

The need for collaborative planning to accommodate the influx of diversity into fast growing regional Towns of Ethiopia: The case of Arba Minch, Southern Ethiopia

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Abstract—Unlike many other towns of Ethiopia; Arba Minch was fortunate to have land use plans right from its establishment in the early 1960s. However, its implementation in accommodating land needs of the diverse groups was limited. This was due to the capacity constraints, vague institutional and legal frameworks, and top-down planning exercises with less regard for the wider community of the town. In effect, informal land transactions, expansion of squatters on topographically unsuitable parts of the town, illegal occupation of land, land speculation and land use conflicts appeared to have been the major problems of land management in the town. As Arba Minch has opportunities and challenges in the years to come, these all call the need for all inclusive, dialogic planning with critical but respectful exchange of ideas to produce ideally consensual outcomes.

Index Terms— Urban land, Diversity, Collaborative planning, regional towns, Arba Minch, Ethiopia

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

Urban land is the scarcest resource and the most contested space for there are competing and conflicting interests over it. It is mainly due to this reason that for healthy urban development land use planning is mandatory. However, planning just as a tool and a means to an end, seeks to influence the process of urban development for the common good (Mattingly, 1993). Since land use is the most susceptible to change, land use planning is the key issue of urban planning practices. Thus, land use plans are the most important tools of urban land management and administration (MWUD, 2006). If urban development efforts are without the guidance of urban land use plans, it will be difficult to bring and achieve the desired changes and developments in urban areas in different spheres such as social well-being, economic vitality and environmental integrity.

Even though the rate of urbanization is the highest for Ethiopia from African countries; yet, it is the least urbanized and at the same time its most urban centers are predominantly spontaneous, developed as outcomes of historical accident or incidence.

The predominance of spontaneous development in Ethiopia

has been posing a substantial need for plan-led development and management of all urban centers of Ethiopia. Though Ethiopia is one of the least urbanized countries in Africa; its rate of urbanization is quite dramatic. In Ethiopia, after the Federal Government has a vested interest in the issues of land, planning for urban centers is made by the National Urban Planning Institute (NUPI); but the urban centers in the country are supposed to be managed by their own town administrations and municipalities.

Arba Minch is a town in Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Regional State. It consists of the four administrative sub-cities namely *Secha*, *Sikella*, *Abaya* and *Nechsar* and these four sub-cities are divided into eleven *kebeles*. According to the Draft Census Report of CSA (2008), Arba Minch has a total population of 74,843, out of which 39,192 were males and 35,651 were females. Its annual average growth rate of population between the Second (1994) and Third (2007) Ethiopian censuses is 4.8 % per annum.

Consolidated research works in the area of land use planning and management are lacking in the town. Studies made by some researcher of urban management mainly focused on Res-

idential Land Management (Dimire, 2008) and Rental Housing Management (Atnafu, 2008). Against this backdrop, this study is aimed at dealing with land use planning and management practices & problems taking Arba Minch town as a multicultural and multiethnic town.

1.2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research were envisaged to assess the practices and problems of urban land use planning and urban land management, to identify the major challenges of (factors that affect land management) and opportunities and to forward the future planning approaches to be adopted in Arba Minch town for the inevitability of the influx of diverse groups from near and far owing to its strategic, economic, administrative functional importance.

2. DESCRIPTION OF ARBA MINCH TOWN

2.1. LOCATION

Arba Minch town is one of the rapidly growing towns of Ethiopia which is located in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples regional state of Ethiopia. The name Arba Minch was derived from the "forty springs" which means a collection of more than forty springs which are located in the Arba Minch natural forest. Astronomically Arba Minch is located at 6° 04' North Latitude and 36°40' East Longitude. It is found in Gamo Goffa zone and used as a zonal capital of the zonal administration in Southern Nation's Nationalities and Peoples Regional State of Ethiopia. It is located at about 505kms south of Addis Ababa and 275kms of Awassa, the regional capital (AMM, 2006).



