

Full Length Research Paper

Exploring causes and consequences of squatter settlement in Jimma Town, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia

Nega Abera Akirso

Department of Sociology, College of Social Science and Humanities, Jimma University, P. O. Box, 307, Jimma, Ethiopia.

Received 26 November, 2019; Accepted 4 December, 2020

This study conducted on the area of squatter settlement in Jimma town is aimed to explore the socio-economic factors contributing to squatter settlement and its effect on social, economic and institutional conditions of settler and development of the town. The study was guided by qualitative approach and employed a cross-sectional and phenomenological design. The primary data required for the analysis was collected through key informant interview, focus group discussion, non-participant observation as well as secondary data from document and analyzed by thematic analysis. The finding of this study revealed that, the root cause identified for squatter settlement are shortage of residential house and its consequential high price of house rent, the need of holding large plot of land and inefficient land administration system. The other finding indicated that, squatter settlement has negative impact on both the government and the squatter. It created fear and lack of confidence on the land they hold illegally, poor infrastructure due to lack of government intervention and low social service delivery, social distress within the community. The study also found out that squatting displaces the host ex-farmers from their farmland and leads to consequent poverty and livelihood disasters. It is recommended that, political will in accessing residential land and financial commitment of the government is required. Active participation of the public and abiding legal procedures of getting residential land is vital.

Key words: Informal, misery, squatter, settlement, slum.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely and increasingly accepted that urbanization is an inevitable phenomenon. In developed countries of Europe and North America, urbanization has been a consequence of industrialization and has been associated with economic development. By contrast, in developing countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia,

urbanization has occurred as a result of high natural urban population increase and massive rural-to-urban migration. The rapid rates of urbanization and unplanned expansion of cities have resulted in several negative consequences, particularly in developing countries (Elfarnouk, 2015).

E-mail: negasosp54@gmail.com.

Author(s) agree that this article remain permanently open access under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Most cities in developing countries are expanding horizontally and the population is moving to unplanned settlements on the peripheries at the expense of agricultural lands and areas of natural beauty (Desalew, 2015). Such settlements produced new peripheral spaces throughout the world, on the margins of national states and of urban territories. Among these sites, refugee camps, slums, squatter settlements, resettled enclaves and so forth are the common ones (Toffin, 2010). It is also believed that the appearance of informal settlements such as slums and squatter settlements in developing countries came as a result of failure of how to deal with the phenomenon of rapid urbanization. Indeed, squatter settlements are among the most widespread impacts of urbanization in both the poor and wealthy world (Elfarnouk, 2015; Minwuyelet, 2005; Sietchiping, 2005).

Informal settlements (often referred to as squatter settlements, slum areas, or shanty towns) are dense settlements comprising communities housed in self-constructed shelters under conditions of informal or traditional land tenure. They are common features in developing countries and are typically the product of an urgent need for shelter to the urban poor (Desalew, 2015; UN-Habitat, 2015). These settlements usually would not have access to public utilities and social services. Informal settlements occur when land administration and planning fails to address the needs of the whole community (Adiukwu, 2014; Hurskainen, 2004; Mohammed and Mohammed, 2006).

According to UN- Habitat report in 2015, in Africa, over half of the urban population (61.7%) lives in informal settlement area and by 2050, Africa's urban dwellers are projected to have increased from 400 million to 1.2 billion. Urban centers in Ethiopia are characterized by massive housing problem and around 70-90% of urban population are living in sub-standard housing, low economic activities, and inadequate upgrading with fast growth of population of 4% per annum (UN habitat, 2018). Such fast growing of the town and population creates shortage of residential homes and increasing house rents in the urban dwellers. Following this, informal purchasing of land plots and grabbing open space from the periphery for the construction of residential homes (squatter settlement) are considered as solution for the housing problem of dwellers (Degu et al., 2015; Mostafa, 2009).

