

## ASSESSMENT OF CORRUPTION IN DECENTRALIZED RURAL LAND ADMINISTRATION IN EASTERN ZONE OF TIGRAY REGIONAL NATIONAL STATE

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### ABSTRACT

This study assessed corruption in decentralized rural land administration in the Eastern zone of Tigray National Regional State. The design of the study is cross-sectional based on a descriptive survey involving qualitative and quantitative data type with primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussion whereas secondary data was developed by reviewing different articles. The study used purposive and systematic sampling techniques, hence, 399 household heads, 32 key informants, and 32 FGD discussants totally 463 individuals have participated in the study. The quantitative data that required descriptive statistics were analyzed using Excel, and SPSS whereas data collected through FGD, interview, and document review were analyzed using a thematic analysis. The study revealed that the overall level of corruption in the land administration office is high. It also found that the forms of corruption range from petty to grand corruption due to the absence of transparency, accountability, limited farmers' participation, and the absence of clear land administration policies. Hence, implementing the ethical code of conduct, training to the land committees, land desk, and land tribunals, and on-time solution to complaints are stated as recommendations.

**Keywords:** Corruption, Rural Land Administration; Eastern zone, Tigray National Regional State, Ethiopia.

### INTRODUCTION

Corruption has been corrosive to the economy of a state since ancient times, however, it had been overlooked in the literature and in the public dialogue until the 1970s (Khemani, 2009). Later in the 1990s, it emerged as an issue of global anxiety whereby the global community becomes acquainted of its crippling effects on service delivery and economic growth (Khemani, 2009; Koechlin *et al.*, 2016). It had specifically lain down particular attention since 2005 when the UN Convention against Corruption was established (United Nations, 2005). This is specifically true when the signatory states of the convention from the developed and developing countries agreed to establish anti-corruption bodies, efficiency of public servants, recruitment based on merit, transparency and accountability in matters of

public finance and generally high standards of conduct in all areas of public affairs (United Nations, 2005; 2015).

Apart from the other continents of the globe, corruption in rural land administration in the African continent is multi-layered that poses a major challenge for development. The complexity of the issue is more noticeable; bribery and nepotism become pervasive in the continent as many citizens in Africa depend on facilities delivered by the government for their vital requests like land (Koechlin *et al.*, 2016). This is more serious in Sub-Saharan African countries whereby almost 70% of the scrutinized scored index is below three, demonstrating that corruption is escalated in these countries (Transparency International, 2011).

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Although the number of studies on corruption in land administration in Ethiopia is inadequate, a survey by Transparency International shows that corruption in the land sector in the country is a major challenge. Corruption is a very severe problem in Ethiopia as the country is ranked 111<sup>th</sup> out of 177 countries in Transparency International's 2013 Corruption Perceptions Index, with a score of 33 out of an achievable 100 (Transparency International, 2013). As one of the nine regions of Ethiopia, corruption in Tigray National Regional State is also admitted for hindering rural land administration. The power to administer rural land in the Region is delegated to the Environment Protection, Land Administration and Use Authority. However, the unclear responsibilities at the levels of government led to corruption as both land administration office and the investment bureau have a mandate to distribute land to venture capitalists (FDRE, 2005; World Bank, 2012). Moreover, voluntary community-elected land administration committees at *Kushet* and *Tabia* levels are delegated to complete land distribution, land registration and certification (FDRE, 2005) however, these committees sometimes use their mandate to bribe money and illegally favour their relatives (USAID, 2011). To this end, there is a correlation between corruption and rural land administration as corruption is obviously a structural barrier of rural land administration. Therefore, dealing with corruption, forms of corruption, and the effects of corruption in rural land administration is imperative.

## **CORRUPTION THEORY AND LAND ADMINISTRATION**

This theory starts by asking a question- 'why is corruption a worldwide problem despite its worldwide aversion'. Therefore, this theory focuses on two basic hypotheses. The first one is 'grease the wheels' hypotheses and the second one is 'stand the wheels' hypotheses. The debate on the two hypotheses lays the effect of corruption on economic growth and service delivery. In relation to the former hypothesis the arguments of Bardhan, (1977); Beck and Maher (1986) is used as they support the benefits of corruption to service delivery, investment and economic growth. In

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contrast to this, the arguments of Kurer (1993), and Méon and Weill (2010) who have a strong abhorrence of corruption, and who tried to test the negative correlation of corruption and economic growth is used to analyze the theory of corruption. These two arguments are analyzed as follows.

