

## HOUSING CONDITIONS OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR WORKERS IN GIMBI TOWN, ETHIOPIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The process of urban growth in Ethiopia has come to be associated with tremendous socio-economic problems. Housing problem is among the main areas of concern. This paper attempts to explore housing conditions of Gimbi town with special emphasis on public and private sector workers. This town has a significant pool of workers due to the fact that it houses various institutions. Data was collected using simple random sampling, and then analysis was made regarding the durability and tenure status of housing conditions of both public and private sector workers. The result shows that housing conditions of both types of workers were found in poor situations though the degree varies to some extent. The study has also confirmed that the results of this study were similar to earlier studies on other urban areas of the country.*

**Keywords:** Ethiopia, Urbanization, Housing, Durability, Tenure Status

### INTRODUCTION

As a result of rapid urbanization, most cities, particularly in developing countries, are now characterized by inadequate housing to deal with a rapidly growing urban population (Potter and Lloyd-Evans 1998; N, Dow 1996). The challenge of housing problem is not only just about the quantity of population, but also its composition. Cities and towns of developing countries are changing rapidly especially in terms of scale and rate of demographic, social, and economic transformations. This pattern of growth will also place strains on housing and services needed for towns and cities (Okpala 2006).

As a method to cope up with these all transformations, and in order to grow and develop in a sustainable way, a city has to be able to attract and retain various professionals and qualified workers. One of the main areas of concern in this regard is its ability to provide adequate housing to workers who are employed by public and private sector workers in the city. The habitability of housing units in terms of their physical structure, durability and ownership status is of paramount importance in determining the residential satisfaction of those who occupy them. The United Nations Human Settlement Program reported that in urban centers of Ethiopia, roofs and walls of scavenged materials do not protect from rain, wind, pests and intruders. Dirty floors turn to mud in the rainy season, putting who cannot afford shoes,

chairs, or a bed at greater risk. Smoke and heat from open cooking fires cause respiratory ailment and severe burns in children (Solomon 1999).

Gimbi, a town in West Wollega Zone, Oromia Region, is not an exception to this problem. This town has a substantial pool of both public and private sector workers due to the fact that it houses various institutions. Since 1991, it has been the seat of West Wollega Administrative Offices. Private colleges and different Non Governmental Organizations have also opened their offices in the town in the last two decades. Because of these different factors, the number of public and private sector workers of the town increased considerably. However, it appears that the town is incapable of providing adequate housing to its fast growing population.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In view of the problem mentioned above, the primary objective of the study is to analyze housing conditions of public and private sector workers of Gimbi town. Its specific objectives are to:

1. Analyze durability status of the houses of public and private sector workers of Gimbi town.
2. Analyze tenure status of the houses of public and private sector workers of Gimbi town.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does the structural characteristics of the houses of public and private sector workers of Gimbi town look like?
2. How does tenure factor affect housing conditions of both public and private sector of the town?

## REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Housing has become an important public issue in almost all societies. Housing conditions of a nation manifest the country's socio-economic development level. It also bears up on the maintenance of privacy, health and the development of normal family living conditions. In addition to this, the quality and size of housing is obviously important for security and enjoyable domestic life. Its location is important in terms of the access it provides to its residents, to city services and employment opportunities (CSA 2001; Habitat 2006).

According to some studies, the majority of the Ethiopian Urban population lives in substandard housing. The quality and quantity of houses in cities of the country are in very severe conditions. Important studies are: Addis Ababa City Administration 2010; Tegegne 2002; Solomon 1999; Tarekegn 2002; CSA 1994; Habitat 2006.

According to UN-Habitat (2006), 79% of the Ethiopian urban population is homeless or lives in substandard housing. For instance, Addis Ababa City Administration (1998) estimated housing deficit of the city to 222,000 houses in 1995. The total housing need for Addis Ababa for 1996 to 2000 was about 261,295 houses. Out of this, 39% is due to overcrowding, while 31% is due to population increase and 30 % is due to replacement of obsolete

dwellings (Tegegne 2002). In the same city, Solomon (1999) conducted a questionnaire survey among a group of Saint George Brewery Factory workers to assess the extent to which public ownership of land has promoted low income home ownership. The study indicates that approximately 20.5 percent of the respondents were home owners while about half of the respondents were public sector renters and about one-fifth of them were tenants in the private rental sector. The rest lived with their parents and relatives. This indicates that the majority of the respondents, about 80 percent, were non-home owners.

