

Key messages on land and urbanisation

- Land continues to be a key resource at the micro level, and the quality of its local administration remains an important driver of patterns of (good or bad) governance and dispute. Access to land is central to livelihoods everywhere, even when citizens migrate.
- Rural land or rights can no longer be discussed in isolation from urbanisation or investment; this is true even in communities that used to be entirely rural or relatively remote.
- Farmers seem to value strong, transparent land administration by peers and government.
 - *Land use planning in rural areas seems rudimentary, and if investments in second level certification are to offer value for money, they should provide a basis for changing this.*
 - *Land use planning should focus on water and irrigation potential, with the impact of poor rains and up-stream competition for water presenting challenges in several sites.*
- In rural areas there is evidence of the increased involvement of government in inheritance processes, as local authorities seek to avoid further fragmentation of holdings, placing limitations on what parents can decide. Inheritance is “no longer a private or family matter”.
- Data do not conclusively support the claim that second level (GIS-based) certification strengthens women’s inheritance rights beyond those secured by first level certificates.
 - *The role of wereda courts in protecting women’s inheritance rights is important (even if they delegate authority), but not always positive, especially if rights are not formalised.*
 - *Land certification registers are often “static,” with new transactions not reflected in the formal register; policy should consider practical solutions to the need for updating.*
 - *The increased use of new technologies can create distance between policymakers and communities, discouraging consultation and feedback with those who cannot access it.*
- Local government tries to prioritise allocation of land for youth groups, MSEs, cooperatives, and in some places for residences: this is appreciated, but land is not always available.
- When land values and transaction volumes are high, short-period formal rental agreements also increase, and in most of the sites are replacing sharecropping as less risky to the renter.
 - *Informal and/or longer-term land transactions seem to persist in sites with high informal international migration rates: protection of migrants’ land rights may need attention.*
- The legal and bureaucratic border between two distinct property regimes re land (rural and urban) moves physically as Ethiopia’s cities expand and towns multiply and grow. This dynamic disrupts livelihoods and land rights, and may contribute to distrust of government.
 - *There is a need for a more sustainable – more stable, gradual and planned – solution to urban boundary shifts. The problem is compounded as the data also confirm that large towns’ expansion, once underway, rarely stays within predetermined legal boundaries.*
 - *Those who are still farming in newly “urban” areas that are not yet developed, need*

temporary (rural) land administration certificates to protect their rights. This emergent problem of those shifting from the rural to the urban system needs urgent policy review.

- *Similarly, local government should ensure that farmers in urban centres do not lose access to the agricultural services (FTCs, DAs, vets, etc.) they need whilst still farming.*
- In many areas, formal processes of land administration are in a state of inertia, even limbo; meanwhile informal – illegal - processes of land accumulation and expropriation continue.
- The growth of informal land acquisitions has been fuelled by urban land regulations which allow the sale - and *ex post facto* legalisation - of land which has “already” been built on.
 - *This creates a key loophole arguably undermining the principle of “land to the tiller.”*
 - *In combination with low formal compensation rates it increases incentives for sales.*
- There is a strong perception in several sites that the establishment of towns benefits “others” “from elsewhere” – not local residents: this challenges the developmental state narrative of “rich farmers becoming urban entrepreneurs,” and of organic class formation.
 - *Anxiety about expropriation in the face of urbanisation has driven parochialism: policymakers should revisit this issue and consider ways to address its implications.*
 - *The social change involved when agricultural communities are incorporated into towns has been underestimated: policy at all levels should give close attention to managing the transition, with better consultation to understand and engage with drivers of resistance.*
- Few are happy with compensation rates that only devalue as land values inflate. Farmers gaining sudden large amounts of money are often ill-equipped to invest it for the future.
 - *Compensation policy that continues to inflate rates will be unsustainable. Policymakers and their partners should continue to focus on the range of strategies that also tackle sustainable alternative livelihoods, with training and other support for those losing land.*
- Landlessness is increasing everywhere. A generational squeeze on inheritance is now being compounded by significant expropriation and (in some sites) heavy informal sales, both of which also now contribute significantly to an escalation of national rates of landlessness.
 - *Landlessness is no longer best understood as the concern of an unfortunate minority, but should be reconceptualised as a driver and focus of livelihoods policy, rural and urban.*
- Corruption in urban and rural land deals (expropriation, illicit sales, improper auctions) is more widely talked about than in previous research rounds, and is particularly (but not only) visible in the development corridor where economic drivers are stronger. Data indicate that widespread current practices re land allocation are driving inequality, impoverishment and dissatisfaction.
 - *Improving the capacity and probity of land administration institutions is a very high priority. A strengthened judicial sector would also be key to entrenching a virtuous circle for reform.*
- Land is money. In all sites, land is no longer only (or even primarily) a basis for production and producer incomes, but also an asset inherently capable of generating a variety of rents.
 - *Land policy in Ethiopia is too important to the country’s transition to be allowed to evolve “de facto.” Policy makers should consider establishing a dedicated and independent Land Think Tank, capable of generating and analysing evidence to inform future direction: on local practice; on the interaction of formal and informal land rights; on processes of urbanisation.*

Land and urbanisation

Data emerging from the four WIDE Bridge communities studied between February and March 2018² indicate that issues of rural land policy and practice can no longer be discussed in isolation from urbanisation (or investment or migration); and that this is true even in communities that 25 years ago were entirely rural, and in some cases even relatively remote. This Brief discusses the complex interaction between rural and urbanising processes, beginning with rural realities, but moving on to consider the changing patterns of urbanisation and expropriation which are uppermost in the minds of many of those interviewed at community level. The Brief considers rural land administration processes, certification, renting and sharecropping, and inheritance in the rural context; it then goes on to discuss government allocations of land and questions of compensation; and the range of experiences of - and attitudes to - urbanisation and investment in each of the four communities. It concludes by discussing land as a vector of inequality and vehicle of corruption.

The Discussion Brief documents a policy landscape facing very serious challenge. WIDE data illuminate a range of situations where: on the one hand, formal processes of land administration or intervention are in a state of inertia or limbo; meanwhile informal – illegal - processes of land accumulation and expropriation have advanced apparently unchecked. The longer this situation is allowed to persist, the more difficult will be the future task of untangling “facts on the ground.” Ethiopia’s majority of rural subsistence farmers, its poor and middle-level urban dwellers, and its growing cohorts of young graduates – many unemployed – are widely identified by policymakers as the primary constituencies to be served by the development state model. This Brief argues that, very often in practice, they are not benefitting: either as a result of inaction and the erosion of probity in land administration systems; or because policy implementation and practices have failed to keep pace with rapid changes in the rural (and urbanising) environment. It calls for urgent attention to a more granular understanding of policy implementation and practice at the micro-level: particularly, but not only, at the boundary of a sharp policy dichotomy between rural and urban land administration systems. The location of this border between two distinct legal and bureaucratic property regimes is mobile: now advancing across new areas of farmland as Ethiopia’s growing number of larger cities and tiny towns expand. The WIDE Bridge data made earlier this year suggest that this dynamic is disrupting the livelihoods and property rights of millions of citizens, and seems likely to be fostering distrust of government.

Land administration in rural areas

The data confirm the persisting importance of access to land in rural (and urban) communities: this cannot be overstated. Access to land remains key to livelihoods as has long been the case (Dessalegn 2009, Pausewang 1983); and this does not change, even when citizens migrate, either locally or internationally.³

Importance of the Land Administration Committee of farmer “peers”

The 2018 WIDE data continue to suggest that Land Administration Committees (LACs) of local farmer peers play important roles in the mediation of land related disputes, and in the administration of land certification processes, in three out of the four sites: in northeast Tigray, Gojjam and Kambata.⁴ Most interlocutors saw a strong and positive role for local LACs operating at *got* level in the three sites: the Harresaw (Tigray) LAC had overseen the return of 17.8 hectares of illegally occupied land during the second level certification process – something for which it had been recognised and awarded by government, although local respondents were less enthusiastic and the re-certification process had obviously been a difficult one.⁵ The role played by the LAC in Aze Debo (Kambata) and Yetmen (East Gojjam) (where second level certification was not yet finalised) seemed to be more positively perceived,⁶ with many interlocutors commenting favourably on LAC independence and good working relations with elders.

