



## Tackling land use challenges with a participatory and integrated planning approach

In Ethiopia, a rapidly growing population, continued dependency on agriculture as well as increased urbanisation and industrialisation have led to an inappropriate use of land and degradation of natural resources. Participatory and integrated land use planning provides solutions for the sustainable use of land and compliance with human rights. Our authors describe how such an approach can be put into practice.

By Hailu Wudineh, Leonie Gomm, Ralf Meyer and Nick Jewell

Ethiopia's population is increasing rapidly, and the rural inhabitants are largely migrating to urban and peri-urban areas (the latter refers to areas relating to a nearby urban area on its inner boundary, a rural area on its outer boundary, or the land in between). As a result, urban settlements are growing at 4.7 per cent annually, often leading to unregulated and unplanned urban expansion. Exacerbated by climate change, the country faces increasing environmental challenges: land degradation, erosion, flooding, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, desertification and recurrent droughts, mainly affecting rural communities and vulnerable groups. These challenges, among others, make land use more competitive, causing disputes, particularly in the peri-urban areas. Rival land use interests between communities and land claiming sectors, such as agriculture, industry, infrastructure, housing, forestry and protected areas, intensifies pressure on natural resources, driving negative impacts. The absence of an institutional and regulatory framework for an integrated and balanced approach to planning worsens the situation. In order to address these challenges, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) is

supporting the Ethiopian government via the Participatory and Integrated Land Use Planning project (PILUP). The project is introducing a multi-level methodology featuring communicating with different levels of government, different land claiming sectors, and including civil society. In doing so, it aims to strengthen the capacities of land use and management institutions, civil society and the private sector to develop, legally anchor and pilot participatory and integrated land use planning processes. Regional and district land administrations are given practical experience in resolving specific challenges, especially in peri-urban and rural areas where competition for land is acute.

The project's measures also include short- and long-term trainings to raise the quality and number of university graduates and skilled workers, providing them with the skills to carry out integrated land use planning. In this manner, over the long term, the sustainable use of natural resources as well as the holistic planning and sustainable development of settlements are to be promoted to reduce disputes over land. Thus the project contributes to good governance and the creation of a

conducive framework for investment. Its first phase (2019–2021) focused on a local level scale, piloting PILUP methods at the Kebele level (sub-district level). In the second phase (PILUP II, 2022–2024), the project extended its approach to the Woreda level (district level).

### From theory to practice

One of the five project areas is Aburamo Woreda, a district in Benishangul-Gumuz Region in the western part of the country, extending from the temperate highlands at 1,400 m elevation above sea level in the West to the warm and humid lowlands at 300 m a.s.l. in the East. The Northeast of Aburamo borders Assosa town, the regional capital, with approximately 50,000 inhabitants and a high rate of growth and in-migration from the countryside (forecasting approx. 70,000 inhabitants by 2035). One of the biggest challenges Aburamo Woreda will face in the future is the planned urban expansion of Assosa town into the rural settlements and cultivated lands of Aburamo. This urban expansion plan was developed without consulting official representatives of Aburamo



Woreda or informing or involving the rural population, who are going to be affected by displacement and resettlement once their plots are engulfed by Assosa's expansion.

Much of Abramo District is sparsely or entirely unpopulated, and land is not used according to its potential. Anbesa Chaka Forest Reserve, a nominally protected area, has been highly degraded by years of seasonal burning while other areas such as Kushimegani or Budur Kebeles remain largely unused, despite their potential to accommodate large-scale agricultural investments – a development strategy the Ethiopian Government is supporting to bring economic growth to lowland areas. Hence, effective land use planning must respond to the many variations of the physical and social composition within the district while addressing its current and future challenges.

### Awareness creation and citizen's participation

Following a people-centred human rights-based approach to land use planning, access to information and meaningful participation are promoted as vital elements in the planning process. Accordingly, the project launched a comprehensive media campaign to inform and raise awareness among stakeholders and the local population. The media campaign provided information to educate, create a common understanding, and inform the affected population about their responsibilities, opportunities and rights.

In order to reach a broader audience, the project collaborated with Benishangul Media, a local radio host, and aired a series of radio programmes on PILUP over a six-month period. Within communities of Aburamo, radio listener groups were established with the support of the GLAD (Green Love Appreciative Development), a local civil society organisation. The radio listener groups were a platform for local people to discuss the land use matters that affect them, after each episode was broadcast. "Establishing the PILUP radio listening groups was an informed decision, helping citizens to understand and follow the programmes more attentively, together. They were the basis for discussions, ideas and exchange of information that followed at subsequent social gatherings," says Endris Abdu, the radio journalist who hosted the shows.

