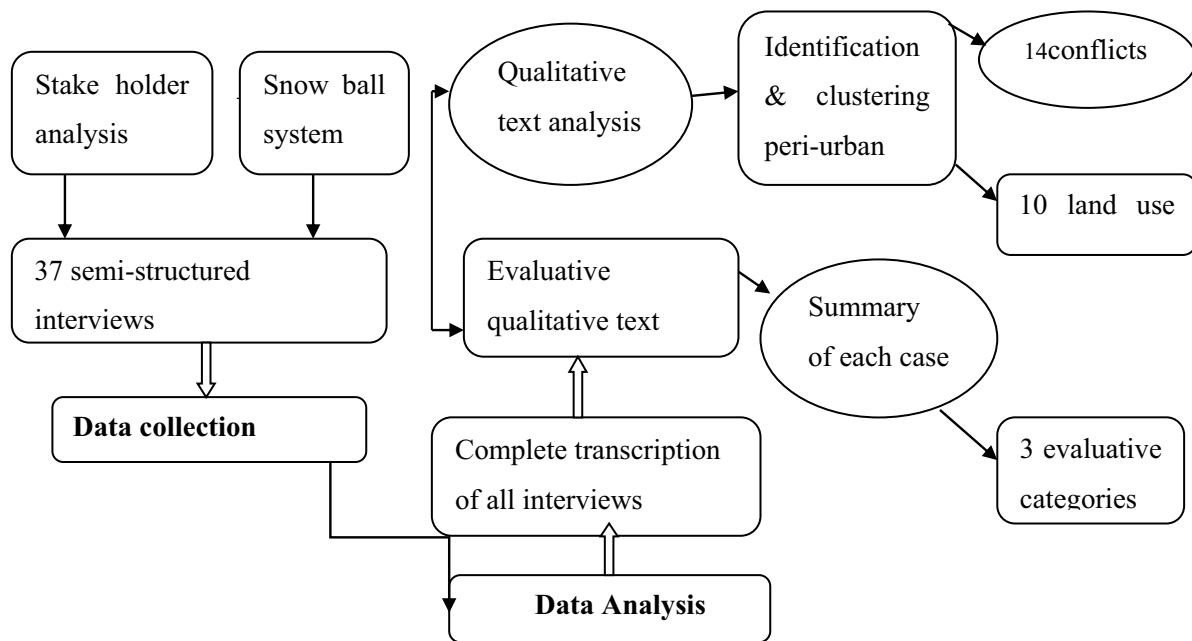


Figure 1. Steps in the methodology. Source: author's compilation, 2024.

village structure. And with land uses that are thought of as urban, like a high density of infrastructure and housing demand. Urban–rural edges have been demonstrated to be particularly vulnerable to land use conflicts as a result of the ensuing multi functionality and complex actor constellations, making them perfect study settings for the topic (von der Dunk et al., 2011). The location was considered especially appropriate since the change from urban to rural settings takes place in a comparatively small space, increasing the likelihood of conflict and multi functionality.

A number of planning tools, including zoning laws, landscape plans and development plans, are in place in the study region to reduce conflicts between land uses. Legal rules are important in regulating disputes among land use actors, but they can be costly and time-consuming, and their results may not always meet the needs of the actors involved. Neighborhood actors are creating new tools to manage disputes within certain land use topics. For example, in 2021, after a multi-year, moderated negotiation process, the mayors of Mekelle city and its surrounding communities signed a new agreement on housing development, known as the ‘Residential Land Development Concept’ (Interviews with key informants, 2024). However, it is typically still the actors' duty to resolve disagreements in a way that works for them. (see Figure 2).

3.2. Target population

The populations of interest were 12,545 aged and adult people these lived in informal settlement of peri-urban area for more than ten years.

3.3. Sampling and sample size determinations

A questionnaire survey was conducted using a three-stage multi-stage sampling technique. Based on the prevalence and practice of informal settlements, the three kebele (Debri, Aynalem and Romant) were selected from the per-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.

The third and last phase involves a simple random sampling of informal houses from the specified areas. The study population's sample size was determined once the three research kebeles were identified. According to Mekelle City Administration (2024), out of the 25,230 informal dwellings in the city, only 12,545 were formally registered as informal settlers. Accordingly, the city's urban land use office claimed