The absence of a Land Administration Expert (LAE) may also have been a problem in Tigray: in Yetmen the role of a highly efficient young female LAE was much appreciated, and farmers who feared losing their rural land rights to the new town were also anxious about the prospect of loss of access to her (rural focused) services to the neighbouring Felege Selam kebele, as a result of ongoing municipalisation.⁷ The local visibility and transparency of systems of rural land holding administration, and of registering transactions, was greater in the two northern sites.⁸

Land use planning

Land use planning (LUP) in rural areas of the communities studied seems to be rudimentary to the point of non-existence,⁹ and if investments in second level certification are to offer value for money, it will be important that they provide a basis for changing this situation. Poor rural land-use planning only serves to disguise the scope of rural change, and may undermine the potential for properly informed evidence-based policy and planning. In the Tigray site kebele authorities claimed to be doing LUP, although in Kambata and Gojjam this was not the case. In Harresaw in Tigray, the location of the new kebele centre has become a cause of significant controversy, and disagreement: this reinforces the importance of transparent land use decision-making in shaping local perceptions of local government and governance. The claims of some at higher levels of government that land use planning is ongoing, and that it is consultative, are not borne out by wider interviews in any of the sites. Both farmers and urban residents claim to know little about land use planning and/or whether it is even taking place – and lack of consultation applies also to urban masterplanning.

In urban areas (see below), there is more evidence of formal processes of land use planning and masterplan development, with support from regional planning bodies; but little to indicate the extent to which the plans connect with administrative reality. Data from Ude close to Bishoftu in Oromia, for instance, indicate that urban land use planning is being done based on Google earth and AutoCAD, “with limited visits to the local areas, and consultations on the ground”. This has resulted in multiple problems and discrepancies; and can undermine accountability to local officials at kebele level who were unable to access the processes – because they were no longer visible to them.¹⁰

Land certification

Second level (GIS-based) certification had taken place in three of the sites, but not in the Gojjam site.¹¹ In Yetmen there was an expectation that this process might bring to a head the stand-off about the consolidation of the new *ne’us mazegaja*:¹² it will clarify exactly which land is considered “urban,” and will advance the likely prospect of expropriation of at least a part of what will become landholdings within the town. In Kedida Gemela wereda of Kambata, second level certification surveying had taken place in January 2009 EC, but the results did not seem to have been clearly communicated at the time of research. Ongoing certificate distribution was reportedly rushed and haphazard, with little community understanding of the process - or of the certificates - and there were indications that inheritance confusions had come to the fore during the process. There were also different views about the success of second level certification in Ude in Ada’a wereda given “shortcomings due to budget and administrative constraints.” Some in government felt it had “eased the process” of expropriation (for good and ill), compared with the first level attempt when farmers concealed the true extent of their holdings. Some farmers in Ude expressed anxiety about the potential for government to increase land taxation on the basis of the new certification (cf. DBIII:07 on local government and governance, which suggests rural land taxes are too low). There is already an issue of the “static” nature of certification, with some of the new generation already inheriting land from their parents which is not reflected in the formal register: whilst their rights do not seem to be threatened, means of maintaining up to date land registries in real time need to be explored – and this is of particular importance where land use change is rapid, as in the development corridor around Bishoftu.

The data provide some indication that women have improved awareness of their rights to land in recent years (and are now listed as land holders on certificates) in Ude and several other sites. However, the picture is mixed in terms of how much they are able to act on the basis of these rights. In the Tigray site, the picture seemed generally to be more positive, albeit still with challenges.

Women and inheritance

The data indicate that women's rights to inherit land continue to confront a range of problems in practice, and this may partly reflect the extent to which women continue to rely on customary and non formalised land rights (cf. Mekonnen 2018).¹³ Some interlocutors in Ude thought that land was being used – including by women – as collateral, but many were unsure. There are different findings in Ude about whether women have the right to inherit land when they divorce or not - with many reporting that it depends on whether or not it was the woman who brought the land into the marriage. Daughters meanwhile, seem more likely to inherit equally with their male siblings than in the past, although in some parts of the country these rights are compromised when they marry, when women (unlike men) are commonly unable to take land rights with them.¹⁴ The involvements of wereda courts in protecting women's inheritance rights – even where they decide to delegate authority back to elders – emerges as extremely important, and not always positive; and there is mixed evidence about the gender sensitivity of the LACs.¹⁵

The data do not provide conclusive support to the notion that second level certification strengthens the land rights of women beyond the rights already secured by first level certification, and it seems rather that wider social processes of change underpin shifts. First level certification does seem to have been significant, however, and in Aze Debo some interlocutors indicated that certification may have had the effect of reducing the acceptability of polygamy, as no more than one wife can be named on the certificate.

Gender relations remain an obstacle. In the Tigray site, inheritance processes – for women as well as men – are complicated by migration and prolonged absences, often delaying the resolution of cases.

Inheritance more generally

In the Tigray site as well, a 3-person Land Justice Committee (LJC) is involved in the adjudication of land claims, including inheritance cases, working closely with kebele and militia where necessary to enforce decisions. This Committee only exists in Tigray. Community views about it were mixed, and some seemed to prefer the role of elders to the apparently more politically connected LJC. Land inheritance is a problem across the board in Aze Debo where holdings are extremely small, and fragmentation on inheritance become unviable, provoking tensions and sometimes conflict amongst siblings.

In the three more rural sites (in Amhara, Tigray and SNNP) there seems to be some evidence of an increased involvement of government in inheritance processes, with families no longer able to pass land to their children as they wish, as local authorities seek to avoid further fragmentation of holdings. Inheritance is described as “*no longer a private matter*” – this is a very important shift in practice, and our research suggests that it needs to be further investigated and clarified.

Renting in/out

In Ude, in East Shewa near Bishoftu, as elsewhere, renting in seems to be a financially viable option.¹⁶ A number of women farmers were renting out land that they were unable to work themselves, alongside a number of other women who were renting in. However, in Ude there is also some indication that land renting informally over many years has created significant tensions: as a result people seemed to be renting for shorter periods and more formally – a pattern also apparent in Yetmen.¹⁷ In the Tigray site, land rental (both *chilmi* and *temelash* systems¹⁸) were reported to be increasing – primarily as a result of massive out-migration, including on the part of landholders.

Although the data are unclear, land rental rates seemed to be somewhat lower than in the Oromia site,¹⁹ although still remarkably high. Rental was informal in many instances,²⁰ perhaps reflecting the blurred border between (legal) land rental and (illegal) loan arrangements in practice.²¹ In most cases in three sites, sharecropping seems to be losing out to renting²² – formal and informal – although there is some indication that the opposite may be happening in Aze Debo.

The role of formal bodies (LAC, LAE, kebele, courts) in land transaction facilitation, registration or documentation seems clearly to be increasing in the Ada'a and Gojjam sites, where land values are higher. Such a shift is less clear in either the Tigray or the Kambata cases. Continuing informality there may be connected with the very high prevalence of (informal) migration in both communities – with which land transactions seem to be intimately connected, as sources of credit or collateral.

