Chapter 60
Challenges and Opportunities for the Development and Management of Urban Green Areas in Addis Ababa:
The Case of Cooperative Housing Green Areas and Street Trees in Nifas Silk Lafto Sub-City

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the challenges of, and opportunities for, the development and management of cooperative housing green areas and street trees. To deal with this issue effectively, the study employed mixed research methods and used questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations and desk reviews, for the purposes of data collection. The findings of this study identify a lack of awareness on the part of the public and of government employees, weak institutional capacities, a lack of coordination among stakeholders, and the absence of clear ownership and enforcement mechanisms, as representing the major challenges impacting the development and management of cooperative housing green areas and street trees. Therefore, in order to develop and manage these green areas properly, the study recommends that the good will, the coordination and the efforts of all stakeholders, including communities, government authority, and non-governmental bodies, be enhanced and duly coordinated.

INTRODUCTION

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The concept of the smart city is not a static one: there is no absolute definition of the smart city, no end point, but rather a process, or series of steps, by which cities become more "livable" and resilient, and thus able to respond more quickly to new challenges. The Office for the Revision of the Addis Ababa Master Plan has also explained that a smart city includes not only smart technologies, but also smart residents, smart mobility, a smart economy, smart housing, smart governance, and smart urban green area development and management. Thus, the development and management of urban green areas such as cooperative housing green areas and street trees, which are the focus of this chapter, are part of the definition of the Smart City in Addis Ababa. This is due to the fact that the development of multi-functional cooperative housing green areas and street trees contributes towards the aims of the smart city in terms of the improvement in the quality of life and environment for the city's population (Alamrew, 2002). The preservation of cooperative housing green areas and street trees in and around the city, also provides psychological satisfaction for the residents. An interesting insight into the purpose of urban green areas and their contribution to smart city development, is provided by Wondimu (2006). He argues that a city or town without sufficient green space can be qualified as an organism with no respiratory system.

As the city of Addis Ababa is now in the process of rapid economic transformation and urbanization, there is growing concern about the fate of green areas. The capital was once called the "forest city". In fact, at the beginning of the 20th century, some 10 million trees were imported from Australia and planted all over Addis Ababa (Berlan, 1963 cited in Wondimu, 2006). Since the nationalization of land in 1975, the green areas in the capital have been subjected to excessive exploitation and severe degradation due to the lack of careful management of green areas and inadequate greening activities (Horst, 2006). Recently, the city administration has been also unable to keep pace with the expectation emanating from the services and facilities of urban green areas and the city's international notion. Moreover, the smart development and management of urban green areas in Addis Ababa barely meets the standards set by other rival African cities, or even the standards set out in the master plan of the city itself (ORAAMP[1], 1996).

The smart development of cooperative housing green areas and street trees is usually planned and indicated in the settlement plan and road design of Addis Ababa. However, these green areas are not operating properly, or are not used appropriately by the residents of Addis Ababa. There are many problems related to these urban green areas, one of which is the level of cleanness. It is true that cleanness is one of the operational attributes for the good quality of urban green spaces, as this creates comfort and convenience for its users. Addis Ababa, however, is not lucky enough to have clean cooperative housing green areas and street trees. Indeed, in some cases these urban spaces are places where homeless people live, dump their garbage and use as toilets. Furthermore, the absence of the effective, timely cleaning and maintenance of these spaces further aggravates the problems.

Cooperative housing green areas also have problems concerning their current functionality and operation. In principle, they should serve all members of the housing cooperative; and they have to be accessible to such members. However, some of these areas are closed, or are simply vacant lots which do not offer any kind of public service. This situation also negatively impacts the environment, the appearance and the economic development of the city.

Generally, these green areas suffer in terms of their appearance, maintenance and cleaning. Moreover, there are also problems related to the extent of the availability and practicality of these urban spaces. However, Addis Ababa is going through a process of transition. Planning for future development and the implementation of management strategies are therefore essential for such urban spaces. However, very little systematic research has been carried out into cooperative housing green areas and street trees in Addis Ababa City.