

## Coen Beeker's 'Urban Fields' for Addis Ababa

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# **The Beeker Method**

**Planning and Working on the  
Redevelopment of the African City**

Retrospective Glances into the Future

Edited by Antoni Folkers and Iga Perzyna

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# 10

## Coen Beeker's 'Urban Fields' for Addis Ababa

Anteneh Tesfaye Tola

Cities under rapid urbanization such as Addis Ababa offer a set of challenges for today's designers and planners. The urgent need for access to affordable and decent living environments presses city administrations, whose primary response tends to be a top-down approach of public housing projects and allocating plots through a bidding process in which only the affluent become beneficiaries. Such socially selective approaches usually segregate urban dwellers into economic classes and fall short of providing affordable housing options.

The formal and informal horizontal sprawl of the city has continued unabated since the mid-1970s and has gained even stronger momentum in the past decade. It is important today to consider options that allow integration instead of segregation and to find options for legal and planned urban environments that deal with peripheral urbanization.

Coen Beeker's 'step-by-step' process of urbanization, which allows gradual changes that promote incremental and adaptable formation of 'urban fields' in the peripheries of Addis Ababa, illustrates the possibilities. He argues that access to legally tenured plots of land and further urbanization through measured steps is crucial for developing affordable and cohesive communities in these areas.

This paper is an analysis of the pertinent challenges faced by the city of Addis Ababa in relation to peripheral urbanization and an assessment of Coen Beeker's proposal to deal with these challenges.

### Les 'Champs Urbains' de Coen Beeker à Addis-Abeba

Les villes ayant subies une urbanisation rapide, comme Addis-Abeba, offrent des défis singuliers aux concepteurs et aux décideurs d'aujourd'hui. Le besoin urgent d'accéder à un milieu de vie digne et abordable exerce une pression sur les pouvoirs publics dont la démarche initiale consistait jusqu'alors en une approche imposée par le haut concernant les projets de logements publics et la distribution de lots en appels d'offres publics bénéficiant exclusivement aux personnes les plus aisées. Une approche aussi sélective, d'un point de vue social,

fini par séparer les citoyens en classes en fonction de leur pouvoir d'achat, visant en outre le court terme en ce qui concerne les stratégies d'attribution de logements abordables. Alors que l'extension de la ville, formelle ou informelle et se déployant continuellement depuis le milieu des années 70, avait gagné un point culminant dans la décennie passée, il est aujourd'hui important d'envisager des choix permettant l'intégration à la place de l'isolement, tout en favorisant des outils pour un cadre légal et des environnements urbains planifiés dans la gestion de l'urbanisation périurbaine.

Le processus d'urbanisation « pas-à-pas » de Coen Beeker, rendant possible une évolution graduelle et visant à promouvoir la formation adaptable et progressive des « champs urbains » dans les périphéries d'Addis-Abeba, illustre une telle possibilité. La présente contribution est une analyse des défis pertinents de la ville d'Addis-Abeba pour son urbanisation périphérique et une évaluation des propositions de Coen Beeker visant à relever ces défis.

## Introduction

A step-by-step approach could be planned for the implementation of a large-scale operation in the first 10 or 15 years, offering 1 to 2 million people (legal) access to an upgraded urban environment in Addis Ababa and other metropolitan areas in Africa. This is pertinent to the place of rapid urbanization: [...] (Beeker 2001)

In his contribution to the book *New Institutional Forms in Urban Management, Emerging Practices in Developing and Transitional Countries*, (Beeker 2001), Coen Beeker asserts that transforming a rural environment into an 'urban field' may be realized step-by-step. He identifies the 'urban fields' in Addis Ababa as built-up areas present in the metropolitan area of the city. If building technique is used as a criterion, he claims, four fifths of the city structure are comparable to villages in the urban periphery. Implicitly, he is arguing that adopting low-tech means of urbanization is important, especially in portions of the city's periphery. In dealing with the peripheral development of the city, it is essential to consider what such an option can offer in terms of affordable dwellings for the majority, while government investment in infrastructure and basic works of allocating the plots are crucial to this.

Such an understanding of peripheral urbanization stands in contrast to what is happening today in Addis Ababa. The city administration is availing land to either real estate companies or through a bidding process in which only those who can afford it are able to acquire leasehold plots. While peripheral gov-

ernment housing projects are hoped to host the urban poor, this has resulted in segregated communities of different income levels and the urban poor is forced to commit to dwelling acquisition schemes that compel them to raise the necessary funds despite being at a distance from the city centre and opportunities to earn an income. Consequently, most decide to either sell or rent out their contracted residences as they cannot afford them.

