

# Participatory Retrofitting Through Extended Planners in Tanzanian Urban Areas

Manyama Majogoro <sup>1</sup>, Oswald Devisch <sup>1</sup> , and Fredrick Bwire Magina <sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Architecture and Arts, Hasselt University, Belgium

<sup>2</sup> Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Ardhi University, Tanzania

**Correspondence:** Manyama Majogoro ([manyama.majogoro@uhasselt.be](mailto:manyama.majogoro@uhasselt.be))

**Submitted:** 22 July 2024 **Accepted:** 14 November 2024 **Published:** 10 February 2025

**Issue:** This article is part of the issue “The Role of Participatory Planning and Design in Addressing the UN Sustainable Development Goals” edited by Hilary Davis (Swinburne University of Technology), Joel Fredericks (The University of Sydney), Marcus Foth (Queensland University of Technology), Glenda Caldwell (Queensland University of Technology), and Callum Parker (The University of Sydney), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/up.i394>

## Abstract

The global endeavour to develop inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements is paramount. Land use conflicts in urban areas persist as a critical issue among stakeholders in contemporary urban development discourse. This article examines the effectiveness of local mediation strategies in resolving land use conflicts within East African cities’ rapidly expanding metropolitan areas. It focuses explicitly on community-based leaders, referred to as “extended planners,” who foster sustainable communities through their involvement in conflict mediation. Unlike municipal authorities, whose responses can be slow, these grassroots leaders promptly engage in mediation efforts, demonstrating their critical role in urban land management. Through an ethnographic approach to data collection and analysis using the cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), this study highlights the significant influence that extended planners have on conflict resolution and the improvement of community welfare. The findings indicate that residents generally report land use conflicts to the Mtaa Government Office, where mediation sessions are conducted. The grassroots leaders, acting as the primary mediators, facilitate these sessions with the conflicting parties and relevant stakeholders, utilising traditional methods and established mediation protocols. The study underscores the diverse roles of different actors in the mediation process, with grassroots (Mtaa) leaders mainly overseeing it. It concludes with a call for empowering these leaders with essential knowledge in urban planning and conflict resolution skills to increase the mediation sessions’ effectiveness.

## Keywords

conflict mediation; extended planners; grassroots leaders; land management; land use conflicts

## 1. Introduction

In the global context, decentralisation is widely regarded as a policy measure that enhances the efficiency of public service delivery (Kessy, 2023; Kobusingye et al., 2016). This concept is promoted as a means of devolving authority from central to local levels (Kombe & Namangaya, 2016), making services more accessible to citizens (Kessy, 2023). In the late 20th century, specifically during the 1980s and 1990s, a significant policy shift occurred in Tanzania, moving from national centralisation to decentralisation (Kombe & Namangaya, 2016; Lupala, 2015), marking a pivotal moment in the governance of urban land transformations (Asabere et al., 2020). This transition aimed to bring governmental power and responsibilities closer to citizens (Kombe & Namangaya, 2016), fostering greater engagement and participation in urban land management (Kessy, 2023; Kombe & Namangaya, 2016). At this foundational stage, Tanzania aligned with East African Federation policies (Smoke, 2003) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, focusing on inclusivity and institutional effectiveness (UN, 2015).

In this context, Tanzania has operationalised the concept of decentralisation, achieving key milestones such as establishing local government authorities under the Local Government Act of 1982 (Chaligha et al., 2007; Kombe & Namangaya, 2016). This legislation, among other provisions, establishes sub-ward offices locally called Mtaa within urban authorities. The Mtaa institution, which operates at the grassroots level of the government (Chaligha et al., 2007; Manara & Pani, 2023; Ngowi et al., 2022), plays a critical role in the delivery of essential public services, including mediation of land use conflicts. This function is a critical mechanism for empowering local voices within the broader framework of global policies (UN-Habitat, 2018).

