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# Land expropriation policy implementation and fairness for urban development in Woldia, Ethiopia

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## Abstract

*The government of Ethiopia has implemented land policy reforms over the years to manage the problems of urban land expropriation for urban development projects. However, the land expropriation process for urban development becomes a pressing concern in Woldia town. This study evaluated the peri-urban land expropriation policy implementation and fairness for urban development in Woldia, Ethiopia. Data were gathered from 323 household surveys, 12 key informant interviews, and six focus group discussions. The collected data were analyzed using the mean implementation score (MIS), relative importance indices (RIIs), the Mann-Whitney U test, and Fisher's Exact test. Among the six processes evaluated, publicity received a relatively high mean score of 3.13, while land dispossession procedures exhibited a low mean implementation level of 1.71. The average implementation level across all six procedures was 2.24, which is below the mean of 3.0. Similarly, the relative importance index indicated that the overall land expropriation procedures were 0.45, below the midpoint of 0.5. The results revealed statistically significant differences between males and females in their perceptions of procedural fairness regarding the fairness of ethical standards ($p < 0.001$), fairness in correcting issues ($p < 0.05$), accuracy of information ($p < 0.001$), and consistency of procedures among displaced farmers ($p < 0.05$). Even though there were significant differences between male-headed and female-headed households in their perceived fairness of ethical standards, issues correction, information accuracy, and procedural consistency, the practical difference in all procedural fairness measurements between male and female households were small, as indicated by an effect size (r) below 0.29. To control land expropriation challenges, the government should include peri-urban farmers in the decision-making process from beginning to end, ensuring that compensation reflected location value, land productivity, and lost livelihood.*



**Keywords**: Land policy, land expropriation, expropriation procedures, procedural fairness, displaced farmers


## 1. Introduction

Land policies are implemented worldwide to allocate land for urbanization, investment, and

housing (Wubneh, 2018). These policies serve as a governmental framework aimed at achieving objectives related to land use management, and individual rights and access to land (Wubneh, 2018; Rugema et al., 2022). Globally, housing construction, urbanization and the expansion of built-up areas have rapidly grown with the support of land policy (Wang et al., 2018). This policy is closely linked to land expropriation and socio-economic development (Wang et al., 2018; Giger, 2022). Although many countries have established laws and procedures for expropriate land for urban development projects (Elbortokaly et al., 2022), practices vary significantly between countries (Nkansah-Dwamena & Bonnie Raschke, 2021; Ayamga et al., 2023). Nonetheless, these laws and processes are essential for defending land rights (Ambaye, 2015), promoting economic development (Azuela & Herrera, 2009), ensuring social equity, and safeguarding environmental protection (McCarthy & Robinson, 2016).

The rise in land expropriation has generated two competing perspectives (Ayamga et al., 2023). The first perspective emphasizes the positive impacts of land expropriation, suggesting that it benefits all parties involved (Liu et al., 2018; Ayamga et al., 2023). In contrast, the second perspective highlights the negative consequences of compulsory land expropriation, which include the loss of land rights without appropriate procedures for property valuation and compensation (Asnakew & Amogne, 2021; Nkansah-Dwamena & Bonnie Raschke, 2021). This view also points to the displacement of farmers without adequate rehabilitation mechanisms and the loss of access to productive farmland, which poses significant challenges for displaced farmers (Ziem et al., 2021; Ayamga et al., 2023). These negative outcomes often arise from the improper application of legal procedures in land expropriation for various urban development projects (Ziem et al., 2021) and unreasonable urban expansion (Wubneh, 2018; Adigeh & Abebe, 2024). Furthermore, inadequate execution of land policy regarding land expropriation procedures has led to various land-related issues, such as increased difficulties in expropriate land for non-agricultural use, a rising number of landless farmers, a decrease in cultivated land areas, and inefficient land utilization (Liu et al., 2018; Adigeh & Abebe, 2024). Studies such as Liu et al. (2018); Ayamga et al. (2023), and Ayamga et al. (2023) indicated that land expropriation for urban development projects is more prevalent in Africa.

In Ethiopia, the implementation of land policy reform has changed significantly since 1975 (Wubneh, 2018). The land use policies of Ethiopia have evolved through three main categories:

the freehold land tenure system (prior to 1975), the public-controlled permit system (1975–1992), and the public leasehold system (1993 to present) (Zerga, 2016; Wubneh, 2018). According to the Constitution of Ethiopia (1995), land and all natural resources are collectively owned by the state and the people of Ethiopia. Therefore, state ownership of land has been established in Ethiopia (FDRE, 1995). The constitution grants the Ethiopian government the authority to expropriate private property for urban development projects by compensating property owners at current market value. Currently, after the government expropriate land from peri-urban landholders through compulsory land expropriation, it leases this land to housing cooperatives (Mohammed, 2018). Although there are various proclamations, regulations, and directives in Ethiopia to guide the implementation of land expropriation procedures, the legal framework for this process faces several challenges (Adigeh & Abebe, 2023). These challenges include a lack of comprehensive policies regarding land expropriation for urban development, unclear legal frameworks, insufficient transparency in the process (Wubneh, 2018; Adigeh & Abebe, 2024), poor enforcement of existing laws, inconsistencies among different laws, and unclear mechanisms for property valuation (Yirga, 2021; Dires et al., 2021; Tadesse & Baye, 2024). Urban land in Ethiopia is primarily obtained from peri-urban farmers through a formal process known as land expropriation (Adigeh & Abebe, 2024) by providing compensation for the displaced landholders (Adigeh & Abebe, 2023). However, the economic advantage of the landholders are not adequately considered during the implementation of this process (Dires et al., 2021; Wubneh, 2018).

