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Housing Conditions of Government Employees in Ethiopia: The Case of Robe Town, Bale Zone, Oromia Regional State

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Abstract:

For the first time in human history, more than half of the world's population is living in towns and cities. Inevitably, this rapid pace of urbanization constrained the speed to respond to the ever increasing demand of adequate and standard housing units in urban centers of Ethiopia including Robe town. Thus, this study aimed to assesses the housing conditions of government employees in Robe town. To this end, a systematic random sampling technique was employed to select 354 sample respondents from each government institutions in the town to participate in the survey questionnaire. Findings of the study indicated that, the overwhelming majority of government employees in the town are residing in a substandard housing unit rented from private house lords. These rent occupied government employees were challenged by continuously increasing rent cost and tenure insecurity. Therefore, facilitating housing access to government employee necessitate for feasible strategy by the national and local government.

Keywords: *Housing, tenure status, housing standard, housing ownership, Robe*

1. Introduction

Rapid urbanization, on a massive scale, and over a short period of time, has been a common phenomenon in the developing countries. The share of the world's population living in urban areas of developing countries continues to rise from 12% in 1950 to 68% in 2000 (Gottdiener and Budd, 2005). By the year 2020, this figure will have reached 75% (RUAF, 2008). Urbanization in these regions is an explosive phenomenon stuffed with many social problems. African cities are thus confronted in the new Millennium with the problem of accommodating the rapidly growing urban populations in providing them with adequate shelter and basic urban services. East African countries have registered rapid rate of urbanization (6 to 8%) for the last forty years. This has happened against declining economic growth and weakening institutional and physical infrastructure (Mireri, *et al.*, 2006).

As part of east African countries, Ethiopia is also experiencing rapid rate of urbanization. The urban population of the country is growing at a rate of 4.4% per year, and is estimated to reach 22 million by 2020 (MoFED, 2006). The growth of Ethiopian cities presents enormous demands of urban services and infrastructure to the nation, of which housing is the primary (UN-HABITAT, 2008). Housing is a basic necessity for human survival, just like food and clothing. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1996 Istanbul resolution offer that housing is a basic human need and as such all people, the poor inclusive, deserve a home where they and their families can live in security and comfort (UN-HABITAT, 1996). Housing is also of great importance to households in both developed and developing economies, because it is the largest fixed capital investment that households make. In developing countries, housing accounts for 10 to 30 percent of household expenditure, 6 to 20 percent of the Gross National Product, and 10 to 50% of gross fixed capital formation (Malpezzi, 2000). Moreover, residential housing plays different roles in the society as well. It is an immense element in the inheritance and a source of personal wealth. It is also important in relation with its value as an asset that can be used as security against credit. Furthermore, it serves as a source of social prestige or status (Katz, *et al.*, 2003).

However, housing the urban poor is becoming one of the major challenges facing mankind in the 21st century. Although studies have shown that the problem of housing is universal, it is however, more critical in less developed countries (Olotuah and Bobadoye, 2009). According to UNCHS report, more than one billion urban residents live in inadequate housing, mostly in sprawling slum and squatter settlements in less developed countries (UNCHS, 2001). Within less developed countries, Sub-Saharan Africa has the largest proportion (71.9%) of residents in slum and squatter settlements (Mashoko, 2012). Ethiopia is not exceptional in this problem. A recent estimate shows that about 70% of the urban populations live in slum houses (UN-HABITAT, 2008). Thus, the urban poor are suffering from poor housing conditions like: acute shortage of housing, sub-standard housing, overcrowding in a single room, inadequate and unreliable housing facilities as well as tenure insecurity (Adesoji, 2011). Thus, formal housing is both scarce and expensive relative to the wage levels of the low and middle income households (Tipple and Willis, 1991).

The current housing policy of Ethiopia is also criticized for not favoring the low and middle income households, except the government led housing construction of condominium in the capital city and few regional centers. Because acquiring land for housing through competitive based lease holding is unthinkable for the low and middle income households. Thus, the major problem facing affordable housing for low and moderate income Ethiopians has been access to housing finance (UN-HABITAT, 2011; GebeyawWalle, 2003). Obviously, this implies that government employees who are categorized under the low and middle income are dominant victims of these problems. So the problem has turned to be one of the pressing issues, which needs greater attention. This is also true in Robe town, the administrative center of Bale zone. The town is growing at an alarming rate with 6.2% per year, which is greater than the national average i.e. 4.4% (MoFED, 2006).