Building on the existing definitions by Wehrmann (2008), who describes land conflict as involving at least two parties with differing interests in property rights and the understanding that land conflicts arise from the interactions between stakeholders with vested interests (Havel, 1986), it becomes evident that some of these conflicts are often rooted in differing temporal perceptions of land use (Havel, 1986). Therefore, conflicts, whether resolved or unresolved, require third-party intervention (Wehrmann, 2008). As per the Tanzanian institutional reforms outlined by Kombe and Namangaya (2016) and Lupala (2015), Mtaa Leaders (MLs) have increasingly assumed the role of third-party mediators at the community level (Manara & Pani, 2023).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, community-based conflict resolution frequently involves third-party mediators, who play pivotal roles in fostering local stability. For instance, chiefs in Kenya, Local Council Courts in Uganda, Umudugudu and Abunzi leaders in Rwanda, Kusasi leaders in Ghana, and Kebele leaders in Ethiopia play similar roles (Ahmed & Muhindi, 2023; John et al., 2018). Although older than the nation-states, these Indigenous mechanisms often intersect with formal judicial systems (Ahmed & Muhindi, 2023; John et al., 2018). Formal courts sometimes refer cases to local mediators for culturally relevant and efficient resolution (Ahmed & Muhindi, 2023; John et al., 2018). In Tanzania's urban settings, Mtaa Government Offices (MGOs) serve the lowest formal administrative functions (Chaligha et al., 2007). Yet, the extent to which these grassroots mechanisms contribute to sustainable development—particularly SDG 16, which promotes peace, justice, and strong institutions—warrants further investigation. Understanding these mediators' role in fostering community harmony through conflict resolution could provide valuable insights into their current and potential impact on sustainable development (UN-Habitat, 2018).

In Tanzania, the government has proactively established policies and land laws to mitigate issues arising from accelerated urbanisation (Kombe & Namangaya, 2016). Concurrently, urban planners have prioritised

developing inclusive and sustainable strategies that foster equity, resilience, and a high quality of life for all residents (Lupala, 2015). Despite these efforts, the negative impacts of urbanisation on urban areas persist, highlighting the need for continuous innovation and adaptation in policy and planning approaches. Building on Kulsrisombat's (2008) argument that urban problems are complex and require a coordinated approach, we argue that successful urban management involves combining the efforts of multiple partners in a cohesive strategy. This requires actively engaging a diverse range of actors across all levels to create more sustainable communities (Tofarides, 2018). Breaking down traditional policy boundaries and allocating clear responsibilities are essential for successful partnerships and achieving development goals (Kulsrisombat, 2008; Lupala, 2015). In light of this, it becomes essential to delve into grassroots leaders' impact in resolving land use conflicts within the community by facilitating mediation sessions.

Emanating from the foregoing dialogue, this article is structured into five sections. The first section comprises the introduction, while the second section delves into the literature review on grassroots land management and introduces the concept of the extended planner. The third section outlines the methodology, which includes ethnographic data collection and cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) as a tool for data analysis. The fourth section presents the results and discussion, and the fifth concludes with recommendations.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *The Concept of Actors in the Land Management Process*

Urban land management has become a significant concern for experts, scholars, and governments due to various urban challenges, particularly in global urbanisation (Asabere et al., 2020; Baffour Awuah, 2021; Barlow, 2015). Urban land is the most critical spatial foundation for this urbanisation, as it is essential for urban residents' productivity and daily lives (Song & Deng, 2015). Land management has become inevitable globally, especially in Africa, where the challenges are dire. On this note, Zhang et al. (2020) argue that political and economic levels, the degree of scientific and technological development, and the methods of urban land management are the main pillars of urban land management, and they differ largely among different countries. However, Jenkins (2000) opines that urban land management should strengthen government supervision, policy, institutions, and market tools, forming a top-down governance system. He also suggests involving citizens in public programs, promoting transparency, and forming a bottom-up supervision system. Jenkins (2000) adds that the formation of top-down and bottom-up joint efforts should be used to achieve the efficient and intensive use and management of urban land.

