

## Informal Urban Housing Land Access and Planning Responses in Ethiopia

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Residential development by the middle and high income population groups in urban Ethiopia has been accompanied by permutation of the conventional plan-service-build-occupy (PSBO) sequence with convoluted formal and informal constituents being embedded in the built environment creation process. This varies from the dominant view within global informal land access (and development) literature where repeated reference is made to socio-economic status of informal participants as being largely ‘low-come group or the poor’ who circumvents the PSBO sequence to eschew short-term cost. Utilizing a case method, the study explains informal land access by housing cooperatives and squatters and the resultant outcome(s) in Addis Ababa city and the abutting towns of Holeta and Burayu. In Holeta, the middle-class populations fleeing inner-city slum conditions tend to jump the municipal boundary and masterplan boundaries to illegally purchase (from farmers and/or speculators under tacit arrangements) and convert prospective prime land (into residential clusters) immediately outside operational boundaries. Here informality’s short-cutting practices outpace planning processes and carries with it an idiosyncratic characteristic of information crisis or invisibility which constrains largely reactive planning practice, with the implementation of the revised master plans being greatly constrained by speculative occupations. Informality in Burayu’s land delivery process occurs on conventionally allocated land. Given that ‘what comes first takes most and sets patterns, and what comes last may never come at all’(Chambers, 1988), there emerges a path-dependent planning in Ethiopia and its *a posteriori* regularization that perpetuates organic development, with a reduced scope for ‘design’. While informality in Holeta tends to expand residential development by greatly weaken planning interventions as it precedes the conventional processes, the case of Burayu has even halted land allocation for housing cooperatives, thus creating more shelter problems through pursuit of formalization. The study concludes that this formal-informal convergence tends to create a larger informal sector as policy responses become harsher on informal processes occurring on planned land. However, we argue that unfettered informal residential development may constitute precursor(s) of future built environment in Ethiopian cities. Hidden among these are middle class and higher income groups who can afford the conventional PSBO model, alluding to the view that informality isnot a temporary manifestation of underdevelopment characterized by survival activities of the marginalized urban poor but a salient and permanent component in developing countries.