Irrigation and the importance of water

There are instances in three of the sites (not the Kambata one) that irrigation has been under pressure in the last few years for various reasons, and this marks a shift since WIDE 3 findings seven or eight years previously. The large Ada'a-Becho irrigation scheme financed by the government in the Oromia site has been delayed for several years and is not yet functional (although there is private irrigation in Ude). Land given to youth co-operatives in Yetmen was supposed to be used for irrigation, but this had proved challenging, not least because of water competition from upstream neighbouring communities: as a result, some of the production has reverted to teff – fortunately continuing to command high prices. The starkest shift was in the northeastern Tigray site, however, where the apparent demise of irrigation potential over the period since WIDE 3 research in 2010-13, as a result of several years of poor rains, demonstrates the importance of considering (agricultural and investment) land in relation with the water sources that feed it.

Grazing land/common land

This highly visible “public good” is under pressure in all of the sites.²³ Allocating this kind of “common land” has been an attractive option for local government, either for young people and other landless; or for housing construction by young people (in the Tigray site) and investors, as a relatively easier and less controversial option, rather than expropriating individuals' land.²⁴ Allocation of grazing land is a source of tension everywhere, however. Prioritising the allocation of communal – including grazing - land, rather than pushing for a more systematic land use planning process, is symptomatic of the *ad hoc* nature of land use policy making across communities, where administrators are seeking pragmatic interim options: not the best developmental outcomes, but the route of least resistance. This reinforces existing power disparities, and may also be creating new ones. As the Tigray and Kambata cases in particular show, with grazing and common land disappearing, this is not a sustainable strategy: it reduces key resources at a time when livestock are becoming more important to local economies (see DBIII:02 on modernisation of smallholder farming); and also adds to wider concerns about the potential for damage to be reintroduced to marginal catchments and hillsides which had been rehabilitated.

Land available to the local government

Where possible, local government prioritises the allocation of land for youth groups and cooperatives: this has a very high priority whenever land is available – but often it isn't.²⁵ In the Tigray site, government land had been allocated (0.25 of a hectare each) in 2008 and 2009 EC to a significant number of homeless and landless youth: primarily the land of farmers deceased without heirs. This was apparently widely appreciated. Hillsides were also allocated to youth groups for income generation in the Kambata and Tigray sites – although success is reportedly constrained by lack of credit,²⁶ by the length of time for plots to become productive, and by logistics (cf. DBIII:04 on young people's economic experiences).²⁷ In Yetmen local government was cautious to distribute

land only from communal areas, avoiding individual expropriation.²⁸ When land is available (which is rarely because of its shortage) it is allocated by lot, and broadly considered fairly done.

Land for government facilities is also in extremely short supply: for Farmer Training Centres (FTCs),²⁹ for schools,³⁰ for retired service personnel,³¹ for preservation for forested areas,³² and for the establishment of municipal offices.³³ In fact the kebele in Ude was even concerned about land for burial grounds, given an extreme shortage of available land.

Urbanisation

Urbanisation is everywhere – outward expansion from larger cities, emerging small towns, and competition over where new municipal centres should be located. The data show multiple threads of concern and problems in all of the four sites. Ambivalence about the benefits of urbanisation is particularly strong amongst farmers in the two sites where it is most advanced: Ude and Yetmen.

Perceptions of urbanisation – contrast with the developmental state narrative

There is a strong perception (primarily in these two sites) that the growth of towns benefits “others” “from elsewhere” – not local residents: this presents a very strong challenge to the developmental state narrative of “rich farmers becoming urban entrepreneurs” and of organic class formation.

Only investors are benefited from the expansion of town. Farmers can't do anything in the town. [Rather] they are exposed to different kinds of addiction including alcohol, and high expenses. It is difficult to survive in the town without having regular income. (Ude, wealthy farmer).

There is also a clear perception amongst farmers and residents in Ude that it is often outsiders who are speculating on the value of land, and adding no value: engaged in quintessential rent-seeking.³⁴

Urbanisation is much better received (and not just by farmers) if it is accompanied by adequate infrastructure development (a strong view in both of the urban sites, Ude and Yetmen)

I don't hate urbanization if it is with basic town requirements. Urbanization without [this basic investment] is simply a waste of land and other resources (Ude non-farmer). What is happening in our area is just land grabbing, by both locals and outsiders (Ude wealthy non-farmer).

Although local government interlocutors describe themselves as proactive in precluding and reversing illegal construction or land acquisitions, their perspective is not shared by many other members of the community: farmers in particular often see little benefit in urbanisation – either large or small scale. In the northeastern Tigray site at Harresaw, meanwhile, the data suggest that there was anger in the community over a proposal by the kebele leader that the kebele centre might be established elsewhere: this reaction seems to have been driven at least partly by anxiety that if the centre moved the potential for electrification and other services would also recede elsewhere.

Boundary making: expanding towns.

The data demonstrate a sharp distinction between the perceptions of urban residents (or prospective urban residents) and rural neighbours about the expansion of towns. Expansion of larger towns³⁵ is taking land away from farming and also away from the surrounding weredas, and this has budgetary as well as territorial implications, which are not being addressed at present.³⁶ There is clearly a need to have a more sustainable and more stable solution (gradual and carefully planned) to boundary shifts. The problem is further compounded as the data also seem to indicate that the expansion of large towns once underway doesn't always stay within legally defined boundaries.³⁷

Urban expansion *within* kebeles is also increasing, and results in considerable local pressure.³⁸ Community perceptions were that these changes were non-negotiable, with “*even a church*” losing land in the Tigray site. In some instances, the negative impact on the surrounding rural area has been balanced by new facilities (banking, school and market facilities) in the centre. However, as

well as these benefits, the relative lack of controversy in the Tigray case (as compared with the three other sites at least) is perhaps because it is at an earlier phase of urbanisation, where many people are keen to have the town services close by, rather than concerned about the impact of its presence.

The newly established town of Ude in Ada'a has raised complex issues of boundary establishment, with some urban areas still outside, and some rural areas inside.³⁹ The Gojjam data show a major preoccupation with boundaries and boundary disputes in general. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that in Yetmen attempts at municipalisation have been treated with suspicion. The degree of opposition from farmers is remarkable, however, and has left the community in limbo, with little implemented despite the fact that the plan to establish a new "*ne'us mazegaja*" on just over 307 hectares was apparently formalised as long ago as 2016. The case of Yetmen perhaps represents a "perfect storm" where farmer and government perspectives collide,⁴⁰ and it is arguably non-typical of towns in the area. It nevertheless offers a warning that

Future generations may not forgive us for the way in which we have allowed the nation's best wealth [prime teff land] to be eaten by urbanisation (East Gojjam, zone official)

As a result of the standoff, "*the community [in Yetmen] is in a state of unrest,*" and little has been done to implement the urban plan in the face of local resistance and petitions to the region:

Selling/buying of land, constructing of house and any other buildings has been blocked. Rural people worry about their land; they have loathing of officials and urban residents. (Yetmen)

Farmers in Yetmen know roughly where they expect the town boundary to be, and illegal house construction on farmland has begun just outside it – along the perimeter.⁴¹ This is a clear indication that farmers anticipate that the introduction of urban land administration arrangements will see tighter controls and significant expropriation.⁴² These new houses in Yetmen may also be an attempt to mark the limits of the town for the future, against further incursion onto valuable rural land.

[Land provision for construction in urban areas: housing and auction](#)

Local authorities have found it very difficult to allocate land for housing in urban areas. Harresaw, the northeast Tigray site is something of an exception with a large allocation to young people.⁴³ The process of allocating land for construction brought complaints from some likely to lose out, but data seem to indicate that the process in Tigray may have been more consultative than elsewhere.