To start with the proponents of corruption, Bardhan, (1977) argued that corruption may trigger development by allowing business persons to grow out of bribers and raise business efficiency. Their hypothesis is known as 'grease the wheels' hypothesis. Furthermore, Beck and Maher (1986) argued that bribe can address the distortions caused by the ill-functioning of service delivering institutions. The standpoint of this argument-grease the wheels- is that investment is negatively affected due to inefficient bureaucracy so bribe may grease the wheel by encouraging the civil servants and other officials to get that personal benefit. The ill-functioning of bureaucracy (slowness in service delivery) is considered as the most prominent inefficiency that corruption could grease as bribes could give bureaucrats an incentive to speed up the process. Generally, the main arguments of the above scholars are corruption may improve weak policies and civil servants and so that, growth and development may be enhanced.

In contrast to grease the wheels' hypothesis, Mauro, (1995), found a significant negative relationship between corruption and investment. Proponents of 'sand the wheels' hypothesis argued that corrupt civil servants might cause delays to extract a bribe knowing the client has no chance than to pay. Moreover, Kurer, (1993) argued that corrupt officials may negatively affect the economy to acquire illegitimate returns. Corruption may be beneficial for the firm but detrimental for welfare. Besides, Méon and Weill, (2010) systematically test both hypotheses. Their findings show that corruption becomes even more harmful when governance is poor/ineffective. They found that corruption slowed growth down even more in countries suffering from an inefficient government and concluded that reducing corruption would be more profitable to countries where other aspects of governance are poor.

