Land subdivision practice in informal settlements: An experience from community leaders. A case of Luis sub-ward in Dar es Salaam Tanzania

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Abstract

The increase in informal settlements has triggered concerns for the future development of African cities. The main challenge is the sustainability and growth of settlements with fewer social services, insecure properties, and uncontrolled land subdivisions. This study analyzes community leaders' engagement in land subdivisions in the informal settlement and the potential of their role in enhancing Participatory Design (PD) in planning processes. It follows activities by community leaders at Mtaa and ten cells in the Tanzanian context. The Mbezi Luis sub-ward in Ubungo municipality is used as a case study. Two months of field participant observation of ongoing activities performed by community leaders in land subdivision activities and interviews with the Mtaa committee members, ten cell leaders, community members, regularization committee, and Ubungo Municipal Town planners were used to collect data. Results indicate the existence of fast land subdivisions into small plots and the rise of reported land conflict cases at the Mtaa office. Community leaders are considered as guides and approvers of subdivisions, they assure liability and safety of the transaction made and are mediators in conflict resolution. At the same time, there are challenges such as power imbalance, overdependence on previous landowner information, corruption, miscommunication, lack of consistency, and general land development vision. This discussion contributes to the institutions and structures that control informal settlement development in fast-developing cities. The article furthers the conversation on identifying existing gaps and the potential of enhancing the role of community leaders in Participatory ways of shaping informal settlement development.

Key words: Participatory design, Informal settlements development, Community engagement, Land subdivision, Land conflicts management, Tanzania

Introduction

Informal settlements have been a covariate and confident affordable housing option for middle and low-income earners in the global south region (Basile & Ehlenz, 2020). Evidence from research shows that up to 13% of the world's population live in these settlements (Núñez Collado & Wang, 2020). Such settlements offer some potential and residents feel more advantaged than those living in formal areas. In

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reality, informal settlements even attract higher income earners, as they provide attributes like integration, security in a more organized community, cooperative advantages, affordable housing and facilitate residents to job proximity (Celhay & Gil, 2020).

African cities are regarded as fast-developing cities while the rate of urbanization is estimated to increase by 50 percent, making it faster than expected. The population growth rate remains constant until the year 2100 it is estimated to threaten available resources. This high rate of urbanization of cities has attracted the attention and concerns of many countries as they are predicted to cause more unregulated developments which would cause a lot of setbacks in service provision and sustainability (UN DESA, 2022). While these cities are expected to develop with an element of informality, there is a need to study more on the viable strategies that could help to deal with it.

Customary land tenure constitutes up to 80% of all land held within the African continent (Agheyisi, 2019). There is a need to look for sustainable alternative ways of avoiding stigma and exclusion in informal settlements as they are mostly occupied customarily so that people can comfortably live in those areas (Basile & Ehlenz, 2020). *Ibid* proposes the community land trust concept to resolve emerging challenges. The idea has been used in Europe and the United States of America to develop communities. Still, the situation has been different in Sub-Saharan Africa as most urban lands are individually designed and developed using self-finance.

Informal settlements are seen as self-controlling areas with a do-it-yourself mentality in their development (Geyer, 2023). In their study, (Basile & Ehlenz, 2020) compare different policies for improving informal settlement development including mass social housing, upgrading, and land titling with community land trust. The results indicated several challenges that arise depending on the nature of informal settlements as they are heterogeneous hence policies have to be adjusted to fit the demand. In countries where land is registered and digitized in informal sectors, informal land management systems are considered illegal and have minimal influence and trust in the community (Adam et al., 2020).

Customary land practices have been associated with informal settlement growth as the subdivision practices do follow customarily and some traditional norms which are not written but somehow followed by communities in an informal settlement. There is a transition of customary land management systems from the traditional to new liberal ways (like commoditization of land and redefining people's relations to their land), but the differences are yet to be explored especially in informal settlement areas (Chimhowu, 2019). Issues of power relations appear to be challenging within community organizations and with other institutions outside communities (Agheyisi, 2019). The existence of legal pluralism (formal, customary, cultural, individual, and group) has been a challenge in many urban areas in Africa (Agheyisi, 2019; Onyebueke & Ikejiofor, 2017). Legal pluralism, ineffective land laws, and intuitions to monitor land transactions and supply have increased community groups' control over informal land transactions and supply in informal areas (Agheyisi, 2019).

Many community members see Title Deeds as liable and desirable, offering many benefits especially when the land is contested (Agheyisi, 2019). However, different land records are processed in informal settlements as proof of land subdivision and ownership using local institutions' approval. These have led to a fast increase and persistence of informal settlements in fast-developing African cities.