Source :www.googlemaps.com

Location of Arba Minch

2.2. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF ARBA MINCH TOWN

The history of Arba Minch town can be traced back to 1960s with the establishment of a settlement less than 3,000 people as a town, "Garo"¹. It was later that the town named Arba Minch, which was derived from the "forty springs" located in the eastern boundary of the settlement. Previously the administrative capital of Gamo Goffa province was located at *Chencha*. Then, the capital was later moved from *Chencha* to Arba Minch in 1963. The reason for the selection of the location of the town and the establishment of the town by the founder *Dejazmach² Amiro Selasie³*, were the suitable and strategic location between the two lakes i.e. Abaya and Chamo, relatively flat (*Sikella* area) land suitable for buildings and for the airport, easy connection with Sidamo and Dilla to Addis Ababa and the existence of *Teff* plantation in the southern part of the Chamo lake (with easy transport by boat)(NUPI,1989)

The history of political administration of Arba Minch can be seen from the framework of the socio-political structure of the administration of the area. Thus, from 1975 to 1988 it was served as the administrative capital of former Gamo Goffa province. From 1989 to 2000, it was politico-administrative center of North Omo Zone. At present, Arba Minch is the capital and administrative center of Gamo Goffa zone (one of the

¹ *Garo* is the original ethno-linguistic name which stands for a town.

² Dejazmatch refers to the traditional military title of the administrator of the region at that time.

³ Amiro Sellasie was the founder (the mover of the administrative center from *Chencha* to Arba Minch) and the administrator of Gamo Goffa province at the time.

thirteen zones of the SNNPR) and administrative seat of Arba Minch *Zuria Woreda*. Administratively, it was divided into four sub-cities namely *Secha*, *Abaya*, *Sikella* and *Nechsar* and eleven *kebeles*.

2.3. DEMOGRAPHY

In 1967, the population size of Arba Minch town was estimated as 2,890 inhabitants. This figure is usually taken as a bench mark population size of Arba Minch town. After eight years, in 1975, the population of the town grew to 8,200 at the annual average growth rate of 12.99% per year. During the First National Census of Ethiopia (1984), it grew to 20,280 at the annual average growth rate of 10.03% per annum (CSO, 1984). The population size of the town became 40,020 in 1994(the Second National Census of Ethiopia) with the annual average growth rate of 6.78% (CSA, 1994). Between the Second and the Third National Censuses it grew at the rate of 4.80% per year. During the Third National Census, according the Draft Census Report of CSA (2008), the population of Arba Minch town amounted to be 74,843 from which 39,192 are males and 35,651 are females. Therefore, it is clear that the population of Arba Minch is growing at moderately faster rate even though it has shown decreasing trend from the establishment of the town till the Third National Census of 2007.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This research was based on both primary and secondary sources of data set. The primary data was collected from direct interviews; personal observation and response to questionnaire administered in a household survey for sample households selected using systematic sampling from the four sub-cities in Arba Minch town and interviews were made with individuals from institutions, departments and the municipality responsible for land use planning and management of the town. Secondary data was obtained from National Urban Planning Institute (NUPI), Central Statistical Agency (CSA), Regional Bureau of works and Urban Development, Arba Minch town Municipality (Land Administration and Supply Agency), Arba Minch Town First Instance Court, as well as from published and unpublished documents. Aerial photographs of the year 1975, the master plan of 1989 and the Satellite Imagery of the year 2008 were used as important data sources for the analysis of expansion of the town and changes over time since its establishment.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. PLANNING INSTITUTIONS & PLANNING APPROACHES