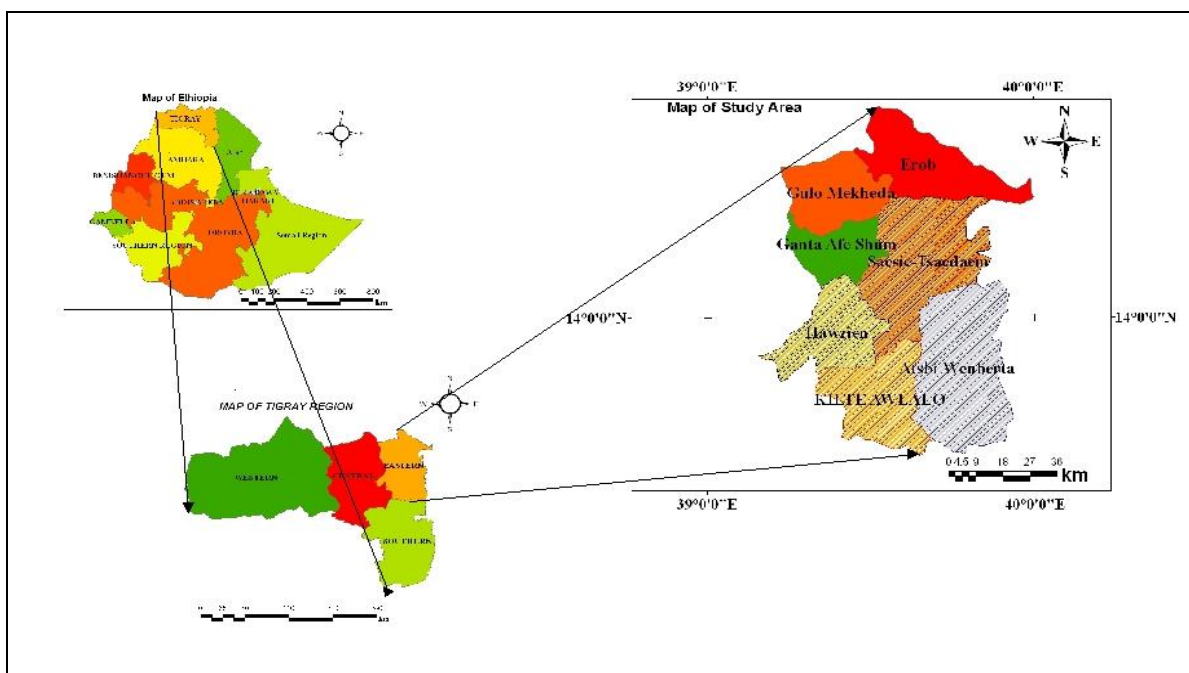


The other very important theory in corruption is the principal-agent theory. This theory described corruption as a series of interactions between the principal and agent. It perceived corruption solely the problems of an agent, with the principal incapable to play an effective role, mostly due to the shortage of information (Groenendijk, 1997). This theory was the predominant theoretical approach to corruption until very recently. However, the literature currently proved this theory as narrow, and they started to analyze corruption from a collective action perspective emphasizing systemic rather than an only personal character (Transparency International, 2013). This study is guided based on the stand the wheel hypothesis and believes corruption in rural land administration as collective and systemic rather than narrow and interpersonal.

## METHODOLOGY

Description of the Study Area and Map: Eastern zone of Tigray National Regional State is found in the northerly part of the country bordered by Afar regional state in the East, South Eastern zone in the South, Central zone in the West and Eritrea in the North. According to 2007 Census conducted by CSA, the Zone has a total population of 755,343, of whom 359,638 are men and 395,705 women; 609,260 or 80.66% are rural inhabitants (Central Statistical Authority, 2007).

**Research Design:** This study employed cross-sectional research design based on the descriptive survey to investigate corruption in land administration in the selected woredas



**Figure 1: Map of the study area**

of Eastern Zone of Tigray National Regional State that involves collecting, analyzing, interpreting quantitative and qualitative data while conducting the study at a point in time. Creswell (2014) argued Hafte, IJCR, 2019; 8(3): 66 - 76

that, the research design is plan employed to answer the research questions stated. Hence, the descriptive research design is pertinent to collect data from many respondents that actually exist

within current practices, progress, and situations of different aspects of the research.

**Research Approach:** The study employed quantitative and qualitative research approaches. A quantitative approach has been used because it was specific, well-structured and explicitly defined whereas qualitative approach has led to understood and often answered like “why”, “how”, “in what way” and “to what extent (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, both primary and secondary sources were used to gather the required information by the researcher himself and other enumerators.

**Sampling Techniques:** The study employed probability and non-probability sampling techniques. For the purpose of this study, four woredas of the Eastern zone of Tigray National Regional State were selected using purposive sampling techniques. The study has selected these woredas because of the existence of maladministration, and corruption practices in rural land administration comparatively worse than the non-selected woredas (Eastern zone Administrative Office, 2017). The Woredas included in the study are Hawzien, Atsbi-Wemberta, Seaside-TsaedaEmba, and Ganta-Afeshum. The participants of the study were the woreda household head farmers. According to the data of the Eastern Zone of Tigray National Regional State, the numbers of household head farmers from the four Woredas were 120,152. From this number, the study has used 399 household head farmers to fill questionnaires. Systematic random sampling was used to identify the household farmers out of the sample unit. The sample size was determined by using Yamane (1967) formula.

The formula is  $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$ . Where:  $n$  = sample size,  $N$  = population size,  $e$  = the level of precision,  $1 =$  the probability of an event occurring.  $n = \frac{120,152}{1 + 120,152(0.05)^2} = 399$ . Purposive sampling was also used to select key informants to collect enough information concerning the topic under study.

**Tools of Data Collection:** The study used questionnaires, interview, and focus group

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discussion as data collection tools to address the issues of corruption in rural land administration. Sample respondents were surveyed using a semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed in English language and translated into Tigrigna language for the convenience of the farmers. This is because the farmers are Tigrigna language speakers. An interview had been administered for collecting information from the Kushet land administration committee, Tabia land administration committee, Tabia land tribunal, woreda land desk, and compliant hearing office concerning corruption in rural land administration practice. The study had also administered four focus group discussions in the four woredas - one from each the sampled woredas. Four groups with eight individuals in one focus group discussion have participated. The participants were local elders, women, and household heads. The participants were selected purposively based on their relevance to the study. In addition to this, relevant research articles were reviewed systematically.

**Methods of Data Analysis:** The study employed qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis. The quantitative data were analyzed using Excel, and Statistical Package of Social Sciences version 25. Accordingly, the components of this package such as descriptive statistics, and bivariate correlation were used as analyses techniques. On the other hand, the qualitative data, which were collected through focus group discussion, interviews, and document review, were analyzed through thematic analysis by categorizing the data into the appropriate themes.