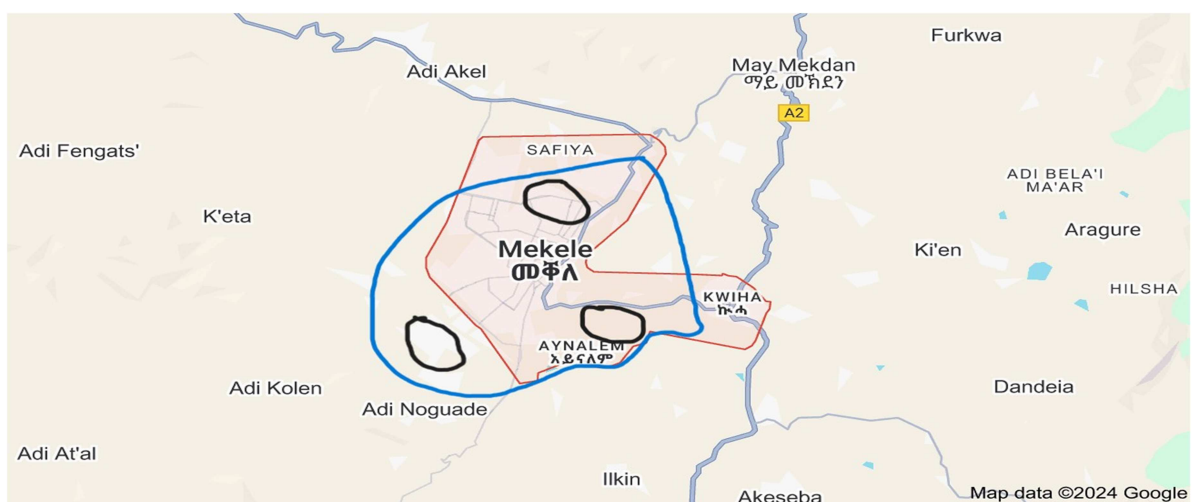


Figure 2. Location of the study region. Source: field survey, 2024.

that 12,545 informal houses comprised the study population. To ensure that each informal settler had an equal chance of being selected for the study, a simple random selection approach was employed.

The sample size of the houses for the analysis was determined using the sample size determination method since this formula enables us to obtain a representative sample of the population with the proper degree of precision. The respondents' responses were used to analyze the instances or levels of agreement with the issues raised for them based on the provided scale of measurements (Yamane, 1967).

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

where

1 is constant.

N is the population size.

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

$n = 12545/32.3625 = 387$.

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. Consequently, Aynalem (130), Debri (170) and (87) according to the size of population.

3.4. Method of data collection

3.4.1. Identification of relevant actors

To understand land use issues from the perspective of local land use players, it was necessary to identify relevant actors. This was accomplished using a stakeholder analysis (Grimble & Wellard, 1997). In the first phase, a desk review is conducted to generate a list of the actors involved in land use and land use decision making in the study region, including mayors, local agencies, farmers, foresters, businesses, interest groups and local inhabitants. To find out which stakeholders they thought were crucial for land use in the area, district partners from local land use practices were given this list to compile and correct. These actors were chosen to be the first interview to be undertaken. Since at least one extra actor representing similar land use interests always participated, some of these actors either declined the interview or could not be reached, but this did not result in significant gaps.

A snowball mechanism was added to the stakeholder analysis to make sure that all pertinent actors were included. We asked each interviewee to list any additional actors they believed to be significant in local land use. After that, it was determined if speaking with these extra actors could yield fresh perspectives; if so, they were also approached. As a result, 37 interviews were done with players from forestry, industry, agriculture, water management and environmental conservation. However, the majority of the interviews were with cross-sectoral actors like mayors. Moreover, even if the planned interview was 45, only 37 interviews were done as no fresh perspectives were found from the actors during the interview. Table 1 gives a summary of the actors who were questioned.

3.4.2. Semi structured interviews

A semi-structured, problem-focused interview (Lamnek & Krell, 2010) was performed with each chosen actor and actors. The majority of these in-person interviews, which took place between June and November 2024, lasted between forty-five and an hour. A document in the Supplementary Materials

Table 1. Interviewed local actors by actor type.

Actors type	Interviews
Mayor and political leaders	15
Local agencies	10
Interest groups, NGOs	9
Business men	7
Local boards	4
Total	45

contains the interview guidelines. After being asked if land use conflicts affected their day-to-day work, the interviewees were asked to list formal and informal land use actors they were aware of in Mekelle's urban–rural fringe area. Each interviewee was asked to identify the location of the conflicts they described on a map using the public participation geographic information system (PPGIS), which supported the data collection with spatially precise information. In order to learn more about these disputes and the respondents' experiences with them, more questions were asked after this. Crucially, respondents were never specifically asked if they thought conflicts were stressful or even how they affected their day-to-day lives, but this information surfaced when they were asked to discuss the conflicts.

3.4.3. Methods of data analysis

Every interview was fully transcribed. There were two steps in the data analysis that were followed. The formal and informal actors in peri-urban land conflicts that were highlighted in the interviews were first identified, grouped and categorized. Thus, a comprehensive overview of actors in peri-urban land in the study region was created. Then, a second analysis was conducted to identify key actors.

