

CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF SQUATTER SETTLEMENT IN GONDAR TOWN IN THE CASE OF KEBELE 18

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The principal objective of the study is to assess the causes and consequences of squatter settlements in the light of unplanned expansion of the built-up area and policy responses to it.

Methods: In order to achieve the study objective, in-depth interview with 20 household heads and municipal administrators' documentary analysis and observational techniques were used.

Results: Major findings of the study indicate that emergence of squatter settlements in the study area is a recent phenomenon that has occurred since 2005. High building standards of the legal houses, delayed responses, and procedural problems of the legal land provision, and high housing rents in the city center were identified by respondents as the causes of squatting in the study area. In addition, less government control of open spaces, the limited capacity of the code enforcement service to control illegal house construction, lack of a comprehensive legal response towards the problem of squatting, and the practice of land sale by land speculators as a means of making profit are other factors that have contributed to the emergence and proliferation of squatter settlements. Compared to the plot sizes of the legal land provision, the plot sizes of the squatter settlements in the study area are large and there are undeveloped vacant fenced plots between squatter housing units. Thus, land in the area is inefficiently exploited and the situation has greatly contributed to the unplanned and rapid horizontal expansion of the built-up area of the town.

Conclusion: The prevalence of squatter settlement is the result of weak administrative responses and loose land management problems which in turn result in the expansion of illegal settlements.

Keywords: Squatter settlement, Policy implications, Illegal house.

INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is often associated with economies of agglomeration and cities are essential development. They are centers of production employment and innovation and in developing countries cities contribute significantly to economic growth. The economic importance of cities is rapidly increasing and the future economic growth will become dependent upon the ability of urban centers to perform crucial services and production functions [1].

Despite the economic benefits, the rapid rates of urbanization and unplanned expansion of cities have resulted in several negative consequences. Particularly in developing countries most cities in those countries are expanding and the population is moving to unplanned settlements on the peripheries at the expense of the agricultural lands and areas of natural beauty. Unplanned and uncontrolled expansion of cities built up areas usually lead to problem of soil erosion, segregation of low-income groups in ecologically sensitive areas, and increased costs in terms of infrastructure provision [2].

In most cities in developing countries the problems relating to rapid physical expansion are not due to land shortage but to lack of appropriate policies and strategies to guide new development, since overcrowding occurs in particular areas. At the same time large amounts of lands are left vacant or only partially developed in other areas [3].

In the developed countries of Europe and North America, urbanization has been a consequence of industrialization and has been associated with economic development. By contrast, in the developing countries of Latin America, Africa, and Asia urbanization has occurred as a result of high population increase and massive rural urban migration [4].

Specifically, Ethiopia is one of the least urbanized countries in the world and in African standard. Despite the low level of urbanization and the fact that the country is predominantly rural with high rate of urbanization, the urban population of Ethiopia is concentrated in few urban centers and the urban system of the country is dominated by Addis Ababa, which has status of being a primate city (ranking as the first urban center).

Gondar as one of the earliest city in the country experiences a lot of urban ecological and life experiences. The city was considered as a strategic and historical place in which different peoples became migrants from different places, especially from rural areas, which has experienced a rapid physical expansion, though this has not been properly controlled by appropriate planning interventions. Almost none of the plans prepared at different times by different planners have been effective nor have they been fully implemented. This unsuccessful planning history of the city is reflected in its development, which has largely been characterized by spontaneous growth.

As a result of rapid horizontal expansion and unplanned growth, Gondar is now confronted with different types of problems, one of which is the emergence and development of squatter settlement. In this study, "squatter settlement" refers to those residential housing units built on publicly owned land without the legal claims, authorization, or provision from the relevant authorities who are mainly characterized by their irregular shape and congested nature. As a result they have significantly contributed to the unplanned and rapid horizontal expansion of the built up area. Such expansion aggravated the development of informal settlements which are outside of legal rule and regulations. Even though the problem of squatter settlement is prevalent in the study area, there is a scarcity of updated and recent research works in and around the

area. Hence, this study was done to fill such gaps via addressing the following research question; what are the main cause, consequences and policy implication of squatter settlement in the area of Kebele 18?

