The objective of the paper is to assess rural land dispute in Bahir Dar Zuria Woreda of Wojer, Feresewoga, and Tentakerkose, Sebatamite, and Lejome kebeles. To achieve the objectives, the study has employed qualitative research approach with case study research design by using primary and secondary sources of data. Data were collected using focus group discussion, interviews, and non-participatory observation; and relevant literatures and documents are reviewed. Key informants and FGD participants were selected based on purposive and snowball sampling methods. The total number of informants participated in this study were 106. The data were analyzed qualitatively through the use of thematic analysis. It is found that rural land disputes were instigated due to various factors like the increases in population number, scarcity of farm land, poverty, the increase in rural land value, and weak rural land administration system, land registration and certification, increase in rural land value were the indirect causes of rural land disputes and the study identified the direct cause rural land disputes such as boundary disputes, inheritances disputes, transfer of land disputes, land dispute on access to road, drainage direction dispute, plant shade, land garbing, dispute on grazing land, divorce related disputes, compensation payment for expropriation of rural lands to the city, livestock destroy crops dispute, and ownership disputes. Rural land dispute is better resolved through indigenous dispute resolution mechanisms. The government and other stockholders should give emphasis to the increasing land use dispute and needs to integrate the modern and indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms to mitigate the problem.

**Keywords**: agriculture; bahir dar zuria woreda; dispute; land use; rural land.

**INTRODUCTION**

Land is one of the most important elements of nature upon which humans depend for their living, thus, land largely determines their lifestyle, culture, and their level of organization, hence land is important for their relationships among themselves, or their progress (Habteab, 2014). Rural life is dependent on land to fulfill their needs. Rural human life depends on land and humans need land to cultivate food crops, fruits, and other plants; to graze their animals; to build houses. For the rural people land is connected with their entire life progress and this makes land the central object of dispute (Wehrmann, 2008) and Bruce, (2011). According to Cotula, et.al. (2004) the major factor underlying land disputes in Africa is linked to the large flows of people seeking land where they can settle and farm for their livelihood. In order to successfully resolve land dispute, it is important to be aware of the many different causes of land dispute that exist in the rural population. In Eastern Africa land, in combination with inequitable access to resources, resource degradation and demographic pressures, poor land governance has been a key driver in land dispute (ECA, 2012). As (Wehrmann, 2008) stated understanding the specific nature of the land dispute under consideration is a vital step in its eventual resolution (Wehrmann, 2008) in Africa. In Ethiopia land dispute is the most serious problem in the rural community (Zerihun, 2016). It is a social problem arises from different sources in the rural population. The root cause of dispute is scarcity of agricultural land in the face of high population pressure that demands land and very limited alternative means of livelihood to the rural community.
people and land as a single source of income and lack of experience to involve in other activities out of depending on plugging farm lands (Bedasa et al. 2018, Siyum, et al. 2013 and Zerihun, 2016). “Land dispute involves conflicting claims to rights in land by two or more parties, focused on a particular piece of land, which can be addressed within the existing legal framework. Land disputes may or may not reflect some broader conflict over land” (USAID, 2020 p.1). Land disputes can trigger more serious conflict, and their expeditious resolution can ease tensions (Ibid).

In Ethiopia, land has always been the main sources of the livelihood of the people as well as the main sources of individual, group disputes and regional conflicts next to the political conflict and struggle for power (Kassa, 2020). Rural land dispute occur among individual farmers, between farmers and government or between farmers and foreign or local investors (Haftom, 2011). In Amhara region the available land holdings are intensively cultivated and often insufficient for household livelihood requirements due to continuing sub divisions and land degradation (World Bank, 2012). The issue of rural land is very sensitive in Bahir Dar Zuria Woreda (Sewnet 2018) and many people are killed because of land dispute (Haile,2017).

As land is the most important resource for humans, it can be the source dispute at any time and place (Kassa, 2020). According to the Ethiopian Policy Studies Institute (2023), in pre urban areas, land is the sources of dispute between government and farmers. The land dispute needs prevention mechanisms to reduce the negative impacts on the peaceful coexistence and agricultural crop production. As Wehrmann, (2008) stated, In many parts of the world, indigenous peoples have a very special relation to their land. For them, land is more than an economic or productive asset. It represents home, binds together past, present and future and constitutes their spiritual base. Land being such a complex issue for them, disputes about it have to be settled in a more comprehensive manner (Wehrmann, 2008).