3.5. Ethical consideration

Prior to starting data collection, the researchers were secured full ethical clearance from the Postgraduate Directorate Office of School of Built Environment under reference number. This official communication, linked to academic establishments, has been dispatched to the Mayor's office and pertinent kebeles, with copies distributed to the researcher, data collectors and supervisors. Its purpose was to ensure that government institutions were thoroughly informed about the research's goals and objectives and to solicit the required information and data. Moreover, the researcher explains ethical principles to the respondents before data collection begin. Up on this, the respondents were agreed upon the principles and taken into consideration and implemented them during the data collection process. Participants in the survey acknowledged the highest level of respect and were granted their right to privacy and confidentiality regarding the information they provided.

4. Results

Two unique findings were offered from our investigation in response to our research questions. In the first hand, by introducing formal and informal actors along with their various networks in order to answer the question of who are the formal and informal actors in the peri-urban area. Findings regarding the complementarities of formal and informal players were given in order to answer the question of how these actors may work together to help vulnerable people. Furthermore, results obtained from FGDs and interview revealed that formal, structured groupings and informal, adaptable, personal relationships that often work in complimentary ways are both included in networks of formal and informal actors. While informal networks, like families and community groups, provide immediate information and social support, formal networks, like the government and companies, manage policies and procedures. In Mekelle, institutional systems set rules for things like garbage management and development, but informal networks like neighbors and recyclers fill in significant gaps. This demonstrates how integrating the two enhances overall outcomes and helps vulnerable groups. Besides, both parties frequently collaborate to accomplish common objectives or offer more thorough support, and informal methods may arise to cover holes or replace shortcomings in formal institutions, especially when formal processes are ineffective, cumbersome or unreachable. On the other hand, results showed that the significant factor that emerges the conflicts of actors is lack of networking between them.

4.1. Overview of land use disputes in the urban–rural fringe area of Mekelle city

119 distinct land use disputes were reported by the actors that were interviewed. Assuming that multi functionality enhanced the likelihood of conflict, the majority of confrontations were always found in the more developed and densely populated informal settlement areas of the urban fringe's western and southern regions. Conflicts were also more prevalent in the district's primarily agricultural east and

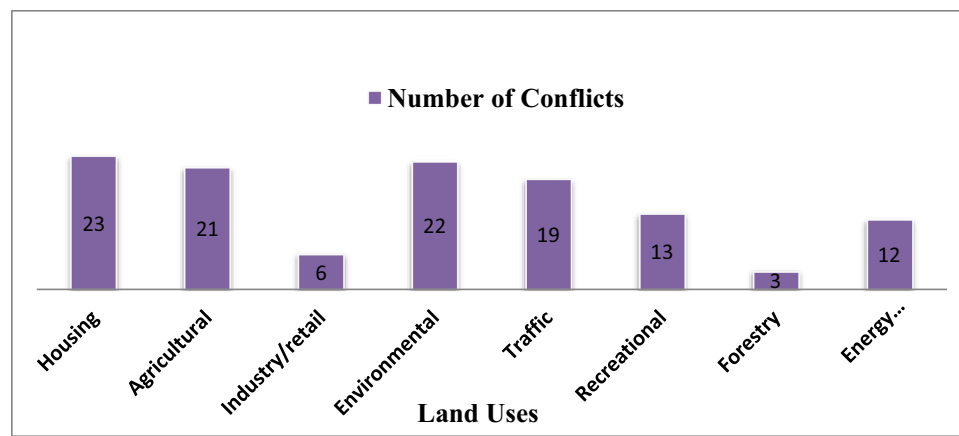


Figure 3. Number of peri-urban land conflicts. Source: field survey, 2024.

north. The most commonly reported contentious land uses were transportation, housing and environmental or species conservation. Land use disputes are frequently sparked by agricultural land uses, energy infrastructures and recreational or tourism land uses. A few conflicts were produced by forestry and industry/retail (see Figure 3). The main disputed land uses in the city and peri-urban fringe were housing and traffic. While energy infrastructures and traffic were frequently fought in the rural areas beyond the fringe, housing and environmental/species conservation were particularly important in the fringe communities. It's interesting to note that disputes over electricity infrastructure were never documented inside cities, rather in rural areas (fringe and beyond).

Land use competition was by far the most frequent cause of disputes in the study region, according to data gathered from key informant interviews. Specifically, the loss of agricultural land as a result of environmental preservation initiatives, new housing developments, or the expansion of renewable energy sources was often bemoaned; this problem surfaced in 27 conflicts. Another prevalent worry was the detrimental effects of land use activities on the preservation of nature, which were typically manifested as habitat loss or disturbance natural resources. The allocation of costs and benefits associated with land use-related activities was another prevalent problem.

