Land Conflicts and Urban Transformation: The Factors that Influence Land Conflict in Hargiesa Capital of Somaliland

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Abstract

Land conflict is a significant challenge in Hargeisa, Somaliland, manifesting as social discord and violence. This study examines the factors driving these conflicts, including expropriation, inheritance, commercialization, and urbanization. As Hargeisa expands, land symbolizes power and wealth, intensifying disputes that can lead to violence, including homicides. Expropriation often favors those with political or economic influence, marginalizing less-resourced individuals. Rising land values exacerbate inheritance conflicts, turning customary practices into contentious legal battles. Additionally, the commercialization and urbanization of land disrupt traditional social orders, causing displacement and fostering resentment. Qualitative data from individuals involved in land disputes underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions. Solutions must tackle the root causes through legal reforms, equitable land distribution, and community engagement. The stability of Hargeisa and Somaliland hinges on effective and inclusive land management strategies. Key findings reveal that 75% of respondents believe land expropriation benefits public figures rather than the community, highlighting the need for stronger legal frameworks. Rising land values drive inheritance conflicts, necessitating legal reforms and cultural shifts. Commercialization has escalated disputes, calling for zoning laws and inclusive economic policies. Finally, urban expansion strains land resources, particularly affecting residents in peripheral areas. In summary, addressing these land conflicts is crucial for social justice and communal harmony in Hargeisa.

Keywords: Hargeisa, Somaliland, Land Conflict, Expropriation, Inheritance, Commercialization, Urbanization, Social Justice, Land Management

Introduction

In the developing world, land rent accumulation is a major factor influencing how rural and peri-urban landscapes change [1]. Africa is rife with land conflicts because land is generally viewed as a "prize," giving those who own it—typically the ruling class—more possibilities to a mass riches and exercise military or political power [2]. Rapid urbanization and booms in real estate development are occurring in several African locations where most of the population is rural [3]. Land speculative activity and commercialization increased, and land ownership concerns became increasingly prominent. When property rights are not sufficiently upheld, as is the situation with Indigenous people whose ancestral lands are encroached upon in the name of urbanization, these difficulties are made much worse [4]. Land conflicts are the main cause of homicides in the City of Hargeisa as vacant land is contested by extended families of people who fled the city, newcomers to the city, and opportunists [5].

Examining how the parties involved use and value their property is necessary to comprehend land conflicts. To understand and prioritize these variables based on their influence, this paper highlights some reasons for land disputes in Hargeisa, Somaliland. Land disputes are recognized to be caused by some factors, including expropriation, land inheritance, commercialization, and urbanization; however, it is unclear how much of each element is responsible. By shedding light on the essentials that most and least contribute to land conflicts, our research seeks to close that gap. The research aims to help government land management organizations address the root reasons more successfully by illuminating these factors.

This paper's main goal is to investigate the elements that lead to land conflicts in Hargeisa. The research uses questionnaire data from people to create a detailed knowledge of property conflicts in the region. Respondents provided significant ideas, particularly those with direct land issues experience. The respondents were mostly men, indicating that land disputes may disproportionately include or harm men, reflecting gendered roles in land ownership or conflict resolution. The bulk of respondents were young people, most likely at a point in life when land acquisition and inheritance become crucial, implying that this age group is more involved in or affected by land conflicts. In terms of Somaliland and Hargeisa, rising land prices, expropriation, land inheritance disputes, and poor land management practices are typically the root causes of such conflicts. Educational attainment was notably high among respondents, with many holding undergraduate or master's degrees. This suggests that land conflicts are not limited to the less educated but also involve well-educated individuals, potentially due to the complex legal and bureaucratic systems governing land ownership.

Literature Review

In accordance the urbanization which is a transformative process that disrupts traditional system of land access lead to tensions between commercialization of land and traditional practices [6].