In Tanzania, Dar es Salaam's area is estimated to be more than 70 percent developed informally (Gwaleba & Chigbu, 2020; Kironde, 2019; Magina et al., 2024). The city is fast informally developing with a minimal budget to rescue the situation as planning authorities face resource shortages (Lupala, 2015). Urban centers are fast sprawling following major routes, causing difficulties for authorities to manage them (Magina et al., 2024). In this growth trend, there are community structures that help in planning and shaping ongoing informal settlement development, some are formal and some are informal community structures (Kironde, 2019).

Based on the foregoing, this study explores community leaders' potential role in land subdivision, transaction, and conflict resolution practices in enhancing PD processes in developing informal settlements. As grassroots leaders work directly with their communities, their decisions shape the development patterns. Transformation of existing practices could help plan land subdivisions and conflict mediation to achieve sustainable development. As part of the governing institutions, community leaders play a crucial role in guiding community development as they are trusted to monitor community growth and sustainability. As such, we begin by reviewing the institutions that control the development of informal settlements in urban areas. Then we discuss the characteristics of these institutions and their influence on informal settlement growth.

Informal Settlements Policies, Characteristics, and Leadership Nature: Literature Review

Policies to improve informal settlements have been changing over time. Historically, informal settlements were perceived as temporal communities built by temporal structures. They could move within a short period and governments used to ignore them as the majority were not living in those areas (Núñez

Collado & Wang, 2020). The authors further provide that most of the slum upgrading projects in South America aim at implementing social-economic improvement in the community rather than other measures.

Moreover, a study of community land management in South Africa by Geyer, (2023) discovers that informal settlements have been left out of zoning areas due to Apartheid laws in the past and current political reasons. In this regard, traffic police officers are left to control and deal with land tenure crimes and de-escalate conflicts while traffic policies deal with informal uses along pedestrian ways and roads (Geyer, 2023).

In many countries of the developing world, land transactions are being done using customary practices and social norms (informal land management), eventually causing conflicts in communities (Agheyisi, 2019). Informal land management is widely practiced in East African countries as formal systems are not available for society's access and use (Adam et al., 2020). In Nigeria's urban area, Community-Based Organizations (NGOs) are associated with planning and land subdivisions with different forms of leadership (Agheyisi, 2019). The organizations have more social legitimacy than legal legitimacy.

Collecting stakeholders' perceptions of customary land use systems and the requirement for transformation into modern formal land use systems is challenging (Adam et al., 2020). In Tanzania, informal land transactions agreement is witnessed and signed by local leaders in local government authorities (Adam et al., 2020; Gwaleba & Chigbu, 2020). In these processes, more community engagement through participatory planning is being emphasized as the government has introduced different programs over time (Gwaleba & Chigbu, 2020; Kironde, 2019). These participatory processes have aimed to combat the fast spreading of informal

settlements in an environment with minimum resources for planning and managing urban growth by improving the community's sense of ownership for the plan's implementation and sustainability.

Characteristics of Informal Settlement

Urban development political ecology has given much attention to inner-city land use and left the peri-urban environment to deal with land use conflicts as cities develop, causing different conflicts and corporations to rise in those areas (Vij et al., 2018). Informal settlements thrive in the periphery of the city or outskirts. Minimal considerations and little resource allocation are made to combat ongoing development in those areas until they become large and crucial in accommodating more people without adequate services.

Informal settlements in South Africa are mostly characterized by backyard extensions that exceed the boundaries of already-built houses for low-income earners (Geyer, 2023). They extend the already planned and developed houses to rent other people. With too much extensions the areas become uncontrolled with emerging land use conflicts.

Neoliberal reforms have made more customary land systems predictable, benefiting investors and outsiders compared to traditional customary land systems, which are widely practiced. These systems are more acceptable in capitals and centers than in rural areas, but with transformation, more is expected to achieve a more sustainable and predictable land tenure system (Chimhowu, 2019).

Sometimes, people draft their agreements and make it a land transaction without involving anyone from the land registry or lawyer. In another case, the draft agreement engages the community leader or one official for the document to get legal recognition as an official ownership document (Adam et al., 2020). This has been an ongoing practice in informally developing areas.

Traditional and customary land ownership laws have made owners more vulnerable to the sustainability and protection of properties. They do not produce written contracts, and even the written contracts do not follow the legal format (Chimhowu, 2019; Vij et al., 2018; Wily, 2011). In Tanzania's urban centers, customary land transactions are more common than legal ones. This has been influenced by the lower financial capacity of local government authorities and their over-dependence on central government funds for planning (Lupala, 2015).