Hence, affordability of housing, access to housing land, inadequate housing facilities and tenure insecurity are some of the loudly spoken problems of government employees in Robe town. Thus, the main goal of this study is to assess the general conditions of housing among government employees in Robe town. How much the problem is serious? What should be done about? are the objectives of the current study.

2. Study Area

Robe is the capital town of Bale Zone. A suffix *Weleshe* is sometimes used to name as *Robe-Weleshe* so as to differentiate it from *Robe-Dida* of Arsi Zone. The town has been established in 1931 as a settlement area. There is no any written document on the historical development of the town. But oral traditions justified that the area currently called Robe had been inhabited by agricultural people of seven kinfolds, namely: *Kato, Hadero, Adoshe, Kere, Ilu, Kacho* and *Zeyibela*, which later grown to establish Robe town. Astronomically, the town of Robe is located in the Southeast of Ethiopia in Bale Zone of Oromia regional State at 7°7' North and 40° 00' East (NMA, 2014). It is found at a distance of 430 and 180 Kilometers from Addis Ababa and Shashemene cities, respectively. The town does not have a clearly defined municipal boundary. The present estimated area is about 36.2Km² (Strategic Planning and Management, 2001). The absence of a well-defined boundary also results in urban rural land use conflict between the municipality and the surrounding farmers.