METHODS

In Gondar, squatter settlements are mainly located in the peripheral areas in the South West and South East (Maraki) part of the city. These parts of the city were selected for this study because these areas are the major expansion areas of the city and where the problem of development of squatter settlements is more prevalent.

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, both primary and secondary data were collected and used. For secondary data, published and unpublished materials including books, journals, government report, and other documents were employed. In conducting primary information, the researchers triangulate qualitative methods (which encompassed, in-depth interview, personal observation and documentary analysis) in order to generate and enhance the reliability and validity of the data. Attempt was made to build up the trust of the community by explaining the academic purpose of the research. The research was conducted in Kebele 18, Gondar.

Personal observation

Personal observation was also carried before, during, and after the interview to investigate the lifestyles and social and physical environment of the squatters. It enables the researchers to examine the prevalence and patterns of squatter settlement in the studied area. With this method, the researchers understood the effects of squatter settlement in the overall infrastructural development and its possible consequence on the lives of the residence.

Unstructured interview

The researcher had employed unstructured interviews in grasping information on how and why squatter settlement is built. It enabled the researcher to reveal the difficulties in controlling and legalizing such development of houses. This technique also enabled to have information on the factors contributed to the development and possible consequences of squatter settlement.

It has been conducted, in grasping in-depth information from those individuals who are closely related with the issue. To have more valid and in-depth data, it was conducted through a more open and qualitative interview guideline. Purposeful sampling has been used in approaching well knowledgeable individuals to the research questions. The interview was conducted with residents, government officials and other concerned bodies. A one-to-one in-depth interview was carried with 15th local residents, three community leaders, and two higher government officials.

Documentary analysis

Both published and unpublished materials were used. These include books, articles, government policies, and reports and the researcher has used updated version of those documents.

After the collection of the necessary information, data processing was performed with thematic analysis.

RESULTS

Origin of the household heads

The 45% of the squatter household heads in the sample originated from Gondar, while those household heads who were migrants accounted for 55% (Table 1). Thus, it is evident that the squatter settlements in the study area are focal points for both the local residents and migrants with large size in proportion and the area looks like in the following Fig. 1.

Methods of land acquisition

The sites occupied by squatter settlements in the study area vary from deep river gorges reserved for vegetation on the city's master

plan to plane areas reserved for legal residential use. In these squatter settlements, the major ways by which squatters acquired land for housing included buying from neighboring peasants, buying from land speculators, acquiring land through relatives and illegal forceful settlement. Thus, illegal land purchase from the neighboring peasants has been the major way of acquiring land for housing.

Factors contributed to the emergence and expansion of squatter settlement

Major findings of the study indicate that high building standards of the legal houses, delayed responses, and procedural problems of the legal land provision, and high housing rents in the city center were identified by interviewees as the causes of squatting in the study area. In addition, less government control of open spaces, the limited capacity of the code enforcement service to control illegal house construction, lack of a comprehensive legal response towards the problem of squatting, and the practice of land sale by land speculators as a means of making profit are other factors mentioned by those governmental official that have contributed to the emergence and proliferation of squatter settlements. Compared to the plot sizes of the legal land provision, the plot sizes of the squatter settlements in the study area are large and there are undeveloped vacant fenced plots between squatter housing units. Thus, land in the area is inefficiently exploited and the situation has greatly contributed to the unplanned and rapid horizontal expansion of the built-up area of the city.

Rapid urbanization, poverty and lack of access to land and ownership, in addition to limited or no social housing, have led citizens to build their homes illegally under very poor environmental and social conditions. Insufficient financial and human resources, burdensome regulatory rules, unclear administrative procedures and unrealistic standards have all been raised as major barriers lead people to search squatting as an alternative means.

Consequences of squatter settlements in the study area

As per the real situation prevalent in the study area, the expansion of squatter settlement resulted in systemic problems which are related to lack of access to affordable housing, inappropriate spatial planning policies and an incomplete system of land management as

Table 1: Distribution of household heads by place of birth (%)

Place of birth	Number (%)
Gondar	9 (45)
Outside Gondar	11 (55)
Total	20 (100)

Source: Field survey, 2012



Fig. 1: Sample photo taken from the area
Source: Personal observation of the area

well as growing urban poverty, the problem creates several associated problems for different parties.