Nature of leadership in informal settlements

Informal settlement leadership is being developed in different forms depending on how the place was created, the history and culture of those residing there, and the policies of the area, which influence the area's sustainability. Traditional, customary ways of land management have existed for a long time and have deeper roots in society than formal land management, which was introduced during the colonial era when towns were not well developed (Adam et al., 2020).

Traditional institutions have been playing a good role in administration before colonial rules, this includes the land sector which had its traditional ways (Agheyisi, 2019). Informal structures are known and used by the wider society in land conflict resolution and transactions compared to formal land systems (Adam et al., 2020). These have resulted in difficulties in monitoring informal settlement development.

In South Africa, informal settlement communities have street committees to deal with all land disputes within the area and are

also responsible for all civil matters happening in the community (Geyer, 2023). There are also politically elected councilors within this area, but the community always holds the street committees accountable for the wrong decisions made compared to the councilors (*ibid*). During conflict mediation by the committee, corruption is always suspected when decisions do not favor one side or the other (Geyer, 2023).

Community governmentality has its weaknesses as it does not exclude misuse of power by community leaders and has long, for instance, excluded women from land ownership (Onyebueke & Ikejiofor, 2017). Informal land systems in an urban setting are seen to be more effective as they are user-friendly and have some social legitimacy, they are widely known and acceptable by the community (Onyebueke & Ikejiofor, 2017). Informal land systems operate without written regulations; they presume the place's traditional ways, practices, and customs (Adam et al., 2020). Formal land governance systems are unpopular and reach a wider community than customary and informal systems *ibid*.

Functionality and sustainability of the existing land subdivision and transaction practices toward city development remain the major concerns that scholars have yet to uncover as they continue to be used (Onyebueke & Ikejiofor, 2017). It involves different stakeholders who have uncoordinated ways of working with the community and hence resulting in conflicts.

Study Area

Mbezi Luis sub-ward is among the eight sub-wards forming the Mbezi ward in Ubungo Municipal Council which is also among five Municipalities within Dar es Salaam region. The sub-ward is located 20 Kilometers from the city center and is one of the fastest growing areas in Dar es Salaam as it is located four kilometers from the new regional bus terminal (Magufuli Regional Bus Terminal) in the Mbezi ward area. Also, the Sub-Ward experiences too much land pressure because its location is directly or indirectly affected by the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) infrastructure along Morogoro Road. The case was selected as it is among areas currently experiencing a lot of land conflicts that are being reported at Ubungo municipal council.

The area is informally fast developing as the government has invested in mega projects such as the Dar es Salaam bus terminal, Lory Park, an intercity bus stand, and an eight-lane road (Morogoro Road). More people are moving to the area in search of development of residential and commercial buildings as the area is near the mega projects and well connected to other parts of the city. The sub-ward is led by the Mtaa chairperson and five members (publicly elected every five years) who form the Mtaa committee and the Mtaa executive officer who is a committee secretary, and a government employee. To manage its fast development Ubungo Municipal Council started a regularization project in the area in 2017. The regularization committee was made and has the task of planning and surveying every land within the area for individuals to acquire legally known ownership documents.

In collaboration with a private surveying firm and municipal council, the regularisation committee documented all the properties within the area and planned the areas with different uses. The proposed plans were approved in 2018 by the Municipal Council and the Ministry of Lands Housing and Human Settlements for the regularization committee to follow up on its implementation. All the local leaders and landowners at the time were involved in the process as it is considered participatory. Since plan development and approval the process has been ongoing in the

area. It is voluntary for the landowner to process ownership documents and still, some parts have already been recognized by the government as surveyed farms with owners who are not the current developers hence the process had to be followed to revoke the already surveyed farms before surveying new plots.

Methodology

As we study community leaders by working with them for two months on their daily activities at the Mtaa office, this study is a qualitative explorative. Site selection considered the availability of information, especially the frequently reported cases of land conflicts within the area to the Ubungo Municipal Council. Since the sub-ward is fast informally developing and has all the local leaders available, it was suitable for the study. 17 ten-cell leaders were interviewed while working with them within their areas to learn their roles in land subdivision practices. Community leaders at the Mtaa office, including the Mtaa chairperson, five Mtaa committee members, and the Mtaa executive officer, were also interviewed to learn their knowledge and involvement in land subdivision practices. Two regularization committee members, Municipal town planners, and 60 community members were also interviewed. Community members were randomly selected to share their reflections on the existing ways of land management, the efficiency and local leaders' engagement in the process.