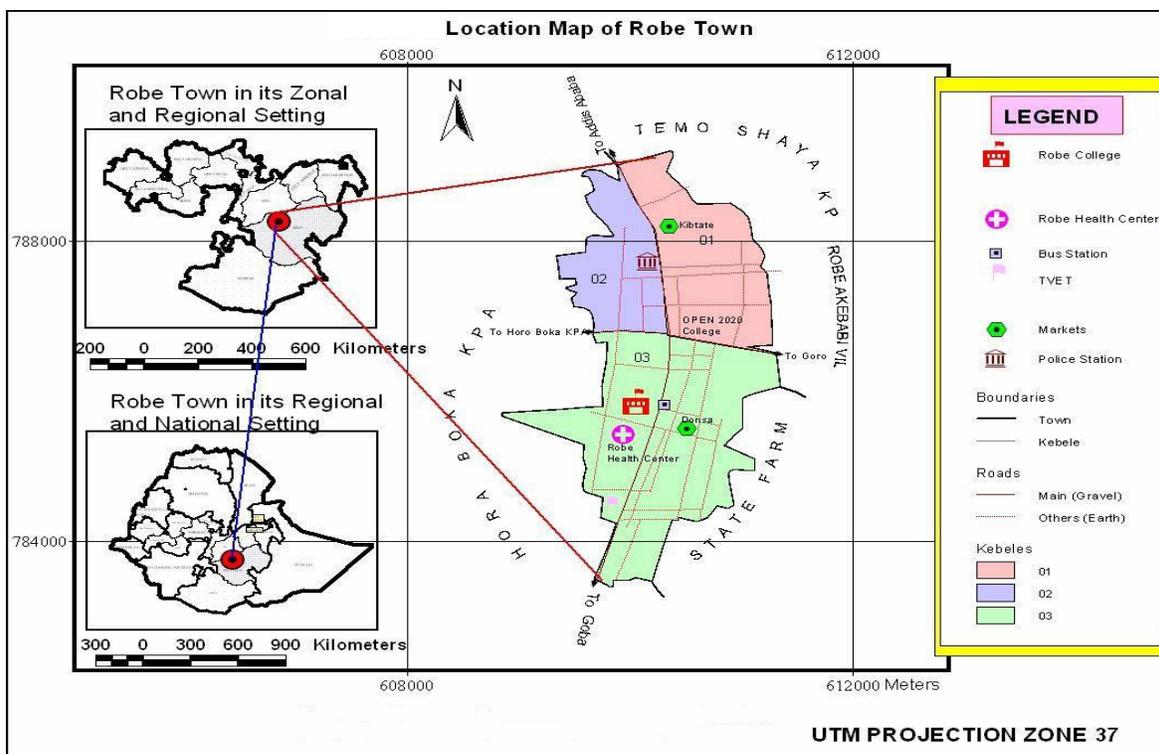


Figure 1: Locations of Robe Town in the National and Regional Settings

Source: Ethio-GIS Data and authors Manipulation, 2015

The town has a total population of 44,382 (CSA, 2007). It is one of the fast growing administrative and business centers endowed with hospitable climate and plain topography. A number of tourists pass through it from different corners of the world, to visit the nearby tourist attraction sites like *Sof-umer* cave, the shrine of *Sheik-Hussein*, the jungle of *Harena-Buluk* and Bale mountains national park. Like other secondary towns of the region, livelihoods of populations of the town depends on commercial activities like household petty economic activities, and retail and whole sale trades. Moreover, it includes small flourmills factories, ordinary *garages*, limited hotels and restaurants, pension, shops, cultural food and alcoholic drink houses as well as street vendors (Getachew, 2015). These economic activities have inter-urban rural linkage with the surrounding areas. As an input, the rural population brought an agricultural product like: wheat, *teff*, barely, maize, vegetables, livestock and their products; fuel wood and the products of wood to the town. In exchange, the town's populations distribute and provides: industrial products like flour, macaroni, spaghetti, *biscuit*; hotel and

restaurant services, secondary and higher level education, transport, banking, health and court services as well as agricultural inputs (Getachew, 2015).

Currently, about 90 government institutions are found in the town. As an administrative center of Bale zone; Zonal offices, Sinana district and Robe town offices are situated in the town. This makes concentration of government employees high in the town.

3. Methods and Procedures

In this study both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were employed. This is because the nature of the study involves both statistical and narrative techniques of description. The study employed survey research design. This is because it enables to draw representative and unbiased samples from the study population and helps to describe the existing conditions of housing among government employees. Moreover, it helps to analyze the relationship between different variables that expressed housing conditions. On the other hand, other designs like comparative study may not be appropriate since it demands study areas with similar economic, social and political status.

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary data was obtained from government employees of the town and officials of the municipality. This helps to get original information from the concerned people and land use management officials. On the other hand, the secondary data was collected from relevant offices of the town, municipality and Zonal and district offices.

The study populations in this research are government employees living in Robe town. This is because; the principal objective of the study is to assess the housing conditions of government employees in the town. Currently, there are about 4,538 government employees working in the town. In order to get the required information from the target population of the town, sample respondents were selected. This is because, taking the whole populations as a target is costly and time consuming. To give equal chances and have a good representative sample, systematic sampling has been employed. For an employee to be included as a sample respondent, being permanent government employee residing in Robe town is mandatory. If there are spouses, both permanent government employees living in the town, one of them were excluded to avoid duplication of responses. Furthermore, government employees working in Robe and living in other area were excluded, and in a place of them the next order employee were drawn as a sample respondent.

For a survey design based on a systematic sampling, the sample size required can be calculated according to the following formula (Cochran, 1977).

$$n = \frac{(t)^2 * (p)(q)}{(d)^2}$$

- Where: n = required sample size
- t = confidence level at 95% (standard value of 1.96)
- (p)(q) = estimated prevalence of standard housing conditions * 1-maximum possible proportion
- d² = margin of error at 5% (standard value of 0.05)

In case where, responses rates from previous studies of the same or a similar population is not available, 50% (0.5) can be taken as an estimate of the prevalence of the issue under study. Applying of the standard values listed above provides the following sample size calculation.

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.5(1-0.5)}{0.05^2}$$

$$n = \frac{3.8416 \times 0.25}{0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025}$$

$$n = 384.16 \sim \mathbf{384}$$

Therefore, for a population of 4,538, the required sample size is 384. However, since this sample size exceeds 5% of the population (4,538*.05=227), Cochran’s correction formula was used to calculate the final sample size(Cochran, 1977).These calculations are as follows:

$$n_1 = \frac{n_0}{(1 + n_0 / \text{Population})}$$

- Where population size = 4,538
- Where n₀ = required return sample size according to Cochran’s formula= 384
- Where n₁ = required return sample size, because sample > 5% of population

$$n_1 = \frac{384}{(1 + 384/4,538)} = \mathbf{354}$$

Thus, out of 4,538 government employees in the town, 354 sample employees were selected to fill the survey questionnaire. In order to get to the determined number of samples from government employees of the town, the name of all government employees

was obtained from their respective institutions. And then their name was recorded and alphabetically ordered with the help of Microsoft excel on computer. Then the n^{th} value was determined by dividing 4,538 to 354. The first number was determined through lottery technique out of numbers ranging from 1 to 12. Finally, target respondents were selected and contact was made with them by referring to their name and institution they are working. Moreover, three officials, each from housing development agency, Municipality of the town and town administration offices were included for interview.