Economic challenges

Notwithstanding the economic challenges for the individual residents, squatter settlements pose a high political and economic cost for government, especially in cases of evictions, legalization, and resettlement. Efforts to document the extent of informal development as well as to allocate the extra institutional capacity to integrate the settlements into the planned area of the city are extremely costly. The infrastructural development in squatter settlement is also difficult and needs huge resources [5].

The social challenges

The variety of spatial manifestations of informal settlements across the area is associated with the many different social dimensions to the problem. Notwithstanding these differences, several issues are important: Notably, residents of informal settlements are often poor and disadvantaged, facing higher unemployment, social hardships and tenure insecurity [6].

As per the information collected from the area, in addition to the lack of access to schools and social services, squatters generally do not hold secure land or housing tenure and face the potential threat of eviction. One of the worst consequences of living in a squatter settlement is not the lack of title to the land or formal registration, but the fact that households are not eligible for different social services.

The environmental challenges

The environmental challenges in squatter settlements are associated with an unplanned use of land, which contributes for the deficient of the infrastructure and affects the beauty of the residential area [7].

As clearly observed in the area, the infrastructure deficit is significant. Since most residents in squatter settlements do not pay the full price for infrastructure usage, the revenue is unable to support the growing demand for infrastructure improvement and extension. Correspondingly, the municipality is unable to provide services with serious economic problems.

Policy implications

Legal response of the municipality towards the problem

According to the municipality administration officer, the municipality organized a technical committee with seven members who are responsible for the legal process which is now on the way to take a legal measure regarding squatter settlement in the studied area (Kebele 18) tries to identify squatter settlers and all agents that took part in that illegal activity. The committee has collected relevant data for two times starting 2010.

According to the municipal administration officer, there is no doubt that the squatter settlement may hold back the fair and planned development of the town. Because of its complexity to make decisions either to give legal recognition for the squatter or demolish it for the sake of developing the area within the frame of master plan. The decision making in such cases is made with a technical committee of seven members from different sectors: From the municipal, Kebele administration, the nearby police office, office of justice, Woreda administration office, land administration, and environmental protection office.

The task of this technical committee restricted only to identify the legal land holdings and buildings in the identified areas and provide the document to the city administration office with subjected recommendation. The city administration on the other hand is expected to take decisions based on the provided evidences. The mandate of implementing the final decision is given to the municipal. Finally, anybody who is not satisfied with the decision passed by the city administration has a right to appeal to the office of urban affairs

within 30 days after the decision is made. This procedural activity will take long period of time and there by become a bottle neck obstacle to make an on time decisions to develop the area. Any infrastructural construction in such areas is considered as wastage of resources and may bring legal accountabilities.

The legal responses of the city government towards the problems of squatter settlements in Gondar may be either of the two standpoints:

Demolishing approach

The municipality has responded to the problem of emergence and development of squatter settlements by demolition. Information obtained from the municipality indicates that about 60 squatter settlements in the two selected areas in Kebele 18 were demolished by the order of the municipality.

As the officials stated despite all previous and recent demolition of squatter settlements carried out by the city government, the number of squatter settlements in Gondar still increasing and hence demolition as a means of curtailing squatter settlements has not been effective.

Legalization of the informal squatter settlement

The other response of the city government to solve the problem of the development of squatter settlements in Gondar was legalization of the illegal squatter settlement. Housing plot that has been illegally occupied before the issuance of the proclamation in 2008 will obtain legal status if it is within the master plan and not exceeding the specified area square meters. According to the regulation, housing unit constructions that have not complied with the master plan and those constructed after issuance of the proclamation protocol No. 37/2008 will not be granted legal status and subjected to demolishing.

As mentioned by government officials, lack of awareness and misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the housing policy in the legalization of the informal settlement by the public has contributed to the emergence of new squatter housing units and proliferation of squatter settlements.

Thus, in addition to demand pressure and supply constraints, lack of comprehensive and clearly defined legal response and action plan towards the problem of squatting has also contributed to the emergence and further development of squatter settlements in the study area.