Although the challenges of land conflict in Somaliland is not new, there is Somali saying in Somali, "Ku qabso ku qaadi maaysid" which means, "If you claim it, you will not go without" [7]. Various scholars have explored the concepts and definitions of land disputes, offering different perspectives in recent publications. Marxist-based social theory argues that individuals and social classes in society possess unequal amounts of material and non-material resources like wealth and power [8]. This study primarily draws on Karl Marx's social conflict theory, providing a theoretical framework for analyzing the dynamics of land conflicts in Hargeisa, Somaliland. In the context of Hargeisa, land conflicts often arise from issues such as urbanization, commercialization, inheritance disputes, and appropriation. Marx's social conflict theory emphasizes the power struggles between different social classes, which can be applied to understanding how competing interests over land access and ownership exacerbate tensions in Hargeisa.

The rapid urban expansion and commercial pressures in the city, alongside historical legacies of land expropriation, have created a landscape where disputes are shaped by both economic and social inequalities. Thus, Marx's framework helped to analyze how these conflicts reflect broader struggles over resources and power within society. According to this theory, more powerful groups often use their resources to exploit those with less power, perpetuating inequality and conflict [9]. In the context of land disputes in Hargeisa, this theory is particularly relevant, as conflicts often arise when those in positions of power (e.g. political elites, business owners) assert control over land at the expense of less powerful individuals or communities. The struggle for land in Hargeisa thus mirrors Marx's view of social conflict, where the claims to land are typically won by those with greater influence, while those with less power are left vulnerable and marginalized [10]. This theoretical lens helps explain the ongoing disputes in Hargeisa, revealing how power imbalances drive conflict and shape outcomes in land ownership and usage.

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Economic inequality heightens the stakes of land ownership, with wealthier individuals often monopolizing land. Clan-based identity plays a significant role in land disputes, as land is frequently tied to historical and social fabric. The impacts of land conflict include violence, homicides, displacement, resentment, and the breakdown of traditional social orders. Proposed solutions include legal reforms, equitable land distribution, Sustainable Urban Planning, and community engagement. By aligning land conflict resolutions with SGDs, Hargiesa can work towards sustainable urban development, reduced inequality, and enhanced social cohesion.

See Table 1 for the Conceptual Framework of this paper.

Concepts of Land Disputes

Conflict has been an inherent part of human history and remains inevitable Land, as a vital resource for shelter, livelihood, and wealth, is a fundamental right that every individual seeks within their country of residence [11]. Mahajan emphasizes that land ownership constitutes one of the primary forms of wealth, noting that "the primary subject matter of ownership consists of material objects like land… the wealth of man may also consist of other things such as interests in land" [12].

The root of land disputes lies in the complexities of land ownership, where conflicting parties have competing interests in acquiring or controlling a parcel of land. These disputes can take various forms, involving different parties such as families, public institutions, businesses, or individuals. For instance, conflicts may arise between families over inheritance rights, businesses vying for valuable commercial land, or private individuals and public institutions over land use or ownership.

These dynamics reflect how land becomes the focal point of contention as a finite and valuable resource. Whether driven by economic ambitions, social status, or the need for shelter, land disputes are shaped by the varying interests of stakeholders, leading to tensions that can escalate into larger conflicts.

Causes of Land Conflicts

The management and operation of land records play a significant role in triggering conflicts over land. Inefficiencies in updating land records by relevant institutions often lead to disputes regarding land ownership. According to Hoque, approximately 80% of civil and criminal cases are rooted in land disputes [13]. The causes of land conflicts are diverse and can stem from various factors, including but not limited to:

• Urbanization and Rising Land Prices: Rapid urban growth often drives up the value of land, making it a lucrative asset and leading to competition and disputes among individuals, businesses, and communities.

• Limited Access to Land Rights: The absence or restriction of rights to access land can result in conflicts, especially in cases where communities or individuals feel excluded from land ownership opportunities.

• Inadequate Compensation for Land Expropriation: When land is expropriated for public use or development projects, inadequate compensation or unfair practices can lead to disputes, particularly among those who feel they have been unfairly treated.

- Mismanagement of Land Inheritance: Disputes frequently arise within families over inherited land, especially when there is unclear documentation, favouritism, or miscommunication among heirs.

These causes highlight the complex nature of land disputes, which are influenced by economic, social, and legal factors. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive land management strategies, transparent record-keeping, and equitable policies that consider the needs of all stakeholders involved.