### **Addis Ababa's pertinent challenges**

The city of Addis Ababa is particularly known for its organic growth, dictated by prime positioning of Ethiopian nobilities, topography, the availability of resources, as well as the need for mobility, shelter and communication. Having passed through three distinct socio-political systems – the monarchy of 1886–1974, the socialist regime of 1974–1987 and the current federal democracy that has been in practice since 1991. The intuitive beginnings of Addis Ababa have been enriched with the additions of places and structures representing each progressive system. “Addis Ababa falls into the pattern of autochthonous development [...] With the exception of the brief intervention of the Italians in the second half of the 1930's, its evolution had an internal dynamics.” (Zewde 2005). Though it can be claimed that it is a city that grew out of the needs of its dwellers, through these different historic contexts one can still see urban and architectural influences that resulted from trade, infrastructure development and cultural exchange with countries such as France, India, Greece and Armenia. Recent trends show a unique tread of urbanization resulting from attempts to alleviate dire urban poverty and the need to have a global presence as a city with multiple diplomatic and cultural responsibilities.

As a city experiencing rapid urbanization but with multiple urban challenges, needs and demands – including the sway between *global socio-economic pressure*<sup>14</sup> and issues of defining local identity – and an urgent need to highlight its global competitiveness and alleviate urban poverty, contemporary Addis Ababa is stretching itself to a new level of complexity. It is a young city, just 130 years old, with an estimated current population of about 4 million. It also hosts the seat of the Government of Ethiopia, the seat of Government for the Oromia Region, the African Union and many more international organi-

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14 Reaffirming and building on the 2002 Monterrey Consensus and the 2008 Doha Declaration, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda – also referred to as the Addis Accord – was issued in July 2015 as follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals and to serve as a basis for the new Sustainable Development Goals. (United Nation 2015). Such a global agenda and goals are designed to garner the necessary political and financial support for development, but they also put considerable pressure on cities through the timelines that need to be met.



zations. This compounds an ever-growing need for Addis Ababa to represent and display a certain regional and global image. As the biggest city in Ethiopia with multiple opportunities, it attracts people from every corner of the country seeking a place of work and a better life. The World Bank's Ethiopian Urban Migration Study 2008 (World Bank 2010) indicates that 37 per cent of the city's inhabitants are born outside of Addis Ababa and have subsequently moved to the city. Almost 90 per cent of those who migrated to Addis state that they have no intention of moving any further. This phenomenon, coupled with the natural increase in density through births, comes with its own demands on the city.

On the other hand, the sudden economic progress and the growing private sector have evolved into a force that restlessly works to profit from every space and opportunity the city promises. The relatively competitive market economy has allowed for the private sector to grow considerably and the progressive interest in capitalizing what the city has to offer is leaving obvious marks on the landscape.

Policies, plans and projects that are working to restructure the city are based on the premise that the existing dilapidated urban environment, which covers about 80 per cent of the physical mass in the city, are no longer inhabitable. The unhygienic conditions of these structures leaves no room for upgrading and re-appropriation. Instead, complete redevelopment as an objective strategy is being considered. Since the master plan of 1986, Addis Ababa has been developing as per revisions to this plan made every ten years, i.e. the recent wave of urbanization is mainly being steered by revisions made to the master plan during 1999-2001 and validated in 2002. This version of the plan introduced the tool known as the Local Development Plan (LDP), used to cope with the required evolution of the city. The LDP is serving as a tool to extend the effectiveness of the structural plan on the ground, for better implementation of the master plan in recent times. In addition to the major infrastructural transformation and the expansion of the city to its fringes, the redevelopment of the 'Casa Incis' and 'Bole Medhanealem' areas into 'mixed use' business districts can be seen as products of using an LDP as part of the master plan. The Integrated Housing Development Program with its Grand Housing Scheme of 2005 (designed to address a backlog of 300,000 housing units in 2004), the Light Rail Construction (aiming to mobilize 60,000 people per day) and road construction and massive redevelopment projects are actualizations of the previous and still active master plan.

Debates about the suitability of LDPs as tools for urbanization aside, the visible results of ten years of their practice are standing in major parts of the city. It can be said that the recent urbanization processes of the city of Addis Ababa are a result of strong top-down planning, design and implementation practices. This can be accounted for by many socio-political realities, but also by the existence of the state as the strongest institution capable of undertaking such massive development endeavours.