The primary data, both qualitative and quantitative were collected through questionnaire, interview and field observation. To this end, both open and close ended format questions were designed to obtain information on the respondents' demographic data, socio-economic characteristics, tenure status, and availability of affordable housing and standards of housing units. For interview conducted with government officials, interview guide was prepared. For data collected using observation, observation checklist (observation grids) was prepared.

In order to assure the validity and reliability of the data, different actions were taken. The validity of the instruments was assured with the help of pilot testing by taking 10% of the size of sample respondents' i.e. 35. The respondents on whom the questionnaire is going to be tested were excluded from being sampled respondents for the main study. In addition, an attempt was made to avoid non return questionnaires by engaging adequate data collectors. On the other hand, since reliability is a necessary precondition of validity, data collected with different instruments were cross checked. Accordingly, data collected through questionnaire, field observation, and interviews were triangulated.

The analysis of data collected both from primary and secondary sources were carried out with the help of various tools and different statistical methods after cleansing and entry to the computer.

To assess the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of respondents' descriptive statistics like frequency, cumulative frequency, percentage and averages were employed. Furthermore, binary logistic regression analysis was employed to determine the tenure status of government employees as house owner and rented. The dichotomous dependent variable, housing tenure status, either owned or rented, may be explained by explanatory variables like: household size, age of the household head, length of residency in the town, service year in employment, income of the residents, number of workers in the family, marital status and educational level. Moreover, Pearson's correlation analysis was employed to test the association between variables like household size and number of rooms in the housing units. To this end, SPSS version 20 soft- ware was employed.

The analyzed data were displayed with the help of tables, graphs and charts. To show proportion of respondents by tenure status pie-chart was used, to show the distribution of respondents by the availability of housing facilities bar-graphs were used.

The qualitative data was analyzed by narrating the response of the key informants obtained from interview and field observation. This data was also crosschecked with the quantitative data generated from other instruments and used as a supplement of former.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Demographic and Socio-economic Backgrounds of the Respondents

Sex, marital status, age, household size, service year as government employee, income level, educational status, and year stayed in Robe town has been presented as background information. This background information is helpful to draw some inferences about some of the dependent variables in the forthcoming discussion.

1. Sex	Percent
Male	69.8
Female	28.9
Missing	1.3
2. Marital Status	Percent
Single	35.0
Married	61.7
Divorced	1.3
Missing	2.0
3. Age	Percent
18-25 years	22.5
26-33 years	39.9
34-42 years	24.4
43-50 years	6.1
Greater than 50 years	5.1
Missing	2.0
4. Household Size	Percent
One	14.5
Two	24.4
Three	19.6
More than 3	37.0
Missing	4.5

5. Educational Status	Percent
Illiterate	1.0
Grade 1-8	2.6
Grade 9-12	2.6
Diploma	30.5
Degree	42.1
Above Bachelor Degree	21.2
6. Service Year as Government Employee	Percent
Less than 5 years	46.0
6-10 years	27.7
11-15 years	8.7
15-20 years	6.1
21-25 years	5.8
More than 25 years	3.5
Missing	2.2
7. Income Level	Percent
Less than 600	4.5
601-1200	8.0
1201-1800	5.8
1801-2000	8.7
2001-2600	8.7
2601-3200	16.4
3201-3800	3.9
More than 3800	42.8
Missing	1.2

Table 1: Demographic and Socio-economic Background of the Respondents
Source: Survey, 2015

4.2. Tenure Status

Tenure refers to the arrangements under which the household occupied its living quarters. Consequently, there are two forms of housing tenure status. They are house ownership and renting. A housing unit is said to be owner occupied, if the occupant household owns it and it is free from rent. A housing unit is considered as rented if the household living in it pays rent to a private individual or to *kebele* (lowest administrative structure) office or to an agency for the administration of rented housing or to other organizations (CSA, 2007). Findings of the study indicated that, greater proportions (75.2%) of government employees in the town do not have their own house. Only about 23.8% of them have their own house. The 2007 Census result of tenure status for Robe town revealed that 31.9% of the housing units are owner occupied and 61% of them are rent occupied. Regardless of the eight years gap between these surveys, the findings don't show a great variation. This minor difference may arise due to construction of new houses by private households for the purpose of rent. While construction of housing units by the local government was came to an end since then. This implies that the greater proportion of rent occupied tenure in the town is by government employee. The insignificant proportion of government employee in the town own house through purchasing, building and inheritance.