Empirical Literature

Marx's social conflict theory emphasizes power struggles between different social classes. This theory can be applied to understand how competing interests over land access and ownership exacerbate tensions in neighboring countries Ethiopia and Kenya. Land disputes are prevalent in both rural and urban settings across these countries, with Ethiopia and Kenya providing illustrative examples of such conflicts.

In Ethiopia, land conflicts have particularly impacted communities reliant on pastoral livelihoods. In the Shineli Woreda, disputes among the pastoral community have periodically erupted. However, local interventions led by community elders have successfully mitigated the potential damage by leveraging indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms. These traditional methods have proven effective in resolving land disputes and restoring harmony within the community. According to the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, indigenous conflict resolution offers several advantages, including active participation by conflicting parties, raising public interest and awareness, creating long-term solutions, and employing a non-discriminatory approach [14]. This approach has led to significant improvements in land ownership conflicts within the Shineli community.

In Kenya, land management is closely intertwined with politics, making the issue complex and difficult to navigate. Mung'ale highlights how land has historically been used as a political tool to gain support and maintain power, rather than establishing effective institutions to manage land fairly and equitably [15]. Land conflicts have particularly affected residents in regions like West Pokot County, and unresolved land issues have often taken on political and ethnic dimensions, as seen in areas such as Rift Valley, Nyanza, Western, and Coastal provinces [16,17].

Despite these challenges, Kenya has developed a decentralized system of governance in land management, aimed at reducing land disputes. This devolved system introduced a structure where land management institutions work collaboratively to address land issues more effectively. As noted by Ouma and Bosire, the devolved system of governance was designed to overcome the weaknesses of the centralized system, promote economic development, and manage internal conflicts more efficiently [18,19]. This system has shown promise in minimizing land disputes by promoting better coordination and inclusivity in land governance.

Methodology

Study Population

The study focused exclusively on Hargeisa, the capital city of Somaliland and the findings are specific to the Hargeisa district. They should not be generalized to reflect land disputes across all of Somaliland. The study is based on Hargeisa Capital only (see Figure 1 for a map of Hargeisa [20]. The target population for this study included disputants officially registered with Hargeisa Municipality and the Hargeisa Land Tribunal Office. Out of a total population of 202 registered residents, a sample of 116 respondents was selected, and data was gathered as detailed in the Descriptive Analysis Statistics (DAS) provided in the supplementary files. The primary objective of the study was to examine the factors contributing to land conflicts within the Hargeisa District by focusing on the experiences and perspectives of those directly affected. The distribution of respondents by age and educational category is illustrated in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. This study's findings offer valuable perspectives on the drivers of land conflicts in Hargeisa, providing a foundation for more informed decision-making by both policymakers and local communities.

Figure 1: Map of Hargiesa Capital (* source wikimedia.org)

Land Expropriation's Influence on Land Conflict

As shown in Table 4, the influence of land expropriation on land conflicts in the Hargeisa District is evident. The dataset results, including the mean and standard deviation, indicate a strong relationship between the variable of land expropriation and the occurrence of land conflicts in Hargeisa City. For instance, the statement 'Land taken by the government is used for private

purposes' had the highest mean value of 3.9 and a standard deviation of 1.24, whereas the question As a result of expropriation, the person attempted to do whatever to gain another land from neighboring areas' had the lowest mean value of 3.5 and a standard deviation of 1.31.

However, the effects of expropriation on land conflicts examined through the aforementioned five statements illustrated an overall mean value of 3.69 and a standard deviation of 1.30. This could be measurably encouraged by the fact that the expropriation had its cause in land conflicts. To that end, the assumption that expropriation causes land conflict in Hargiesa seems to be true, as mentioned in the dataset gathered from residents of the Hargiesa district.

Land Inheritance

Land inheritance contributes to the land conflict in Hargeisa City, and the statistical analysis demonstrates how this variable affects the dependent variable. As shown in Table 5, the mean and standard deviation of the respondents, examined through the five aforementioned statements, illustrate the contribution of land inheritance to land conflicts in the Hargeisa District. The statement that 'mismanagement of land inheritance leads to land disputes among the entitled individuals of the inherited land' had the highest mean of 3.83 and standard deviation of 1.226, whereas the statement 'Hargiesa Local Government does not have a legal framework for land inheritance' had the lowest mean of 3.59 and standard deviation of 1.299.

