



LAND USE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

DR. GEBEYEHU BELAY, AUGUST 2024

KEY MESSAGES

Land is the most scarce and valuable resource in Ethiopia. The importance of land in Ethiopia is not associated to economic value per se. The social, environmental and political contributions are very significant too. Due to this reason, land use policy and policy guided land use plans and/or spatial plans are imperative. Development control cannot be effective without land use/spatial plans and its effective implementation.

The Ethiopia's land use planning/ spatial planning and development control systems are fragmented and often ineffective, leading to uncoordinated and unsustainable urban and rural development. Outdated and inconsistent land use plans, coupled with weak enforcement, have resulted in the proliferation of informal settlements, encroachment on environmentally sensitive areas, and haphazard infrastructure development.

Land use plans/spatial plans as a result of their very nature need to be multispectral and integration is a must for its implementation. Technical, social, economic and environmental requirements and cultural significance have to be considered to develop a land use plan/spatial plan for sustainable development.


Land rights and associated benefits are the foundations of land use planning and implementation. Plan enforcement is equally important to efficient planning. Development control is a tool for effective implementation and plan enforcement.



Dr. Gebeyehu Belay is currently a freelance consultant. He was an associate Professor of cadastre at Bahir Dar University, Institute of Land Administration Ethiopia. He specialized in cadastre and registration systems. Dr. Gebeyehu served in different capacities in the regional bureau of rural land administration and use of Amhara region Ethiopia and at the capacity of vice dean of ILA for more than 35 years in total.




The key challenges observed in Ethiopian land use planning and development control are:

-  Sever conflict between land uses and land users that result in over exploitation of land resources.

-  Capacity limitation for effective planning, implementation and development control.

-  Weak institutional arrangement for plan enforcement, implementation and development control.

-  Lack of effective sectorial integration both at planning and implementation levels (vertical and horizontal) and meaningful citizen participation.

Regardless of its significance there is no specific policy addressing land use/spatial planning and development control challenges in Ethiopia.

However, there are supporting legal documents such as rural land administration and use proclamations both at federal and regional levels similar legal documents are also available for urban land though some of them are still at the draft level.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The constitution is the supreme law in Ethiopia. The most important land related issues are enshrined in the constitution. According to the constitution land is not subject to sell or any other means of exchange. Land must be used according to approved land use plan. However, this provision was not applied or enforced except in some urban land uses. The policy on spatial planning, land use planning and development control is needed to effectively and efficiently use the scarce and the

most valuable land resource in the country. Studies on Land use land cover change (LULC) in different localities showed that there are severe land use and users conflicts.

The conflicts are in most cases the result of competition that can be avoided by careful planning. There was a long standing attempt to develop land use plans and integrated watershed development plans in rural areas and master plans, and recently structural plans and detail plans in urban areas. The plans usually were targeting on natural resource development and conservation in rural areas and built in area development in urban areas. The initiatives used to overlook the need for increased efficiency, effectiveness and addressing the pressing needs of the local communities in both rural and urban areas. As a result of this the plan qualities and implementation rates found to be very low. The studies identified the following challenges:

-  Limited planning capability and limited implementation rate.

-  Lack of Integration and Sever land use and users conflicts.

-  Lack of public participation and transparency in land use planning and development control processes undermines community ownership and accountability.

-  Scarcity of land and natural resources.

-  Limited coordination and information management and sharing among land administration, urban planning, and environmental agencies hinders integrated and evidence-based decision-making.



Methodology

Literature review was the main method of this study. The review was made systematically. The key words that can represent the study subject were identified. The databases that are globally recognized were searched.

All studies made on Ethiopian land administration were downloaded and summary tables for all relevant study reports were organized. The assessment report developed based on systematic review. The assessment report was the base of recommendation for policy brief topics.

The draft policy briefs then were prepared and the drafts were presented for stakeholders and comments from the client and stakeholders were used to upgrade the draft policy briefs.

Findings

The policy objectives alone cannot produce sustainable development. The capacity to develop implementable land use plans need to be created and these initiatives have to be supported by policy provisions too.

The policy also has to consider hot spot area protection. The land devoted for special purpose such as environmental protection, heritage sites, tourist attractions needs to be carefully identified and provided with special protection. Based on the findings of this study a very aggravated land use and users conflict was observed. Land use land cover change studies conducted in different localities proved that there is increasing dominance of land use types associated with settlement, food, and fodder and fuel production.

The expansion of agricultural land and, homestead resulted the decrease in grass land and, the forest land and bushland is a common finding. The land use conflict is usually related to increased population. The population increase forced people to use the land for more immediate needs such as food and fodder.