DISCUSSIONS

The study revealed that squatter settlement in Gondar town is expanding and similarly the report of United Nation [2] explained Informal settlements have always been a persistent feature of urbanization and mostly squatter settlements accommodate mainly the needs of the urban poor or low-income and other disadvantaged groups, and exacerbate their poverty.

As mentioned in the result section, the expansion of squatter settlement in the study area is the result of various social, economic and political administrative problems. In line with this a working paper by Minwuyet [4] argued similarly as the main reason for the expansion of squatter settlements on these fragile slopes and hazardous areas is the result of land cheapness or can be occupied without payment, and also there is less possibility of eviction from such sites. Similarly, a research done by Asmamaw [5] revealed that the shortage of housing, inefficiency of formal land provision, reservation of open land without proper monitoring, absence of clear urban-rural boundary, inability of controlling illegal house construction, and 'un affordability' of standardized houses construction by the urban poor are the major factors contributing in the establishment and expansion of squatter settlements in the country. Moreover, the report of United Nation [2] explained that frequent changes in normative and legal bases, the lack of normative standards for enforcement and new construction laws, standards and norms are much more significant constraints for the

small and often underfunded departments that deal with building and occupancy permits, complex and less transparent system for obtaining permits and licenses for construction are contributing factors for the expansion of informal squatter settlement in developing countries.

The study also reported that the expansion of squatter settlement in the study area created social, economic, and environmental and policy related challenges and problems. Similarly, Alpha University College [1] argued that informal squatting resulted in the creation of the poor nature of the residence, services and infrastructures in squatter settlement are below the adequate or minimum levels and basic social services of water supply, sanitation, electricity, roads and drainage, schools, health centers, market places may be absent with little dependence on public authorities or formal channels. In response to this, governments at different contexts are developing various demolishing, upgrading and legalization policies [1]. In addition, the report of United Nation [2] explained that formalization of informal settlements has been implemented widely in all countries across the region or is in the process of being so and it emphasizes on the integration of informal land and housing markets within the sphere of the formal economy.

CONCLUSIONS

In Gondar the degree of physical expansion of the built-up area of the town has outpaced the infrastructure and basic urban services provision capacity of the city government, which as a result, are inadequately provided. Legal landowners, land developers, and squatter settlements have been jointly responsible for this rapid expansion. Squatter settlements in the area are characterized with poor infrastructure and reside with mostly by those poor parts of the society. Squatters in the study area are often residing in the periphery of the center of the city.

The high building standards of the legal houses, delayed response and procedural problems of the legal land provision system, and high housing rents in the city centre are the major factors identified by interviewees as reasons given for squatting. In addition, less government control over open spaces, limited capacity of the code enforcement service to control illegal house construction, lack of comprehensive and consistent legal response towards the problem of squatting, and land speculators' practice of selling land for profit are other factors that have contributed to the emergence and proliferation of squatter settlements.

The city government has responded to the emergence and development of squatter settlements mainly through periodic demolition and partial regulation. Thus, in addition to the demand pressure and supply constraints, lack of comprehensive legal response towards the problem of squatting has also contributed to the emergence and development of squatter settlements in the city in general and in the study area in particular.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the negative consequences of squatter settlements, the following recommendations are made:

- The municipality should formulate a comprehensive and consistent legal basis to prevent the emergence of new squatter settlements. The government should take preventive measures rather than demolishing the structures or regulating of squatter housing units.
- Squatter settlements are the foci of migrants. Thus, in order to minimize city ward migration and pressure on the main city, strengthening of the surrounding small urban center should be enhanced.
- The majority of the household heads in the study area are in low-income groups and they have been forced to squat mainly due to the high building standards of the legal houses and high rent of house, i.e., which makes them unaffordable. The preconditions for legal house building, such as depositing part of the construction costs in closed accounts and building a block-walled house, are beyond the reaches of the urban poor. Hence, policies that encourage low-cost housing should be in place.
- The municipality should strengthen the ability of the Kebele administrative leaders and the community to control the emergence of new squatter settlements.
- The ongoing social housing construction should be strengthening. Quality must have great attention in those the so called Condominium house.
- Generally, detailed studies concerning the root causes of squatting, the extent of the problem of squatting, and the possible solutions should be provided by the concerned bodies.

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