Overview of squatter settlement in Jimma town

Jimma is the biggest town in SouthWestern Ethiopia located in Oromia National Regional State at a distance of 346 Km from Addis Ababa. The present town was developed on the Awetu River by the Italian colonial regime in 1930s and as a center of market for the collection, organization and export of a cash crop. The town evolved as a hometown of the Kingdom of Abba Jifar I (1830-1855) with relatively homogenous society

and culture. It gradually developed to a place of residence for a diverse and increasingly cosmopolitan population. The period of Italian occupation (1936-1941) was socially and economically significant because it saw the first major influx of people into the town of Jimma from beyond the borders of the former Kingdom of Jimma. In general, both the urbanity and the urbanization of Jimma can be explained by the story of coffee production and marketing (Yonas, 2016).

Based on the 2013 Census projection by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA, 2013), the total population of Jimma town in 2019 is 195,228, of whom 97,359 are men and 97,969 are women. With an area of 50.52 square kilometers, Jimma has a population density of 3,864.4 per square kilometer. A total of 52,149 households were counted in the town, which results in an average of 3.74 persons to a household, and 48,625 housing units. The town administration is classified into 13 inner city and 4 outskirt kebeles.

According to Desalew (2015), Horizontal sprawl and expansion of urban center in Ethiopia are characterized by mass displacement of the outskirt ex-farmers from their farmland and consequent fast expansion of squatter settlement. The experience of Jimma town expansion is the same as that of other town in the country. According to Tamrat (2016), out ward expansion of urban settlements and institutions are observed in all corners of Jimma. The weak urban house affordability pushes the inhabitants to the practice of squatter settlement as a normal phenomenon and consequently a source of problem for the town administration. Based on Jimma Municipality (2018), among the 17 kebeles found in the town, the phenomena of squatting is fashionable activity in 8 kebele, which shows how much the problem is widen in the town.

According to Tendayi (2011) cited in Degu et al. (2015), the causes for development and expansion of squatter settlements in urban centers of Ethiopia slightly vary from place to place. In Addis Ababa metropolis (like Bole, Yeka and Kofle Keranio Sub Cities) the main causes is unaffordable land values for the poor; in Adama city, there are limited capacity of local authorities to develop and deliver land to the poor, inefficient land delivery process and poor land administration. The same study found out that, in Bahir Dar city, unaffordable standards, low household income and inability of the poor to save were identified as the leading causes; whereas, in Jimma city the causal factors for the expansion of squatter settlement are high cost of building materials, poverty, corruption, and generally inefficient land administration process.

The response options to the emerging informalization process from state and local authorities have taken a variety of forms. These have often ranged from *laissez-faire* and co-optation to coercion. Regardless of the response option adopted, the resultant scenario has often taken two forms. On one hand it has resulted in isolation

and resistance and on the other it has resulted in partnerships, cooperation and mutual problem solving. According to Tendayi (2011), the response to squatter settlement taken by the local government in Jimma town are both coercive and co-optation. Formalization of illegal settlements through validation of security of tenure as well as a series of demolitions in the past has been tried. However, demolition of illegal structures is not done consistently, and affected families tend to reassemble and start all over again and also eviction in some cases led to social and political strife. On the contrary, regularization of squatter settlements attracted more informal settlers in the town. Having this general understanding, the researcher is motivated to explore the nature of squatter settlement, its cause and impact on the dwellers and local government in Jimma town.

Objective of the study

The main objective of this study is to explore the causal factors of squatter settlement in Jimma town and its effect on social, economic and institutional conditions of the settler and development of the town. To meet the general objective, this study mainly focused on the following specific objectives:

- (1) To examine the practices of squatter settlement in the study area,
- (2) To scrutinize causes for squatter settlement in the study area
- (3) To explore the consequences of squatter settlement on the squatter and urban upgrading

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in purposively selected kebeles of Jimma town, Oromia Regional State. To meet the stated objectives of the study, it was guided by a qualitative research approach. Hence, to collect necessary data from the scratch and to gain deep information qualitative approach is better over quantitative. Regarding the study design, this study employed phenomenological design with cross-section time frame. The necessary data required for this study was gained from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected from key informants and observation through interview guide and checklists; while, secondary data were collected through written documents. It was done first by reviewing literature and other studies. The sources of primary data were Jimma town municipality officials and experts, kebele leaders as well as the squatters were interviewed. Personal observations were made in the selected squatter settlement to understand the animate condition in the setting. Finally data was summarized, analyzed, interpreted and presented in verbal form.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The extent of squatter settlement in the study area