Despite the importance of urban land management, several weaknesses exist, especially in the developing world (Baffour Awuah, 2021; Barlow, 2015; Nuhu, 2019; Ravnborg et al., 2016; UN-Habitat, 2009; Watson, 2009). These weaknesses include low land registration, poor development regulation compliance, lack of access to land, insecure property rights, poor records, weak institutions, inadequate housing, and limited infrastructure funding (Baffour Awuah & Abdulai, 2022). As noted earlier, urban land management differs from country to country in Africa since land management operates through various laws, policies, and reform programs (Babalola et al., 2024). The reform strategies are often decentralisation to improve inclusivity and collaboration between or among institutions (Babalola et al., 2024).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly South Africa, land and spatial inequalities in urban spaces persist, rooted in socio-economic disparities and historical legacies like apartheid. These challenges have hindered efforts to achieve equitable land reform in the post-apartheid era, exacerbating socio-economic inequalities and complicating urban development (Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, 2024). As such, urban land management has focused on the potential of public property and the impact of public investments (Centre for Affordable Housing Finance in Africa, 2019). The emphasis of the reform programmes hinges on building integrated urban systems, which have been seen as one of the most critical requirements in resolving and addressing the vast inequality and responding to the pressures of urbanisation. In Egypt, Moghaieb et al. (2021) note that ineffective urban land management has resulted from the magnitude of economic, social, and environmental misuse of land, while the number of governmental bodies that govern public land is confusing. As such, roles overlap between the General Authority for Urban Planning and the National Centre for Planning State Lands Usage, with no clear linking framework. The road map of reform constitutes a practical and comprehensive institutional structure/framework that consists of all relevant planning institutions and identifies the roles and responsibilities of each institution. Yet, the road map stipulates effective land use planning to achieve proper sector trade-offs that maximise the developmental outcomes of land use options. Also, the authors provide that effective urban land management can be realised by ensuring decentralisation of the political decision-making as a way towards a decentralised land planning system that allows decentralisation authorisation to be placed on different planning levels, which enables the cumulative impacts of future development and shared responsibility for protection and management across a more comprehensive number of stakeholders.

Kironde (2006) argues that the administrative setup effectively hinders the timely delivery of adequate planned land to meet the rising demand in Tanzania. The main obstacle to meeting demand is the extreme centralisation of power in the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Human Settlements Development (MLHSD) about all aspects of urban management—spanning from surveying and approval of land use schemes to the subsequent granting of title deeds to new land owners. Lupala’s analysis of “land management in peri-urban zones of Dar es Salaam” reveals the involvement of various actors in the land management process (Lupala, 2002). The author identifies four primary groups at the local level: community-based actors, groups-based actors operating in small cohorts, individual actors, and grassroots institutions such as the MGOs, Ward Land and Housing tribunals, and the police. He argues that formal institutions, including central and local governments, seldom involve themselves in peri-urban land management (Lupala, 2002). This classification is consistent with the categorisation proposed by Kombe and Kreibich (2000) for public land use planning actors such as landowners, local leaders, community committees, political leaders, and local government authorities. While Lupala’s analysis focuses on land management in informal areas situated in peri-urban zones of Dar es Salaam, the same management process applies in urban areas where the planning processes are more formal (United Republic of Tanzania, 2007).

Kreibich and Olima (2002) identify two categories of actors involved in urban land management: local-level actors and gatekeepers. Tofarides (2018) identifies local-level actors as individuals and organisations working at the grassroots, with gatekeepers regulating the flow of information, resources, and policies from higher government levels to the community. Kreibich and Olima (2002) classify local-level actors as grassroots leaders, chiefs, community-based organisations, and local volunteers, while gatekeepers encompass politicians, national organisations, large landowners, senior public officials, and middle- to lower-level civil servants. In this context, MLs function as local-level actors, while urban planners serve as

gatekeepers within the Local Government Authority and the MLHSD of Tanzania. In the realm of Tanzania's urban land management, "gatekeepers" are the key individuals or entities who hold the power to control access, development, and decision-making regarding urban land (Kessy, 2023; Kombe & Namangaya, 2016). Babeiya (2016) concludes that the decisions made by gatekeepers significantly influence urban growth, development patterns, and land use policies. These decisions are further guided by various legal frameworks, such as the Local Government (Urban Authorities) Act of 1982 and the National Human Settlements Development Policy of 2000, which regulate and direct interventions in land management processes. However, literature often overlooks the relationship between these actors, particularly the MLs. This article argues that MLs, as extended planners, alongside urban planners in local government authorities, play a crucial role in mediating land use conflicts.