## RESULTS

In this section, the results of the study are clearly stated based on the methodology used to gather the relevant data. It includes the rate on the existence of corruption in rural land administration, the forms, causes, the effects of corruption in rural land administration, and the correlation between corruption and cadaster registration.



### The Status of Land Registration in the Cadaster System

A Cadaster is a series of maps showing the size and location of all land parcels together with text records that describe the attributes of the land. The key procedures inside a cadastral framework are the arbitration, exchange, and sub-division of land rights that would help the farmers know their plot.

Figure 2 deals with the status of land registration in the cadaster map in the study area.

As indicated in figure 2, the analysis was based 399 respondents out of which 325 of them responded that their land is not registered in cadaster system while 24 of the respondents replied that their land is registered in the cadaster system. Supporting this, the focus group discussants argued that their *Tabia*

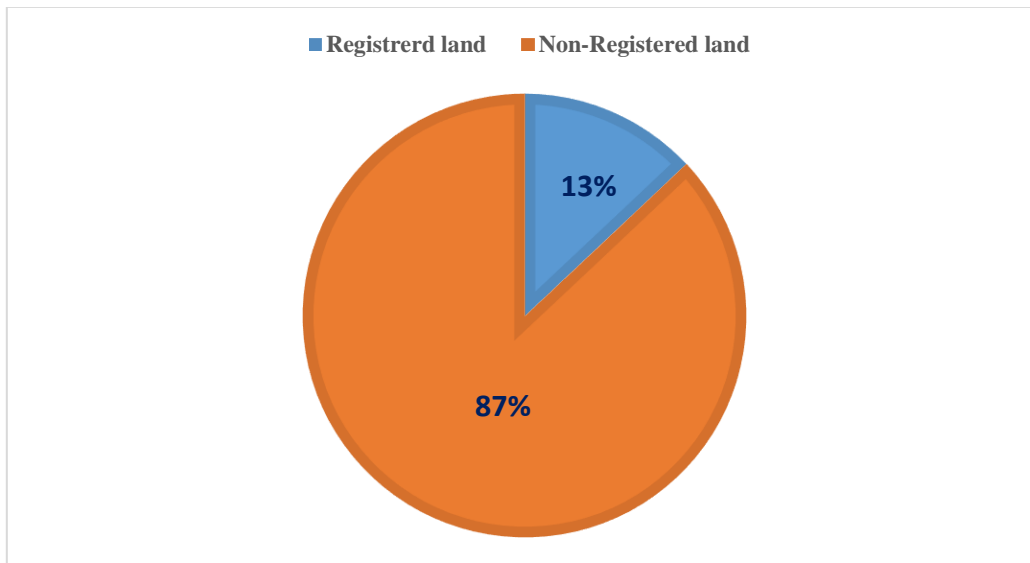


Figure 2. Status of land registration in cadaster map  
(Source: Own Survey Data, 2018)

land administration committee was informed them to be ready for the registration of their land in the cadaster map but this system was not yet implemented which accentuates corruption. Besides, key informants from the woredas land desk argued that though cadastral surveys are very important for the better management of land, the farmers land in the study area is not yet registered in the cadaster map. They also affirmed that, even though the cadaster system is started in some

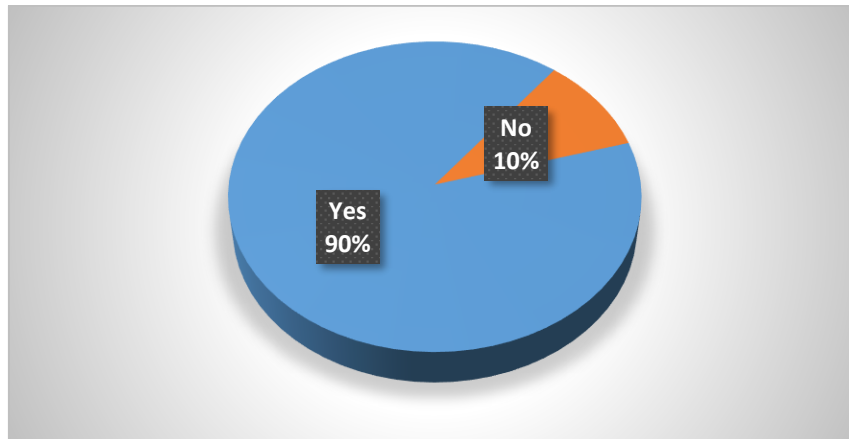
woredas of the Eastern zone of Tigray, the rate of registration is low due to the shortage of educated labor.