In Woldia town, the population has increased from 15,325 in 1984 to 108,748 in 2023 (Baye et al., 2020; CSA, 1984, 1997, and 2007) with a growth rate of 5.9%, which exceeds Ethiopia's overall growth rate (4.3%). The population surge has increased the demand for urban development including housing among urban residents. In response, the local government has implemented urban development strategies based the Urban Land Lease Proclamation No. 721/2011, the Property Valuation for Compensation Proclamation No. 455/2005 (effective before 2019), and Proclamation No. 1161/2019, which has been in effect since 2019.

Some recent studies have examined land expropriation for urban development in Ethiopia (Gemeda et al. 2023; Adigeh & Abebe, 2023, and 2024). However, the study did not assess the land expropriation process based on six procedures and 27 sub-specific procedures and, the fairness of land expropriation procedures between male- and female-headed households were not

sufficiently addressed. Therefore, the present study aims to (1) determine the levels of land expropriation process implementation (2) evaluate the implementation of land expropriation process, and (3) examines the effects of procedural fairness by gender. Furthermore, the study highlights the United Nations' efforts to achieve its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 11, which promotes inclusive and sustainable cities and human settlements, and Goal 16, which aims to enhance peace between landholders and the government. This research therefore, offers a timely and significant contribution for policymakers and the local government to understand the issues arising in the land expropriation process and to propose appropriate solutions

## 2. Procedural justice theory

Procedural justice theory evolved through several phases, beginning in the 1970s with the work of Thibaut and Walker (Thibaut & Walker, 1978), continuing through the 1980s and 1990s with Lind and Tyler (Lind & Tyler, 1988), and ongoing in the 2000s with Tyler (Tyler, 2003). Procedural justice theory helps assess the fairness of decision-making processes in order to understand displaced landholders' satisfaction with government land expropriation policy implementation, acceptance of governmental decisions, and expropriation processes (Colquitt et al., 2013; Tyler, 2016).

The core principles of procedural justice include participation (providing opportunities for displaced landholders to express their views); impartiality (the local government must provide accurate information and apply consistent, transparent, and unbiased decisions); respect (treating displaced landholders with politeness); and trustworthiness (the local government must be honest and avoid bureaucratic procedures) (R. L. Cohen, 1985; Demková & Hofmann, 2022).

Procedural justice has been applied in various contexts, such as modern court systems, land-acquiring departments, and police forces, to build trust and transparency between the government and the displaced landholders (Tyler, 2006). Additionally, consultation with displaced landholders and transparent and responsive processes are major roles of procedural justice theory (Cohen, 1985; Tyler, 2016)

This theory is relevant to the current study for examining whether compensation is adequate, whether the decision-making process, valuation methods, and compensation formulas are

transparent and applied consistently, whether alternative land is provided, and whether the process treats both men and women respectfully, respecting the rights of landholders. This process requires strong, good governance. However, the implementation of this theory in Woldia town was hindered by land governance constraints.

According to procedural justice theory, satisfaction depends on both outcome fairness (distributive justice) and process fairness (procedural justice). In this study, farmers were dissatisfied with land expropriation procedures and property valuation due to procedural failures. These failures included a lack of government consultation with landholders regarding the project's types, benefits, and general processes; the acquiring agency's failure to ask landholders for permission before visiting their sites; the exclusion of dispossessed farmers from the decision-making process; the inadequacy of the property valuation technique used for land expropriation; the government's failure to consider the current market price during compensation determination; and valuers' failure to estimate equivalent compensation for the loss of property.

This study makes three major theoretical contributions: extending procedural justice theory to the context of Ethiopian land expropriation, applying procedural justice theory to explain law-practice gaps, and operationalizing land governance frameworks within a local context.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationships between the legal framework, actual practice (implementation quality), procedural fairness, governance outcomes, and resulting outcomes. The legal framework, encompassing land expropriation procedures such as planning, publicity, valuation, compensation, dispossession, and development, establishes the formal rules. However, actual practice often deviates significantly from this framework. Common issues include a lack of consultation with landholders, site visits conducted without prior permission, the exclusion of farmers from decision-making processes, inadequate valuation practices, the disregard of market prices, rights violations, and delays in transferring land for urban development projects. This poor and inconsistent implementation directly undermines procedural fairness, which in turn leads to decreased trust in government, increased conflict, and landholders disregarding the housing plan when procedures are perceived as unfair. Consequently, satisfaction with the land expropriation process, property valuation, consultation, and overall treatment is low.