In the locations where urban land has been auctioned, either in or near the research sites, it has attracted very much higher bids than the minimum price.⁴⁴ Once this becomes known in the wider population, it generates suspicion – as expressed in both the Oromia and Amhara cases – that "*government is selling our land to rich outsiders.*" Further auctions are now blocked in Yetmen for the time being, and are also described as "*on the way*" rather than implemented in Ude, where there has been no allocation of land through auction to date. It is unclear precisely why there has been a delay, but in Ada'a wereda (unlike Enemay) investors and outsiders have simply gone ahead through informal "purchase" arrangements from the farmers, at rates two to three times the level of government compensation (see below). Administrators' decisions to delay, and farmers' decisions to sell informally are both logical in the short-term: the cumulative long-term developmental outcomes seem less certain or desirable. Even where people have land legally certified as theirs, there is often a lag in obtaining the urban "*carta*" when it has been incorporated recently (as for instance in Harresaw and nearby Dera, where administration is apparently relatively stronger).

One aspect of the formal allocation process in the Oromia development corridor site seems to have involved the provision of urban plots for construction to "*model farmers*"⁴⁵ and this has resulted in perceptions of unfairness, which themselves remain contentious (cf. Chinigo 2014; Dessalegn 2009; Mekonnen 2018). In the past, civil servants had been able to get urban housing plots, but inflation has made this unaffordable in Ude.⁴⁶ This had provoked complaints, and the local government had merely "*asked people to be patient*" until additional budget was made available – again delaying

development and waiting for further directives. It was a widespread perception that “*the major purpose of allocating land for model farmers, and other civil servants and teachers is to hasten the urbanization of the area.*”

The majority of urban residents, however, are non-farmers: many Ude farmers who had earlier sold rural land were later unable to get land in urban areas, and were living with relatives, often in considerable poverty. Others who had bought land informally for residences in newly urban areas close to the road in Ude (a process reported to have escalated massively over the last seven years), were waiting for the municipality to formalise their claims – and were all relatively wealthy.⁴⁷

Informal acquisitions in urban peripheries

The growth of informal land acquisitions has been massively fuelled by the urban land regulations which allow the sale of land which has “already” been built on, creating an important loophole.

The sale of land to private individuals is acceptable in as much as it is legally registered and has a building on it. The 2% tax is levied on the sale of the house and the tax goes to the Municipality so as to make part of its income. However, it is hardly possible to sell a bare land which has no house on it. Neither the government nor the private individual can transfer in [the] form of sale unless in accordance with the lease holding proclamation. (Ude)

This blurred situation can plausibly be expected to undermine the developmental, inclusive or egalitarian effect of the current land policy. It can also allow - even encourage - corruption by local officials. As one farmer put it, there is

no equal access to urban land because of economic difference: there is no free access to land but people can access land with their own money. The problem is there is no land in the government stock, and yet they are [ready] to take land from farmers with compensation. (Ude farmer)

Compensation

land can be passed to the next generation: money often can't: most farmers who were expropriated have not been successful in their lives. (Ude)

No-one is happy with compensation payments for expropriated land, which devalues as fast as land prices are inflating. Compensation issues were reported to have been the major focus of discussion in Ude about the new masterplan.⁴⁸ Across the sites, compensation paid by government is considered to be too low and out of date;⁴⁹ rates are also considered arbitrary;⁵⁰ and discrepancies between regional and federal payment rates do not help.⁵¹ Other interlocutors complained that the government compensation amounts are fluctuating, and that this creates further suspicion and “hesitation” towards the government amongst farmers. Logical but illegal pre-emptive sales by farmers in the Oromia site were reported to have been increasing recently ahead of the prospect of compensation, because of government activities to measure plots along the road.⁵²

people are becoming wise unlike the past when they gave away their land almost for nothing (Ude)

Policy cannot simply continue to inflate rates: it must tackle the issue of sustainable alternative livelihoods. In none of the sites was there training or follow up with those expropriated available to help them develop.

Even in the Tigray site, in an area where rental rates would seem to suggest that land value inflation was more modest, and expropriation had not taken place for federal road construction,⁵³ individuals had nevertheless pressed compensation claims (albeit in this case for rural land) in court.⁵⁴ In Ude, where people had lost larger areas of land to infrastructure development⁵⁵ as well as to investment, a compensation case had reached the Oromia Supreme Court.⁵⁶

Landlessness

The landlessness of a younger generation who have not been able to inherit rural land is an escalating problem in all of the communities studied, with an interlocutor in the Tigray site indicating that only 20% of men in their twenties had land; similar estimates for the Oromia site indicated 25%. Despite some attempts to distribute land to youth co-operatives in all sites, the problem is far beyond the capacity of local authorities, and is a key driver of migration, including international migration, especially in northeast Tigray and Kambata. In the Tigray site it was reported that landlessness is reshaping social norms, encouraging young women to prioritise the chance of marriage to a farmer - even a significantly older man - if he has land. Similarly in Yetmen, bridal access to land was a high priority in marriage negotiations (cf. DBIII:04 on young people's economic experiences). The issue of landlessness is perhaps most acute in Aze Debo in Kambata, where landholdings have long been small, and a new generation has been unable to access land.

Land expropriation and sales is now also contributing to an escalation of national rates of landlessness. Landlessness through expropriation seems to have been on a smaller scale than landlessness (and subsequent impoverishment) through informal sales of land, particularly but not only in the site close to Bishoftu in the development corridor. Landlessness can no longer be understood as the concern of a small minority, but should become a significant driver and focus of livelihoods policies in urban as well as rural areas.

Land for Investment and construction

In all four very diverse cases, short supply of land operates as a key factor (often *the* key constraint) in investment. Investment in the Oromia site is on a massive scale⁵⁷ with many moving in from outside; whilst in Yetmen it is minimal or non-existent (blocked by local resistance to the allocation of land),⁵⁸ and in Aze Debo and Harresaw it is very confined.⁵⁹ Land close to Aze Debo was recently surveyed for a potential 160 hectare industrial site, to the great concern of the kebele chair (cf. DBIII:07 on local government and governance). Aze Debo is also the only site where land allocations to non-commercial non-governmental bodies were reported.⁶⁰ It is worth noting that the various (Protestant) churches emerge as significant (and increasing) landholders in the Kambata site, a situation which drew criticism from some interlocutors.

Legal process for obtaining investment land

As noted above, in Ude the scale of investment means that the administration of lease land has been shifted from the local wereda office to the regional government body and zone, especially for larger investments. This makes decision-making yet more inaccessible to local input, with a concomitant shift in the scope for corrupt practice, away from local decision-makers, but potentially in favour of others. Lease rates⁶¹ are high everywhere, even in a town close to the relatively remote Tigray site.⁶²

There is considerable ambiguity around the processes by which land, even for large investments in Ude, was originally obtained,⁶³ with different interlocutors reporting different legal or non-legal processes, including *ex post facto* "legalisation" through payment of historical land taxes. Even where investment is formal and land legally obtained, there is a very strong perception amongst farmers and residents in Ude that outsiders are speculating on the value of land.⁶⁴ Investment leases in Ude were typically 35, 40, even 100 years, whereas Sirba farmers are renting for small scale investments, but only for short periods, something which was reported to have resulted in local conflict.

Illegal mechanisms for appropriating land

In remote northeast Tigray close to Harresaw, just as in Oromia's development corridor, in and around Ude, municipalisation and investment have combined to drive up the value of land, and the

cost of renting land or accommodation or buying houses – and to encourage illegal acquisitions. The differences are of scale, and probity of administrative response.

The data (which report community perceptions) indicate the widespread view in the Oromia site that a large volume of land has been illegally obtained by investors; and that the local government (which is seen as complicit in this process) could have plenty of land at its disposal “*if they were to correct this and take it back.*”⁶⁵ One interlocutor suggested that in Ude “*there was no land that had not been sold.*” The process of illegal acquisition of land is fuelled both by the scope for *ex post facto* legalisation – and also by the extraordinarily strong economic and market drivers: one investor reported having bought 3,000 square metres on the main road 8 years previously for as little as 9,000 birr. Clearly, as an Ude kebele interlocutor put it, many farmers “*have lost their land to a very low money*” and it is unsurprising if initial satisfaction with these deals has soured over time.