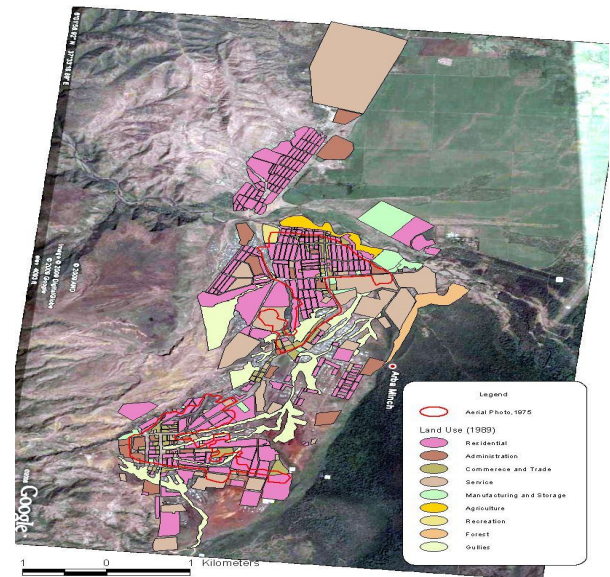
The planning approaches involved for the preparation of master plans for Arba Minch town was clearly and dominantly "top-down". For the preparation of five respective master plans of the town, the central government was responsible. The first master plan was prepared by a town planner from the Ministry of Interior. The second master plan (1967) was prepared by the Italian Town Planning Consultants under the supervision of the central government. The second master plan of the town was revised and modified by the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing (MUDH). The last two master plans (1989 and 1995) were prepared by the National Urban Planning Institute (NUPI). From these all planning experiences for the town, it is possible to conclude that the planning approach was typically "top-down", which mainly focused on Survey-Analysis-Plan-Implementation approach of master planning. This method did not give adequate room for community participation or consultation in the process of planning (either in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation). It was based on the belief that efficient land use planning is best undertaken by professional expertise within bureaucratic and technical mindset, however, it couldn't brought about the desired changes. The following table presents the summary of master planning for Arba Minch town. More specifically, it puts in the year of preparation, time frame, preparing institution and main focus of the plan.

Table 4.1: Summary of Master plans for Arba Minch

No	Master plan	Time Frame	Prepared/ revised by	Main Focus
1	The 1963 master plan	-	Mr. Powell	Joining <i>Secha</i> & <i>Sikella</i>
2	The 1967 master plan	20 years	CISU	Joining <i>Secha</i> & <i>Sikella</i>
3	The 1980 master plan	-	MUDH ⁴	Parcellation plan
4	The 1989 master plan	7-8 years	NUPI	Envisages the center of the town to be at its geographic center
5	The 1995 master plan	10 years	NUPI	Shifting the center to both banks of <i>Kulfo</i> river

Source: NUPI (1989, 1995)

As the preparation mandate of the master plans was dominated by the central government, the implementation, monitoring and evaluation mandate was at the same time controlled by the central government. The latter issue is less practical in reality even though the mandate was of the central government. Insignificant rooms were given to the local government (*Zonal*, *Woreda* administrations) and the municipality to deal with such matters. Figure 4.1 presents expansion and land use of the town compared at three different times (1975, 1989 and 2008) based on aerial photograph, master plan and satellite imagery.



Source: Based on EMA (1975), NUPI (1995)

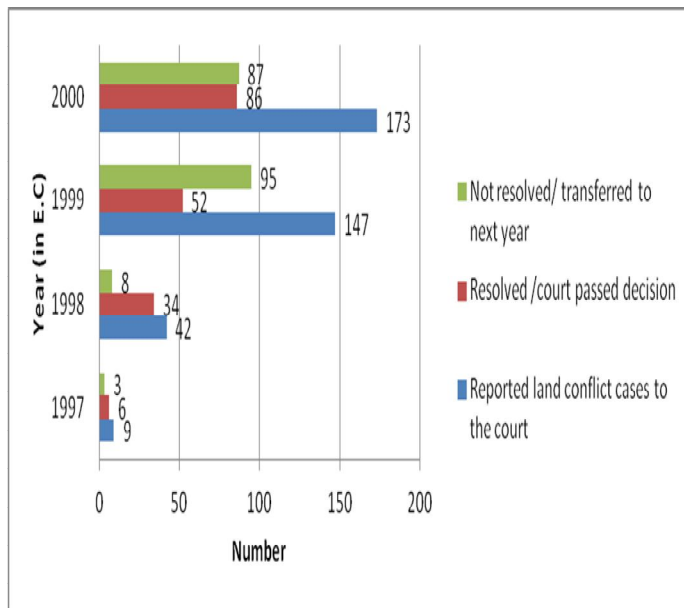
Figure 4.1. Expansion of the town (1975, 1989 and 2008)

4.2. CHALLENGES OF LAND MANAGEMENT IN ARBA MINCH

There are many challenges of land management in the town of Arba Minch. The prominent ones among these included the increase in land and land related conflicts owing to the poor land information system and management of the town, illegal and informal land acquisition, proliferation of illegal settlements, and rampant corrupt practices. The information on land use conflicts was obtained from the Arba Minch Town First Instance Court for four consecutive years (1997-2000 E.C). As it was observed, the number of reported cases of land use conflicts, in Arba Minch town, is increasing from time to time.