The scarcity of land in general resulted in land use and users conflicts. Increased efficiency and effectiveness without compromising Sustainability is recommended. The recommendation can only be effective if it is enforced with proper land use and development control policy.

Recommendations

The land use plans in Ethiopia must target sustainable, efficient and effective utilization of the scarce land resource. Land must be used to its best potential the best alternative use for a given land in a given time period must be selected. The selection should not target increase production and productivity at the expense of the environment. Sustainability principles must be adhered to in all land use planning/spatial planning decisions.

The selection process of the best alternative should not be dominated by agricultural production alone. Consideration of all development alternatives by integrated land use/ spatial planning have to be the main objective. Land can be better productive for different industries.

Suitability is not only attached to agricultural production. Integration and holistic approach is recommended while trying to select the best option for a given land in a given time period. Time is very important dimension in land use planning. To synchronize the need of a society and correct timing land use plans have to be iterative. The best selection process should not overlook special requirements of hotspot areas. A good plan is as good as the result it produces for a society. The quality of the paper work is of no value if it cannot be implemented. The policy objectives must consider land use plan implementation and enforcement challenges. The capability of producing implementable plans in general is identified to be low in Ethiopia. The focus of planning methodologies was on technical qualities and most of the plans were biased to natural resource conservation and development.



Integrated development plans targeting on sustainable development need of a society should be the policy objectives.

Vertical and horizontal integrations is required during Plan preparation and its implementation. The vertical integration must address the national objectives and budgetary requirements of plan implementations.

Horizontal integration is between sectors at same level. The sectors have to share responsibility and perform according to the agreed plan. The lead agency is responsible for coordination.

Direct and representative participation is required to better reflect societal needs. The policy objectives have to consider local needs and the goals have to be stratified on each administrative level. As we go down to the administrative ladder the objectives have to be more detailed and approval of the land use plans by the local communities is very important. At national and regional levels the objectives have to target strategic needs.

The enforcement and implementation of land use/spatial plans is so important. Plans have to be prepared following administrative boundaries for better clarity in obligations and responsibilities. The leadership at all levels has to approve the land use plans as a development plan of a given administrative unit. The need for human power and other resources needed for plan implementation have to be clearly quantified and possible sources identified.

Recommendations

- Develop a comprehensive national land use planning and development control policy to provide clear guidelines and coordination mechanisms.
- Cascaded roles and responsibilities have to be assigned to different administrative level and each objective must feed to the objective of the preceding level.
- Establish a centralized land use information system to facilitate data management, data-sharing and evidence-based decision-making.
- Prepare and regularly update comprehensive, multi-sectoral land use plans at the national, regional, and local levels.
- Ensure land use/spatial plans are aligned with broader development strategies, environmental protection goals, and infrastructure investment plans.
- Incorporate climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction measures into land use planning.
- Streamline and digitize development permit and approval processes to improve transparency and efficiency.
- Strengthen the capacity of local authorities to monitor, inspect, and enforce development regulations.



- Introduce deterrent measures, such as fines and demolition orders, to address unauthorized and non-compliant development.
- Engage with diverse stakeholders, including community representatives, civil society organizations, and the private sector, in land use planning and development control processes.
- Conduct awareness campaigns for citizens to gain knowledge about land use regulations and their rights and responsibilities.
- Establish grievance redress mechanisms to address community concerns and disputes related to land use planning and implementation.

Action Plan

Effective land use planning and development control policy implementation requires the existence of strong institution. The first action therefore will be resolving the institutional challenges. Land is the input for all development initiatives. Land use planning therefore requires the involvement

of all development actors. The institution that is responsible for land use planning and development control need to have the authority to plan, implement and control the land devoted for all kinds of development initiatives.

The next key function will be policy formulation. The policy formulation has to involve all stakeholders. The needs of all development actors have to be properly addressed in the policy provisions. Legal framework and enacting or modification of laws is the next important task. The legal status for the responsible institution and the plans approved by the institution is very important for development control and law enforcement.

Clear strategy and action plan development is the next step. The policy and legal system need to be strengthened by regulations, directives, manuals and standards. After the preparation and approval of the legal system capacity building is imperative. Planners and implementers at all levels need to be capacitated. Among others the importance of short and long term need based and tailored training programs can never be overlooked.

CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

The way forward is largely indicated in the action plan section. Land as one of the scarcest and valuable resource has to be utilized in effective, efficient and sustainable manner. The efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability can only be realized by the implementation of carefully crafted land use/spatial plans. The plans have to be implemented

and stringent development control is required to manage user and land use conflicts. The land must be allocated to the most effective, efficient and sustainable use to realize sustainable development. The policy objectives, implementation strategy, and supportive legal provisions must be in place to realize the envisaged sustainable development.