The indigenous rural land use dispute resolution mechanisms have strong attachments with the life of the community (ibid). In addition, rural communities use the modern land governance system to find a solution for land disputes but they prefer it the indigenous mechanism by thinking their future relationships based on their cultural values (Hulu, et. al, 2023).

The study primarily deals on the cause of rural land use disputes and the resolution mechanisms in Bahir dar zuria Amhara community that have been observed in largely in recent times between and among individual farmers, government, the community and investors. The researcher assesses and identifies the causes of rural land use disputes and the settlement or resolution mechanisms in the study area.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is conducted in 2019-2022 at Bahir Dar Zuria Woreda which is found in the previous west Gojjam Administrative Zone of Amhara National Regional State of Ethiopia and currently it is found in the new administrative zone of North Gojam Zone. This picture is the Map of the study area Figure 1.

Figure 1. Map of Lake Tana
The Woreda, shared boundaries with Lake Tana in north, Acheffir Woreda in the east, Dera Woreda in the east, and Yilmana Densa Woreda in the south. It has 36 rural kebeles. The people in the study area largely practiced crop and in some level they practiced livestock production for their livelihood.

This Study used qualitative research approach. According to King, Keohane and Verba (1994) the qualitative approach enable a researcher to unearth an immense amount of information for a study. The researcher also used case study research method. This study is conducted in the farming rural areas of five kebeles of Bahir Dar Zuria Woreda, and based on empirical researches. Primary data were collected through in-depth interview, FGD, using narratives and non-participant observation. 109 participants were purposively selected and key informants comprised elders, religious leaders, rural land administration experts, and community members. This study also used secondary sources of data such as from online sources, books, published journals, working papers and other unpublished written works. Data were analyzed qualitatively by organizing the data’s in to themes and contents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Causes of Rural Land Disputes in the Study Area

Interview with the Woreda Rural Land Administration shows, rural land and rural land related disputes are the main types of dispute in rural communities of Bahir Dar Zuria Woreda. As he argued, “the dispute aroused from various causes which are land based due to shortage of land for various purposes to the rural people like land for farming”. In this regard, Zerihun, (2016) indicated that in the rural Ethiopia, the root cause of the increasing rural land dispute is shortage of agricultural land in the face of high population pressure and very limited alternative means of livelihood for the rural community. Furthermore, focus group discussants explained as follows:

We encountered and observed in our villages that rural land disputes among individual landholders, family members, government officials and the community is increasing at an alarming rate within community as land is a multipurpose resource for livelihood (FGD 2 with the elderly arbitration committee at Sebatamet kebele 9th February, 2022).

This evidence showed rural land disputes are highly disruptive in the community. The study reveals that causes of rural land disputes in the study area are divided in to two major categories even if they are interconnected to each other. These are briefly discussed below.

Indirect Causes of Rural Land Disputes

a. Population Pressure

The collected data indicated that natural population growth with unbalanced land for farming, settlement and grazing purpose is a factor for land disputes in the study area (Interview with kebele rural land administration and use expert 1 at Wojer kebele, 9th February, 2020). In this regards, Kironde (2012), USAID (2016), and Wehrmann, (2008) Africa in general and Eastern Africa in particular is the scene of many disputes related to land and other natural resources. This is partly a result of the increasing demand on the existing resources as a result of population growth, land governance deficits and lack of developing appropriate land dispute handling mechanisms in the rural areas. As the informant argued,

Due to population increase, most of our farmers hold inadequate plot of land to cultivate for their food security and there is high demand for farm land within the community members. Thus, this makes land as a source of dispute between and among individuals (Interview with Woreda rural land administration expert1 at Bahir Dar zuria Woreda, 16th February, 2022).

Furthermore, some of the focus group discussants also narrated the issue of rural land shortage in their community in the following way:

There is great imbalance between the available farm land and the farming community who needed land for farming. Control of the available farm land through different mechanisms created unproductive competition and it aggravated land disputes. A case in point, focus group discussants illustrated, many people in the study area are landless and they asked the government to get access from the communal land for farming, ranching and settlement purpose (FGD5 with kebele land administration and use committee at Tentakerkose kebele,
As a result, this natural phenomenon resulted in the increased land dispute in the community. Therefore, population increases were the root cause or indirect driver for land disputes in the community of the study area.

b. Rural Land Scarcity

Rural land scarcity and shortage causes land dispute. In supporting this, Ayalneh, et al. (2006) stated that the presence of scarcity and shortage of land has resulted in dispute among rural households in Ethiopia. In addition, Moreda, (2016) explained that in Amhara region the available land holdings are intensively cultivated and often insufficient for household livelihood requirements due to continuing sub divisions and land degradation. Therefore, the evidence gained from Woreda rural land administration asserts also, rural land scarcity and shortage largely drives land disputes within the community. The informant described the problem in the following ways:

In our community, most of the young members of the community are landless due to shortage of access to land. They used different mechanisms to get access to farm land like rent, buying, and share cropping. This created unproductive competition to control land through the above stated mechanisms and mostly led to disputes among and between individuals (Interview with kebele rural land administration expert 2 at Tentakerkose kebele, 9th, February, 2022).