Other land uses, like housing or agricultural, are restricted by compensation measures, and land users frequently lament the decreased profit or income as a result of compensation paid. Nineteen conflicts were criticized for having a detrimental effect on quality of life, and the most common problem in this category was a detrimental visual impact. In addition to being voiced in relation to informal settlement, this concern also surfaced in relation to environmental deterioration, including littering and the removal of landscape features.

Moreover, data obtained from FDGs, interview and document review demonstrated that fast sprawl with rural systems collide, coinciding laws, letdown of formal land delivery systems, ambiguous tenure, poor administration and conflicting interests (government, developers and farmers) are the dominant root causes of peri-urban land conflicts in the study area. This causes one-sided expropriation, insufficient recompense, land conjecture and socio-economic disturbance that are driven by a lack of participation, transparency and deprived planning.

In conclusion, local land use players describe a lot of land use disputes in Mekelle's urban-rural periphery. All of the region's primary land users are involved in these conflicts, but housing is a common source of contention. The most prevalent problem in these conflicts is competition between land users, although other typical complaints include adverse effects on the environment or quality of life, as well as the allocation of costs and benefits.

4.2. Formal and informal actors and their networks

Focus group discussions and key informant interview demonstrated that family, friends, neighbors, neighborhood organizations and their immediate networks were informal actors in peri-urban land

conflicts. On the other hand, government agencies, decision-makers and their potential networks were considered formal players. Besides, the vulnerable groups residing and working in informal settlements benefited from the complementing roles played by both formal and informal players and their networks. The main factors in urban fringe land conflicts were the complementary roles played by formal and informal players and networks in aiding peri-urban informal settlers. These could take the form of negotiating with peri-urban residents, settling disputes, influencing the course of the city and unlawfully allocating land to end users. In addition, the two actors are assisting the settlers by giving them up-to-date information, proficiency and skills.

4.3. Specific description of the actors and their role

Ethiopia redistributes land to commercial developers and others through tenders and allotments, thereby acquiring formal urban land from peri-urban farmers (FDRE, 2011). The primary method of transferring land to developers was the allocation and tender process, which continued to be the most active method for towns to generate revenue. However, the land need for resident home building was not met by the allocation and tendering process. As a result, residents start to participate in unofficial land acquisition. For instance, the actors in the study areas used a variety of strategies to purchase land parcels from the land market. Figure 4 illustrates how many households in informal settlement settings are purchasing lands through the informal land transaction mechanism. Regarding informal land transactions, Mersha et al. (2022) noted that, similar to the global south, Africa has seen an increase in urban land demand, which has led to the growth of informal land transactions and the expansion of urban informal settlements, particularly in peri-urban areas.

Informal land transaction players and peri-urban land conflicts are more prevalent in Ethiopia and many other East African nations where the formal land delivery system is still deficient (Adam, 2020). These actors include private citizens, brokers, administrative officials and local committees (gatekeepers), who take on land administration duties beyond their role. The respondents who participated in KII and FGD, however, noted that the actors engaging in informal land transactions and peri-urban land conflict activities in the research area included local land authorities, residents, land brokers, speculators, real estate developers and heads of religious institutions. Legally binding rules are altered or modified by these unofficial actors to suit their own interests. According to Tellman et al. (2021), actors in property transactions and land use conflicts are constantly evading official regulations, altering them, or creating new ones pertaining to urban land governance. In addition to facilitating informal title registration procedures, which can result in land conflicts when a parcel of property is transferred to several parties,