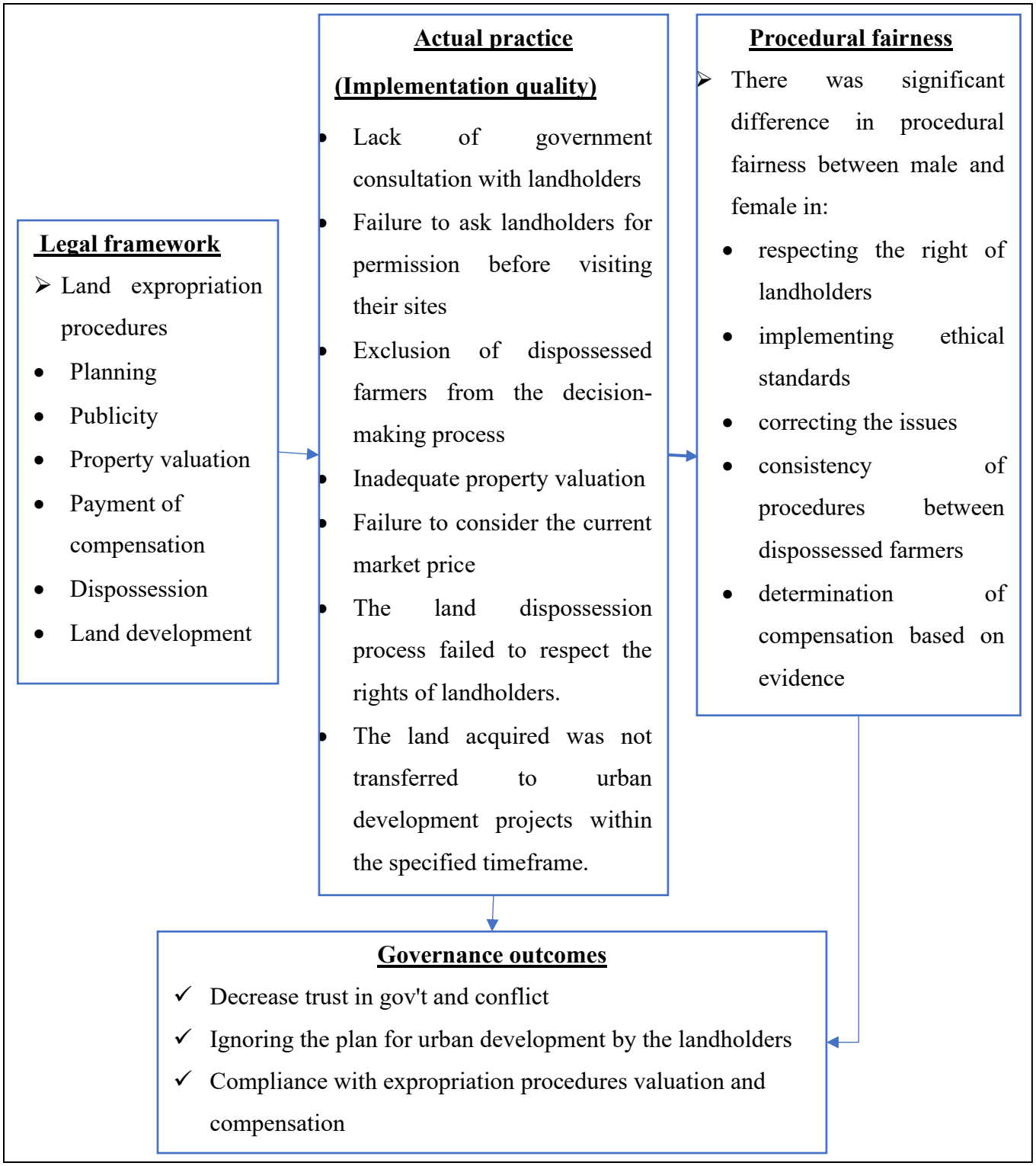



Figure 1: Conceptual framework for land expropriation procedures and fairness

## 3. Materials and methods

### 3.1 Research approach and design

The study addresses the research problems using a mixed-methods approach with a concurrent triangulation design. This design facilitates the collection, analysis, and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data, placing equal emphasis and integration during the interpretation phase. After analyzing the household survey data, the study triangulated the findings using FGD and KII data. This enhanced the validity of the research conclusions drawn from the household survey. Thus, themes from the FGDs and KIIs were corroborated with statistical results from household survey data to support the findings. Both primary and secondary sources were utilized to gather quantitative and qualitative data, which provides more comprehensive insights into the issues surrounding land expropriation. Key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and household surveys were employed as primary sources for this study. Additionally, secondary data were obtained from governmental records, annual reports, books, journal articles, proclamations, urban land policies, and directives.