Informants also added, the shortage of farm land in which the rural people depend upon it as a significant livelihood to achieve food security and this contributes competition to use and access the farm and grazing land, and resulted in disputes among individuals, groups, and families. Accordingly, peoples’ competitions for land to use, control, or access are the sources of dispute (Interview with Woreda rural land administration expert 1 at Bahir dar zuria Woreda, 18th, February, 2022).

c. Poverty

According to informants, rural economic poverty also causes for individuals and groups to involve in land and land related disputes. As land is an important economic asset to alleviate their level of poverty and to achieve food security (Interview with Woreda rural land administration expert1 at Bahir dar Zuria Woreda rural land office, 18th February, 2022). Rural land is a very important economic factor of production to produce food and other primary goods for survival from poverty. In addition, land for the rural people is the source of income and social insurance, and reputation (ECA, 2012).

As informants said “farm land is the only source of income and livelihood due to the absence of alternative source of income and lack of experience to inter into other ways of life beyond farming”. This affirmed that people who are poor in land and having economic problems are more vulnerable and involved to land disputes due to that their small plot of land is not enough to sustain their life in agriculture (Interview with kebele rural land expert 4 at Lijome, 10th February, 2022). In this regards, Wehrmann (2008), indicated in his study as follows:

The root of land disputes and conflicts are psychological fears and desires (e.g. fear for existence, fear of insecurity, desire to be recognized, cared for and loved) resulting in material and emotional needs (need for shelter, need for a production base, longing for self-esteem, or seeking power and wealth). These needs shape people’s interests, which then result in their attitudes and positions and finally define their behavior to land disputes and conflicts.

In addition, informants also indicated, community members attempted any possible means which are acceptable or not in the community or by the government to get access to plot of arable land for the fulfillment of their needs to secure their living. Hence, they encounter dispute with individuals, families, and the community and the government.
d. Institutional Weakness of Rural Land Administration Institutions

The weak enforcement potential of rural land administration institutions, lack of transparency and accountability in land governance, the prevalence of corruption in institutions and limited access to land administration services for the poor rural population are structural causes to rural land disputes (Ashenafi, 2013, and Wehrmann, 2017). Again, the data gained from informants revealed that the potential of kebele and Woreda rural land administration and use offices were limited and failed to govern and address rural land disputes which are recurring in the community due to various causes (FGD3 with farmers who settled their land disputes through customary conflict resolution mechanisms at Sebatamet kebele, 11th February, 2022). Furthermore, the informants complained as follows:

*Our kebele and Woreda rural land administration institutions are fragile to govern the causes of rural land disputes because of their irresponsible activities such as corruption, lack of accountability, transparency, poor record keeping, unnecessary bureaucratic system, the absence of well-timed response and decision to our land cases and this aggravated and derived land disputes more serious in the community (FGD1 with elders at Wojer kebele, February, 10th 2022).*

Besides, two key informants disclosed that rural land and rural related disputes were vastly existed among families, people and state officials, due to abusing of power and forcing officials by different mechanisms like creating influence by other body that have a relationship to divert the existing normal legal working procedures towards the interest of a person to have farm land illegally is common. As a result, violation of the rights and benefit of most vulnerable people like the economically poor in transferring and using of rural land rights were the most common sources of disputes in the study area (Interview with community elder 2 and religious leader 1 at Feresewoga kebeles, 23rd February, 2022). These issues resulted to fuel the problem.

e. Land Registration and Certification

The major advantage of rural land registration and certification was to reduce land based dispute and land related disputes. Indeed, the government in the study area conducted rural land certification and registration of the rural lands to ensure the holding rights (USAID, 2016, Berhanu, & Fayera, 2005, Shewakena, 2007). Rural lands are recorded and farmers acquire certificate of their piece of land in order to ensure tenure security and to reduce land dispute that arise among or between farmers (FGD1 with the kebele rural land administration and use committee at Lijome kebele, February, 10th 2022). However, the researcher observed the Woreda courts and land administration offices were crowded by large amount of people who have land and land related disputes due to lack of land registration and certification problems.