However, the contribution of Land inheritance to land conflicts examined through the five statements showed an overall mean value of 3.73 and a standard deviation of 1.23. This could summarize the level of agreement among the participants' views on the effects of land inheritance on land conflicts in the Hargiesa District. Finally and foremost, the Data analysis of this Variable (Land Inheritance) study demonstrates that the mismanagement of inherited land has a strong influence on the land conflict in Hargiesa District.

Commercialization of Land

As shown in Table 6, the mean and standard deviation values from the five aforementioned statements suggest the potential impact of land commercialization on land conflicts in the Hargeisa district. The statement "Hargiesa Municipal has no involvement in the pricing mechanism of land" has the highest mean (4.18) and standard deviation (1.08) of any other statement. While the statement "commercialization of land heightens community conflict" had the lowest mean (3.89) and standard deviation (1.22), it was also the least accurate.

But the commercialization of land had an overall mean of 4.05 and a standard deviation of 1.1 which might be the driving force, if not the second-largest component after urbanization. One could, therefore, comprehend that land conflict could have been greatly influenced by the commercialization of land. Finally, the dataset could say that commercialization has a positive relationship with the conflicts of land that Hargiesa City may suffer daily, and there could be no

immediate plan to overcome such obstacles that hinder the economic matters of the whole district of Hargiesa City.

Urbanization Affects Land Conflict

Table 7 mentions the mean and standard deviation values of the aforementioned questions, which could have an impact on land conflict in the district of Hargiesa as a result of the expansion of the city. Compared to other factors explained earlier, the role of urbanization in land conflict exists, and the statement 'expansion of the city affected the private-owned land of the city' has the highest mean of 3.49 and standard deviation of 1.35. On the opposite side, the statement 'the expansion of the city threatens the stability of the land issue' had the lowest mean of 3.19 and a standard deviation of 1.32. In addition, urbanization had an overall mean of 3.36 and a standard deviation of 1.35, which showed its positive impact on land conflict in Hargiesa. As a result, the dataset reflects the undeniable and measurable influence of urbanization on land conflict. Finally, urbanization, as shown from the responses of the participants, had a strong relationship with the occurrence of conflicts in the Hargiesa district.

Statistical Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26.0(IBM SPSS Statistics) was used for statistical analysis [21]. Data are presented as Standard deviation, Mean, and Min-max for quantitative Variables. Slovin's formula is used for assessing the confidence level of the data and the difference is considered statistically significant when Error Margin $E < 0.05$.

Results and Discussions

The study investigated land conflicts in Hargeisa by collecting data through a questionnaire administered to 116 respondents from a target population of 202 residents. This method allowed for a focused analysis of the demographic characteristics of those involved in land disputes, with the majority of respondents being male (70.6%) and aged between 25 and 34 years (59.2%). Educationally, a significant proportion of respondents held higher qualifications, with 70.6% having earned a degree and 29.3% holding a master's degree. These findings suggest that land conflicts in Hargeisa are not restricted to particular social groups but involve a broad range of educated individuals, possibly due to the complexities of legal frameworks governing land ownership.

The research aimed to address four critical questions related to land conflict in Hargeisa, focusing on the influence of land commercialization, expropriation, inheritance, and urbanization. The findings from the data analysis provided a nuanced understanding of each issue. The

commercialization of land has emerged as a significant driver of conflict in Hargeisa. As land values increase, competition over ownership and use intensifies, often leading to disputes. This implies that the rapid expansion of Hargiesa outpaced institutional capacity and created disputes over ownership and use. These findings align with the well-known "Urbanization Theory" which suggests that commercialization not only inflates the value of land but also fosters inequality, with wealthier individuals gaining more control over land resources, thus marginalizing less affluent groups.

On the other hand, Land expropriation has been a major contributor to land conflicts, primarily because of the opaque and often unjust nature of the process. Many respondents highlighted the lack of transparency and inadequate compensation as central issues. Expropriation, particularly when influenced by political or economic power, displaces communities, disrupts livelihoods, and fuels resistance. This implies that urban elites acquired land at the expense of informal settlers. This finding supported the "Marxist Land Theory" which suggests that land conflict stems from commodification and concentration of land ownership, often excluding marginalized citizens.