### 3.2 Sample size and sampling techniques

Multistage sampling techniques were employed to select the Woldia town administration, the Kebeles within Woldia, and the sample households. In the first stage, Woldia was purposively chosen from the eleven zonal town administrative capitals in the Amhara Region. This decision was made because the practice of property valuation for compensation in Woldia differs from that in other towns and cities in the Amhara region, such as Gondar, Lalibela, Sede, and Mekane Selam. To verify this difference, data on property valuation for compensation was collected from Gondar, Lalibela, Sede, Mekane Selam, and Woldia. In the first four urban areas, compensation was paid for crop production value, by-products, ripe and unripe perennial fruits, trees, and any other improvements made on the land. In Woldia town, however, compensation was paid only for crop production value and by-products, a practice that significantly impacts the livelihood of peri-urban displaced farmers. This suggests that land expropriation procedures in Woldia town were poorly implemented. This critical difference motivated the decision to conduct this study specifically in Woldia town.

In the second stage, six of the ten Kebeles were purposively selected because they had already undergone land expropriation for urban development. In the third stage, a total of 323 households were randomly selected using a simple random sampling method. The sample size for respondents was determined using the formula provided by Yamane (1967). Based on this formula, the required sample size for a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error was as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N\times e^2} \;\; ; \;\; n = \frac{1462}{1+1462\times 0.05^2} = 323 \ldots\ldots\ldots\

### 3.3 Data analysis method

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, relative importance indices, the Mann-Whitney U test, the Fisher Exact test, and thematic analysis. The mean implementation score assessed the level of implementation of the land expropriation process, based on six major procedures and 27 sub-specific procedures (Appendix I). To interpret the mean scores based on the household survey, a class interval was determined. The interval width was calculated as follows:

$$\text{Interval width} = \frac{(\text{maximum value} - \text{minimum value})}{\text{Number of desired categories}} \quad \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots(2)$$

The mean score was calculated on a scale where the highest value is 5 and the lowest value is 1. The range of the 5-point Likert scale is calculated as (5 - 1 = 4), which is then divided by 5, representing the range of the scale (4/5 = 0.8). Thus, a value of 0.8 indicates the interval between each scale point, which is used to establish the minimum and maximum lengths of the 5-point Likert scale. Therefore, the mean value of the implementation level of the expropriation process is summarized based on this five-level Likert scale (Table 1).

Table 1: Scales for measuring the implementation level of land expropriation

| Five-level likert scale for implementation of procedures | Scale | Mean range |
|---|---|---|
| Very low level of implementation (VLLI) | 1 | 1-1.8 |
| Low level of implementation (LLI) | 2 | 1.81-2.6 |
| Medium level of implementation (MLI) | 3 | 2.61-3.4 |
| High level of implementation (HLI) | 4 | 3.41-4.2 |
| Very high level of implementation (VHLI) | 5 | 4.21-5.0 |

Source: Adapted from Vagias (2006)

**Relative Importance Indices**

Relative Importance Indices (RIIs) are used to assess the implementation level of the land expropriation process for urban development. They are essential for analyzing Likert scale questionnaires and are among the most popular and accurate metrics available (Genc, 2023). A high relative importance index indicates a high weighted frequency, which results a higher rank (Obineme et al., 2021), and it is calculated using the following formula:

$$RII = \frac{\sum(n_i W_i)}{S*N} \quad \text{.....(3)}$$

where 'RII' represents the Relative Importance Index, ranging from 0 to 1, '$n_i$' denotes the number of respondents who selected a particular response category 'i' on the Likert scale, '$w_i$' is the weight assigned to each response category 'i' for a 5-point scale, $\sum(n_i W_i)$ represents the sum of the results of the frequency ($n_i$) and weight ($w_i$) for all five response categories, 'S' is the highest score (in this case, 5), and 'N' denotes the total number of households (323). Awaad et al. (2024) categorized relative importance index (RII) values as follows: $0.0 \leq RII \leq 0.2$ as very low, $0.2 < RII \leq 0.4$ as low, $0.4 < RII \leq 0.6$ as moderate, $0.6 < RII \leq 0.8$ as high, and $0.8 < RII \leq 1.0$ as very high (Table 2).

Table 2: Relative importance index value and legal framework implementation level

| Legal framework implementation Level | RII Range | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Very low | $0.0 \leq RII \leq 0.2$ | Procedure not implemented based on legal framework |
| Low | $0.2 < RII \leq 0.4$ | Procedure poorly implemented based legal framework |
| Moderate | $0.4 < RII \leq 0.6$ | Land expropriation procedure partially implemented |
| High | $0.6 < RII \leq 0.8$ | The majority of procedures implemented based on legal framework |
| Very high | $0.8 < RII \leq 1.0$ | Land expropriation procedures implemented based on legal framework |