Tensions have been compounded as many of those investing are considered “outsiders,” and referred to by some as “parasites.” A similar view applies in Yetmen, albeit on a much more micro local scale, where local farmers’ perceptions are that their neighbours from adjacent kebeles want to move in to obtain a foothold on their land - newly urban land - along the main road.⁶⁶ Anxiety has driven an increase of parochialism, and this has policy implications of its own.

Ada’a wereda interlocutors claim that illegally constructed buildings are being demolished, but it is not clear that most community members believe that this is the case. In none of the sites is there a sense that (urban) local government stakeholders are managing to control the integrity of land administration processes - without extra-legal influence. In Aze Debo, for instance, interlocutors claim that a coffee investor was able to leverage family and social capital to overcome resistance from wereda and kebele authorities. In the Amhara site, farmers see the municipality manager as being in league with “rich incomers” rather than serving their interests. Even in the Tigray site, there were reports of the (illegal) resale of land for houses to rich farmers in Harresaw, as well as Dera and Atsbi towns.⁶⁷ Social courts, LAC members and elders continued to play important roles in trying to untangle disputes in the Tigray site (where there is also a land justice committee), and Amhara and SNNP sites, whereas formal courts had become more important in the Oromia site.

Ex post facto legalisation of land claims – and corruption

Wereda, kebele and municipality officials are seen as influential in land administration, because of the public ownership of land, but also because – as with housing plots discussed above – “*they have the capability to make it [illegal holdings or constructions] legal.*” Since local governments are unable to allocate land, other than to youth co-operatives, and in a few other exceptional cases, the only way to obtain land is illegally – hoping for subsequent legalisation. Interlocutors widely believe that “*the sale of land or a house [can be] registered and authenticated by the municipality*” but also that not all members of the community may know about this or be able to bring about the result, which fuels (perceptions of) inequality. So routine is the *ex post facto* process in Ude, that it has been institutionalised in popular expectation: many even complained that processes for obtaining *ex post facto* legal *carta* were taking a very long time. This situation opens up further loopholes, and makes municipal authorities very powerful – and potentially corruptible.

In many cases there is criticism of officials seen as working in their own rather than community interests. One instance is the attempt of a kebele chairman in the Tigray site to locate a new urban centre in his own sub-kebele. Another is the powerful critique of the governance of land allocation, particularly in the site close to Bishoftu.⁶⁸ There are indications that recourse to the courts may be becoming more common in more serious cases, although the evidence is unclear, and judicial process has rarely been invoked (other than by government) re illicit land transactions.⁶⁹ More formal or government-backed processes for renting in or out are becoming more common in the Oromo and Amhara sites for standard small-scale agricultural transactions, and this seems indicative of a positive increase in collective confidence in this system:⁷⁰ Improving the capacity and probity of

land administration institutions is a very high priority. Land administration cannot improve without the integrity and efficacy of the judicial sector to back it up when necessary.

A Policy dichotomy at the urban-rural interface

Current land policy enshrines a dichotomy between rural and urban property systems – with little or no attention given in practice to how individuals should negotiate the transition between the two as they move, or as urban boundaries move around them. Various factors exacerbate the problems facing farmers and poor or middle urban residents. One is obtaining ID cards.⁷¹ Another is the policy of expropriation of farmers who do not use their land. This dictates the way in which farmers (notably in Tigray) are reluctant to move fully and finally to urban centres: rather they are dividing their time or the family location, or renting out town houses they may own, but staying on their farms (interlocutors put their number between 40 and 80 in the community). These sets of perverse incentives may be at odds with the developmental state conceptualisation of class formation and urbanisation amongst wealthy farmers, militating against their “developmental transition” from rural subsistence to urban entrepreneurialism. This potentially creates a vacuum in urban areas – and one which the data suggest is regularly being filled by other wealthier individuals.

Rural land within urban boundaries

An emergent problem in several of the sites (Ude, also Yetmen) is the need for temporary (rural) land administration certificates - on the basis that these areas are still farmed, but will become urban later on. This is an emergent problem of those shifting from the rural to the urban system of land administration, and arguably needs urgent policy review. The complementary problem is that farmers in urban centres in Ude and Yetmen abruptly lose access to those services which they need in order to be able to support themselves whilst still farming – agricultural DAs, FTCs, and other extension services (cf. DBIII:07 on local government & governance).

Where farmers’ houses have been incorporated into new municipalities some face particular risks of expropriation of (part areas of) larger “homesteads,” if and when land is reallocated under urban regulation. In urban areas landholdings cannot be in principle more than 500m² per household, plus 200m² for children: in many cases where farmers have larger landholdings around their houses, this means there is something valuable to be lost.⁷² Urban land leasing in Yetmen and Ude – in Ude for instance for civil service housing - has been suspended because of great opposition from farmers.

Tentative conclusions: land and inequality; “land is money”

Everybody seeks land including me. Who hates having money? Land is money. The question is its level differs. There are people who seek land for life and there are people who seek land for luxurious life. (Rich non-farmer in Ude)

People are poor because they have small or infertile land (Harresaw)

Current policy and practice around land rights in Ethiopia is driving inequality, impoverishment and dissatisfaction. Whilst research and analysis have for some time focused on the negative impact on local communities of large-scale allocations of “land to the investor” in the lowland peripheries (Dessalegn 2014, Lavers 2012, Mosley 2012), WIDE data begin to indicate the scale of what may be a looming crisis in the four large EPRDF-administered regions, and are in line with other recent work (Mekonnen 2018, Lavers 2018). Access to land is increasingly seen as *the* key vector of relative wealth: land – and not just in the development corridors – is becoming more than a source of income through its productive agricultural use as traditionally conceived. Rather land as an asset is now re-emerging as a key source of rents for many wealthier groups: rich farmers who have bought or otherwise acquired land in urban or valuable sites, which they can rent out or invest in; political entrepreneurs who have used their connections to gain valuable land rights; wealthy urbanites who are buying up plots in the development corridors – but also in remote rural towns; “investors” –

local or from elsewhere who are taking land legally or illegally, for productive purposes or merely as a speculative asset, etc..

In all of the sites studied (with the debateable exception of Harresaw, where many are hard hit by recent drought) inequality is increasing, and many of the most dramatic cases of differentiation are associated with land (see also DBIII:05 on modernisation and inequalities). Inequality in access to land seems to have increased recently, but in all sites many of those seen as “richest” in land access were longstanding elites. In all sites, historical land distribution still provides a baseline in rural areas, with those who had more land during the imperial period, or who managed to hang on to it during the Derg, often still amongst the “richest” of today’s group, later redistributions notwithstanding (although the equity of later distributions seems to be higher in the Tigray (latest 1983 EC) and the Amhara (latest 1989 EC) sites). In Aze Debo it was reported that traditional patterns of land discrimination experienced by “lower clans” persisted, with the new generation of these groups facing particular problems of landlessness. But the dramatic and lasting socio-economic impact of the consolidation of resources and power amongst elites, by means of formal and informal land acquisitions, of investment, and of urbanisation is felt in all of the communities studied.

Land policy in Ethiopia is too important to the country’s transition to be allowed to evolve *de facto*, in ways which seem far from policymakers’ original intent. Decision-makers should consider establishing a dedicated and independent National Land Think Tank, capable of generating and analysing evidence to inform future directions. WIDE is only one of a number of research initiatives which have generated interesting evidence and thought-provoking analysis about land in Ethiopia over the last half century: it is time to make better use of these resources.