Primary data collected from key informant interview of

municipality officials, and kebele leaders indicated that, the extent of squatter settlement in Jimma town is high, in that, it is practicing in 8 kebeles out of 17. This implies that almost 50% of the town kebeles are familiar with the squatter settlement. As indicated by municipality key informants, they define squatter settlement as 'an illegal holding of land and construction of house in the outskirts areas of the town without any urban plan. The phenomenon is characterized by its unauthorized land holding and construction, absence of infrastructure and basic social service and substandard housing. This shows that the working definition of squatter settlement and its characteristics equates with the definition given by Daniel (2006) and UN-Habitat (2015) as a violation of formal rules about property rights, zoning types and quality of construction. However, UN-habitat definition considers such type of urbanity as a 'slum'.

Squatting in Jimma town was undertaken in the form of land occupation and land development. According to the key informants from municipality, both government acquiring lands and buying of agricultural lands at the fringes of urban from farmers are the common practices in the town.

According to kebele leaders, the process of construction of squatter house is undertaking over night by using old tin roof to make it as an old house. Due to this, in Jimma town, the price of old tin is much higher than that of new one according kebele officials. They confirmed that the selling price of a single new roof tin in Jimma town is 150 ETB, while the same brand old tins' price accounts from 175-200 ETB in the town.

Participants in squatter settlement

Squatting as a phenomenon of grabbing residential lands for, is claimed as the act of land less and lower income people in the area. In this regard, the group of people who are engaging in squatter settlement as described by key informants from government office cannot be clearly demarcated by their economic or social status; hence, from the very lower to higher income groups participate in the phenomena but the purpose is different. A key informant from kebele administration illustrated the above idea, that:

"In our kebele, people who participate and owned lands illegally are both those who have residential house in the town as well as homeless and landless people with lower income. He corroborated that, squatter settlement is a matter of land grabbing than problem induced solution for urban residents. People participating in squatter settlements differ in socio-economic status".

These show that, land, especially urban land, as a scarce resource is demanded by different groups of people irrespective of the income level of competent.

Causes for squatter settlement in Jimma Town

The root causes for squatter settlement in Jimma town are basically two as indicated by the key informants. The first one is shortage of residential house which fits with the urban people and its consequential high price of house rent. The second causal factor is the need of holding large plot of land for the purpose of either having an open space surrounding the residential area or to sell it later to get much profit. These conditions, according to informant from one squatter settlement kebele are initiated from the weak supply of urban land to the urban dwellers for residential houses. He also added that, the practice of land sale by land speculators as a means of making profit heighten the expansion of squatter settlement. Another key informant from Jimma town municipality justified the causal factors that, less government control of open spaces and lack of a comprehensive legal response towards the problem of squatting are identified as causal factors that have contributed to the emergence and spread of squatter settlements in Jimma town. These finding corroborates with the finding of the study conducted by Degu and his colleagues in 2015 in Burayu town and UN-habitat report of 2015 in that, the practice of squatter settlement is not only the result of poverty and low income of squatter household; however, cumbersome procedures, very poor performance of land development and management agency to deliver the land to the applicants and inefficient land administration process are the pressing factors for the growing rate of squatter settlement.

Impacts of squatter settlement on the squatted and Local Government

Data gained from primary sources indicated that squatter settlement has negative impact on the government and the squatter/ resident. According to an informant from one of squatter settlement kebele, squatter settlement creates fear and lack of confidence on the land they hold illegally, which leads to poor infrastructure and social service delivery. Another informant from other corridors of squatter settlement verified that squatting creates social distress within the community by creating uncertainty in their stay, leading to economic crises when demolished. Squatter settlement also displaces the host ex-farmers from their farm land and consequent poverty and livelihood disasters as reported by the key informant from the host community. The social disintegration of settlers from their place of origin like Idir, ekub and family breakdown are other negative impacts of squatter settlement as indicated by key informants. A key informant from Jimma municipality illustrated that: informality leads government to loose income that should be gained from both annual tax and land lease, creates difficulty to upgrade infrastructure and to provide social

service; hence, the house is constructed out of or without urban plan. This result confirms the argument of Huskanien (2004) in that, due to constant fear of eviction, the development of urban and investment ought to be hindered. In general, unplanned urban growth leads to long run and complicated problems unless it is managed prior to the phenomena.