**Man Whitney U test and Fisher Exact test**

The Mann-Whitney U test and Fisher Exact test were used to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in procedural fairness, which includes ten variables categorized by gender (Table 3). These variables were developed based on an empirical and theoretical literature review, including studies by Cao & Zhang (2018), Nkansah-Dwamena & Bonnie Raschke (2021), and Shukla (2021). The Mann-Whitney U test and the Fisher Exact test were used when the assumptions of the chi-square test were not met. The Mann-Whitney U test was used for ordinal

data, while the Fisher Exact test was employed for binary data. Fisher's Exact test is specifically designed for 2x2 contingency tables, particularly when expected cell counts are less than 5. The Mann-Whitney U test determined whether there was a difference in perceived fairness between males and females based on the rank sums of the two samples rather than the means. The smallest U-value exhibited the largest gender difference, whereas the largest U-value indicated almost no difference between genders. The Mann-Whitney U test was also used to determine effect sizes (r), derived from the Z-values and sample size (n). According to Cohen (1988), an 'r' value of < 0.10 indicates no effect, 0.10–0.29 a small effect, 0.30–0.49 a medium effect, and ≥ 0.50 a large effect. These effect sizes illustrate the magnitude of the effect during land expropriation urban development and are calculated using the following formula:

$$r = \frac{Z}{\sqrt{n}} \text{----------(4)}$$

where 'r' denotes the effect sizes, 'Z' represents the Z-value from your Mann-Whitney U test, and 'n' represents the sample size (n = 323)

Table 3: Description of variables used for gender-based analysis

| No. | Indicators | Type of variables and Measurements |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Fairness of representation during plan preparation | Ordinal (1. unfair, 2. undecided, 3. fair) |
| 2 | Procedures compatible with displaced farmers' needs | Dummy (1= yes, 0=otherwise) |
| 3 | The process respects human rights | Ordinal (1. unfair, 2. undecided, 3. fair) |
| 4 | Fairness of government's accountability | Ordinal (1. unfair, 2. undecided, 3. fair) |
| 5 | Fairness of ethical standards | Ordinal (1. unfair, 2. undecided, 3. fair |
| 6 | Unbiased of judicial reviews | Categorical (0. no complaints, 1. complaint raised with response no, 2. yes) |
| 7 | Accuracy of information | Dummy (1= yes, 0=otherwise) |
| 8 | Determined compensation based on evidence | Dummy (1= yes, 0=otherwise) |
| 9 | Fairness of correcting the issues | Ordinal (1. unfair, 2. undecided, 3. fair) |
| 10 | Consistency of procedures between dispossessed farmers | Dummy (1= yes, 0=otherwise) |

Source: Cao & Zhang (2018), and Shukla (2021)

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1 Land expropriation type

Land expropriation for urban development has a significant impact on the size of landholdings. Due to land expropriation for urban development, the majority of respondents (68.1%) experienced full land expropriation, while 31.9% experienced partial land expropriation. By gender, most male households (54.5%) and female households (13.6%) reported complete land expropriation (Table 4).

Table 4: Land expropriation type of respondents (N = 323)

| Land expropriation type | Respondents | | Gender (%) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | % | Male | Female | Total |
| Full land expropriation | 220 | 68.1 | 54.5 | 13.6 | 68.1 |
| Partial land expropriation | 103 | 31.9 | 25.7 | 6.2 | 31.9 |
| Total | 323 | 100 | 80.2 | 19.8 | 100 |

Source: Field survey (2024)

### 4.2 Levels of land expropriation process implementation

The land expropriation procedure varies from country to country. In Ethiopia, the government has established six major procedures. These procedures were evaluated based on procedural justice theory and Ethiopian land governance frameworks. As shown in Table 5, the planning stage received a low mean score of 2.03, indicating poor implementation of the planning procedures. This stage includes inadequate consultations with landholders, experts visit the site without the permission of landholders, poor impact assessments of the project, and a lack of acceptance of the plan by peri-urban farmers (Appendix I). The second stage is publicity, which received a mean score of 3.13, reflecting a medium level of implementation. This stage includes notifying landholders about land expropriation, representing dispossessed farmers during the pre-expropriation plan preparation, actively participating in the decision-making process, attending public meetings related to land expropriation, and expressing opinions regarding the land expropriation process (Appendix I). This suggests that public engagement and information sharing

were somewhat successful, indicating an effective communication strategy that facilitates smoother progress in later stages.

The third stage involves property valuation for compensation, which shows a very low mean level of implementation (1.94). This low score arises from the government's failure to consider current market prices and a lack of transparency in property valuation, as well as the exclusion of losses during property valuation. Key informant interviews (KIIs) with experts indicate that the Property Valuation and Compensation Proclamation No. 1161/2019 was improperly implemented. Specifically, the implementation excluded all losses during property valuation and ignored the principle of current market price, reportedly due to budgetary constraints and a mismatch between the number of expropriated farmers and the allocated budget.

In the fourth stage, compensation was implemented at a low level (2.39) due to various compensation issues. These issues include the government not provide full compensation for the value of crop production and permanent improvements made to the land. Furthermore, compensation did not replace property loss, the majority of dispossessed farmers did not receive the determined compensation within 30 days of notice, and landholders did not hand over the land until payments were made (Appendix I) which significantly affects the overall mean value.

The fifth stage, land dispossession, had a low mean score (1.71) because farmers were not given enough time to vacate their properties, and the government unlawfully took ownership and physical possession of land through governmental force (Appendix I). The final stage, land development, also had a low mean implementation level (2.23) because the acquired land was not delivered on time for urban development projects, including cooperative housing, and the acquired land was not used for the specified use within the specified time period (Appendix I). Key informant interviews (KIIs) indicated that the acquired land has remained undeveloped for over four years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the conflict between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian government from 2020 to 2022, and the ongoing conflict between Amhara Fano and the Ethiopian government in the Amhara region.