Tarekegn (2002) also found out that in the urban areas of Ethiopia housing units made of wood and mud walls constituted 80.3 percent. Housing units made of wood and thatch walls for urban areas constituted 3.1 percent, while housing unit with stones and cement, hollow blocks, and bricks accounted for 6.6 percent. Roofs made of corrugated iron sheets accounted for 82.6 percent. The distribution of housing units by type of materials used for construction of floors shows that 72.6 percent had earth/mud floor, and about 14.9 percent had cement/concrete floors. The same author shows that the source of water supply for majority of, 73 percent of the housing units is piped tap water. Housing units that obtained their water from river/lake constituted 9.8 percent, followed by unprotected spring (8.5%). 42.3 percent of the housing units did not have toilet facility, where as 5.5 percent had flush toilet private/shared, 51.1percent dry pit toilet private/shared. 65.4 percent of the housing units use electricity.

In the same pattern, the 1994 census revealed that 34.4 percent of the houses of urban Ethiopia were owner occupied while 57.3 percent were rented. Of the later, nearly 38 percent were rented from local government. These were below standard houses with very low rent and mostly housing low-income people of the city. The average rent in the city was 40.98birr and 76.87 percent of the housing units were below birr 50.00 birr (Ethiopian Currency). The high share of renting in the city was due to income constraints and lack of proper policy to encourage low and middle income residents to construct own houses. There was a demand rental houses among the low and middle income residents. The present land planning and land delivery has to recognize such needs (CSA 2001).

## Location

Gimbi is the capital of West Wollega Zone, Oromia Regional State of Ethiopia. It is situated at 441 kilometer from South West of Addis Ababa. The astronomical location of the town is 9<sup>0</sup>, 10' N and 35<sup>0</sup>, 50' E longitude. Being located in the eastern part of the zone, which is predominantly a high land area, Gimbi and its surroundings experience an average temperature of between 18<sup>o</sup>c and 20<sup>o</sup>c and annual rainfall amount of between 1600 and 2000 millimeters. In 2008, the total population of Gimbi town was about 36,399 of which 18309(50.3%) were males while the rest were females.

## METHODOLOGY

There were about 1266 employees, both public and private sector workers, in Gimbi town. From all these, about 1016 workers were employees of ten public sector organizations while the remaining, 250, were employees of eight different private sector organizations. Then, systematic random sampling procedure was used to obtain 20% sample size independently for both public and private sector workers i.e. 150 and 50 employees respectively. Finally,

questionnaires were distributed to obtain relevant data. Tables and percentages were used to present data, and qualitative descriptions were used for discussions and analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The main types of materials used for construction, structural attributes of houses, and ownership status of residents have important implications for setting up housing standards and the development of appropriate housing construction technology (Solomon 1999). To this end, the assessment of basic features of the town's housing sector has to be made in order to draw impressive policy recommendations.

### Durability

Durability is a major important indicator of housing quality. Durable house is defined as a housing unit built from materials adequate enough to protect its inhabitants from the extremes of climatic conditions such as rain, heat, cold, humidity. Therefore, in this paper, a durable housing unit consists of cement, stone, brick and hollow block. While the non durable housing unit is made of materials such as mud and wood (WHO 1988).

Information on type of housing unit based on the structural type of the houses is presented in Table 1. The respondents' houses were grouped according to whether the houses are attached (row) or detached. The result shows that the proportion for the detached houses for both sectors of workers is by far greater than that of attached or row houses. However, the figure for the detached houses is higher among the private sector workers while that of the attached houses is higher among the public sector workers. Study made by Tarekegn (2002) is also in line with this study. He founded out that 54.3 percent of housing units of Ethiopian urban areas were found to be in non-storied detached and 43.3 percent were in non-storied attached buildings. Large proportion of the housing units 95.8 percent in urban areas were permanent, 2.93 percent improvised and 0.74 percent were mobile structures.