Fig 1. Luis Sub-ward location map
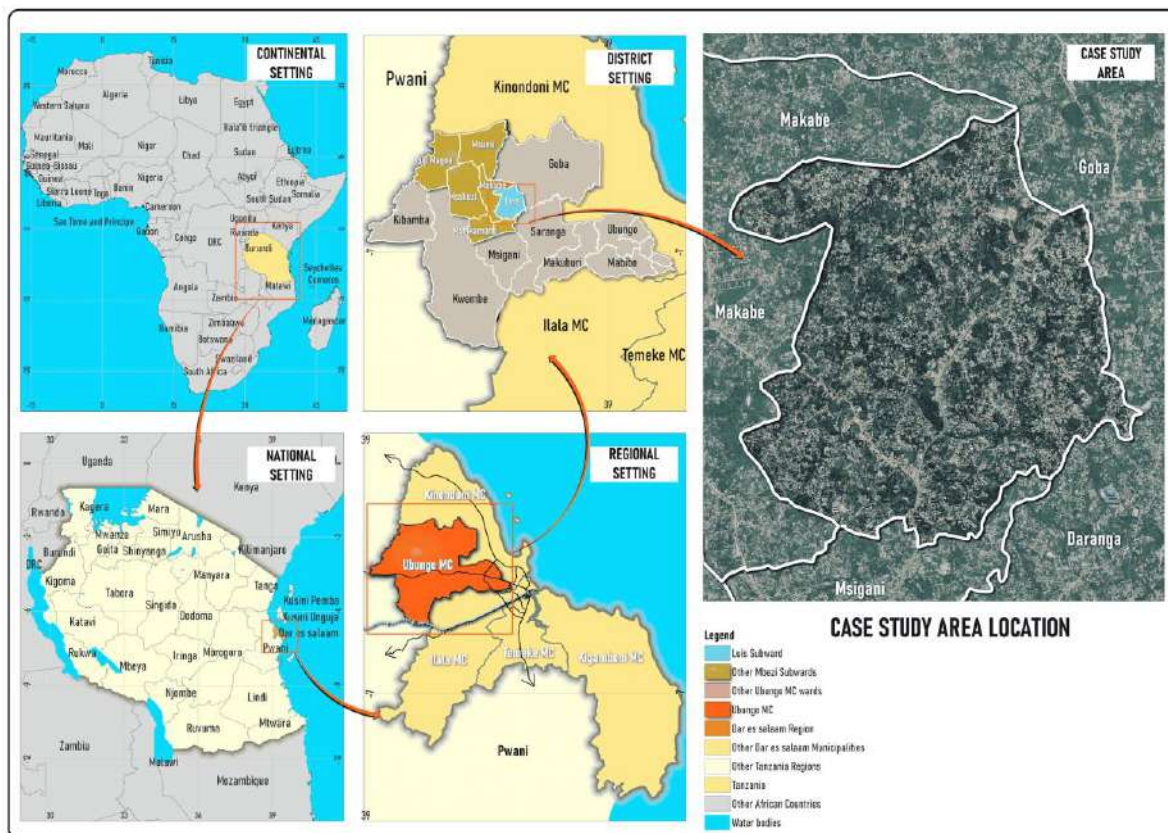
Source: Gasper Kabendela and Yohana Mageta based on data from Ubungo Municipal Council

Interviews with community leaders were conducted to explore their role and knowledge of their involvement in land subdivisions. It aimed at gaining insight and knowledge on the process and awareness of community leaders' participation in shaping the area's development and sustainability. Working with and observing the community leaders at the Mtaa office was done to learn the leader's involvement in the process and how the process is handled for the sustainability of ongoing development in the area. Interviews with community members were based on their experience with local leaders' involvement in the process of land subdivision, this was to open up the criteria being used, the aim, and how easily the process can be done.

Town planners at Ubungo Municipal Council were interviewed to learn about their involvement in the process and their challenges regarding participatory planning and land subdivision practices in informal settlements. Regularization committee members at the Luis sub-ward were also interviewed to learn about their involvement in land subdivision in the area and how they handle the situation for the whole area's development.

Data were collected and triangulated from observations of practices and interviews with different stakeholders to learn how land subdivision is done in informal settlements and the impact of the ongoing practices. The collected data was analyzed using the cultural history action theory CHAT to determine the available local leaders' roles in land subdivision within the area. The theory is used to learn the specific roles and identify initiatives to improve the existing practices.

Findings and Discussion

Findings from the nature and practices of land subdivisions are displayed to learn about the existing actors and the process. Challenges and opportunities will be discussed to identify the existing gaps. The discussion compares the existing policies and practices.

Land subdivision practices occur as part of land transformation and development from peri-urban to an urban area where every part of the land is developed. In the Luis sub-ward, land subdivision practices depend on the owner's interest. The landowners are the main initiators of land subdivisions in the area. Subdivision criteria depend on the landowner's experience and interest during the process. In urban areas, the land subdivision process can happen due to individual landowners' internal forces, such as demand for money, or external forces, such as preventing land encroachment.