According to the interview with the kebele rural land administration and use expert 3 at Wojer kebele, 9th February, 2022, said “rural land registration and certification procedure was very complex” due to that, there were many interested people in one plot of land and challenging to know and identify the right owner. Moreover, individuals and families arouse ownership disputes during the times of land registration and certification procedures and the disputes were investigated at the grass root within the community to identify who have the proper holding right based on the rural land administration proclamations. The community and villagers were witness to identify a certain plot of land was owned by whom from its source. Thus, land registration and certification disputes were still continued and needs effective resolution mechanisms.

f. Increase in Rural Land Value

The value or price of land increased due to many reasons which include expansion of urbanization, the existence of high demand for land and commercialization of rural land for farming (USAID, 2020). In fact, two Woreda rural land experts indicated, the issue as follows:

*The area is peri urban so that commercialization of farmland for flora farms to national and foreign investors and industry sites formed. Hence, causing land disputes between individuals, and investors and the government because of unfair land valuation and expropriation problems were happened. Above all, the price of land in the area was very high and people who trade in land were increasing from time to time due to the expansion or enlargement of the city. Equally important, the land market were ran out of the government system and these practices were the source of dispute when the government attempts to control the land market and what the government call “illegal land grabbing” (Interview with
In this regards, the dispute arose, when the government tried to control the illegal land market by damaging their constructed houses without considering their expenses of the price of the land they paid and the price of house construction in general (Interview with kebele rural land administration expert4 at Sebatamet kebele, 9th February, 2022). Furthermore, three focus group discussants were argued on this issue and summarized as follows:

The values of farm land such as farm land is single source of survival, source of social privilege, source of wealth accumulation, and means of getting care takers for old age in the community due to limited alternative means of livelihood beyond using land as a major sources of income to lead their life and this indirectly contributed to the frequently emerging rural land disputes (FGD2 with the elderly arbitration committee at Wojer kebele (Shimagile shengo or the elderly arbitration committee is a body established by the government for rural land disputes only at the kebele level), February, 9th, 2022).

Direct Causes of Rural Land Disputes

a. Boundary Dispute

Boundary disputes between individual farmers who are neighboring in farm and private grazing land were mostly happened in the rural population (Bamlak, 2013, Haftom, 2011 and Kassa 2022). According to one key community elder informant, this attributes of rural land dispute was due to boundary trespassing of individuals’ farm and private grazing land of the other farmers. In addition, boundary disputes also happened between the community and individuals when individuals encroach and garbs communal lands (Interview with elder2 at Wojer kebele 5th February, 2022). The population pressure and land degradation increases the completion control a very small piece of land (Siyum, et. al, 2013). The other informant also added that community members in the study area used collected stone, tree, ditch, and small rivers to demarcate the boundary of their agricultural farm land, private grazing lands and communal grazing lands from individual holding. The symbols gradually disappear due to natural and man-made forces through time. The removal of border demarcation symbols brings boundary trespassing between individuals. Due to this reason, dispute would occur between individual farmers, groups and the community. Also, boundary disputes occurred between individuals and the community when individuals pass the boundary of the lands of the community owned institutions like school and church compounds (Interview farmer 2, who settled their land dispute through shimglina at Sebatamet kebele, 14th February, 2022).

The rural people involved in farm land boundary disputes and the natures of the disputes were difficult to govern with formal state based conflict resolution mechanisms. Because, no one knows the real boundary of a certain disputable land except, the guise of the neighboring farmers. The upshot of all, informants suggested that the various forms shimglina customary conflict resolution mechanisms are more suitable to settle this types of disputes (Interview with the kebele rural land administration expert 3, at Wojer kebele, 9th, February, 2022). Three FGD4 discussants said that:

We knew members of our villagers who are now in jail as a result of serious farm land boundary trespass disputes and who emotionally took direct physical violence and we knew individuals who killed each other to keep a little portion of their farm land boundary (FGD4 with the kebele rural land administration and use committee at Tentakerkose kebele, 10th, February, 2022).