### Corruption in Rural Land Administration

Corruption is a serious problem in rural land administration processes. It has significant societal costs and has a major effect on the livelihoods of people worldwide. Figure 3 shows the rate of corruption in the study area.







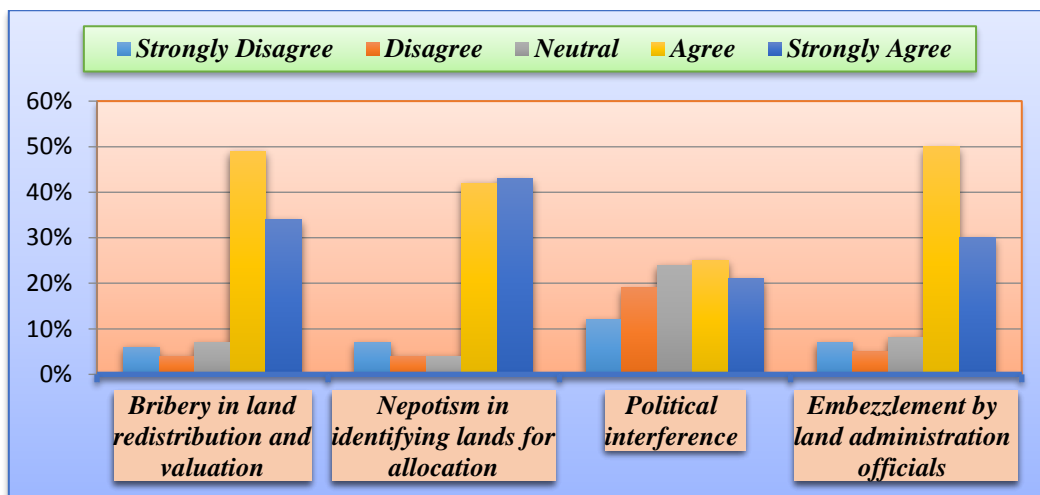
**Figure 3: Corruption in land administration**  
Source: Own Survey Data, 2018

Figure 3 indicates the response of the survey participants on the existence of corruption in rural land administration in their locality. As a result, 90% of the respondents replied about the existence of corruption in the rural land administration in their district. Besides, the focus group discussants replied that corruption is severed in rural land administration in their respective *woredas*. The *woreda* land desk additionally admitted that corruption in land governance is an uncontrollable issue in the *woredas*.

The complaint-hearing officials added that the *woreda* board has identified corruption as the key bottleneck of land governance.

**Forms of Corruption in Rural Land Administration**

Corruption in the land sector can take a variety of forms. Figure 4 shows the forms of corruption, which are prominent in the study area.



**Figure 4: Forms of corruption in rural land administration**  
(Source: Own Survey Data, 2018)

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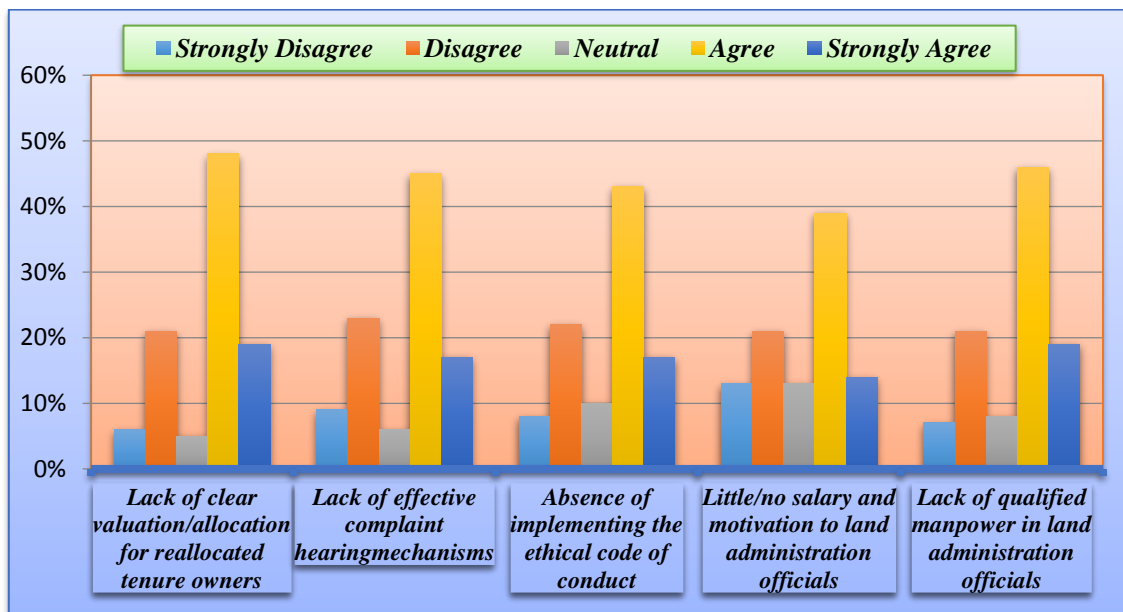