Government's intervention in squatter settlement area

Even though the problems are wide and touches large group of people in the town, key informants from Kebele administration forwarded that, some measures were taken to tackle the problem. According to the key informants from the municipality and kebele leaders, formalizing the squatter settlers who were settled before 2012 were done by the help of Arial photo. By this action, they reported that, 264 squatter settlers were formalized in one of the study kebele "Mendera Qochi", as indicated by the kebele leader. Demolishing illegal houses which were built after 2012 were the other side of responses taken by the local government on the squatter settlement. However, measures taken by the government were and are full of hindrances as pointed out by the key informants. They elaborated that, the process of formalization of squatter settlements permits only squatters who registered prior to 2012 and legalize only 200m² for each settlers. Restriction on the specified size leads grievances and geared towards conflict between squatter and government.

The above data gained from primary sources shows that, the response of government towards squatter settlement is focused on both Formalization and Demolition of the acts. Demolition, employed by the government a response to squatter settlement, conceived by the victims as crises and irresponsible measure. Hence, they claim that, the practice of squatter settlement in the town is not an occasion but seemingly continued from the past. However, government officials overlooked the act and lastly used forceful action. In general, the response of government can be categorized under laissez-faire, co-optation and coercion which were best clarified by Tendayi (2011). Overall, the finding clearly depicts that the general situation of squatter settlement is as a result of land policy and administration failure, hence weak land management and information created an open space and better environment for informality in urban housing in Jimma town.

Conclusion

Rapid urbanization and inadequate capacity to cope with the housing needs of people in urban areas have contributed to the development of informal settlements.

Informality (squatter settlement) is triggered by different factors. There are three views regarding the root cause of squatter settlement in Jimma town based on the findings. The first line of view considered by the town government is that most of the squatter settlement found in Jimma town are not 'poverty driven' in its character. However, people having better income are squatting to the periphery to access large plot of land for recreation. The ex-farmers who live in surrounding town transfer parcel of their land to the third party due to fear of eviction from their land by municipality, either by informal marketing or distributing their farm lands to their family and relatives to construct informal houses.

The other view generally perceives that informal settlement is driven by poverty and housing problem. The assumption is that the land value in a formal way is higher to access and time consuming. On the other hand, the house rent value increases quickly. To escape from this problem, the lower income groups are choosing squatter as a solution. The third view is that, the causes for squatter settlement is poor land administration system. The inability to afford sufficient land for the dwellers, poor performance of land development and management, the absence of clearly demarcated land ownership right created an open space for squatter settlement. Entirely, the cause for squatter settlement are multi-faceted but can be managed under the poor land administration system that hinders access to residential land and control informal land marketing.

Measures dealt with challenges posed by informality in Jimma town can be also categorized into three. The first category is laissez-fair which left the phenomena as it is going on. Such measures were also implemented in the town at the early stage of squatting. Uncontrolled expansion of squatter settlement on the open space and urban fringe ex-farmers land were the result of such measure. The second measure is coercion in which using bulldoze or law in demolishing and relocating of the squatter. It was implemented in the town but created a political strife and economy damage. The third category is co-optation. It is a form of upgrading the squatter settlement by ensuring security of tenure for the property owner in the settlement. Such measure removes the fear of perpetual ejection and creates an interest to invest in the improvement of the house and their environment. This measure was also implemented by the government but the process of implementation is bounded by law and created unfairness.

In General, the response to problem was not clearly identified as which measure best fits with the context of Jimma. The entire measures were taken even at the same time. As a result the extent of squatter settlement in the town is rather declining. The socio-cultural misfortune of settlers in the new setting is another concealed but tensioned aspect of squatter settlement. The absence of community based institutions (Iddir and Ekub) and formal work setting weaken the interaction of

residents in the community.