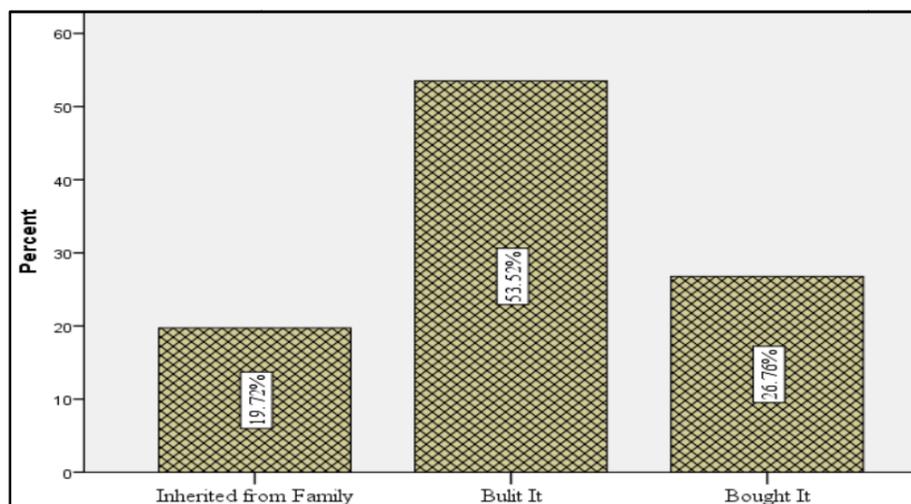


Figure 2: Proportions of Government Employees by Source of House Ownership
Source: Field Survey, 2015

The majorities of government employees in the town that own their own house are those who worked as government employee and stayed in Robe, for relatively longer period of time. This is attributed to the ease of land acquisition process both in the bureaucracy and price in the earlier times. This has implication on difficulty of securing home ownership within optimum period of time for government employee in the town. Because buying or building a house needs saving of money for a while, simultaneously, as time goes the cost of housing rises. This makes the hope of being house ownership through saving less realizable for government employee in the town.

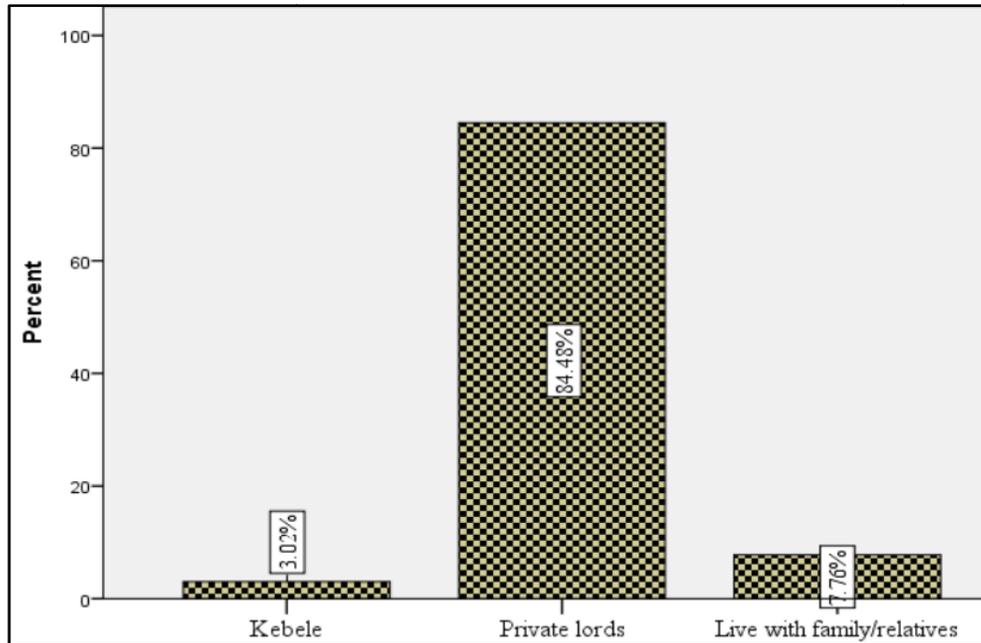


Figure 3: Proportions of Government Employee by Source of House Rent
Source: Field Survey, 2015

As portrayed in the above figure, about 84.5 percent of the government employees were residing in a house rented from private lords. The other which accounts for 7.7 and 3 percent were living in *Kebele* and relative’s houses, respectively. Both of them are in the midst of problem. Residents in private rented housing are crying for the rapidly increasing rent cost (average=580 ETB) and lack of basic housing facilities. On the other hand, though rent cost of *Kebele* houses (*Kuteba bet*) is fair, they are very few in numbers, and thus the competition is very tough. Consequently, only employee with some sort of authority or proximity to the authorities can have access to these houses.