As it is illustrated in figure 4, bribery in land redistribution and valuation (83%), nepotism in identifying lands for distribution and rent-seeking in land administration committee, land desk, and land tribunals (85%) are the main forms of land-related corruption in the study area. Besides this, the focus group discussants confirmed that nepotism is common in their respective *Woreda*. Many parcels of land are not distributed to the poor farmers due to the patron-client relationships of the landowners with the land administration officials. Bribery is the other forms of corruption identified

by the focus group discussants and argued that landowners who have excess land pay money and in kind to the land administration officials not to take and distribute their land to the have-nots.

### Causes of Corruption in Rural Land Administration

The causes of corruption in the context of rural land administration in the Eastern zone of Tigray was analyzed based on the study of Transparency International (2011). The results are stated in the chart below (see figure5).



**Figure 5: Causes of Corruption in Rural Land Administration**  
(Source: Own Survey Data, 2018)

As illustrated in figure 5, majority of the respondents agree and strongly agree that lack of clear valuation/allocation for reallocated tenure owners, lack of effective grievance hearing mechanisms, absence of implementing the given code of conduct are the main causes of corruption in the study area. According to the focus group discussants, there is no specified period for accepting complaints. On top of this, farmers are usually blocked by the local level compliant

hearing offices not to appeal their concern to the higher body.

According to the *woreda* land desk, there are different impending points for corrupt actions to take place at the different levels of the rural land administration offices. These include lack of transparency and accountability, limited farmers’ participation in basic decision making, the absence of clear land administration policies, proclamation, and regulations, weak institutions and different capacity challenges. Besides, the officer of



compliant hearing office admitted that an effort had been made to accept complaints, and solve them on time and properly. There is also a specified period for the farmers to present their complaints and appeal to the higher body. Specifically, the officer stated that there are 3 days a week that help citizens to present their complaints but there were times whereby citizens were not served in these specified timeframes. This was because of unanticipated and serious meetings in the office. Nevertheless, there is also another challenge if the complaints and

appeal presented by the farmers are to be addressed with other stakeholders who are responsible for this task.

**Bivariate Correlation between Rural Land Cadaster and Corruption**

A correlation analysis with Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r) was conducted on variables in this study to assess the relationships land cadaster and corruption in rural land administration.

**Table 1: Bivariate correlation between rural land cadaster and corruption**

The Average Mean of Corruption in Rural Land Administration Registered land in Cadaster			
Registered land in Cadaster	Pearson Correlation	1	-.907**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	399	399
The Average Mean of Corruption in Rural Land Administration	Pearson Correlation	-.907**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	399	399

Source: Own Survey Data, 2018

As indicated in table one, the Pearson correlation between land cadaster and corruption is (r = -0.907\*\*, N=399, p=.000), which indicates that the relationship between these variables is strong and negative. This shows that as the registration of land in cadaster increase, corruption decreases. Corruption is rampant in rural land administration (refer figure 3). Besides, the registrations of land in cadaster in the study Woredas are started but only a few *woredas* are benefited out of it, which shows the level of registration very low (refer figure 2). Therefore, though cadastral systems are very important for the better land administration and avoid conflict over the boundary among the farmers,

the result shows that the land in the study area is not registered in the cadaster map that has its own line

share for accentuating corruption. According to the focus group discussants, corruption in the land sector is a very serious problem. Decisions are made arbitrarily not based on the given ethical code of conduct that harms the effort towards enlightening good governance in land administration. They added that in land administration offices, the committees and tribunals are highly corrupted and made decisions based on their interest and not in accordance with the established rules and regulations.