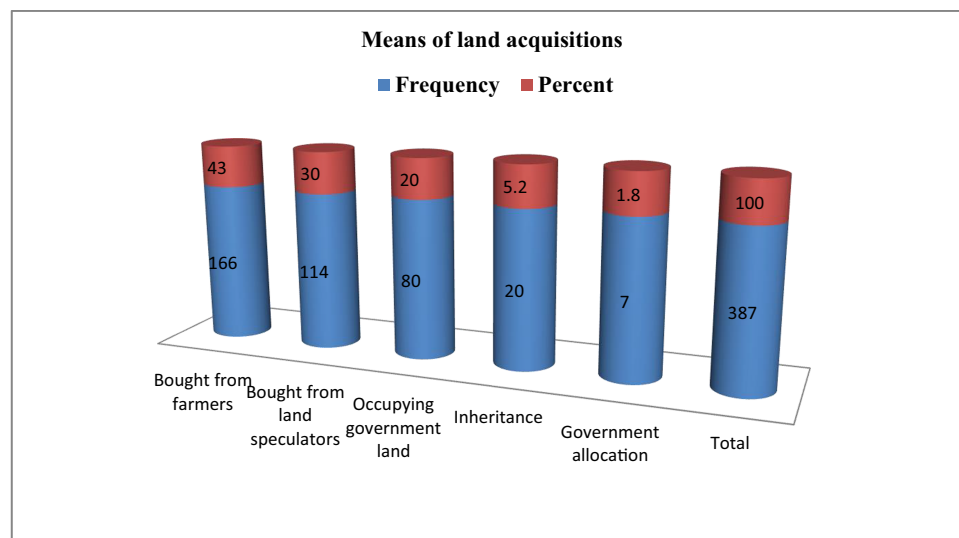


Figure 4. Means of land acquisition in informal settlement areas. Source: field survey, 2024.

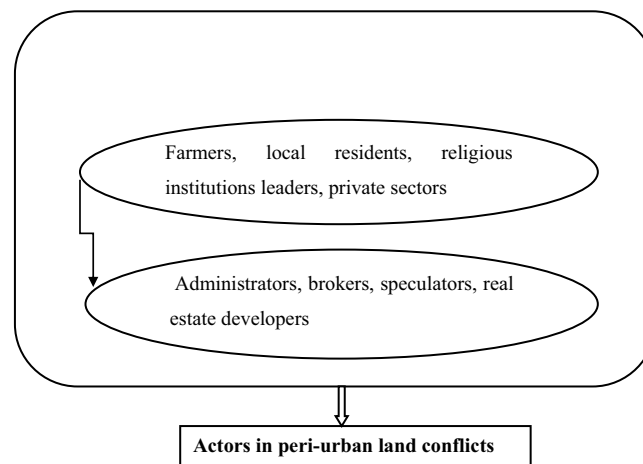


Figure 5. Key actors in peri-urban land conflicts. Source: field survey, 2024.

these informal actors also encourage land transactions and share information. In addition to informal property acquisition and conflict resolution, they also take part in illegal land development and building activities. Figure 5 shows these unofficial actors and the description about these actors are discussed below.

4.3.1. District land administrators

These organizations include local professionals and politicians who serve as land administrators. Land suppliers, policy regulators, administrators and land-use managers are among the many roles that the local government plays in urban land use administration in the study area. It also establishes standards and guidelines that local planners, managers, authorities and other actors must adhere to. This suggests that a formal institution has been set up by the government to ensure that land management players adhere to the set norms and regulations.

4.3.2. Farmers

Original landowners who live in metropolitan or peri-urban regions and whose primary source of income is agriculture are known as farmers or original land providers. In addition to being the primary suppliers and sellers of land for the black market, farmers also divide land informally and construct substandard residential buildings on agricultural land without obtaining permission. Farmers are partly driven to construct informal housing on agricultural land in order to profit from future improvements in the value of urban real estate and in part because they hope to earn more money by renting out their homes. Additionally, local farmers serve as subbrokers, supplying the major brokers with information. The majority of the information regarding the land for sale can be obtained directly from the farmers, according to the survey's findings.

4.3.3. District residents

City dwellers that obtained land through official or informal means and pursued non-agricultural pursuits are considered local residents. In informal settlement areas, land transactions and peri-urban conflicts also involve locals and non-farmers. They take on the roles of brokers, witnesses, buyers (speculators) and land sellers. When they needed money, they divided their land into smaller portions. One member who owned a sizable plot of land attested to my good fortune in purchasing a sizable piece of property when it was still reasonably priced. In an effort to gather funds for the construction of my ideal home, I have just started parceling and selling this land. Local authorities and certain brokers have referred me to potential buyers.

4.3.4. Private sectors and real estate developers

These actors who legally register to provide housing and demand land for commercial and industrial uses in exchange for government funding are referred to as private sector and real estate developers. For their

commercial and industrial goals, these actors require land. Making money off the land is their first priority. These actors were heavily pushed to purchase land and start businesses by the federal and local governments, particularly the Mekelle municipal administration. This organization seeks land from informal settlement areas due to Mekelle city's strategic position and growth potential. If these procedures fail, they start to complain the government and other body, which ended up with conflicts.

4.3.5. Land brokers

Residents and non-residents of the city who provide all-purpose brokerage services but primarily deal in land dealings in order to receive a 2% charge from each land plot sale are referred to as land brokers. City dwellers are also familiar with them. The role of land brokers as information sources in informal markets is more significant than what sample questionnaire respondents suggested, according to the findings of a focus group and interview with land administration specialists and land brokers located in cities. The primary source of information regarding plot availability is land brokers. Once they have information, they share it with everyone they encounter. This suggests that land brokers in the city can learn about the availability of plots for sale through a variety of social contacts.