Moreover, about 67% of the employees witness a frequent shift of rented residence in the town. The reasons that obliged respondents to shift their residence frequently include: frequent increase in rent price of a house, demand for better quality house, lack of basic housing facilities and recurrent argument with house lords and others. Among all of these, continuous increase in the rent price leads to the decision of leaving the house. Factors determining level of argument include: marital status, number of children, use of water, toilet and light services.

The binary logistic regression model was used to establish the relationships between housing tenure status and predictor variables. Seven predictor variables were selected to explain the dependent variable (tenure status).

Variables in the Equation							
		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	Marital Status(1)	.430	.455	.892	1	.345	1.537
	Educational Level(1)	.440	.420	1.100	1	.294	1.553
	Age(1)	2.083	.448	21.601	1	.000	8.031
	Salary (1)	-.503	.440	1.306	1	.253	.605
	Household Size(1)	-.132	.352	.140	1	.708	.877
	Year of Residence(1)	1.880	.471	15.916	1	.000	6.551
	Work experience(1)	-.972	.557	3.042	1	.081	.378
	Constant	-.310	.370	.703	1	.402	.733
a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: marital status, educational level, age, salary level, household size, Year of residences, work experience.							

Table 2: Determinants of Government Employee’s House Ownership
Source: Field Survey, 2015.

Out of the total predictor variables, two variables were significant at 5% probability levels. The omnibus test of model coefficients has a Chi-square value of 70.67 on 7 degrees of freedom, which is strongly significant at $p < 0.005$ indicating that, the predictor variables selected have a high joint effect in predicting the status of government employee's home ownership. Age of the employee's is important such that the larger the age of the employee, the less likelihood that an employee would live in rent house. As age of an employee increased by one unit (in year), the odds of being rented tenure decreases by a factor of 8.031, which is significant (at $p < 0.05$). The other important determinant of tenure status government employee is year of residence in Robe town. As year of residence of government employee increases by one unit (year), the odds of an employee being rented tenure decreases by a factor of 6.551 (at $p < 0.05$).

4.3. Housing Standard

Availability of housing units alone is not enough to judge housing condition. Because quality of housing unit is other important aspects of residential housing units, since, housing quality is related with standard of living, health condition, room occupancy and etc. Room occupancy density is one of the best indicators of housing quality. The mean household size and room number per housing units is 2.83 and 2.39, respectively. The Pearson correlation coefficient between household size and room number ($r = +0.1$) also shows very weak positive association. A cross tabulation result shows that there is a big difference in the room numbers of owner occupied and rented housing units. About 83.3% of owner occupied houses have three and more than three rooms, while about 74.2% of rented houses have less than three rooms. This clearly implies that, government employees residing in rented rooms (With Children) are in a great problem of over-crowdedness. This can be attributed to either limited supply of adequate rooms for rent or preference of the employee to live in a single room as a strategy to reduce cost of house rent.

The physical state of housing unit, which is the result of its construction materials, is also another significant indicator of housing quality. Thus, data on the construction materials of wall, roof, floor and ceiling was collected through the survey questionnaire. In addition, age of the housing unit also used to add some insight to the study of housing quality.