*When we die only one [span of land] is adequate for us, why do we fight one another for that?
Land will finish us, we cannot finish land. (Ude resident, near Bishoftu, Oromia)*

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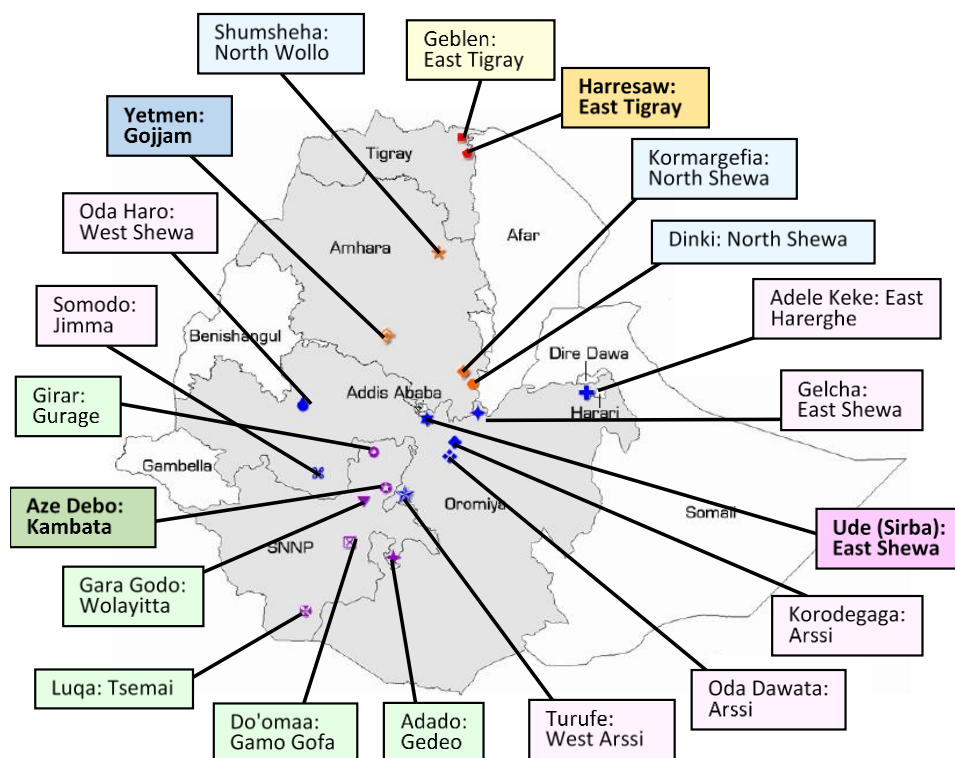
Note: Discussion Briefs from Ethiopia WIDE Research

This brief is part of a series of seven discussion briefs produced by the Ethiopia WIDE team on the topics of land, farming systems, non-farming systems, youth economic experiences, social protection, inequalities and governance, based on research carried out in four communities in the first quarter of 2018.

Ethiopia WIDE is a rigorous independent longitudinal study of 20 rural communities in Amhara, Oromia, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples, and Tigray regions (see below), selected in 1994 by researchers from Addis Ababa and Oxford Universities, as exemplars of different types of rural communities in Ethiopia. They represent wide variations in a range of key parameters notably livelihoods (including surplus producing, drought prone, cash-crop and agro-pastoralist sites), remoteness or ease of access, cultural institutions, and religious and ethnic composition. The team has recently published a book entitled *Changing Rural Ethiopia: Community Transformations*, as well as a compilation of an earlier series of discussion briefs under the title: *Twenty Rural Communities in Ethiopia: Selected discussion briefs on change and transformation*. Further reports and data are available on the website www.ethiopiawide.net.

In the current Bridge Phase, 4 sites were selected one from each of the 4 regions for a fourth round of research. (In the map below the names of these sites are bolded and darker colours have been used for the boxes). Links have been established with 4 universities: Ambo University, Bahir Dar University, Hawassa University, and Mekele University. We anticipate that these institutions will take on an increasing role in continuing to track change in communities across the country.

Map of the 20 WIDE communities (with Bridge sites shaded)



¹ This discussion brief has been written by Sarah Vaughan. It draws on the work of the research officers in each of the four sites, and on analysis and interpretation of this data made by Catherine Dom, Agata Frankowska, Mulugeta Debalke, Shalom Ali, and Shiferew Neda. I am also grateful for inputs from other team members: Agazi Tiemelissan, Pip Bevan and Alula Pankhurst. I am particularly grateful to Alemu Asfaw of Bahr Dar University, and the Yetmen research officers Damtew Yirgu and Aster Shibeshi for their patience helping me understand complex land-related dynamics in East Gojjam. The paper has also benefited from feedback from Tom Lavers and Fana Gebresenbet, as well as comments from participants at a High Level Discussion Forum held in Addis Ababa in November 2018, notably including Asnake Kefale. None of these people is responsible for the conclusions I have reached and recommendations I have made.

² See the map at the end of this brief. Note that Ude in East Shoa zone of Oromia, close to Bishoftu in the development corridor south of Addis Ababa, is the most rapidly changing of the four sites in terms of land use planning (the municipality here is called Ude and there are also two less urbanised villages called Sirba and Kumbursa). Yetmen in East Gojjam, and close to the national urban corridor to Debre Markos, is also subject to pressure for rapid change, designated since 2016 as a “*ne’us mazegaja*” with an urban plan. Whilst Azo Debo in Kambata zone of SNNP is close to the zone capital at Durame, both it and the Tigray site in Atsbi Wemberta wereda of northeast Tigray remain *relatively* less affected by land use changes: essentially still rural kebeles, although in each case they have lost land to nearby encroachment. The changes discussed are taking place in or near all sites, but they are more immediate and more dramatic in the in East Shoa and Gojjam cases.

³ “The key thing that can help a young person to establish a livelihood in this community is to get land” (middle farmer, Harresaw) “There are two things [migrants] want to accumulate money for, before they come back; a) building a house and b) getting enough money to lease land so they could live from it.” (Harresaw migrant)

⁴ There is no LAC in Ude, the Oromia site close to Bishoftu, where land administration in the development corridor has been taken to a higher level of government, beyond the authority of Ada’a wereda.

⁵ Some interlocutors’ positive perceptions were overshadowed by anger towards a kebele administrator trying to move the kebele urban centre, and complaints about partiality and nepotism amongst kebele officers. Other interlocutors (including kebele officials) were highly critical of the LAC’s “many mistakes” and it is clear that the process of “correcting” land boundaries during recent second level certification was not straightforward.

⁶ it remains to be seen how they will have weathered the completion of processes of second level certification and distribution of new certificates ongoing during 2018 after fieldwork.

⁷ Although technically assigned only to work in rural areas, until the new land administration arrangements of formerly rural areas to be included in the urban plan for the new Yetmen municipality had been finalised, she continued to provide services to Yetmen’s farmers as best she could, over and above her responsibilities in Felege Selam kebele, from which Yetmen was now formally separated.

⁸ It could be argued that in these sites there is less distinction between customary and formal land rights than further south, and that land administration systems may be better established and better accepted as a result (cf. Mekonnen Firew Ayano 2018): the correlation is moot and the hypothesis goes beyond our findings.

⁹ The situation is different in urban areas where plans exist, whether or not they are implemented.

¹⁰ Land use plans for the four urban areas in Ada’a wereda were developed by the region – but reportedly also with the involvement of the rural land, agriculture and health sectors of the existing rural kebeles and wereda. There have been community level meetings about the masterplans in Ada’a wereda, but the farmers were unhappy as “they feel they can’t build any house for themselves or their children without permission” in the urban land administration context. In the two sites, Ude and Yetmen, farmers also assert that they were not at all involved in the land use planning processes which established the urban masterplans.

¹¹ We believe it has been conducted since March 2018.

¹² The term denotes the third smallest for four categories of formally designated urban centre.

¹³ Although the WIDE data do not go into similar detail, the account provided in Mekonnen Firew Ayano’s excellent recent account of a rural woman’s *de facto* inability to press informal land rights acquired through marriage in the formal arena as a result of wider social norms (2018) resonates closely with our findings.