This evidence indicated how farm land boundary dispute was serious issue in the community and needs effective resolving mechanisms.

b. Dispute on the Transfer of Rural Land

These causes of dispute is related to the transfer of farm and private grazing land from one landholder to another land user in the form of rent, donation, inheritance, sell, and share cropping for a limited period of time was common activity in the rural community (Behailu, 2015, Mequnent, 2016, Ashinafe, 2013, USAID, 2016). According the data obtained from the elderly arbitration committee, transfer of rural land was the most prevalent cause of dispute in community. Farmers transfer their farm land and private grazing land to other farmers through informal traditional local agreement for a few years. Commonly, farmers rent and sell their land to individuals who have insufficient farm land or...
no farm land in contractual traditional local agreements because of different reasons. During the end of the contract, individuals violated their holding terms of agreement and unable to return the land to its owner (FGD2 with the elderly arbitration committee at Lijome kebele, 9th February, 2022). This causes disputes between individuals.

In addition, the informants stated that share cropping was common activity in the community of the study area. Elders, women and disable land holders who cannot do agricultural labor activity used their land as a source of income through share cropping mechanisms based on the tradition of the community. In this regards, Siso (one third) and Iqul (Equal) is the most commonly used share cropping mechanisms in the community. Siso share cropping means the legal land holder takes one third of the crops from the total amount of crops and the remaining is for the share cropper holder. Iqul (Equal) share cropping means the legal land holder and share cropper holder divide the total crops equally. In addition, sometimes they also shared agricultural input expenditures including labor work based on their agreement. Both share cropping mechanisms were practiced based on local traditional agreements. Here, the dispute arise when one of them are violated their share cropping agreement they forwarded (Interview with elders at Fereseewoga kebele, 19th, February, 2022). As the kebele rural land experts described the issue in the following manner:

Almost in all working days, disputes related to the transfer of rural land were reported to our office to find a solution to the disputes. Most of the disputants were individuals and families. They also added that these types of disputes mainly were resolved effectively through the community based conflict resolution mechanisms to maintain the peaceful interaction of the disputants (Interview with kebele rural land administration expert4 at Sebatamet kebele, 9th, February, 2022).

c. Rural Land Inheritance Disputes

Inheritance is one of the mechanisms to get access to rural land for livelihood. Disputes over the inheritance of parental farm land between family members’ causes serious disputes in rural communities because of incompatible interests of inheritors (Wehrmann, 2017, Wehrman, 2008, FAO, 2002). Likewise, in the study area community, unequal division of rural land when family members inherit their family farm land led to disagreements and cause serious disputes. Families who divide their family farm land are not equally satisfied by considering who serves and cares the most to the owner of the land during their life time. Therefore, the disputes arises within the family members due to their interest are incompatible to inherit the land (Interview with elders and religious leaders at Wojer kebele, 7th and 24th February, 2022). The other informants also summarized the issue as follows:

There were individuals who ask inheritance right without knowing the inheritance regulation of the government in the community. In addition, there were families who killed with each other due to disagreements over the inheritance of their family farm lands. Therefore, land inheritance dispute were also common problem in the community (Interview with the kebele rural land administration expert1 at Fereseewoga kebele, 10th, February, 2022).

d. Dispute on Squatting on Communal Lands

Illegal occupation of communal grazing lands through squatting was the common problem in the rural community (Assefa, 2012, Mulugata, 2017). As most of FGD discussants described, squatting on communal grazing lands near the farm lands and at the frontier of settlements were also the cause of dispute between individual farmers and the community. Farmers who holds farm land near to the communal land squats to expand their farm land (FGD2 with the elderly arbitration committee at Sebatamet kebele, 9th, February, 2022). The weak management of communal lands by the government and the community, shortage of land, and landlessness were encouraging causes for squatting. However, the community has the interest to protect the communal land for common grazing purpose and the dispute arose, when the community tries to manage and return the occupied land; though squatters were not voluntary to do and the dispute were disruptive in the peaceful coexistence of the community. Above all, the weak management of communal lands opens the room for squatting and causes to disputes (Interview with kebele rural land administration expert 2 at Wojer kebele, 12th February, 2022). Thus, squatting on communal land were one the causes of rural land dispute which involved many actors and needs effective solution to resolve the problem.