GLAD facilitated community dialogues enabling full participation of local communities and specially emphasising representation of



A community dialogue in Amba.

Photos: GLZ Ethiopia

views among women and vulnerable groups. Three community dialogue sessions were conducted and attended by a total of 140 individuals from all sub-districts except the furthest, Genigen. Key discussion points included the purpose and meaning of PILUP, the nature of integrated land use planning, citizens' rights and responsibilities, gender transformative approaches, the purpose and advantage of participation and the benefits of integrated planning. Women were specially invited to ensure their interests and land, use planning concerns were heard and recorded. A total of 40 women attended the dialogue sessions. According to GLAD executive director Mengistu Beyessa, "the meetings brought increased awareness about planning and helped citizens' voices, especially those of women, to be heard".

The nomination of participants for the community dialogues was based on selection criteria such as gender, age (including youth), social status, vulnerability, etc. Participants of different organisations such as the women federation, women association, youth women association, as well as Kebele land administration and use committees, nominated by the project jointly with GLAD, were invited through the Kebele bureau with the support of an invitation letter of the Benishangul-Gumuz bureau of land.

### Capacity development and planning process

During the planning, experts from various sectors worked together with the technical assistance of the project, providing an opportunity for learning in the context of "on-the-job" training setting. In addition to practical cooperation with key stakeholders, the project provided short- and long-term training opportunities to enhance the capacities of concerned experts and officials from various government institutions. The training focused on land use planning processes and principles, geographic

information system (GIS) and remote sensing techniques, resource inventory and management, communication and visibility, monitoring and evaluation, conflict management and transformation, legal aspects of land use planning as well as human-rights-based and gender-transformative approaches (see Box on page 8).

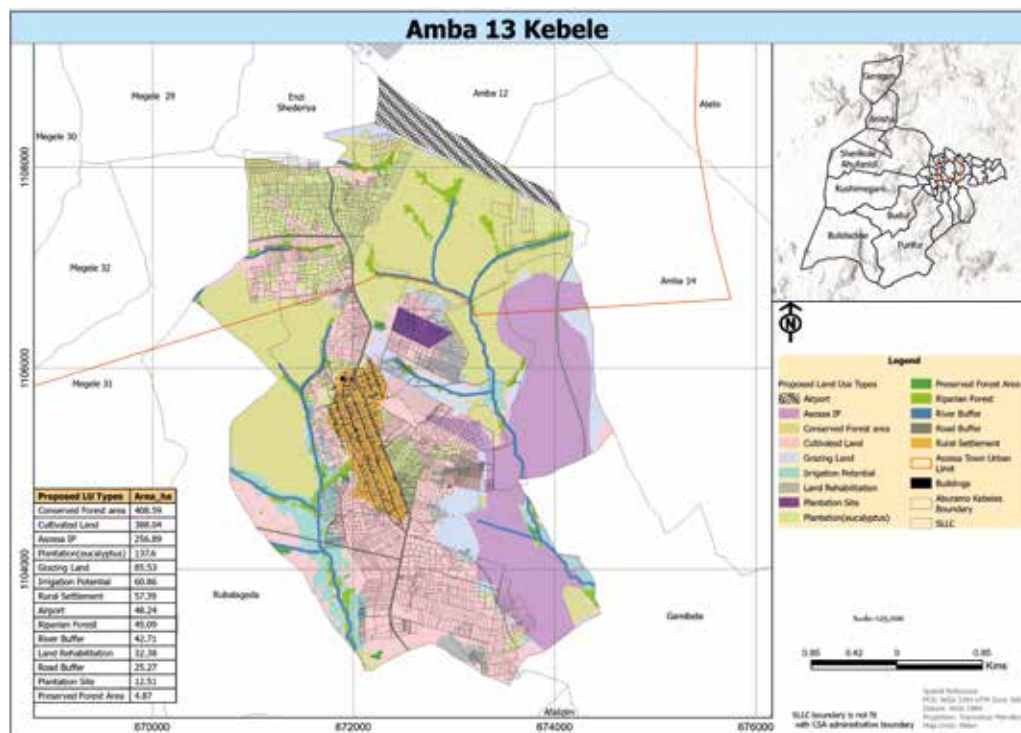
To guarantee collaboration and coordination among the different land-claiming sectors, regional steering committees and regional technical committees were established as key instruments. These committees are composed of officials and technical experts from concerned offices such as the land bureau, the agricultural bureau, the urban development bureau, the environmental protection bureau, the regional council and the Aburamo Woreda administration office, as well as civil society representatives. While the steering committee comprises high-level leaders of multiple sectors at the political level, experts and civil society and community representatives are on the technical committee. Both committees periodically met, discussed and decided during the different phases of the plan. "The project steering and technical structures were essential for the successful implementation of PILUP," says Aschalew Mamuye, the PILUP focal person of the land bureau, continuing: "These platforms are essential for integrating multiple sectoral plans, which had been prepared in isolation, resolving the conflicts and overlaps." Mohammed Shehu, a smallholder farmer in Aburamo for more than 40 years, explains he is grateful to have been involved as a participant in the process. "Our country today is not the same as it was 40 years ago," Mohammed recalls. "The soil fertility is degraded, forests are depleted, and wetlands are disappearing." Mohammed wishes to see the environment recover. "If the approved land use plan of Aburamo is implemented, the natural environment will be restored, and land-related disputes will be minimised," the farmer hopes.