At a global level, urban development and management practices are deeply embedded within the framework of the SDGs, particularly Goal 11, which emphasises the creation of sustainable cities and communities (UN, 2015). Goal 11 aspires to foster inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements. Achieving this goal is closely tied to the effectiveness of actors engaged in urban governance across central and local levels, particularly in urban planning and land use conflict management. On this aspect, we argue that if extended urban planners, who form a segment of the urban management team, can adequately play their roles, the apparent land use conflicts among different users can be reduced to a greater extent. Hence, cities will become nests where the quality of life of their inhabitants can improve. Also, dialogues, public meetings, and other gatherings to provide or receive feedback can pioneer urban development and management strategies.

## ***2.2. Gatekeepers in Legal Frameworks for Urban Land Management in Tanzania***

Urban land management frameworks in Tanzania can be grouped into three categories: legal instruments for local governance, land tenure and urban use regulations, and environmental management. For example, the 1982 Local Government (Urban Authorities) Act defines the roles of urban authorities, distinguishing them from central government functions, focusing on decentralisation and community empowerment (Kombe & Namangaya, 2016; Lupala, 2015). This Act also allows urban authorities to define wards and sub-wards, involving urban planners in land use management (Peter & Yang, 2019). Although urban planners' roles in land conflict mediation are not specific, the Act includes wards and Mtaa as core governance structures.

The Land Act No. 4 of 1999 provides a foundation for urban land management, addressing land administration and conflict resolution (Wehrmann, 2008). It defines roles for critical figures, such as the Commissioner of Lands and municipal councils, which significantly influence land use decisions, planning, and building regulation (Babeiya, 2016). Land tribunals mediate land conflicts before formal adjudication (Wehrmann, 2008). Despite some defined roles, clarity is needed regarding the responsibilities of MLs within this system. The Ward Tribunals Act, Cap. 206, establishes Ward Tribunals to promote peace and mediate land disputes (Wehrmann, 2008). Although mediation is their primary role, adjudication often dominates. Generally, MGOs and urban planners at planning authorities resolve land conflicts (Kombe, 2010; Manara & Pani, 2023).

The Urban Planning Act No. 8 of 2007 outlines goals for managing land conflicts, sustainable land use, and organised land management. The Act promotes empowering landholders, engaging the public, and using administrative structures across all levels, with the Minister and Director of Urban Planning overseeing consistency in policies and urban development.

While district and national officials have defined roles, grassroots leaders' functions are unclear. In East Africa, traditional leaders, like chiefs, play a crucial role in rural and peri-urban conflict resolution (Ahmed & Muhindi, 2023). In Uganda, local council courts handle family, tenancy, and customary ownership disputes, fostering community harmony before legal proceedings (John et al., 2018; Kreibich & Olima, 2002). Similarly, traditional leaders in Ghana, Ethiopia, South Africa, and Rwanda are essential in grassroots land conflict resolution (John et al., 2018). While their community impact is recognised, there is limited knowledge of these leaders' frameworks, underscoring a need to understand their potential role in urban planning and land management.

### ***2.3. The Role of the Mtaa Government Institution in Land Use Conflict Resolution***

According to the United Republic of Tanzania (1982) and Manara and Pani (2023), the Mtaa is a crucial local government body operating at the lowest urban level. It functions under the Ward committee and includes the chairperson, the Mtaa Executive Officer (MEO), and committee members (Ngowi et al., 2022). The chairperson is politically elected every five years (Babeiya, 2016), while the MEO is a government-salaried employee who oversees the day-to-day Mtaa administration and represents the local authority Director (Chaligha et al., 2007; Ngowi et al., 2022; Nuhu et al., 2023). The Mtaa committee comprises up to six elected residents, and it helps the MLs to execute their duties (Ngowi et al., 2022). Despite lacking executive or legislative power, Mtaa fosters community participation and includes ten cell leaders from the ruling party (Manara & Pani, 2023; Ngowi et al., 2022). In carrying out these community activities, the Mtaa government has been actively involved in resolving land use conflicts within the community as an initial step before such disputes proceed to formal court systems. Akintayo et al. (2024) refer to these resolution methods as Alternative Dispute Resolution, which have been significantly effective in resolving conflicts outside the traditional court system.