Thus, in the year 1997 E.C, when the court started its function, the number of reported cases of land use conflicts was only nine out of which six were resolved and the remaining three transferred to the next year. From the total cases reported, in the year 1998 E.C, about 81%, in 1999 E.C, only 35% and 2000 E.C, nearly 50% have been resolved and the remaining cases for respective cases have been transferred to the next year. This has been posing substantial challenges to court as land information system of the town was weak to timely resolve those conflicts.

⁴ Now the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing (MUDH) is restructured as Ministry of Works and Urban Development (MWUD).



Source: Computed from Arba Minch town First Instance Court (2008)
 Figure 4. 2: Reported, Resolved and Transferred cases of Land Use Conflicts in Arba Minch town for four years (1997-2000 E.C)

As a newly emerging and large-sized town in the SNNPR and Ethiopia in general Arba Minch exhibits various methods of land acquisition. Among which, informal land transaction is the major way of land acquisition next to getting from the municipal allocation through formal and legal ways. Along with this, informal (squatter) settlements and illegal occupation of land are becoming common phenomena in the town. The land information documentation system of the town is found to be very archaic which resulted in land conflicts and shortage of land for provision, corruption in land allocation, etc The prevalence of these problems in the town were attributed to lack of efficient service delivery, cumbersome procedures in land allocation and delivery, transparency & accountability. This in turn resulted in corrupt practices in land management and administration of the town. Even though the principles of good governance are in place in the town but have limited implementation on the ground.

The problems associated with poor land management include the prevalence of land conflicts, illegal settlements, informal land transactions and land speculation, illegal occupation of land and residential housing construction and corruption. The factors that exacerbate the poor land management in the town include the delay of the revision of the master plan, centra-

lized and a top-down planning exercise, limited implementation of the master plan mainly to residential land allocation, lack of institutional memory due to the frequent change of managers and experts of the municipality causing the problem of continuity of municipal activities in land management, inadequate mix of man power to manage the land resources properly and poor documentation and management of spatial and/or land information in the town.

5. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

The preparation of the master plans was centralized being a top-down, based on Survey-Analysis-Plan-Implementation process, professional exercise with giving little emphasis on the existing and evolving situations of the town, insignificant or very limited community participation or consultation. As the plan was implemented within the institutional frame works with the capacity constraints and vague responsibilities many land use challenges emerged such as informal land transactions, expansion of squatters on topographically unsuitable parts of the town, illegal occupation of land, land speculation and land use conflicts appeared to have been the major problems of land management in the town

Given the overriding challenges and promising opportunities ahead, the town of Arba Minch should be well prepared in such a way that it will be able to adequately address the inter-linked dimensions of physical, social, economic and environmental aspects of the town while respecting the local distinctiveness of the diverse groups. Thus, there is a pressing need for creating and maintaining sustainability of the town transcending the physical emphasis of land use and built up environment. Unlike the previous planning approaches; this, of course calls for a collaborative, an all inclusive, dialogic approaches to be applied in order to shape the urban space for the years to come. Hence, this kind of planning could be done based on consensual decisions with critical but respectful exchange of ideas among stakeholders as informed equals in a well facilitated forums that optimize trust and candour needed for exhaustive examination of competing and conflicting concerns and interests but ultimately make the town best place to live, work for various groups with their diverse backgrounds.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like extend sincere gratitude to Addis Ababa University School of Graduate Studies for funding this work and Dr. Yirgalem Mahiteme for critically reviewing the manuscript. I wish to thank Arba Minch University for sponsoring this papaper to be presented at the 1st National Symposium held from 14-16TH June, 2012 at Arba Minch University, Ethiopia, under the theme "Cultural Diversity and Heritage Management".

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