**Table 1.** Structural Characteristics of the surveyed houses Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2010

Structural type	Occupational Status				Total	
	Public Sector Workers		Private Sector Workers		N <sup>o</sup>	%
	N <sup>o</sup>	%	N <sup>o</sup>	%		
Detached	103	68.7	38	76.0	141	70.5
Attached	47	31.3	12	24.0	59	29.5
Total	150	100.0	50	100.0	200	100.0

Knowledge about the materials used for the construction of walls, roofs, floors and ceiling may be of special significance for the assessment of durability of the housing unit, demand for construction materials. The survey revealed that 88% of houses of public sector workers were made up of wood and mud while the corresponding figure for the private sector workers was 86%. Walls made up of a mixture of stone, wood and cement for public sector workers constitute 8% and the corresponding figure for the private sector workers was 12%. The remaining very few proportions of public sector workers' houses were made up of hollow blocks and bricks. As far as floor materials were concerned, the overwhelming majority of the houses of both public and private sector workers have mud floors constituting

91.3 % and 84% respectively. Houses with floor materials of stone and cement form 8.7% and 16% respectively for public and private sector workers respectively. Regarding housing characteristics in terms of ceiling materials, vast majority of houses of both public and private sector workers were made of polythene sheet (Table 3). Earlier studies (Solomon 1999; Tarekegn 2002) also showed that the majority of housing units of urban areas of Ethiopia were made of non durable wall materials, that is, wood and mud.

In comparative terms, houses of private sector workers have slightly better floor, wall and ceiling materials than houses of public sector workers. However, the overall data shows that the housing conditions in terms of structural characteristics and construction materials of both sector of workers was characterized by poor quality. Therefore, the majority of the households live in housing units characterized with dilapidations which imply the need for appropriate interventions toward slum improvements through wide urban upgrading and urban renewal schemes.

**Table 2.** Reported Rental Agencies of the Respondents

Rental Agencies	Occupational Status				Total	
	Public Sector Workers		Private Sector Workers		N <sup>o</sup>	%
	N <sup>o</sup>	%	N <sup>o</sup>	%		
Local Govt	21	22.3	3	9.7	24	19.2
Private Sector	65	69.0	24	77.4	89	71.2
Banks	8	8.5	4	12.9	12	9.6
AARH	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	94	100.0	31	100.0	125	100.0

**Source:** Questionnaire Survey, 2010

### Tenure Status

The proportion of owner occupied workers was higher among the public sector workers while the proportion of workers living with their family was higher among the private sector workers. However, the proportion of workers who lived in rental dwellings for both sectors was almost the same (Table 5). Here, public sector workers were more housed than private sector workers because in such small towns, privately owned houses have more facilities and amenities than rental dwellings. Private housing stock was extensively rented by both public and private sector workers in the town. This high share of renting was partly because of income constraints and lack of proper policy to encourage both sector of workers to construct own houses.

**Table 3.** Reported Construction Materials of the Surveyed Houses

Occupational Status	Construction Materials																								
	Wall Materials										Floor materials						Ceiling material								
	Wood and mud		wood, stone and cement		hollow block		brick		Total		mud		stone and cement		Total		Chip-board		Polythene sheet		No Ceiling materials		Total		
	N <sup>o</sup>	%	N <sup>o</sup>	%	N <sup>o</sup>	%	N <sup>o</sup>	%	N <sup>o</sup>	%	N <sup>o</sup>	%	N <sup>o</sup>	%	N <sup>o</sup>	%	N <sup>o</sup>	%	N <sup>o</sup>	%	N <sup>o</sup>	%	N <sup>o</sup>	%	N <sup>o</sup>
Public Sector Workers	132	88	13	8	5	3.3	1	0.7	150	100	129	91.3	21	8.7	150	100	2	1.33	129	86	19	12.7	150	100	
Private Sector Workers	43	86	6	12	1	2	0	0	50	100	42	84	8	16	50	100	6	12	44	88	0	0	50	100	