Figure 1  
'Yeka Abado' a peripheral housing project (Source: A.T. Tola)

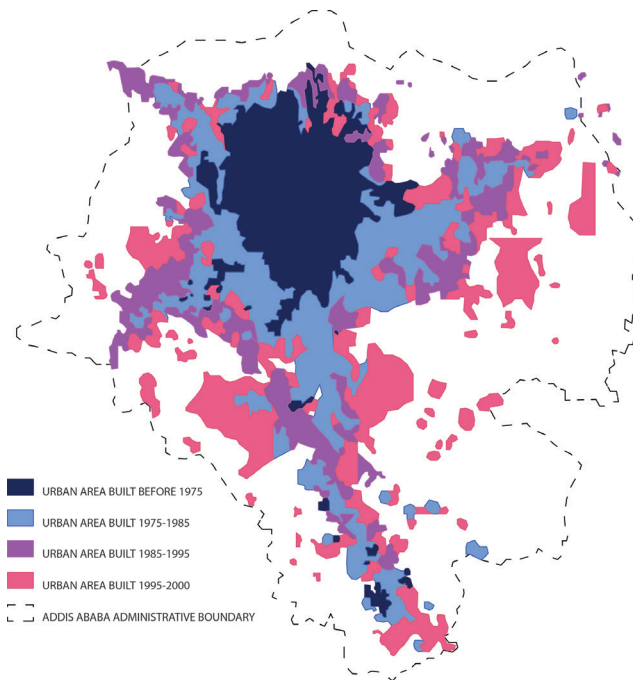
Currently, the Addis Ababa City Administration is developing the tenth version of its master plan, which envisions an increasing intensity of urbanization. The Addis Ababa Master Plan Project Office is responsible for the task of creating a plan to drive the development of the city for at least the coming decade. Initially established as the Addis Ababa and Surrounding Oromia Integrated Development Plan Project Office (AASOID), this office had ambitions to develop a plan that would have clear, multi-scalar guidelines to equip both the city of Addis Ababa and smaller towns on the fringes of the city, in the administrative region of Oromia, for integrated urbanization.



**Figure 2**  
**'Yeka Abado' urbanization confronting**  
**urban farming (Source: A.T. Tola)**

By April 2014 this plan was confronted by public resistance and demonstrations that resulted in chaos, loss of lives and detentions in many parts of the Oromia region. It was perceived as a contentious political move intended to expand the administrative boundary of the city of Addis Ababa into the Oromia region.

Politics aside, this incident brought a long-standing concern to the fore. The horizontal sprawl of the city, ongoing since the mid-1970s, had gained an ever-stronger momentum in the past decade. Prior to 1974, the growth rate of Addis Ababa was 6.5 per cent, declining to 3.7 per cent during the communist rule of 1974–1991 (Tufa 2008). By the time the 1986 master plan was implemented, the city had expanded to 51,000 hectares, from the 21,000 hectares prescribed under the 1965 plan. As shown in figure 3, this planned and unplanned expansion resulted in a significant horizontal enlargement, especially within the 25 years from 1975 till 2000. This trend has been complemented by the master plan of 2003 and actualized by intensified investment from both the state and private sectors.



**Figure 3**  
**Expansion Trend of Addis Ababa until 2000 (Source: ORAAMP 2000, redrawn by Anteneh Tesfaye Tola)**

In the peripheries of the city, this expansion took place with the few implementation tools available. The city continued to expand, especially in the eastern and western parts of the territory, which used to be large farmlands and small farmers' communities. Smaller bordering towns of the Oromia region, such as Sululta, Gefersa, Lege Tafo, Alem Gena and Dukem, also felt the stress Addis Ababa was experiencing. With the lack of integrated development plans, governing local development plans (LDPs), and deficiency in institutional administrative capacity in these areas, such developments resulted in farmers having to adapt to a changing demography and lifestyle. Government compensation and under-the-table exchange of land for money to facilitate new developments resulted in a loss of employment and income. The new developments were neither participatory nor inclusive to the farmers. Consequently, the youth in the farming communities were forced to change their occupations and become, for example, construction workers, to commute to city centre to search for work or take low-wage jobs such as being guards and house maids in the new communities. It can be argued that Addis Ababa remains with the challenge of finding an appropriate means of urbanization, especially in terms of peripheral developments.

The proposed land-use map shown in figure 4 is an excerpt from the newly revised master plan of the city that will guide urbanization for at least the next ten years. This proposal embraces and builds on this pertinent trend. The horizontal expansion is enhanced by the newly proposed tracts of land for developments designated as ‘mixed residence’, indicated in yellow.