Recommendations

The appropriate handling of squatting activities requires a lot of political will, proper urban land administration and use system and financial commitment of the government as well as active participation of the public.

- (i) Political will is essential in order to embark on land reform that will not put the urban poor at a disadvantaged position with regard to access to residential land.
- (ii) Participatory upgrading of squatter settlement is vital. Virtually, government cannot fulfill the development demand of citizen in all areas as soon as possible, so that communities' involvement in squatter upgrading should be recognized and mobilized.
- (iii) Inefficiency of urban authorities, along with poor land management practices and inadequate urban planning schemes should be solved by creating multi-sectorial and comprehensive urban planning approach with clear mandate analysis.
- (iv) The right of citizen accessing a residential area should be respected. To do that, the approach of leasing of urban land should be seen critically because the current practices of land lease favors free competition which exclude economically poor from the game; hence, their purchasing power is lower than that of the rich.
- (v) Fair compensation to the periphery rural land by municipality can minimize illegal market of land surrounding urban outskirts.
- (vi) The response to already existing squatter should stick to co-optation; hence it encourages collaborative effort in seeking solution to the problem.
- (vii) The enhancement of infrastructure and social service delivery institutions should be intervened by the government without marginalization. This can create a social harmony among the residents and ignite a way to form both formal and informal social institutions in their physical setting.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

REFERENCES

- Adiukwu OF (2014). Prospects and challenges of informal settlement and urban upgrading in Abuja. *International Journal of Innovation and Scientific Research* 11(2):402-426.
- Central Statistical Agency (CSA) (2013). Population projection of Ethiopia for all regions at woreda level from 2014-2017.
- Daniel L (2006). Housing in Urban context: informal settlement in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Addis Ababa University.
- Dequ B, Melesse A, Jafari SSA (2015). Causes and Remedy of Squatting In Burayu Town, Ethiopia. *Developing Country Studies* 4(11):10-18.

- Desalew B (2015). Squatter settlement and its impact on urban amenities of Tilil town, Awi Zone, Ethiopia, MA thesis in Geography and Environmental studies, Addis Ababa University.
- Elfarnouk N (2015). Squatter settlement in Tripoli, Libya: Assessing, monitoring and analyzing the Incidence and prevalence of urban squatter areas in the peri-urban fringe, Libya, Kansas University.
- Hurskainen P (2004). The informal settlement of Voi. *Journal of field research to Kenya* 40(6):64-78.
- Minwuyelet M (2005). Squatter settlement, and policy implications in Addis Ababa: the case of Kolfe Keranio sub-city; working paper on population and land use change in central Ethiopia number 2, Addis Ababa University.
- Mohammed A, Muhammed S (2006). The cause and consequence of informal settlement in Zanzibar. XXIII FIG congress pp. 1-17.
- Mostafa T (2009). Informal settlement and sustainable urban development case study: Metropolis on Mashhad in North eastern Iran. *Journal of World applied science* 7(10):1235-1238.
- Sietchiping R (2005). Prospective slum policies: conceptualization and Implementation of proposed informal settlement growth model. SAGE, Melbourne University.
- Tamrat M (2016). Horizontal Urban Expansion And Livelihood Adjustment Problem Among Ex-Farmers In The Kebeles Surrounding Jimma Town: The Case of Derba Kebele. *European Scientific Journal* 12(14):308-328.
- Tendayi G (2011). Housing informality in expanding Ethiopia cities: Moving beyond the 'the new formal'; REAL CORP, Tagungs band.
- Toffin G (2010). Urban fringe: squatter and slum settlement in the Kathmandu valley (Nepal). *CNAS Journal* 2792:158-168.
- UN-Habitat Report (2015). Informal settlement: Habitat III issue paper, New York.
- UN-Habitat Report (2018). Working For A Better Urban Future:Annual Progress Report 2018.
- Yonas S (2016). Modern education in Jimma town, south west Ethiopia: A historical survey, 1932-1991. *International Journal of Science and Research* 5(10):1088-1110.