In this regards, the kebele rural land administration and use committee indicated as follows:
In our area, almost all farmers who had farm land in a shared boundary to the communal land squats some portion of it to expand their farm land, to shelter private grazing land for ranching. The dispute instigated when the community started to demarcate the boundary to return the squatted parcel communal lands. Most important of all, the community was the protector of communal lands, despite the fact that, formal state based mechanisms were weak to settle and govern communal land related disputes which arose between the community and individuals (FGD 5 with kebele rural land administration and use committee at Tentakerkose kebele, 10th February, 2022).

e. Land Disputes in Access to Road or Pathways

Based on the information obtained from elders, access to pathway was one source of land dispute in the community. The community needed pathways or road for going to farm fields, grazing lands, connection to villages, church, and to governmentally known public roads. Farmers in the study area were sowing pathway purpose allocated lands which shared boundary to their farm land and closed it. The movement of people and animals to their farm fields were in problem. Therefore; this causes disputes among community members to open the closed pathways. The root of this dispute were shortage of farm land and lack of governing mechanisms related pathway related disputes within government rural land administration systems (Interview with elder 4 at Tentakerkose kebele February 7th, 2022).

Further, the existence of pathways to access the community to different places from their home was acceptable by the community and the government, but shortage of farm land was significantly a push factor to use pathways for cultivation activity. The dispute was more intense especially during summer season in which it was the time that the movement of farmers and animals to their farm field increased (Interview with elders and religious leaders at Lijome kebele, 13th, and 17th, February, 2022).

f. Dispute on Grazing Land

Dispute on grazing arable land is often happened in African rural society (Wehrmann, 2008 and Daudeline, 2002) the Ethiopia experience is not much far from this phenomenon. In the study area, there are disputes between individual land holder and the community over communal grazing land. The dispute is happened when individual land holders take some portion of the communal land for private grazing purpose (Demeke, 2012). In the same manner, there were disputes related to communal grazing land between the community and the government when the government took their communal grazing land for flora farming investments to private investors without considering the livelihood of the people who use that area for grazing (FGD1 with elders at Feresewoga kebele, 10th February, 2022). In addition, elders explained the issue as follows:

In our area, grazing land disputes were happened in the community, when farmers used their farm land for grazing as a result of shortage of communal grazing land in the community due to environmental degradation and the dispute mostly happened when individuals who took over other private grazing lands. The dispute involved families, and individuals (FGD2 with the elderly arbitration committee at Sebatamet kebele, 9th February, 2022).

g. Divorce Related Dispute

Dispute due to land property division was common when land holders make divorce in the rural community (Germa, 2014, Shibeshi et al. 2015). Similarly, in the study area, the husband mostly neglects the rights of his divorced wife to divide the farm land and interred in to dispute between families of the wife and husband. Land property division during divorce cause serious dispute among the families of husband and wife and sometimes led to violence and loss of life (Interview with elder 4 and religious leader 3 at Wojer kebele, 17th February, 2022). Four FGD1 participants said:

In our community, there was no divorce which was peaceful in the procedures of land property division between the divorced individuals. The dispute was common to all divorced individuals but it was more serious to those farmers who married landless women and led to divorce. The dispute was serious due to that as he is asked to give half of his farm land to her. The government supports the equal share of landless women from her husband during divorce in conditions but the community did not recognize this activity. Accordingly, divorces completed with dispute and sometimes families inter into destructive disputes (FGD1 with elders at Tentakerkose kebele, 10th, February, 2022).
h. Drainage Direction Land Disputes

Drainage direction on farm land to the flows of flood is a source of disputes in the rural community. Farm land drainage is seasonal cause of farm land disputes. As FGD discussants explained, a lot of farmers involved to farm land disputes because of drainage direction of flood. Mostly, in summer rainy season, farm land disputes caused by drainage direction are common in the community to protect their farmland from degradation or erosion (FGD2 with the elderly arbitration committee at Lijome kebele, 9th February, 2022). In addition the informant described it in the following ways:

> Our farmers used drainage in their plot of land to the flow of floods and farmers divert the direction of the drainage which comes to their farm land in order to protect from erosion and the health of crops from flood damage. Since, the farm lands are interconnected to many other farm lands, and the drainage runoff inter into the neighbor farm lands, hence, it were damaged the crops of others and disputes happened between and among farmers in the community. There is no regulation to govern drainage direction disputes in rural land administration institution of the state. However, the community has their working habits in regulating drainage systems across many plots of farm lands (Interview with the kebele rural land administration expert1 at Fereseewoga kebele, 10th February, 2022).

i. Plant Shade Land Disputes

Peoples in the study area planted trees for timber, housing and firewood and for other related purposes. Plants that are planted near harvested farm land have been influenced the productivity of crops due to the plant shades. The owner of the plant wants to benefit from it after it is growing up to the needed stage to use for different purpose. On the other hand, the owners of the crops are also interested to reduce the effect of the plant shade in on the crops health and productivity. Thus, their incompatible goal cause disputes (Interview with elder 6 at Sebatamet kebele, 30th February, 2022).

