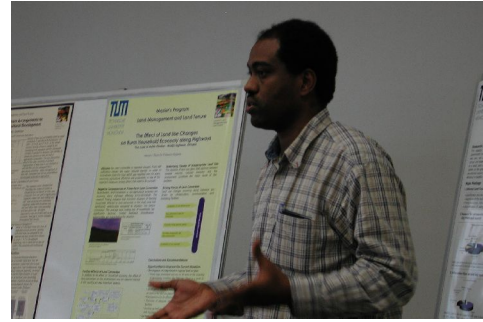


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The effect of land use changes on rural household economy along highways: The case of Addis Ababa-Modjo Highway, Ethiopia

Ethiopia has been confronted with food insecurity for a prolonged period of time. Now, prime farmland conversion from agriculture to non-agricultural purposes, which nowadays is one of the global concerns, has affected the East African nation, too. In the country, the most affected area in terms of prime farmland conversion along highways is the Addis Ababa – Modjo area. The research findings imply that the economic situation of farming households affected by land conversion in this area has significantly deteriorated since its emergence. The mean land holding size has significantly declined. There are limited livelihood diversification opportunities. The land expropriation procedures have repeatedly failed to address the concerns of farming households. Compensation discrepancies are contributing further to the declining economic situation of households.

No land use plan has been prepared for the study area to clearly designate different functions and uses to land. This represents the underlying problem for household income loss and irreversible loss of farmland through haphazard land use changes along the highway. Areas designated for investment are mainly determined by investor's convenience. The push factor for investors to occupy a given land depends on infrastructure development, ease of communication facilities and provision of energy sources. The competing interests between agriculture and other activities and passion to investment in other sectors is diminishing the stock of farmland, which are producing high quality crops consumable in the nearby large markets of the country. The situation whereby investors' interests on land uses are overriding societal interests such as future food production prospects counteracts all efforts to combat rural poverty.

The situation is aggravated by the present land tenure arrangements. Ethiopia is one of the ancient states of the world and has a history of feudalistic and socialistic rule in the past, and semi-market oriented economic system at present. All political systems substantially influenced the tenure arrangements that are currently in use (see Challa Kumsa, Habtamu Manu, Adugna Mekonnen).

The country needs various sectors, including industries, recreational facilities, hotels, tourism and some others so as to strengthen the economy. Guiding plans to determine where these sectors should be spatially situated remain essential components of land management. Furthermore, farmland protection should be implemented through the development of land use plans that optimises between the interests of society, national economy and the ecology. Along with land use planning, other sorts of options, which can be used in the protection of farmland, are available for use. To provide infrastructures for industrial development and non-agricultural demands in locations of less agricultural importance, public projects need to be considered. This research concludes that unless measures to stop conversion of prime farmlands to other purposes are urgently taken through the promotion of alternative approaches, the agricultural land loss occurring today will ultimately dislocate rural dwellers, have irreversible effect on future generations and increase food insecurity.

Key words: land conversion, land use changes, rural household economies, food security, rural development, poverty reduction, land use planning, Ethiopia