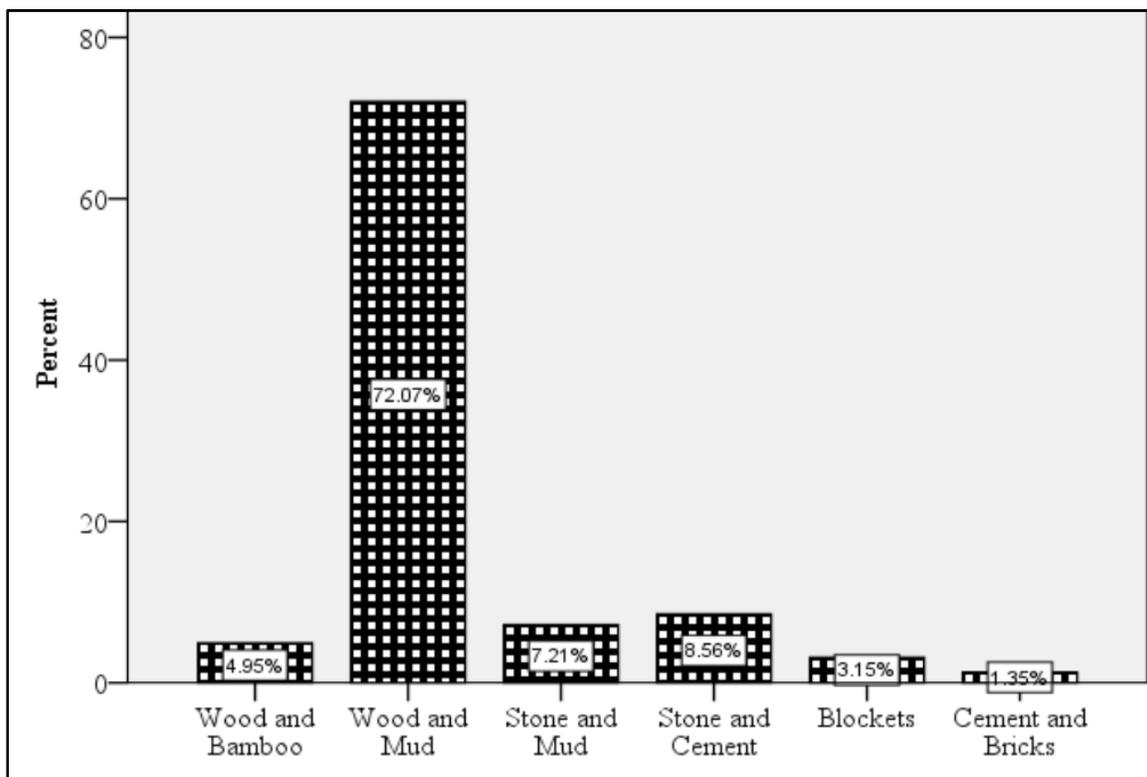


Figure 4: Distributions of Respondents by Construction Materials of Housing Walls

Source: Field Survey, 2015

This implies that government employees in the town are living in sub-standard housing made of non-durable construction materials. This is attributed to the available housing unit in the town. About 92.7% of housing units in the town are made of wood and mud (CSA, 2007). Thus, government employees in the town do not have other option than renting the existing housing units. Similarly, the dominant construction material of roof is corrugated iron sheet. It accounts for about 88.9 percent. Others like concrete and thatch are very insignificant. Obviously, wall made of wood and mud is covered by corrugated iron sheet. Besides, some houses made of stone and cement as well as cement and bricks also used corrugated iron sheet cover. That seems why the proportion of roofs made corrugated iron sheet exceeds the proportion of house made of wood and mud. The other important indicator of physical quality of housing unit is availability and type of ceiling.

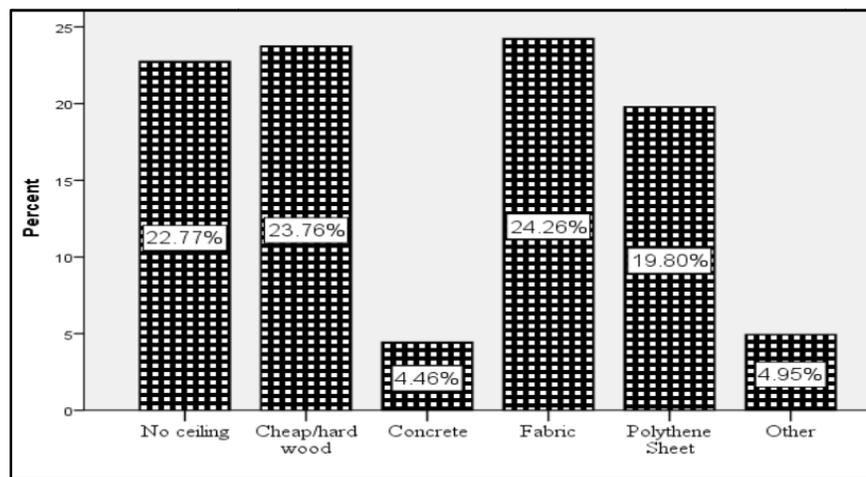


Figure 5: Proportions of Respondents by Construction Materials of Ceilings
Source: Field Survey, 2015

The 2007 national census result, shows that, about 24.8% of housing units in the town had no ceiling (CSA, 2007). This implies that housing units occupied by government employee in the town are relatively better in terms of ceiling.