Such a land-use map on a structural level is necessary. Details in terms of local development plans, including urban designs and guidelines, have also been prepared to facilitate further implementation. But they are still largely ‘top-down’ tools and prone to failure unless complemented by grass root studies and projections. In other words, such plans can only serve as directions and will only be effective when supplemented by the necessary implementation tools.

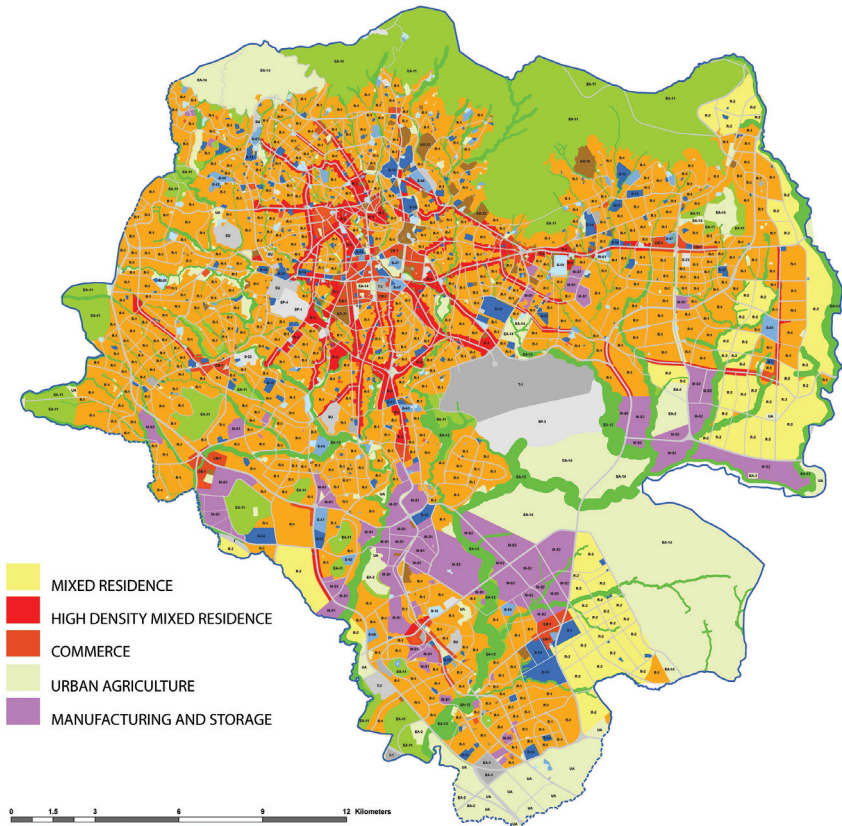


Figure 4  
Proposed Land Use Map for Addis Ababa 2006 (Source: Addis Ababa City Master Plan Revision Project office. 2014)

## **Coen Beeker: Rural environments to ‘urban fields’**

According to Coen Beeker (2001), the generation of ‘urban fields’ can base itself on structural plans, as in figure 4, provided by the city administration and then pass through several other steps. In Beeker’s view, these steps build up on each other but are not necessarily to be followed in order, nor are they performed separately as there will be overlap and revisions necessary as the process unfolds. That said, these steps can broadly be grouped into two stages comprising eight steps, outlined below.

### **Stage A: Availing the plot**

The availability of legally tenured land that can be leased by the government to dwellers is an important stage in the process of forming the ‘urban fields’. The end goal is the availing of residential plots from the farm lands currently being used by farmers belonging to peasant associations. The proper steps need to be taken to make sure the process is satisfactory to all stakeholders.

**Step 1** Preparing the Settlement Scheme: It is essential to start such a process with a plan. Such a plan will help demarcate infrastructure, public function spaces and private plots. Given that the land is owned by the government and allocation of this land has social implications, it is usual that local- and city-level offices are mandated to generate a plan for such areas. Nevertheless, it is crucial to have all partners on board. Thus, such a development scheme cannot be a purely top-down process. Coen Beeker’s work in Ouagadougou is relevant in this regard: “three proposals on this issue were discussed with an arbitrarily selected 100 household heads (Folkers 2010). The main purpose of this dialogue was to involve the residents in a ‘spontaneous’ settlement in the choice of the most feasible proposal” (Beeker 2001). This primary engagement allows the planners to collect essential issues and formulate vital concepts for the scheme, and the local farmers get an opportunity to present their interests related to the upcoming changes, thus averting the possibility of dissatisfaction and potential confrontation. By using different planning tools, discussions can be held regarding different options in order to come up with the most favourable proposal.