4.3.6. Religious institution

Churches and mosques are examples of religious institutions, which are places of worship with associated social, religious, or charitable endeavors. Among the religious organizations that contributed to the expansion of informal settlements and peri-urban land use conflicts in the area under study were Orthodox churches, Protestant churches and Muslim mosques. The local administration has observed that these institutions do not want to go through formal land acquisition because of the ease of access and their capacity to reverse their informality, even though the land leasing proclamation requires them to acquire land through the allocation system.

4.3.7. Land speculator

People who engage in land subdivision and purchase real estate for residential use through unofficial land transactions for speculative purposes are known as speculators. Depending on their financial status and their activity, such as building or speculating, land buyers have different needs for land (Interview with important actors, 2024). According to information gleaned from important informal interviews, some buyers resell their property without improving its worth in an effort to increase their profits. Furthermore, 40% of respondents bought land from vendors who had previously bought it from landholders, according to the questionnaire poll data. Some of the land speculators had purchased land with the goal of relocating there, but they were compelled to sell it because of a divorce or other personal tragedy, such as losing their job.

4.4. Local land use actors' experience with land use conflicts

A study of local land use actors' experiences with land use conflicts reveals that these conflicts are a significant and largely negative aspect of most actors' daily lives. An average of five to seven disputes were recorded by the players in as an interview with a local agency that operated in the highly multifunctional area west of the peri-urban of Mekelle explained. The highest number of conflicts was thirteen distinct land use conflicts. The majority of performers (24 out of 35) stated clearly that disputes were a part of, or even a significant part of, their day-to-day work. Of course, it is not an issue in and of itself that local actors regularly deal with land use conflicts. Nonetheless, nearly half of all players reported feeling a high degree of strain from land use disputes, and most actors reported at least one conflict that they felt was a hardship. The impact of land use disputes on the experiences of local actors is explained in detail below, using the perceived strain identified during the evaluative text analysis.

Besides, nearly half of all interviews, or 15 actors, reported feeling a lot of stress from at least one confrontation. They used terminology that made it apparent that they found the peri-urban land use conflicts to be intense and severe. The quote from an agency employee that appears in the paper's title sums up his experience with disputes over one building, but it also accurately captures the experience of performers in this group more broadly: 'It is a total drama'. This group's actors devote a lot of effort to

resolving land use disputes; one mayor recounted that she and her team ‘fought like crazy’ over a housing development dispute.

For example, an agricultural respondent described 10 distinct land use disputes, the most of which he considered to be intense and harsh. He mostly discussed issues involving rivalry for land usage, particularly the loss of agricultural land as a result of infrastructure and housing expansion. These disagreements are ‘a big problem’, ‘more than troublesome’, ‘a burden, definitely’, and ‘a drastic experience’, according to him. He went on to say that because there is so much at risk, these battles are especially harsh as further described:

Indeed, that is a strain. [...] We had either been building up the firm for 15–20 years or had been doing so for 20 years at that point. We had 1 hectares of arable land at the time, which is 10% of the whole area. Then someone comes along and says, ‘Well, I will just take half hectares of arable land from you’. You’re not enjoying yourself if you don’t know how to handle it.

5. Discussion

Through a survey of key local actors, this study created a cross-sectoral view on land use conflicts in an urban–rural borderline zone. It lists the categories of actors that are most frequently identified. Actors in land use conflicts can be identified using a variety of methods, each with specific benefits and drawbacks. These methods include media analysis, litigation court records and geographic information system (GIS) analyzes (Rodrigues et al., 2019).

Interviews with major players reflect the viewpoint of those directly impacted and can uncover conflicts that have not been explored by the media or courts (Rodrigues et al., 2019). Monitoring land use disputes is a vital component of regional development since they have a huge influence on how people interact in rural communities. All of the main land uses in the area experienced conflicts over land use, but housing was the most common cause, followed by transportation and the preservation of the environment or species. The division of costs and benefits, negative impacts on the environment or quality of life, and competition between land users were the most prevalent conflict issues, despite the fact that there were many distinct kinds. The findings of Steinhäuber et al. (2015) and Adamou (2005) who described peri-urban land use conflicts and identified actors in Germany and Niger in the areas of commercial, residential, forestry, settlements/transportation and conservation as reported by actors at the national and regional levels, are largely confirmed and further supported by these results. Additionally, they discovered that the most significant conflict issue is land use competition, with farming.