The informant indicated the problem in the following ways:

> The government and the community accepts that plant shade has a significant effect on the health of crops and the productivity of the farm land which are near to the tree planted area. Despite, the fact that, the activity of individuals in the community created dispute by the reason that individuals did not consider the benefits of others who losses due to the plant shade that are planted in the border of their farm land (Interview with the kebele land administration expert 3 at Wojer kebele, 10th February, 2022).

Therefore, this shows that it is an attribute of the direct cause of land disputes in the community and needs effective resolution mechanism to reduce the adverse effect of the problem.

j. Livestock Destroy Crops

Based on the collected data, distraction of crops or harvests by cattle or livestock caused serious disputes between individuals in the community. The informant explained it as:

> This cause of disputes mostly happened in our area when the landholder’s farm land shared boundary with the communal grazing lands and pathways. The owners of the crops needed compensation for the damaged crop and accused the owner of the livestock, and sometimes, the owner of the livestock might reject its accusation so as not to pay compensation, triggering the disputes and changing to direct violence as revenge (Interview with elder4 at Tentakerkose kebele, 13th February, 2022).

In this regards, in concerning this dispute shimglina customary conflict resolution mechanisms contributes a lot in reconciling the disputants to restore their earlier peaceful relationships.

k. Land Grabbing Dispute

Land grabbing disputes are the most commonly happened dispute in the community due to that individuals seizing the communally owned rural lands. Peoples who do not have sufficient land or no land are more participated in such types of activities. Peoples who grabbed some portion of the communal land registered it illegally and they claim ownership, when the community and the government asked them to leave the land and directly inter in to disputes (FGD5 with the kebele land administration and use committee, at Lijome kebele, 9th February, 2022). In addition, the informants explained it the cause of the dispute as follows:
Now day’s government officials and their relatives is the leading actor in land grabbing activity through different mechanisms like taking some portion of the communal land by establishing associations in the name of job creation for the unemployed job seekers. In fact, its objective is significant, but it creates grieving among the community members and results to dispute between the government and the community members because of the unfair practice of government officials in the recruitment of job seekers to create job on the lands of the community (FGD2 with elders at Sebatamet kebele, 9th February, 2022).

This form of dispute is difficult to settle within the state system of state based formal conflict resolution mechanisms as it is more exposed to corruption and unable to manage and resolve the disputes on time and sometimes it also aggravated the problem (FGD2 with the elderly arbitration committee at Sebatamet kebele, 9th February, 2022). Therefore, land grabbing largely causes disputes among community members.

I. Dispute on Compensation Payment for Expropriation of Rural Land

As to key informants revealed, dispute in rural land expropriation with unsatisfactory compensation for the farm land they lost by the government was the most common disputes that arise in the study area (Interview with elder1 at Sebatamet kebele, 19th February, 2022). In supporting this argument, Hillo, (2018) stated that:

The issue of rural land dispute between individuals and the State in Ethiopia arise when there is expropriation by the State of rural land under individual holding with inadequate compensation. Where land is expropriated by regional governments for leasing to agricultural and industrial investors, there is a significant variance between what the investors pay and what is paid out in compensation in many cases. Many farmers complain that government agencies are just taking their land in order to lease it to another individual or company without the interest of farmers.

Indeed, the rural land administration institutions should discuss with the land holders about their ideas to lose their land rights and to receive compensation. This helps the rural land administrative bodies to pay the compensation with a fewer grievances and to get consensus with the parties who lose their farm land by compensation (Interview with Woreda rural land experts at Bahir dar zuria Woreda, 9th February, 2022). However, in practice, the informants explained that:

No one was discussed with us and we were not asked our interests about our farm land and our choice of interest in we needed compensation money or another plot of land to be replaced for farming. As a result, we were in dispute with the government because of that they were not satisfied us in the compensation payments. Besides, the grievance hearing committee in the rural land administrative body was not impartial to resolve the dispute that aroused because they were politically appointed to do this task and they favored to the government in their discussion and decision to resolve the disputes. Accordingly, the dispute resolution mechanisms in relation to this issue were not effective in resolving the dispute that were arose due to unfair land valuation and expropriation (Interview with elders at Tentakerkose kebele, 17th, February, 2022).