**Step 2** Demarcation of land for public activities: Once a scheme is approved, the demarcation and protection of proposed public use areas follows. Areas drafted for social, economic and infrastructural purposes are included in this category of space and the demarcation of these areas paves the way to the subsequent parcellation.

**Step 3** Creation of a local agency: A local agency, under the authority of the city administration, can be created to take responsibility for the implementation and follow-up of the scheme generated in the first step. Such an agency is a key unit for the tasks related to plot allocation, administering finances, etc. and is positioned between the city council and the local dwellers.

**Step 4** Plot allocation: Coen Beeker proposes that each farmer who gives up his/her land use right for such a development should be offered two legal plots per hectare for a maximum of ten years, as part of a compensation scheme. Incoming beneficiaries should be selected through a lottery system. A request for a plot, accompanied by an initial basic fee and evidence of the ability to proceed according to the plans, can be forwarded by the aforementioned agency.. Contrary to the current practices of allocating plots through a bidding process, this inclusive method allocates land to those unable to participate in a competitive scheme and ensures access to different income groups.

**Step 5** Bank loan: At this point the agency should have sufficient money to be granted a bank loan, which will facilitate the gradual handing over of plots. Major site works, such as main access roads, water, and electricity provision can be done using such a fund. In this way, the agency develops its capacity in terms of public works and forming of communities.

**Step 6** Compensate farmers: In addition to the ability to own two plots of land per hectare in the newly allocated parcels, farmers will also be compensated financially. The amount of compensation needs to be calculated based not only on the area of the plots, but also their yield. This is important to ensure farmers are properly compensated. The government should play a role at this point, by making sure a consistent annual fund is provided to the farmers. This is only to jump start the whole development process and eventually the agency should take over. A special fund for compensation should be established that the new beneficiaries should contribute to every year.

## Stage B: Local associations and shared responsibilities

**Step 7** Forming cooperatives: Such a gradual development process should recognize local socio-economic practices. Ethiopian traditions such as ‘*equb*’,<sup>15</sup> and ‘*edir*’<sup>16</sup> form financial interdependences among communities. Such traditions of solidarity supported by the local agency can be organized into cooperatives. These cooperatives will be agencies for maintaining infrastructure and social spaces. In addition, local financial schemes can be used to build the capacity of households to upgrade their dwellings so that the ‘urban field’ continues to grow and urbanize. The partnership can further be extended to include private partners, who can also create job opportunities and possibly extra development support.

**Step 8** Shared responsibilities: While the city council remains the main authority in governing the neighbourhoods, through the gradual process the original peasant associations, the local agency and cooperatives can share responsibilities. This sustains the initial concepts of the plan while accommodating potential alterations through timely negotiations and decision-making.

## Conclusion

The gradual steps posited by Beeker place the availing of residential plots into the market as key target. He argues that security of tenure offers opportunities for a phased upgrading of rural environments. Because of the realistic steps involved, beneficiaries of such a process will be motivated to continuously invest in their own dwellings and the environment. Local farmers will have enough time to adapt to such changes and will have the opportunity to gradually integrate into the planned urbanization they have already had a say in. Recognizing that governments and city administrations play a key role in contexts such as Addis Ababa is both practical and important. Also key is crafting methods in which actual users of these urban structures play significant parts in defining the goals and participating in the implementation as they see fit and affordable. In addition to the multistorey housing models the city administration is implementing today, Addis Ababa can also use such modest models to make individual housing options available to lower- and middle-income groups of the city population. Moreover, cities going through

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<sup>15</sup> A savings scheme used by local communities.

<sup>16</sup> A communal organization initially intended for funerals, currently embracing more functions such as the up-keep of neighbourhoods.



rapid urbanization should be equipped with multitude schemes and methods to deal with the various urban challenges and should not enter into a campaign mode, implementing a short list of options all over their territories.

It is also becoming evident in such models of urbanization that planners and designers tend to morph into moderators of such processes. Today's rapidly urbanizing cities offer a different set of challenges in which ready-made and set-to-implement plans tend to be short lived. Coen Beeker's early engagements in African cities and the methods he used in places such as Ouagadougou showcase such an evolution in the practice. His ability to form coalitions with and among different actors in the field demonstrates a paradigm shift.

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