**Source:** Questionnaire Survey, 2010

The study also made clear that the perceived causes of the gap observed between non-home-owners (high proportion) and home owners (with low proportion) are places of birth, financial problems, need to change work place and, fear of bureaucratic nature of the town's municipal. For instance, in addition to other factors, the majority of workers who were originally from other places were not willing to construct or buy houses because of the fact that they may change their work place in the future or have houses from other places. In addition to this, others claimed that lack of saving schemes or access to loan and fear of bureaucratic hurdles are the main obstacles which hindered them from owning houses (Table 4). It can be argued that, in general, private sectors were the main provider of rental houses for both public and private sector workers especially for the latter. Clearly, rent increases with an increase in the quality of houses. Therefore, in this regard, it can be concluded that private sector workers are more housed than public sector workers. This holds true only for rental dwellers (Table 2). According to this study, financial or related factors such as lack of saving schemes, access to loan and lack of money were the main obstacles of respondent's competence from owning houses. They constitute 79.4% for the public sector workers and 40% for the private sector workers. In addition to this, 14.7% of the public sector workers and 60% of the private sector workers reported their reasons for inability of owning houses as need to change work place. Comparatively, public sector workers were likely to live longer in Gimbi town; however, their main problem hindering them from owning housing unit is financial constraints (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Perceived Causes which hindered the Respondents from Home owning

Perceived causes	Occupational Status				Total	
	Public Sector Workers		Private Sector Workers		Total	
	N <sup>o</sup>	%	N <sup>o</sup>	%		
Financial related problems (lack of access to loan, lack of money, & lack of saving schemes)	27	79.4	6	40.0	33	67.3
Need to change work place	5	14.7	9	60.0	14	28.6
Fear of bureaucratic hurdles	2	5.9	-	-	2	4.1
Total	34	100.0	15	100.0	49	100.0

**Source:** Questionnaire Survey, 2010

**Table 5.** Dwelling Status and Method of Becoming Home Ownership of the Respondents

Occupational Status	Dwelling Status							
	Owner Occupied		Renter		Living with Family		Total	
	N <sup>o</sup>	%	N <sup>o</sup>	%	N <sup>o</sup>	%	N <sup>o</sup>	%
Public Sector Workers	51	34.0	94	62.7	5	3.3	150	100.0
Private Sector Workers	7	14.0	31	62.0	12	24.0	50	100.0
Total	58	29	125	62.5	17	8.5	200	100.0

**Source:** Questionnaire Survey, 2010

## CONCLUSIONS

The result of the study shows that the housing characteristic of both public and private sector workers of the town is characterized by poor quality. The overwhelming majority of the respondents live in rental dwellings which belong to either private household or Kebele. These dwellings are poor when their structure, physical conditions and tenure status are considered.

With respect to physical conditions of the houses, only less than one-tenth of both public and private sector worker's houses appear to be in good condition. Otherwise, the remaining vast proportion needs maintenance in one way or another. Most dwellings are built of wood and mud.

In comparative terms, housing conditions of public sector workers differ from housing conditions of private sector workers in the following aspects. Firstly, the proportion of workers living in rental housing is higher among the private sector workers. In other words, the percentage of home owners is higher among the public sector workers. The proportion of employees living with their relatives is higher among the private sector workers. Secondly, Financial constraints are the main problem for non home owners of public sector workers to construct or buy their own houses while need to change work place is the main perceived problem to home ownership for the private sector non-home owners.

By implication, the capacity of Gimbi town to attract and retain professionals and qualified workers depends up on the availability of houses. In case of this study, since the majority of housing quality indicators are sub standard, the ability of the town to attract and retain these workers is minimum. This means that housing supply in terms of its facilities and amenities, availability of quality rental dwellings, and the quality of physical structure of houses do not give residential satisfaction to private and public sector workers of the town.

Therefore, in order to increase the town's ability to attract and retain professionals and qualified workers, improving the residential satisfaction of houses of the town is of paramount importance.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Access to safe and healthy shelter is essential to a person's physical, psychological, social and economic well-being and should be fundamental part of national and international action. With this backdrop, considering the magnitude and scale of housing and housing



related facilities, it is essential to recommend the following points based up on the finding of the study.

The study revealed that the majority (above 60%) of the respondents specially, private sector workers are non-home owners i.e. they live in rental dwellings. The present land delivery and house construction agencies should encourage such workers.

The majority of public and private sector workers who live in rental dwellings have rented their houses from private owners. In other words, there are no sufficient government rental dwellings. Therefore, the municipality authorities and concerned bodies should construct sufficient rental houses.

Since most government houses need total replacement and installing of services, workers who live in these houses are faced with enormous problems. This kind of housing problems should also be addressed.

Financial problems; especially lack of access to loan is the main obstacle for the non-home owning workers who need to have their own houses. In this regard, provision of loan either by their respective organizations or by other bodies appears very important.

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