## DISCUSSION

The study revealed that corruption is an issue of the collapse of the *woredas* good land governance whereby the overall level of corruption in the land administration is very high. In the land sector, corruption varies from minimal bribes and fraud to the complex abuse of government power, which negatively affect the implementation of rural land policies. Specifically, the study found that paying a bribe to preserve their illegally grabbed land has become one of the drivers of corruption followed by political patronage. In this regard, Koehlin et al., (2016) confirmed that although the types of corruption differ from country to country, bribery, informal payments extracted from land service users appear tremendously as the most common form of corruption. Corruption in this sector reduces peoples' access to land, harms the livelihoods of farmers, and increases landless rural poor. For example, Transparency International (2011) found that around the globe where land governance is deficient, high levels of corruption often flourish. Under such a system, land distribution is unequal, tenure is insecure, and natural resources are poorly managed. Therefore, corruption is a common feature in the rural land sector in the study area that takes different forms, which put a wide range of socio-economic impacts on the poor farmers.

The study also found that farmers are not satisfied with the service delivery of the rural land administration officials due to the absence of transparency and accountability, limited customers' participation, the absence of clear land administration policies. In other words, it shows the interrelationship between corruption and bad governance in which the weaknesses in the implementation of the principles of good land governance has led to corruption and finally affected farmers' satisfaction. Burns and Dalrymple, (2008) and Transparency International (2011) further found that the main cause for petty and grand corruption are weak institutions, limitation in the implementation of the ethical code of conduct, and incomplete land registration systems. Therefore, land administration officers use their power to seek

bribes in return to the services they provided. Due to the absence of transparency and non-inclusion of local farmers in the decision-making, corruption in rural land administration is not yet addressed in the study *Woredas*. For example, Banda et al., (2017) found the weak implementation of laws, use of discretionary powers, favoritism, illiteracy, desperation, shortage of land, and poverty as drivers of corruption in land administration. Therefore, corruption in the study area has weakened core democratic values, undermined the credibility of public institutions, and eroded the consolidation of good governance. It limited economic growth because it reduced the number of public resources, and impeded the efficient use of rural land.

## CONCLUSION

Corruption in land administration has negatively affected the *Woredas'* rural land administration. It affected peoples' access to land and harmed the livelihoods of farmers and increased landless rural poor. Corruption in land administration takes on different forms ranging from petty to grand corruption. Besides, the existence of poor oversight, weak institutions, and lack of capacity in the land administration process has exacerbated rural land corruption. Hence, farmers of the *Woredas* are not satisfied by the service delivery of the land administration officials due to the absence of transparency and accountability, non-inclusion of local farmers in the decision-making, the absence of clear land administration policies. Therefore, the overall corruption level in the land administration office is very high, which needs actions to be taken by the different levels of the government. There are ethical standards plastered in the wall of every land administration offices, however, these standards have rarely been enforced, thus their impact has largely been inconsistent and limited in the study *Woredas*.

## RECOMMENDATION

Implementing the ethical code of conduct in rural land administration is a significant factor to reduce corruption in land distribution/allocation. Hence, the





*Woreda* land desk, *Tabia* and *Kushet* land administration committee, and *Tabia* land tribunals should follow the ethical code of conduct in running their day-to-day activities. Besides, the *woreda* land desk should provide different awareness creation training to the farmers of the *woredas*, on the job and off job professional training to the *Kushet* and *Tabia* land committee, and land tribunals in order to reduce confusion in the implementation of the rural land policies. Moreover, the regional environment protection, land administration, and use authority should establish an anti-corruption office at each *woreda* in order to combat the existing rampant corruption in the rural land administration. Furthermore, the *woreda* and *zone* compliant hearing offices and departments respectively should give on-time solution to complaints raised by the rural farmers.

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#### **AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION**

This study was designed, directed and coordinated by Hafte Gebreselassie Gebrihet as the principal and only author, provided conceptual and technical guidance for all the aspects of the article. The author analyzed the data and wrote the manuscript.