Land tenure

Most people are customarily owning land within the area. They own through informal agreement contracts and are known by other community members as owners. Over 80% of the land was previously surveyed as farmlands for different people and ownership documents were given. As the place continued to grow, more people came to the area. Since then, the already surveyed farms have been subdivided into different people by the former owners and their relatives. Still, they did not revoke the surveyed farms' ownership documents as some were on bank loans. A regularization plan had to be implemented in 2017 on the already surveyed farms to rescue the ongoing land subdivisions causing informal settlement growth. In the interview with regularization committee members, tenure challenges were seen to be a major setback.

"The land has a lot of previously surveyed farms, we cannot survey the plan over the already surveyed farm. The law requires the surveyed farms to be revoked before surveying new plots. People own their areas with written agreements on the already existing farmlands which are legally known and the owners are still around. The process of surrendering existing

documents takes some time and involves funds for the revocation process." - Regularization committee member

In the land subdivision process the primary actors are the seller who is the landowner and buyer, the other actors are the whiteness from buyer and seller. In informal settlement, the agreement document has to be approved by a community leader who can be a ten-cell leader or Mtaa leader. The approval of the community leader assures the buyer that the right owner is selling the property and that there are no conflicts to be observed before buying it. The whiteness role is just to observe the exchange and advise the represented part. The other actor could be a broker who facilitates the trade. Legal firms have evolved as some people trust them to prepare the sales agreement contract as it will be more legally acceptable.

Table 1 Actors in the process and their roles

Actor	Roles
Landowner	Planning of land and subdivision
	Selling/seller
	Subdivider
	Infrastructure consideration
	Invite witness
	Prepare contract
Buyer	Inspecting the land
	Making sure the land is legitimate
	Invite witness
	Negotiating the price, size, shape, accessibility and location
Community leader (Mtaa chairperson, Mtaa committee member, ten-cell leader, Mtaa executive officer)	Assurance of land ownership
	Assurance of infrastructure accessibility
	Approve the subdivision of land
	Advise on the plot size and accessibility
	Assurance that the land does not contradict existing plans
	Signing and stamping the contracts
	Resolving any conflict
	Recognition of new landowners
Regularization committee member	Receiving requests for an official plot survey
	Advise on the existing plan implementation

	Monitoring regularization plans implementation
	Cooperate with local leaders to implement the plans
Mtaa office	Meeting point
	Formal platform for conflicts discussions
Land broker	Introducing the buyer and seller
	Price negotiation
	Transaction facilitation
	Searching for alternatives
Legal firm	Preparation of sales agreement
	Witnessing the agreement
	Stamping the agreement
Witness	Advising
	Signing the agreement documents
Town planner	Preparation of town planning drawings
	Development control
	Building consent and permit provision
	Building permits inspection
	Plans implementation
	Community engagement
	Standards monitoring
	Land conflicts mediation

Plot size

In the area, regular plot sizes range from 200 to 900 square meters, except in the place popular as "Kibanda cha Koka" where the plots are below 200 square meters. This is according to the previously demarcated pieces of land in ongoing regularisation progress. In small areas where the sizes are small, many conflicts are reported daily at the Mtaa office, especially regarding public infrastructure maintenance and building. The issues of solid waste collection, soil dumping, building toilet tanks on the roads, and encroachments are common due to plot sizes. In other parts some people who still have not decided to divide their land have large plot sizes, some having more than 5000 square meters.

Plot subdivision process

The landowners are the main plot subdividers. Those owning large plot sizes tend to subdivide into small sizes according to their interest and

experience. As more landowners subdivide their lands into small pieces it puts pressure on others who own large plot sizes. In the area, plot subdivision is initiated by landowners and it later includes the buyer, witness, and community leader to approve the agreement. The landowner must know the piece of land to be subdivided, the size, and the location for the buyer to be found. The local land brokers are sometimes involved in getting buyers, but most of the time, buyers get information through community connections and networks. In Luis sub-ward community leaders are always asked or involved in searching for information on anyone who is subdividing or selling his/her land, buyers trust community leaders' information, especially for the ones not much familiar with the area. Communicating through community networks is easier and more reliable than land brokers who charge for their services.

Who subdivide plot

In many cases, the landowner subdivides the land according to the owner's interest, and adjustments can be made to meet buyer requirements regarding plot size, accessibility, and location. Community leaders often negotiate the area's social and public infrastructure access, such as electricity lines, water pipes, road access, stormwater, and solid waste management.