¹⁴ Parents in Ude and Aze Debo seemed only to share land with their sons when they married.

¹⁵ In the Tigray site, even the presence of two women out of five on the LAC was dismissed by some interlocutors because they are “*not powerful*”; a number of young women complained of being “*outsmarted*” of their inheritance by the LAC, with problems reportedly faced by divorcees, widows and daughters, and there is high consciousness of women’s land rights in the community. The involvement of women in the LAC in the Gojjam site seems more tokenistic, with less community pressure for change.

¹⁶ A female divorcee was renting in one hectare for 12,000 birr *per annum* and (with the help of family members) producing 30 quintals of teff which she was able to sell for 60,000 birr. Others complained that it was hard to make a profit given high input costs.

¹⁷ This problem of disputes related to rental contracts contrasts with *sales* of land in Ude, discussed below, where disputes seemed not to have arisen, despite frequency and informality; one seller *was* reported to have demanded more money, but disputes seem to be constrained by the illegal character of the contracts.

¹⁸ Longer term flexible “rental” arrangements, and “to be returned” loans.

¹⁹ A rental rate of 12,000 birr for half a hectare, but for four years, is a typical example in Tigray.

²⁰ With elders as witnesses, rather than formally registered through the kebele or LAC.

- ²¹ For instance, land has also been used (extra-legally) as collateral against loans, for instance to finance migration: it is not without the risk which attaches to migration, with at least one case of a female migrant who had died without repaying a loan secured against land in the Tigray site.
- ²² Farmers with land to rent in Yetmen, for instance, suggest that they prefer to offer it for rental than sharecropping, as a means to limit their risk given increasingly variable climatic conditions, and greater fluctuation in the success of production.
- ²³ In Kembata the active 7-member LAC had intervened to demolish illegal constructions on grazing land and grazing land was extremely scarce. Some communal grazing areas had been lost to the expansion of Durame town. In the Tigray site some individuals felt that there was little grazing land left - and in two sub-kebeles it was in practice being treated as if privately held by individuals.
- ²⁴ Thus for instance in Yetmen, a large area (120 *gezm*) along the Muger river had been allocated to 200 young people – the only reallocation of grazing land which the community had (reluctantly) been willing to accept. Within the town, meanwhile, it was also grazing land which had been allocated for auction – with 10 plots sold and houses being constructed. This initiative had proved highly controversial, and the auction process is particularly remarkable given a history of violent opposition to the construction of a school on grazing land 9 years previously. Further auctions have not taken place however (see below).
- ²⁵ In Aze Debo none had been allocated, other than for a longer-established beekeeping group, and for mining.
- ²⁶ There is no YRF in Harresaw: the system operates in the wereda but is undersubscribed because young people have not managed to fulfil the criteria. In Harresaw five groups reportedly tried to access it but gave up.
- ²⁷ The hillside land for beekeeping is far from the coop members' residences in Kambata
- ²⁸ 1500 m² land was given to an animal fattening youth group and the building completed. 4 sheds were constructed and rented out to 24 unemployed people, who were involved in tailor, shoe, and clothes shops. Land was also allocated to a dairy youth cooperative and another youth group with a grocery business.
- ²⁹ Land for Farmer Training Centres (FTCs) is very limited in Ude kebele (only one hectare rather than three hectares). Two hectares had been taken in Tigray – with a tussle over the compensation – and land now rented out to rich farmers. In Aze Debo the FTC was able only to use land rented from the school
- ³⁰ The Ude school does have land, which it is able to rent out for a significant sum (40-60,000 birr *per annum* for 2 hectares) used to top up the school budget. The wereda had asked to take it over for allocation to teacher residences, but the School Director and PTA strongly resisted and the request had been dropped. In Aze Debo, young landless people felt “priced out” when wealthy investors sought to rent valuable school land.
- ³¹ The wereda allocated two hectares of kebele land in Aze Debo to demobilising military personnel in 2005EC.
- ³² An area of 15 hectares of community forest land in the mountainous part of Aze Debo kebele has been preserved since the Derg, although there is now pressure for its distribution
- ³³ Ude municipality initially couldn't get land for its own offices: the wereda intervened to provide 3,000 square metres of land confiscated from an investor who hadn't used it.
- ³⁴ “*The main problems in our kebele about land is about urban and rural land. Initially the kebele was divided into urban and rural administration. Now maxana (parasites) have finished all the lands within urban territory and the urban administration are willing to annex to the rural land. This a serious problem for our farmers*” (Ude resident). In both Yetmen and Sirba this is seen as “*the main problem*” affecting the communities.
- ³⁵ Bishoftu is taking 5 of 27 kebeles from Ada'a (Kajima, Kaliti, Quurqura, Garbicha, Ganda gorba); Bichena is taking half of the land of 4 kebeles from Enemay wereda in Gojjam; Durame is affecting 8 kebeles of the Kambata wereda (Aze Debo, Zato, Bezan Binara, Abonsa, Teza, Kerchicho, Dega Kedida, and Shershera).
- ³⁶ For example, in an apparently temporary measure, Bishoftu municipality is picking up cost of Ada'a salaries, as the rural wereda loses lucrative licence fees and tax revenues to the larger town when boundaries shift.
- ³⁷ Wereda sources suggest Bishoftu had incorporated Gomeju fuel station, earlier within Ude kebele, although this transfer seemed less clear on the ground. This problem is also an issue – albeit managed differently, where the wereda centre is smaller, and within the same wereda, e.g. at Atsbi and Haik Mes'hal in the Tigray case.
- ³⁸ Aze Debo was alive with rumours of imminent “*municipalisation*” – provoking uncertainty and anxiety, after the experience of 26 families incorporated into nearby Durame. The small town of Dera in Atsbi has also taken land from one got in Harresaw tabia – with a positive impact on the urban population but a negative impact on the rural population: 23 of them lost approximately 11 hectares of land (only demarcated as farmland in 2009EC) “*by directive*” to a new livestock market, which began immediately (before any compensation): several of those who had been landholders in the area were imprisoned during resulting conflict.
- ³⁹ The relatively recent establishment of a market centre seems to have encouraged development, and all areas within 200m of the main road are considered to be urban. Compared with Sirba and Kumbursa, Ude town reportedly has a more urban “*feel*” with more modern architecture.
- ⁴⁰ Yetmen has a history of the politicisation of land expropriation. First, the history of 1980s villagization provided a strong material incentive for resistance, in defence of valuable 1,000m² “*gwara ersha*” household plots (referred to locally as *arba be haya-amist*, 40x25m). Second, a controversial 1997GC land reform in parts of Amhara set a cap of 4 *gezm* on land holdings here. Thirdly, violent conflict over the allocation of land for a school in the last decade was also seen in party political terms. Finally, a strong community history of investment in Addis Ababa and elsewhere (rather than locally), combine with high teff prices to reinforce a determination to defend highly profitable farmland. Resentment and anxieties

have increased as farmers have lost access to valued rural services for land administration, veterinary and DA extension support, no longer automatically (or at all) available to an area formally classified as “urban”.

⁴¹ Data suggest that these houses were built in collaboration with the existing landholders to house their (adult, and otherwise landless) children.

⁴² This parallels the views of farmers in Ada’a wereda, who see tighter restrictions requiring permission for building in urban areas, compared with rural areas, where informal construction is seen as easier.

⁴³ Local government was able to allocate housing land to 320 young people (over half female) in 2005EC, with 50 now constructing: recently, it had been decided young people can get land only in their own sub-kebeles.