Overall, the average implementation level of the land expropriation process was 2.24, which is below the mean value of 3.0 (Table 5). These land expropriation procedural failures were not random but reflect good governance failures, particularly the absence of meaningful farmer

participation in the decision-making process, farmers lost land without adequate process, and non-transparent valuation processes in property valuation and compensation (Appendix I).

Table 5: Implementation level of land expropriation process

| Values | Implementation level of the land expropriation process (N= 323) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Stage 1 Planning | Stage 2 Publicity | Stage 3 Valuation | Stage 4 Payment of compensation | Stage 5 Land dispossession | Stage 6 Land development |
| Mean | 2.03 | 3.13 | 1.94 | 2.39 | 1.71 | 2.23 |
| SD | 0.54 | 1.02 | 0.77 | 1.06 | 1.04 | 1.44 |
| Level | Low | Medium | Very Low | Low | Very Low | Low |

Source: Field Survey (2024)

### 4.3 Relative importance indices of implementation level of the process

Land expropriation for urban development was implemented based on six procedures to ensure effective implementation. To analyze the ranking for the implementation level of land expropriation procedures, the relative importance indices (RIIs) were employed. As shown in Table 6, the relative importance indices for the planning stage, publicity procedures, property valuation and submission of claims stage, payment of compensation stage, dispossession stage, and land development stage were 0.41, 0.53, 0.35, 0.46, 0.34, and 0.45, respectively. The average RII score from all respondents was 0.45, below the midpoint of 0.5, suggesting moderate implementation of land expropriation procedures. This study suggested that more attention should be given to indicators with lower relative importance indices (less than 0.5), specifically the planning stage, property valuation and submission of claims stage, payment of compensation stage, dispossession stage, and land development stage (Table 6 and Appendix I)).

Table 6: Relative importance indices of land expropriation process implementation (N = 323)

| Procedures/stages | Number of indicators | Respondents score | | | | | Total | RIIs | R |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | AVL (1) | AL (2) | AM (3) | AH (4) | AVH (5) | | | |
| Planning stage | 4 | 231 | 16 | 4 | 37 | 369 | 656 | 0.41 | 4 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Publicity procedures | 5 | 182 | 5 | 0 | 75 | 600 | 862 | 0.53 | 1 |
| Property valuation and submission of claims stage | 7 | 214 | 20 | 0 | 25 | 304 | 562 | 0.35 | 5 |
| Payment of compensation stage | 5 | 169 | 77 | 12 | 166 | 324 | 748 | 0.46 | 2 |
| Dispossession stage | 4 | 227 | 81 | 18 | 89 | 139 | 553 | 0.34 | 6 |
| Land development stage | 2 | 219 | 8 | 0 | 34 | 458 | 719 | 0.45 | 3 |
| Total average respondents score | 27 | 207 | 35 | 7 | 71 | 366 | 683 | 0.45 | |

Note: (VL) denotes average very low, (L) indicates average low, (M) signifies average medium, (H) represents average high, (VH) indicates average very high level of implementation, (RIIs) stands for Relative Importance Index, and (R) represents rank; Source: Field Survey (2024)

The chairperson of the Kebeles indicated that before and during the conversion of peri-urban land for urban development, the government involved only a small number of peri-urban landholders in the decision-making process. Furthermore, all activities related to land expropriation were conducted based on input from this limited group of peri-urban farmers. As a result, the majority of peri-urban farmers were not consulted by the local government regarding their willingness to participate. This situation undermines trust between the government and landholders. Consequently, peri-urban farmers believe that the government is not acting in their mutual interest, leading them to feel compelled to relinquish their land for urban development projects, including housing development.

Experts' key informant explains the participation of landholders in the urban development plan, the involvement of stakeholders, and the willingness of landholders as follows:

> *An urban expansion plan was developed in 2013 to address the housing challenges faced by urban residents. To facilitate this, a significant amount of agricultural land on the periphery has been incorporated into the boundaries of urban areas. In implementing this urban expansion plan, the local government has included stakeholders, particularly landholders, in the meeting and decision-making process. During discussions with landholders, many peri-urban landholders voluntarily offered their land for urban expansion. However, some peri-urban farmers were reluctant to vacate their plots even*

*after receiving the determined compensation, as they believed it was insufficient (A key informant interview, Urban renewal and land development experts, Male, 2024).*

In the overall procedures, the responses from the expert key informant interviews (KIIs) were as follows:

*After identifying the plots of land and their ownership, meetings and discussions were organized. Following these discussions and reaching a mutual agreement, real property valuation for compensation was conducted based on Proclamation No. 455/2005, which was in effect before 2019, and Proclamation No. 1160/2019, which has been in effect since 2019. These proclamations govern the compensation process and the expropriation of land holdings for public use. Subsequently, the local government acquired land from these farmers for cooperative housing development. Finally, the government allocated the acquired land to housing cooperatives in accordance with Urban Land Lease Holding Proclamation No. 721/2011 (A key informant interview, acquiring governmental bodies, Male, 2024).*