The final participatory and integrated land use plan of Aburamu Woreda was accepted by the woreda land use committee and approved by the Regional Steering Committee after consultation with the Regional Technical Committee. The plan will become legally binding following ratification by Benishangul-Gumuz Regional Parliament.

### Ensuring sustainability and accountability

To ensure that implementation of the plan is correctly carried out, the project supported the regional government to establish a review body comprising experts from the different land-claiming sectors who served as members of the technical committee. The task of the review body is to evaluate proposed projects and assess if these are compliant with the approved plan. “Whenever land use requests arise in Aburamo, the review body will adjudicate how far the proposal is in line with the approved land use plan and provides guidance to decision-makers,” Aschalew notes, underlining the importance of the review body.

Capacity building is key to ensuring sustainability and long-term viability of new planning methods. The project has contributed to both higher (postgraduate) education and technical training. Recently, four training modules on different topics related to integrated land use planning were produced and integrated into the Ethiopian National (TVET) education system. At postgraduate level, a Masters’ curriculum on Integrated Urban and Rural Land Use Planning at the University of Addis Ababa was supported. Having passed all procedural steps, the course awaits final approval by the University senate before enrolling its first students in the subject. Training in PILUP at academ-



A land use plan at sub-district level.

ic as well as technical levels will address the large technical capacity deficit and the growing need for improved land administration in the country.

To summarise, participatory and integrated land use planning promotes sustainable development by balancing environmental, economic and social needs while enabling local communities to participate in planning for their own areas. The approach helps manage natural resources effectively, resolves conflicts and enhances resilience to climate change. Ultimately, it aligns local practices with national policies, fostering equitable growth and food security. However, it will take more time, commitment and resources to follow up on the implementation of and compliance with land use plans, scale up the approach into other districts and strengthen the legal framework for PILUP at other government levels, such as regional or federal.

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**R**eferences: [www.rural21.com](http://www.rural21.com)

### Principles of PILUP

**Participatory land use planning** means that the local population actively participates in planning and decision-making.

**The human rights-based approach** is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. In the context of land use planning, it focuses on strategies that strengthen access to information, meaningful participation, accountability and access to justice to ensure that such processes ad-

here to human rights standards and respect the tenure rights of people, communities and others.

**Integrated land use planning** as proposed by PILUP II means plans developed in different sectors and across different levels of government being connected and interrelated. This implies that the spatial relationships and interdependencies between plans contribute to a cohesive and logical integrated plan. Including spatial, administrative and sectoral relationships, rather than planning in isolation, ensures that the final result, the integrated land use plan, is better organised, unified and interconnected, and thus better able to effec-

tively address the widest range of demands made on the land.

The **gender transformative approach** seeks to actively examine, challenge and transform the underlying causes of gender inequality rooted in inequitable social structures and institutions. Gender-transformative approaches in land use planning focus on challenging and changing the underlying gender norms and power dynamics that affect access to and control over land. By doing so, they seek to eradicate the systemic forms of gender-based discrimination by creating or strengthening equitable gender norms, dynamics and systems that support gender equality.