In addition, Inheritance disputes have played a significant role in shaping land conflicts in Hargeisa, especially as traditional and modern legal frameworks clash. Many participants reported that unclear inheritance rights and the contestation of customary practices lead to family disputes that spill over into wider community conflicts. As land becomes increasingly valuable, inherited property is no longer viewed solely through the lens of tradition but as a vital asset, making disputes more likely. These findings suggest that reforming inheritance laws, while respecting customary practices, could reduce tensions in this area.

Finally, the result of this study indicated significant evidence of Urbanization on Land conflict of Hargiesa Capital. Rapid urbanization has further strained the availability of land, contributing to a rise in land-related conflicts. The expansion of Hargeisa has intensified demand for land, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas. This resulted in conflicts over land use, ownership, and allocation, with both residential and commercial interests clashing over limited resources. This implies the Urbanization Theory that reveals that urbanization disproportionately impacts marginalized communities, who are often displaced or deprived of access to land due to rising costs and encroachment by wealthier individuals and entities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study presents a nuanced understanding of land conflicts in Hargeisa by identifying four key areas of concern, each tied to specific research questions: expropriation, inheritance, commercialization, and urbanization. These findings offer a focused analysis of the drivers of conflict, alongside recommendations aimed at addressing the underlying causes.

Land Expropriation

The data reveals that land expropriation in Hargeisa disproportionately benefits public figures, often serving personal interests over public services. Seventy-five percent of respondents agreed that expropriation is used primarily for personal gain. This misuse of authority has fostered widespread resentment and intensified land disputes. The study recommends strengthening legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to curb power abuses. By establishing clear expropriation laws and introducing robust accountability systems, officials can be held responsible for unethical practices, ensuring land expropriation serves public interests rather than private agendas.

Land Inheritance Conflicts

Land inheritance conflicts in Hargeisa are largely driven by rising land values, which have turned inheritance into a high-stakes issue. These disputes are not only financially motivated but also influenced by traditional and legal ambiguities. To address inheritance conflicts, the study advocates for a multi-faceted approach that integrates legal, social, and community-based solutions. Key interventions include the clarification and enforcement of inheritance laws, fostering community engagement to mediate disputes, and promoting cultural reforms that align traditional practices with modern legal frameworks. By combining these approaches, inheritance conflicts can be minimized, mitigating the impact of rising land values on family and community relations.

Land Commercialization

The commercialization of land has intensified conflicts in Hargeisa, as rising land values fuel competition for ownership and use. Political and social factors further complicate these disputes. The study recommends implementing proper zoning laws that designate specific areas for commercial, residential, agricultural, and public use. By regulating land use, conflicts arising from unplanned commercialization can be reduced. Additionally, inclusive economic policies should be designed to balance the benefits of commercialization with the needs of the broader community. Public awareness campaigns and community engagement are crucial, as informed citizens are better positioned to defend their land rights and participate in decision-making processes, ensuring that commercialization benefits all stakeholders rather than a select few.

Urbanization and Peripheral Communities

Urban expansion has placed significant pressure on land resources, particularly affecting residents on the outskirts of Hargeisa. As the city grows, peripheral communities are increasingly vulnerable to displacement, marginalization, and land grabs. To address these challenges, the study proposes several solutions including Inclusive urban planning, sustainable urban growth and strengthen land governance through sustainable development themes.

In summary, the study provided a sophisticated analysis of the key drivers of land conflicts in Hargeisa, offering practical solutions aimed at resolving these issues. By addressing the root causes—such as power imbalances in expropriation, legal ambiguities in inheritance, unchecked

commercialization, and the marginalization of peripheral communities—Hargeisa can move towards a more equitable and sustainable land management system. Further research is recommended to deepen the understanding of the structural factors behind land conflicts, with public institutions urged to conduct comprehensive studies. This will help create policies that are both context-specific and effective in fostering long-term stability and social cohesion in Hargeisa.

Funding statement

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