"In my area, we once experienced the problem of road access as two neighbors closed the common access road that people used. Since the road served more than ten houses, they came to me complaining that those neighbors were building a wall on their access road and forcing them to use another road which was not friendly. I visited the area, and upon asking why they said it was not an official road, they agreed to close it as two neighbors without discussing it with others who benefit from that road. I told them to demolish the wall and reported it to the Mtaa office, but they continued building it. After two days we cooperated with all community members to demolish the wall in the morning, and those owners went to the police. Still, the police told them to return and abide by other society members' demands since the community leader was there. The road still exists and serves the community, these are some of the challenges we as community leaders have to deal with in infrastructure provision commonly" - Ten cell leader

Factors considered during the subdivision process

Different factors are considered before and during the land subdivision process. The common factor to consider is the availability of land and its ownership. In most cases, land with ownership issues is difficult to sell as every individual is afraid of being a victim of ownership issues. The location, size, accessibility, and adjacent land use in the area also matter as they influence the subdivision process. The availability of landmarks on the plot boundaries and neighbors to confirm the boundaries is a key factor as it can help avoid conflicts in the future. The approval of the community leader to the subdivision is another factor to be considered during the land subdivision process as this assures the legitimacy of the land.

Land sales and modalities

Inland sale, transactions are done by cash, mobile money, and bank deposit. The process includes knowing the price after site inspection and negotiations. Depending on the agreement after talks some sellers accept payments in phases depending on how close the buyer and seller are, but otherwise, the payment is done in full. Sometimes, the transaction is done by exchanging lands within the area or from another location. Land brokers charge 10% of the agreed value for their service when used. Most of the sales in the area involve community leaders like Mtaa committee members or ten

cell leaders for confirmation before and after sales, sometimes, the community leader is the one facilitating the sales agreement as the prices are indicated within agreements.

Who gets what at what price?

In the process of land subdivision and transaction landowner is the initiator and the expectation is to know the land part to be subdivided and the price to be gained from subdivision and transaction. The buyer is expecting to find the area that suits his/her interest and at a good price compared to the experience or expected return after buying the place. The land broker is expected to facilitate the exchange by finding the buyer and getting a commission of at least 10% of the agreed price or other negotiated price. A community leader is expected to inspect the area and approve the agreement after assuring that all parts have reached a consensus and there is no conflict. The community leaders are paid to attend the negotiations and approve the transactions through signing of the documents and stamping, there is no fixed amount of price as it is always negotiated to help facilitate transactions. Prices vary as some of the buyers are members of other communities and others are new community members who want to buy land within the community hence the price is negotiated but most of the time is 10%. There is no record of this activity at the Mtaa office.

Challenges during subdivision

During land subdivision, the major challenge that has been experienced in the area is the encroachment of the neighbors and proposed infrastructure land. The proposed roads are being encroached on by soil dumping during the construction phases, solid waste dumping, soil erosion on the infrastructure causing effects on adjacent plots development, and the construction of soak-away pits on the road reserve. As some subdivided plots are too small, they cause encroachment of neighboring plots during construction. Some community members subdivide their land without informing community leaders, especially with inheritance or giving land as gifts to relatives or children. This could only be discovered during construction and it is sometimes difficult to find out as the same family is involved.

As some parts of the area regularisation plan have already been surveyed, it was discovered that the already surveyed plot was subdivided and a part was sold to another person and the community leader approved the subdivision. After the subdivision, the owner requested the regularisation committee to approve the subdivision and produce other ownership documents officially. Others subdivide without reporting to community readers; hence, the results indicate that more houses are being built without following any plan. In the process no formal measurements are being used, most of the time they use pace or just look at the available space. The boundaries applied in land subdivisions can easily be adjusted or removed without knowing. It is not easy to trace the boundaries after construction.

The whole process of land subdivision aims to protect buyer and seller interests. The major challenge has been the general knowledge of the impact of the ongoing buying and selling practices. The process is sometimes followed to fulfill the procedure of having a contract without a community leader's attendance at the act. As a result, the community leader just signs land subdivisions of the area in the areas that have already been surveyed or encroaches on the agreed infrastructure areas like roads, water, and electricity lines. The seller determines the size and location of subdivided land, sometimes without considering the existing infrastructure, causing difficulty in controlling development patterns as the seller and buyer could have different aims. No measurements are involved in buying and selling land; therefore, only the physical marks placed during the transaction are dependent on reference points.