FGDs indicated that the land expropriation process in Woldia town differs significantly from that in surrounding towns in North Wollo, particularly during the planning stage, property valuation, and dispossession stage. We gathered information from urban residents in North Wollo regarding property valuation and compensation, but implementation varies across different towns in the zone. Based on the information obtained from peri-urban displaced landholders, we attempted to communicate with the local government about property valuation for compensation. However, the government is unwilling to include both ripe and unripe perennial crops, as well as permanent improvements made to the land during property valuation. Following this, although the issue of property valuation was for all displaced farmers, most did not raise complaints due to frustration with governmental authority. Some displaced farmers, however, did file complaints with the local government judicial office. Following these complaints, the judicial experts displayed visible bias toward the acquiring bodies over the displaced farmers. Furthermore, there is partiality among the displaced farmers, as judicial experts requested that the governmental bodies re-evaluate the compensation for some farmers who filed complaints. As a result, an additional 3,000 to 5,000 Birr was added to the compensation for certain displaced farmers who raised complaints.

Therefore, the procedures for land expropriation for urban development in the study area present challenges for both the government and landowners. Because certain steps within these procedures have been overlooked and inadequately implemented in the study area. Procedural justice theory was used to evaluate the land expropriation procedures. Failures in procedural justice in Woldia town stemmed from a lack of consultation with landholders, the exclusion of dispossessed farmers from the decision-making process, and the use of inadequate property valuation techniques. Likewise, a study by Abdulai et al. (2022) pointed out that little attention has been given to peri-urban farmers' readiness to convert their land. Concurrently, Adigeh and Abebe (2024) identified lengthy delays in obtaining serviced land as a major challenge. In another study, Adigeh & Abebe (2023) noted that farmers who lost their land during the urban development planning process had minimal involvement in the decision-making process. The findings of the study is also supported by several other studies, including those by Adigeh and Abebe (2023); and Aschale and Asres (2024), which noted that compensation for acquired land does not adequately reflect the loss of property. Similarly, Aschale and Asres (2024) reported that the compensation provided for displaced farmers was both inadequate and delayed, and that the valuation practices lacked transparency. Similarly, the studies by Gizachew (2020); and Asnakew & Amogne (2021) found that property valuation in Ethiopia is often inaccurate and compensation is unfair. In addition, the study by Cao & Zhang (2018) emphasized the importance of project planning, including policies for farmland expropriation and compensation. The FDRE (1995) Constitution of Ethiopia, Article 40(8), the Urban Land Lease Proclamation No. 721/2011, the Property Valuation for Compensation Proclamation No. 455/2005, and the current Proclamation No. 1161/2019, grants the government and the authority to expropriate private property for urban development projects, including cooperative housing development, by paying commensurate compensation that reflects the current market value of all lost assets. However, in Woldia town, the compensation given was insufficient because land improvements and both ripe and unripe perennial crops were not considered in the compensation determination.

### 4.4 Procedural fairness between gender

In this study, fairness in the land expropriation process refers to the equitable representation of male and female headed households during the land expropriation process. Studying on perceived procedural fairness based on gender is crucial for identifying the gender-specific impacts of

inequitable land expropriation procedures. The Mann-Whitney U test revealed a significant difference in perceptions between male and female respondents regarding respect for human rights during land expropriation for urban development at less than 10% significance level (U = 7298). Thus, the rights of female respondents ($T_1$ = 177.5) were more respected by the government than those of male respondents ($T_2$ = 158.2). Governmental implementation of ethical standards also differed significantly between genders (U = 6406, $p < 0.001$). The Mann-Whitney U test revealed a statistically significant difference between genders regarding procedural fairness in respecting human rights and implementing ethical standards. This finding suggests that females perceive a greater sense of fairness in the government's implementation of ethical standards during land expropriation procedures ($T_1$ = 191.4) compared to male households ($T_2$ = 154.7). In terms of perceived fairness in addressing issues, there are statistically significant differences based on gender in the perceived fairness of addressing concerns raised during land expropriation for urban development (U = 7303, $p < 0.05$). Female respondents exhibited a greater sense of fairness in resolving problems during the process ($T_1$ = 177.4) compared to male respondents ($T_2$ = 158.2) (Table 8). Based on Cohen's (1988) guidelines, there is a small practical difference in all procedural fairness measurements between male-headed and female-headed households, as the effect size (r) is below 0.29 (Table 7).

The results of the Fisher's Exact test indicated a statistically significant difference between genders concerning the accuracy of information provided before, during, and after the government's land expropriation process ($P < 0.001$), as well as the consistency of procedures among displaced farmers ($p < 0.05$). Female respondents demonstrated relatively a higher level of agreement on the accuracy of information (39.1%) compared to their male counterparts (17.4%). Additionally, females perceived relatively greater consistency in the procedures among dispossessed farmers. Men, therefore, were more likely to report concerns about procedural fairness. Overall, despite the higher levels of agreement among females regarding accuracy and consistency, their percentages remain low for most indicators (Table 7).