⁴⁴ In Dera town, close to the Tigray site, during 2010EC auctions, “the nominal/ minimum bidding price for mixed-use land was 195 birr per square meter and for business areas was 200 birr per square meter. However, the winners of the bid paid minimum 1,127 birr and maximum 2,361 birr per square meter.” In Yetmen the allocation of one area where 10 plots were sold at auction also attracted very high bids, in the same range.

⁴⁵ For instance, a woman in Ude described her husband receiving 140 square metres for a residential house in Dukem “as an encouragement for being a model farmer.”

⁴⁶ Plots of 200 square metres had previously been made available for civil servants with a payment of 25,000 birr, with teachers paying only 15,000 birr. These rates had inflated, and locals in Ude town were being asked to pay 50,000 birr for 160 square metre plots – which many felt was too expensive. As a result, most of the housing associations of local people had reportedly been dissolved.

⁴⁷ “I have 200 square metres of land in the urban area. I am using it for residence. I bought this land from the farmers about 13 years ago. Still I don’t have carta for it but [I am] on the way to receive carta. It is impossible to say I have full right to it unless I took carta for it. Recently the municipality is planning to give us carta, especially for those of us who bought the land many years ago” (Ude resident). “In the urban area I have this land which is more than 400 square metres. Currently urban land is very expensive and you cannot buy as you want [sic]” (Ude resident). “There is no way to access new land in Ude town unless you buy from the owners. If you buy from the owners/farmers it may take some steps to make it legalized” (Ude resident).

⁴⁸ Some of those now landless had received compensation as little as 61 birr per square metre in the past. In ongoing instances of negotiation about compensation in Ude, rumours of higher rates becoming available (300 birr) have blocked movement on land for urban leasing in Ude at current rates (150 birr).

⁴⁹ Oromia is still using the 1999 compensation proclamation providing 102 birr per annum per square metre, so urban expansion is mostly by informal sales at three times this price (i.e. private sales of 60,000 birr rather than the 24,000 birr offered by government for 200m2).

⁵⁰ Nearby Dukem town pays 168 birr per annum per square metre, more than 50% above Ude.

⁵¹ In Yetmen there was resentment of the fact that land compensation rates were different between federal and regional projects: those who had lost land to the construction of the main road were better off than those who had been offered (and often resisted) compensation for local development initiatives (notably the school construction). Higher federal rates of compensation for road construction were also paid in Ude and Aze Debo.

⁵² This was in the area from Arosa Hotel to Kumbursa town, apparently for residential construction. Private sales have increased ahead of this expected expropriation to take advantage of the price discrepancy.

⁵³ Removals had taken place only for an FTC, and the building of a dam. In all three of the other sites (Yetmen in Gojjam, Ude in East Shoa, and Aze Debo in Kambata) federal roads had been asphalted and widened.

⁵⁴ For instance in the case of an individual who lost land to the wereda for establishment of an FTC: reports that this land has been rented out to rich farmers since 2006EC seem likely to compound the problem, and the case was apparently not resolved.

⁵⁵ Notably the Addis - Adama highway, and school construction

⁵⁶ A number of farmers had lost land to the Chinese road construction camp, with whom they were now in dispute, as the land had not been returned on completion of the road.

⁵⁷ Investors are as follows:

Project	Land size	Year received	Years leased	Capital (birr)
Motel & recreation	8,000	2000	40	7,000,000
Printing factory	2,000	2000	40	2,075,000
Horticultural production	11,898	2000	30	8,000,000
Spice processing	3,000	2001	40	4,000,000
3* hotel	5,000	2001	40	1,000,000
Purification plant	5,000	2001	40	32,900,000
Horticultural production	39,918	2001	20	100,000
Motel & recreation	2,000	2002	40	369,930
Water bottling plant	9,685	2001	40	8,000,000
Textile factory	4,937	2001	40	34,320,000
Agriculture & furniture production	20,000	2002	40	3,360,000
Association of Oromo Culture	5,000	2001	40	3,000,000

Horticultural production	20,000	2001	40	250,000
Hotel	22,904	1999	135	20,000,000
Plastic packaging factory	10,000	2007	70	68,000,000
Motel	15,000	2004	45	51,329,000,000
Water bottling plant	2,500	2000	40	5,400,000

⁵⁸ Investment in the Gojjam site has been heavily constrained by lack of available land, and resistance to its reallocation. In Enemay *wereda*, outside the separate municipality of Bichena town, the only investment is in one gas station, at Mahabere Berhan kebele, on the road to Bichena. In Yetmen itself, urban residents wanting to invest were unable to do so other than on their own plots. Thus for instance, a several-story building to be rented to a bank was being constructed at the roadside. An additional proposal for a fuel station and associated facilities in Yetmen itself, submitted by an urban resident with diaspora family support, had been rejected for lack of available land, and strong farmer resistance to expropriation. Another initiative, to allocate school land for investors, had also been thrown out, with petitioners lobbying the regional government against a proposal they considered “illegal.” As a result, to the great frustration of the local authorities, the investment they wish to bring to the area has ceased and what they see as “developmental change” is paralysed.

⁵⁹ Coffee processing by an investor from Durame since 2002EC, and a new flour factory in the former; mineral water bottling plants, beehives, grinding mills and a significant number of hotels (53!) in Atsbi town in the latter, mostly established by individuals from within the *wereda*.

⁶⁰ A kindergarten run by a protestant church; a milk processing coop supported by an international NGO.

⁶¹ Ude lease rates paid are reportedly 189 birr per square metre *per annum*.

⁶² Land lease costs in Dera town seem to be remarkably high, with a plot of 200 square metres incurring a half a million birr lease payment, with 20% or 100,000 birr payable immediately, and 8,000 birr payable *per annum* thereafter. Ten plots for business and mixed use (business/residential) were auctioned in 2010 EC.

⁶³ For instance the Gomeju gas station.

⁶⁴ Interlocutors complain that the Industrial zone at Dukem took 200 hectares at only 18 birr per hectare, which – whatever the productive investment – is regarded locally as problematic.

⁶⁵ In fact according to the *wereda* 78.5 hectares of land was taken back from investors in Ada’a *wereda*, and most given to youth association. Farmers and traders seem to feel that this is only the tip of the iceberg.

⁶⁶ They refer to them as “*tirkim, gebeya yetefachew, mechi*” “flotsam, market crowds, late-comers.” A series of sales of 6x12m² plots distributed in 1982EC at the end of the Derg period set the precedent for farmers from neighbouring kebeles to establish themselves in what are now urban plots along the road: this is widely now seen amongst farmers in “rural Yetmen” as a situation that should not be allowed to be repeated.

⁶⁷ A woman in Harresaw who reporting having sold her land informally observed that her semi-formal witnesses to the deal would be important if a problem arose later; and that LAC members “*were not involved because it was illegal, but they knew what was going on.*”

⁶⁸ “*It is totally unfair. The municipality and kebele officials are doing what they want only then looking at peoples’ perceptions and willingness. They are officially asking you money to give a document for your own land. If you refuse you will be there in their office for years without any tangible result.*” (Ude, rich farmer)

⁶⁹ The good governance campaign of 2015-16 saw the dismissal, even charging and arrest, of significant numbers of land administration officers, and even a number of municipal mayors. Charges were dropped earlier this year, and those detained released.

⁷⁰ Although note the important caveats set out by Mekonnen (2018) regarding the impact on customary rights.

⁷¹ In Ude the data suggest that many residents have two ID cards, for rural and for urban areas, if and when they have land in more than one place. Several people also in the Tigray site have property in urban and rural areas, although in this case it also seems possible to pay land tax on urban housing without having an urban ID.

⁷² Especially in Yetmen, for instance, where the standard “*gwara ersha*” homestead plot following Derg-era resettlement is 1,000 square metres: the more than twice what farmers expect to be able to “keep” following urbanisation, if land is reallocated along urban regulations. Whilst this community is perhaps not representative of all areas, the model of Derg-era villagization will nevertheless be widely applicable.