Building permits are not being considered in the area. People buy land and start building without their plans, inspection, and permission. Building permit knowledge is minimal as some think community leaders are responsible for building permits, while others do not know anything about it. The infrastructures considered to be left for connectivity are too tiny, in some parts, it is only a one or two-meter footpath. The Municipal Council has no exact system of knowing the building permit provided in informal areas after inspection. The experts from the Municipal Council have no specific schedule for inspecting building development within the area. Community leaders from the Mtaa office when inspecting the ongoing sites within the area a lot of developers have no permits. Building without a permit sometimes results in corruption opportunities as developers want their projects to be completed on time without delay due to the building permit process.

Opportunities available

When properly used, some opportunities in land subdivisions can improve development planning and management. The process involves community leaders if a sales agreement is to be approved. This gives community leaders the power to approve and monitor development within the area. Their involvement in ensuring land safety and the availability of infrastructures makes them important actors in the process. Engaging witnesses is another opportunity, as they have a chance to advise if they know the proper plot condition to be involved as witnesses.

Buyer and seller adhering to having a written contract is an opportunity to improve subdivision within the area. The contracts could result in an organized land subdivision within informal settlements if monitored. The availability of regularisation within the area could be advantageous if it is properly used. Currently, the regularisation committee is voluntarily chosen by the public, and according to the regularisation guidelines they are supposed to advise on planning and improvement within the area. Most of the land conflicts within the area are resolved at the Mtaa office and ten cell leaders, this has the potential to reflect plans at lower levels of leadership in the community. As subdivision and sales must involve the local leader, this is the opportunity to rectify and design improved plans for informal settlements.

The whole process is very inclusive, involving different actors at different stages. This could be the best opportunity if planning is incorporated into the process through negotiation, witnessing, and sale approval of the particular piece of land. Community leaders are trusted to make sure infrastructure facilities like roads, electricity lines, and water pipes are available. When there is any issue the information goes to the community leader to communicate with the service provider and make sure the service is available in the area, the same with road availability local leaders influence protecting the existing and negotiating for proposed roads. At the local level the process is participatory as they know and trust each other and reasoning for the decision is made according to the agreed standards of the area.

At Ubungo municipal council the government has the Integrated Land Management System (ILMS) . It is a government system that follows the development and management of land in different areas. In the system, all the past and current plans of the area can be integrated, and information on the past and present government-approved plans in the area can be given. This could be an opportunity as the system is currently only accessed by a few experts using their government emails. If the system is expanded, it would be helpful for the buyers to get the right information before making any decision.

The area is already in the regularization process, and a committee working with the community and a private surveying company has surveyed it since 2017. As there are challenges with ongoing fast development, the area has been surveyed for almost 20% of the plan. Community leaders like the Mtaa chairperson and the Mtaa executive officer are supposed to work with the regularization committee and engage them in all the decisions concerning land to achieve the plan.

There is a communication chain between the community leaders at the Mtaa level and the ten cell leaders. The ten cell leaders are geographically distributed and have four assistants each who can assist on their behalf, this could assist in planning and development control. Municipal council experts collaborate with community leaders although the challenge of fast development and the demand to subdivide and develop is higher than the demand response. There is already a guide to building permits since 2018 that the government has provided for the authorities to follow when controlling building permits.

Communities are also being organized through social media, such as WhatsApp groups. The groups are diverse and have different focuses, and their control is not reliable, as they are not official and organically evolve within the community. Some groups join communities of the same locality to discuss challenges regarding social activities and infrastructure improvements, such as electricity lines and road surface improvements. The groups are not very engaged in discussing land subdivisions; hence, the subdivision information remains with the landowner, buyer, and community leader.

Formal vs informal subdivision

The formal land subdivision process is guided by law. The Land Act of 1999 and The Urban Planning Act no.7 of 2007 guide land acquisition, land use planning procedures, change of use, and land subdivision process to be followed for the already surveyed plot. Landowners in unplanned areas can request a planning authority to plan first before starting any development. The planning authority has the duty of engaging the community and planning their area before the beginning of development, it includes monitoring the plan development by giving building permits. In formal areas, the land is planned and surveyed. Every individual knows the boundary and has the information on the area plan and the surrounding plan and how development is supposed to be. The process of land subdivision must start with the request of the landowner to the planning authority, then an inspection is to be done to know if the standards are to be met for the land use. After inspection, the planning authority Town planner has to write the recommendation for subdivision approval with the proposed plot subdivision measurements. The request and recommendation must be submitted to the Land Commissioner's office for approval. Then the owner has to surrender the ownership documents for the new documents preparation.