4.4. Availability of Housing Facilities

Currently, none of them are using unsafe sources of drinking water. About 40.8% of the respondents have tap water in their compound used privately. About 73.9% of them have Kitchen, while the remaining 25.4% of them do not have this facility. But 89.45% of them are using traditional Kitchen (majority shared). The 2007 national census result shows only 1.5% of housing units in the town had modern kitchen (CSA, 2007). Thus, had there been adequate housing unit with modern kitchen facilities, government employee in the town, would have been used it. Particularly, modern kitchen is indispensable for unmarried male employee as they are afraid of cooking their meal in traditional shared kitchen. Regarding toilet facility, about 66% of them have dry pit latrine used privately and shared. The remaining 33.3% of them have flush toilet used privately and shared. This implies that, the overwhelming majority of government employees in the town are using the unsafe type of toilet facility. Besides, about 66% of them do not have access to bathing facilities. The 2007 national census result indicated that about 88.8% of housing units in the town did not have bathing facilities (CSA, 2007). This implies that government employee in the town occupied housing unit that has bathing facility selectively and their demand is still high.

4.5. Intervention Strategies

In this sub-section an attempt was made to examine the intervention strategies designed and implemented to minimize housing problems of government employee by both the national and local government. Hence, various policy and strategy documents were appraised and compared with the existing situations in acquisition of land for housing purpose in the town. In addition, result obtained from interview made with municipal officials was also examined. Furthermore, effort of government employee to get land for residential purpose was also analyzed from the survey questionnaire and interview.

Out of the total respondents that filled the questionnaire, about 86.9% of them reported that they did not get land for building a house. When they request this resource, response they obtained from government officials include: there is no vacant land for the time being, land would not be given to you unless you organized in some sort of association and, currently, told to compete through auction. Interview made with gov't official clarified that the currently working approach is acquisition of land through auction. However, most of the government employees even did not try to compete for lease because of lack idea about the lease process, fear of the tough completion and lack of money. Some of the promising opportunities according to them include: construction of communal shelter (need was collected), delivery of land with initial lease price for housing when organized.

These prospectuses are drowning from the lease policy "Region or City government may permit urban land for lease payment down to nil for a development activity, social service-rendering institution, low-cost housing, private dwelling houses, and similar undertakings, it purports to encourage" (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2002: 1735).

5. Conclusion

The study identified that, the vast majority of government employees are residing in a housing unit rented from private house lords, with a nonstop increase in rent price, which in turn resulted in weakening the economic status of government employee. The other serious problem confronting rent occupied government employees is tenure insecurity, which is manifested in frequent shift of residential house. And the problem is more severe for employee with children. Moreover, the study found out that, point of argument between house lord and tenants are on common utilization of water, electricity, kitchen and toilet facility with their lords and other renters. Most government employees in the rental tenure status are living in substandard housing units. This is partially attributed to the limited availability of standard housing units in the town. Currently, the only option to acquire land for residential purpose is

through auction. However, administration of the town revealed that still there are options to get land with initial lease price in an organized way.

Therefore, strategies that make government employee home owner need to be designed and implemented by the national and local governments. Plausible options suggested by government employees themselves include, delivering land for housing for free or with minimal lease price and arranging mechanisms whereby they can get credit that can be returned in the long-run. These enable them to build a home of their own preference. The other option forwarded is building communal shelter (condominium) with long term cost sharing scheme. Therefore, any endeavor of providing house/land for housing by government should give priority for households with relatively large family size. Moreover, making contractual agreement with the house lords is also recommended for the renters while renting a house, since this gives them breathing time till they get other options. House lords were highly recommended to set up these services separately for the renters, so that they can pay for their own bills. Investors ought to be invited to the sector, so that they can build standard housing with fair price for renters. Opportunities pointed out by the town administration ought to be implemented without wasting time. The experience of paying house allowance in few government institutions ought to be transferred to the other institutions.

5.1. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

5.2. Acknowledgements

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