In addition to the above stated issue rural land disputes were destructive and sensitive in the study area. In this regard Sewnet (2018) stated it as in the following manner:

Expropriation to farms resulted in political violence, tenure insecurity, strained government-society relations and created distrust and deterioration of government legitimacy. Conflict and resistance to land usurpation was an integral part during and after land acquisition. The pandemonium was caused by deep rooted grievance of economic crisis, top-down approach of expropriation, inadequate compensation; breaking of promises and absence of rehabilitative measures of dislocated landholders. The evictees had been participated in conflict at the time of land appropriation but it was mostly peaceful resistance. Unlikely, all residents were participants of the strife after the commencement of farms which was very violent and destructive in terms of human life and material wellbeing.
Land dispute Resolution Mechanisms in Bahir Dar Zuria Woreda

a. The modern land dispute Resolution Mechanism

In Africa, the modern courts are responsible to resolve rural land use and land related disputes based on the land laws and policies of a state (USAID, 2020 And FAO, 2007). In the study area, land dispute cases are settled in kebele social courts. Judges in the Kebele social courts are not certified professionals or they did not have any specializations in land law but they have awareness of the land laws and policies. Based on their knowledge on land laws, policies and witnesses they are decided on land dispute cases. The role of the social court at kebele farmers association level only try to help the disputants to reach on an agreement on the issue by informing the disputants about the land laws and polices related to the dispute. If the disputants are not agreed on the decision given at the kebele level, they have the right to appeal to the Woreda court (interview with the kebele land administration experts, 2022).

The Ethiopia Rural Land Administration of Proclamation No.456/2005 in Article 12 provides: Where dispute arises over rural landholding right, effort shall be made to resolve the dispute through discussion and agreement of the concerned parties. Where the dispute could not be resolved through agreement, it shall be decided by an arbitrator body to be elected by the parties or be decided in accordance with the rural land administration laws of the region (USAID, 2012, P. 40).

Based on the above provisions and the regional provisions, the local land administration committee is established for land dispute resolution. The committees are selected from the kebele community. They are arbitrators of land dispute. However, they lack the skill to settle land disputes because of that the educational levels of committee members are low. They can only read and write based on the knowledge they got through informal education (FGD, 5, 2022). The committee also lacks recording of dispute cases properly.

b. Indigenous Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

Rural land holders and users in the study area used indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms to settle their land disputes (Alemneh, 2024). Shimglina is the most commonly used rural land use dispute resolution mechanism in the study area community. Shimglina is the dispute and conflict resolution mechanism through elders, religious leaders, family conciliators and by using associations of Iddir (self-help association of villagers) and by using Mahiber (religious association of villagers for spiritual purpose). They take their dispute case to one of the variant of shimglina based on their choice. The number of shimageles (elders) and who is the right person to resolve the dispute is determined by the disputants and the first elder or religious leader or member of the associations named above initiates the shimglina process (Interview with elder 4, 3, & 7, 2023). The second procedure following to initiation is Site visit or observation of the area which is the cause of the dispute. After that they begin to discuss how to settle the problem by the help of the elders, religious leaders and association members, disputants resolve the disputes. The next step is to say a critical word by a wrong dower to the non-guilty “Yiker liegezeabhare” (leave our dispute to respect our religious principles or the word of God). Because of that in addition to the values and norms of the community, shimglina is firmly attached with the peace culture of orthodox Christianity (FGD with elders and religious leaders, 2023). Furthermore, Shimglina is a “culture of peace” in Bahir dar zuria rural farming community and led the disputants from dispute, conflict, force and violence to peace, respect, and healthy relationship through religious, value and norm based reasoning to settle the land use disputes.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

Rural land is an asset for livelihood, and the manifestation of their identity, wealth, and social and economic development. Land scarcity, land degradation, population pressure high demand for arable land and weak rural land administration system to govern the direct and indirect causes of land use dispute, poverty, lack of alternative livelihood, increase in rural land value, are the leading causes of rural land use dispute in the study area community. The study also examines the rural land use disputes resolution mechanisms. The community in the study area used both the modern and indigenous dispute resolution mechanism to settle rural land use disputes. Shimglina is the most dominantly practiced indigenous system of rural land use dispute resolution mechanism. Finally, the researcher recommended that the government, policy makers and dispute intervention stakeholders should give emphasis to mitigate, prevent and manage the increasing rural land use disputes.
Integrating the indigenous and modern conflict resolution mechanisms can effectively resolve land use disputes in the study area.

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