Furthermore, as Yasmi et al. (2013) and the data above showed, land use conflicts have a significant but primarily negative impact on the experiences of local land use actors. There are many different land use conflicts that actors are aware of; these conflicts are crucial to their work, and most of them find at least some of them stressful. These findings are made even more pertinent by the fact that the respondents were never specifically questioned about how conflicts affected their day-to-day experiences, but the reports of strain surfaced as players discussed the disputes. Local actors’ capacity to carry out their job may be impacted by disputes since they can lead to project failure and require a significant investment of time and money to resolve. Conflict can lower work performance and cause delays, according to research on workplace conflicts (Vaux & Kirk, 2018). Yasmi et al.’s study on forest conflicts in Southeast Asia also found that conflicts can be expensive in terms of both time and money.

6. Conclusion

The roles that the different land actors play may be influenced by competing interests, motives, or perceptions. Some of these players may play related or comparable responsibilities, while others may play many roles and impact land governance issues in different ways. Therefore, conflicts and collisions between agents can be unavoidable. The power disparities between the parties under discussion have an impact on fair engagement and involvement in peri-urban land governance. The circumstances required for equal participation by all players are not provided by the current institutional and legal structure. It permits conflict between actors as well as within them (Massoi & Norman, 2013). For example, the central government is unable to share jurisdiction with local authorities due to conflicting rules and regulations. It

is essential to comprehend the institutional structure that controls land access in peri-urban areas, as well as the objectives and perspectives of the many stakeholders regarding the governance system. In addition to providing valuable insights for theory and policy about peri-urban land usage and transactions, this is crucial for improving land governance generally.

The discussion also highlights the significance of participation in improving land administration in peri-urban areas; hence, sectoral integration and actor cooperation are necessary for effective sustainable planning. Further, the aim of this article is to recognize the most pertinent types of actors as reported by local residents and showed that land use conflicts are significant and primarily detrimental to the actors in the study area. Actors are aware of a wide range of land use conflicts, with rivalry among land uses being the most prevalent concern. These disputes are typically related to housing, environmental conservation and traffic. Actors deal with these issues on a regular basis, and many find them to be stressful.

Besides, a local agency employee once put it this way: 'It is a total drama'. Land use conflicts can hinder local land management procedures, tie up resources and be seen as complex and challenging to handle. They can also be extremely stressful. Land systems are inherently subject to ongoing negotiation processes, which have an effect on how people live, work and interact in rural areas. And the findings showed that friends, family, neighbors, community organizations and their immediate networks are informal actors engaged in peri-urban land disputes. In addition, government agencies, people and authorities that set laws and regulations were identified as formal actors.

Lastly, average of five to seven disputes were recorded by the players in as an interview with a local agency that operated in the highly multifunctional area west of the peri-urban Mekelle revealed. The highest number of conflicts was thirteen distinct land use conflicts. The majority of performers (24 out of 35) stated clearly that disputes were a part of, or even a significant part of, their day-to-day work. These analyzes can back up the existing problems in most Ethiopian cities and towns. So the local stake holders has to incorporate the findings in the rule, regulation and policy formulation by considering win-win strategy.

7. Recommendations

The following points are recommended for the local stakeholders:

- I. Identifying formal and informal actors using stakeholder analysis.
- II. Defining formal and informal actors daily experiences.
- III. Making discussion with the identified formal and informal actors including their network and incorporate the concepts of actors network, functions and experiences in rule, regulation and policy formulation.
- IV. Conduct a comprehensive stakeholder analysis: systematically identify and classify both formal and informal actors to map the community's landscape of influence and vested interests.
- V. Document actor lived experiences: conducting an ethnographic analysis of stakeholders' daily practices, documenting their operational challenges and underlying motivations to ground their prescribed roles and expressed needs in lived reality.
- VI. Engaging stakeholders in collaborative dialog: facilitate structured discussions with identified actors, exploring their relationships, networks and functions. Integrate insights from these engagements guided by actor-network theory (ANT) into the design and reform of rules, regulations and policies.

Disclosure statement

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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.