In informal areas, this is different as the land subdivision mostly relies on the landowner as it should follow his/her interest. As the area is being developed the number of landowners increases as the land transforms from a peri-urban to urban areas. Transformation of the areas comes with more subdivision of land and dense development as there are no standards and guidance. With the increase of landowners, it becomes difficult to monitor as different landowners have different interests in subdivisions and development. The subdivision process relies on trust that the land being sold belongs to the owner and a buyer's curiosity about the location and accessibility. Owners just produce a selling agreement; it is more of a buyer's duty to keep the agreement as proof when asked. The boundaries are physically

placed with different things and can be easily removed or adjusted. It is not easy to recall the boundary once shifted as there is no reference to how the subdivision was done apart from relying on the previous owner's narrative.

Discussion

The booming of informal settlements is associated with ongoing land subdivisions. Land subdivisions are approved by community leaders, who are trusted by communities to provide good control and guidance, this has been highlighted by (Adam et al., 2020; Gwaleba & Chigbu, 2020; Kironde, 2019). Landowners are mostly related to the size and location of the plot that they want to sell. If local leaders are keen and know how to plan their areas, they have a high chance of advising landowners on how to subdivide their land while considering the sustainable development of the whole area.

Multiple layers of community leaders are engaged in the land subdivision without communicating with one another. The Mtaa chairperson or Mtaa executive officer can approve the land subdivision without informing the ten-cell leader of that particular area and vice versa. In PD the available mechanism could be reduced if there is a guideline to be known by the public, as of current it depends on the community leader's influence and availability. Document storage and retrieval are challenging in informal settlements. Most of the produced documents are not stored at the Mtaa office, ten cell leaders have no office and hence use their houses. The available office has no space for storage and available record system keeping demand space and it is not followed.

It is difficult to connect ongoing land subdivisions with the general development outcome of the area. As the process happens quickly with minimal control, it is easier for forgeries and buyers to be misled, resulting in conflicts. Local leaders are engaged but have little knowledge of the link between their decisions and the general land development outcome in the area. In family land, it is even more difficult sometimes, as inheritance in this area is not properly written and controlled, resulting in conflicts when subdividing. This could be an opportunity for PD in community engagement in planning and government policies intervention in improving the situation and funds allocation (Bason, 2013; Vaz et al., 2022).

Planning authority experts like Town planners are not very involved in the ongoing land subdivisions at the grassroots level. Currently, they are involved in public meetings to advise and educate the community on the process to be followed in planning, building permit procedures, and resolving community conflicts, especially in public infrastructure development projects in the area. The municipal council is experiencing a higher demand for land development control than the available experts to facilitate sustainable development. Hence, the duty has been left to community leaders as it is difficult and might take a long time before the expert is fully involved in the land subdivision.

There is still no direct digital technology to help follow, document, and interact with the public on the ongoing development within their areas. Available technology captures some data and is accessible to specific experts at the Municipal level, while the social media platform provides space for interaction and discussion of the community infrastructure and engagement strategies within some specific areas. Available social media groups like WhatsApp groups have no formal leadership and voluntarily evolve to solve community issues like road accessibility or water pipes, after resolving the issues they tend to lose function and interest in the community.

Conclusion and reflection

This paper reflects on the whole land subdivision process in informal settlements and uncovers the existing PD and how it affects the area's sustainable development. The practice has been analyzed with its process and actors involved for action to be taken. The relationship among actors is seen to be somehow weak in understanding the ongoing impact of the ongoing community's development. Plans are controlled individually and even the community leaders have no bigger development plan for the area and how these subdivisions play a crucial part. Unlike other places where informal settlements are controlled by none government organizations (Onyebueke & Ikejiofor, 2017), community organizations (Sletto, 2023) and sometimes even criminal gangs (Geyer, 2023), here the informal settlements are controlled by formal known elected community leaders and ruling political part leaders at grassroot level.

Municipal experts who are supposed to monitor development are few compared to demand and the tools for community engagement are still weak to be involved in the ongoing land subdivision practices at the grassroots level. Existing plans are not properly known by the community to be monitored. Only the regularisation committee members with the assistance of an existing private surveying firm know the plans, the other community leaders know very little of the plans o be followed. Community members trust their leaders in subdivision and transaction approval, this could be an opportunity if leaders are to be given guidelines and skills for monitoring land subdivisions in informal settlements. If trained experts like town planners could be decentralized to ward level or an area with 3 kilometers radius especially in fast developing cities like Dar es Salaam this could help communities to get consultation and monitoring while developing.

Luis sub-ward in Ubungo Municipality is a case of many informal settlements experiencing fast development. Community leaders are trusted in the area and supervise land subdivisions, transactions, and conflict resolutions. This has been the common practice in a lot of booming informal settlements. If grasped as an opportunity to improve and avoid further development of informal settlements this could be an opportunity to improve their skills and provide them with guidelines to be followed. Grassroot development guidelines should be provided to the public to consider when subdividing land or buying land for any development, especially in informal settlements.

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