Table 7: Procedural fairness by gender (N = 323)

| Ordinal indicators | Female respondents ( N = 64) | Male respondents (N = 259) | Mann-Whitney U- test | Z-value | P-value | r-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | % | $T_1$ | % | $T_2$ | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Representation in pre-expropriation stage of plan preparation | 4.7 | 162.1 | 4.6 | 161.9 | 8283 | -0.018 | 0.985 | 0.001 |
| The process respects human right | 31.2 | 177.5 | 18.1 | 158.2 | 7298 | -1.942 | 0.052 | 0.108 |
| Fairness of government's accountability | 25 | 175.8 | 18.2 | 158.6 | 7406 | -1.472 | 0.141 | 0.082 |
| Fairness of ethical standards | 29.7 | 191.4 | 19.3 | 154.7 | 6406 | -3.496 | 0.000 | 0.195 |
| Unbiased judicial reviews (96 HHs raised complains which include F= 16 and M = 78) | 25 | 155.8 | 20.5 | 163.5 | 7892 | -0.745 | 0.456 | 0.041 |
| Fairness of correcting the issues | 21.9 | 177.4 | 16.6 | 158.2 | 7303 | -2.089 | 0.037 | 0.116 |

| Binary indicators | Freq. (N = 64) | % | Freq. (N = 259) | % | Total % out of 323 households | Fisher Exact test P-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Procedures compatible with displaced farmers' needs | 3 | 4.7 | 4 | 1.5 | 2.2 | 0.143 |
| Accuracy of information provided by the government | 25 | 39.1 | 45 | 17.4 | 21.7 | 0.000 |
| Consistency of procedures between dispossessed farmers | 44 | 68.7 | 141 | 54.4 | 57.3 | 0.048 |
| Determined compensation based on evidence | 2 | 3.1 | 5 | 1.9 | 2.2 | 0.629 |

Note: $T_1$ represents mean rank for female, $T_2$ denotes mean rank for male, ‘r’ represents effect sizes, Freq. represents frequency, and ‘N’ denotes number of respondents.
Source: Field Survey (2024)

The overall procedural fairness results indicated gender inequality in several areas, including respecting human rights, implementing ethical standards, correcting the issues in land expropriation, ensuring the accuracy of information provided before, during, and after the government's land expropriation process, and applying procedures consistently among displaced farmers.

FGDs revealed that male households are often arrested by the police without adherence to ethical standards at the request of the local municipality when they refuse to voluntarily provide their peri-urban land to the government. In addition, if these male-headed households raise concerns with the government about property valuation, compensation amounts, or payment issues, they also become vulnerable to arrest. It is concluded that male-headed households face a higher rate of arrest compared to their female counterparts, largely due to cultural norms that assign the administration of land and land-related resources primarily to male heads of households. Additionally, married male heads of households are typically the decision-makers regarding their plots of land in this area. These findings could encourage governmental bodies to promote fairness between displaced male and female landholders and to build trust between the government and both genders. Similarly, Shukla's (2021) study in India revealed that addressing issues related to procedural fairness enhances landowners' sense of justice among affected groups, which in turn improves satisfaction across all affected groups. Likewise, a study by Nkansah-Dwamena and Bonnie Raschke (2021) in Tanzania found that procedural fairness, transparency, and respect for all forms of land rights among different groups are crucial for increasing trust and fostering relationships. Zhai's (2019) study in China indicated that challenges associated with the compulsory expropriation of land include inadequate compensation and disorganized resistance from those whose land has been requisitioned. The study by Li et al. (2022) showed that good land governance must be based on equity, efficiency, and balancing the needs of urban development and the landholders.

## 5. Conclusions and policy implications

Land policies are designed to address issues related to land expropriation procedures, including problems associated with decision-making processes, property valuation, and land compensation. The implementation of land expropriation procedures was evaluated based on six key themes outlined in Ethiopian law. The implementation levels of these procedures were below the average, negatively impacting landholders' satisfaction. The effectiveness of the land expropriation process is closely linked to the satisfaction of peri-urban displaced farmers. Factors such as the loss of land rights due to legal procedures, the appropriateness of property valuation techniques, the adequacy of compensation, and the timeliness of land expropriation significantly enhance the willingness to provide their land. Perceived procedural fairness related to respect for human rights during displacement, adherence to ethical standards, accuracy of information provided by the government, fairness in addressing issues that arise during the process, and consistency of procedures among displaced farmers were not equitably implemented between male-headed and female-headed displaced farmers. Thus, issues of procedural fairness in land expropriation, property valuation, compensation payments, land development strategies, decision-making processes, and the evaluation of the project's impact on farmers require special attention from the government. Based on the findings of this study, the following policy implications are proposed to address land expropriation issues.

- The town administration should develop and implement standardized land expropriation agreements to be signed by the local government and displaced farmers prior to land expropriation for urban development.
- Municipality experts should strengthen consultation processes regarding the current land expropriation framework, ensuring farmers are informed and heard before any land expropriation plan is finalized.
- Establish an independent body to assess whether land expropriation for urban development adheres to legal standards and serves the public interest.
- The town justice office should provide displaced farmers with written information detailing appeal procedures and how to access legal aid.

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## Conflict of interest

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