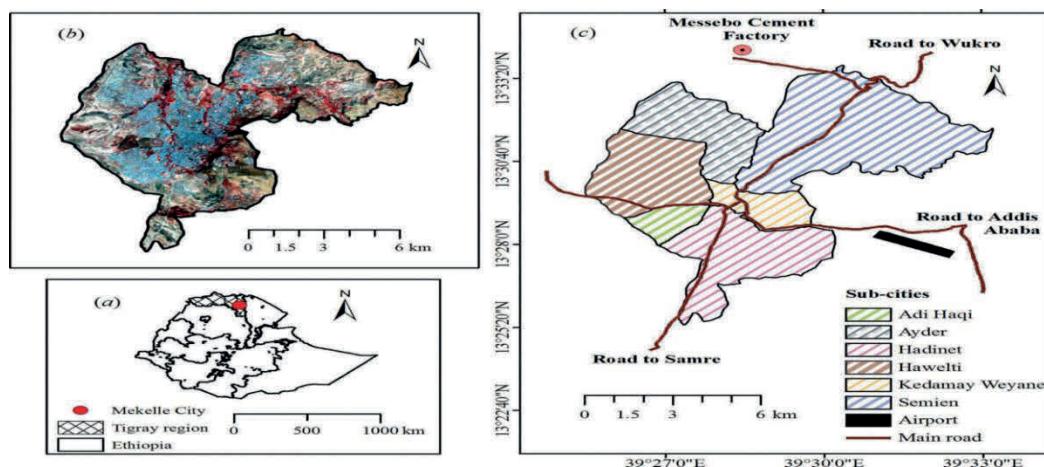


Fig. 2. Location map of the study area: (a) – country map including Mekelle city and Tigray region, (b) – the false color composite Landsat image of 2014; and (c) – sub-cities of Mekelle city (Fenta et al., 2024).

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.

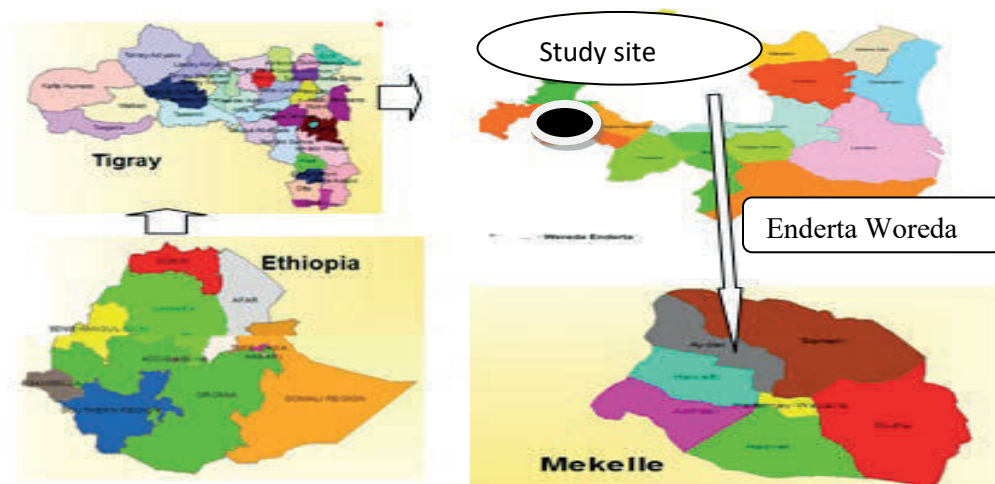


Fig. 3. Location map of case study area, Enderta district and Peri-Urban Conflicting Areas (Retrieved from Google Maps, 2024, <https://www.google.com/maps>).

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).

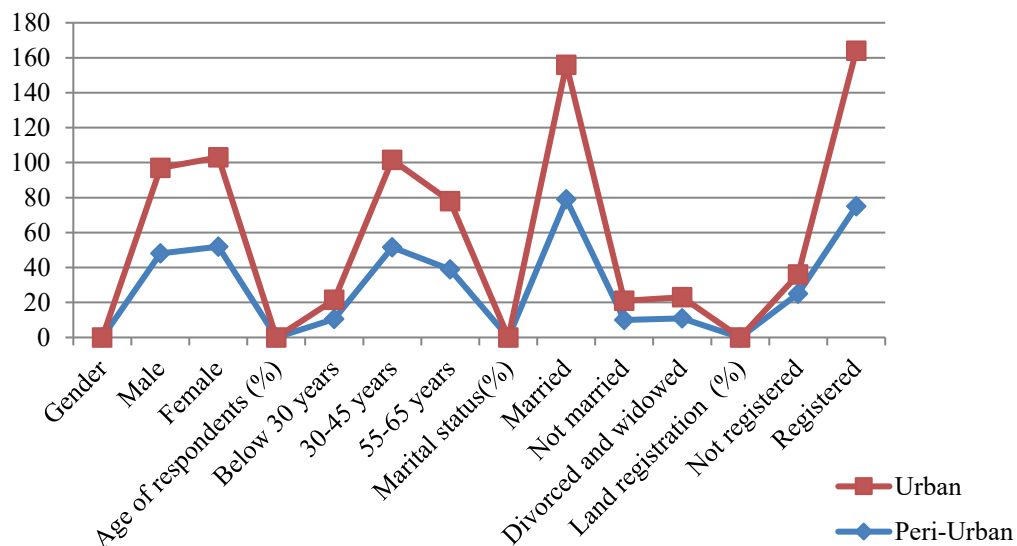


Fig. 4. Respondents' Characteristics (Number of Peri-Urban respondents 225, Urban Respondents 225) (data from the field survey in 2024).

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 $p < 0.05$. ($2 = 14.159$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$)

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, Adihag 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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