From this perspective, traditional chiefs, akin to the MLs in Tanzania, assume a crucial role in resolving domestic conflicts in various African societies as mediators promoting peace and fostering community cohesion (John et al., 2018). Scholarly research highlights that despite the establishment of modern judicial systems, the authority of chiefs remains significant, rooted in their strong ties to local customs and the social reverence afforded them within their communities (Ahmed & Muhindi, 2023; KaraniOnyiko et al., 2021; Marfo, 2019). Chiefs employ culturally embedded mediation strategies that address immediate disputes while fostering sustained communal stability (Ahmed & Muhindi, 2023; KaraniOnyiko et al., 2021; Marfo, 2019). Studies by Marfo (2019) and Ahmed and Muhindi (2023), focusing on Ghana and Kenya, respectively, illustrate that chiefs' roles in mediation involve de-escalating tensions, facilitating inclusive dialogue, and promoting win-win solutions that reflect community values. These roles are understood within the framework of social capital theory, which suggests that chiefs' influence and respect derive from their social relationships, providing collective and reproductive benefits. Authors such as Ahmed and Marfo (2019) advocate for targeted capacity-building programs to enhance chiefs' skills in conflict resolution, communication, and negotiation, thereby strengthening the effectiveness and durability of these practices. However, a gap remains in the literature concerning the specific frameworks or structured approaches employed by local leaders in their mediation processes, highlighting the need for further research on these Indigenous mediation mechanisms, particularly in urban environments.

In Uganda, scholars such as Kobusingye et al. (2016) have examined citizen preferences for reporting land conflicts, emphasising the role of decentralisation in establishing numerous institutions aimed at conflict resolution, particularly in northern areas. Despite statutory institutions, citizens often favour customary systems, which, while lacking judicial authority, are perceived as more accessible and efficient. This preference raises critical questions about why citizens opt for informal systems over formal ones and how factors such as accessibility and effectiveness compare. Additionally, it is crucial to examine the frameworks utilised by customary systems in resolving land use conflicts and their applicability within urban contexts. A comprehensive understanding of these dynamics is vital for advocating the recognition and strengthening of customary practices in contemporary land governance.

Kombe and Namangaya (2016), on the concept of “decentralisation by devolution” in Tanzania’s urban areas, argue that it was designed to empower local governments to deliver services more effectively. However, they note that the lack of necessary skills limits the full success of this approach. Although there is limited detail on the specific skills missing, Ngowi et al. (2022), who explore the legal knowledge of the MEOs, argue that they generally lack sufficient legal knowledge, which is significant in performing their duties fully. Instead, they address these gaps by relying on professional experience, guidance, training, and past decisions (Ngowi et al., 2022).

However, the question remains: Who oversees conflict resolution at a Mtaa level, and how are they involved? While the MEO is a permanent and pensionable government employee, they act as the secretary of mediation meetings and are employed based on professional qualifications. The remaining staff, including the Mtaa chairperson, are elected by the community and only need to possess basic literacy skills. On the roles of the Mtaa chairperson, Manara and Pani (2023) see Mtaa chairpersons as essential community representatives. They argue that these leaders and their fellow workers work alongside the Municipal Office (MO) to merge formal government practices with local customs, creating a hybrid governance system that combines both approaches. These authors recommend that the government support this blended governance model with additional resources and political backing. According to them, understanding how formal and informal systems interact provides insights into property management and land reform in African cities. Given the significant roles that MLs play, it is essential to examine how they carry out their activities further, especially regarding land use conflict resolution.

#### **2.4. Towards Extended Planners**

The term “Extended Planners” is adopted from the extended family concept by Bester and Malan-Van Rooyen (2015). They argue that the extended family consists of multiple generations and can include biological parents and their children, in-laws, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. This family structure remains popular in the Global South, where relatives often live with a nuclear family (Vogt, 2020). Vogt (2020) emphasises the crucial role of extended family members in supporting youth during their transition to adulthood. These members provide emotional and practical support that complements the nuclear family (Bester & Malan-Van Rooyen, 2015; Vogt, 2020). Based on the foregoing proposition, Vogt (2020) opines that sociology research supports extended family, showing the benefits of close familial ties and mutual obligations among people living together.

Furthermore, in an extended family, members often live together in the same residence, pooling resources and undertaking familial responsibilities, and multigenerational bonds facilitate this arrangement (Bester & Malan-Van Rooyen, 2015). Despite its importance, the extended family faces challenges and risk factors such as complex relationships, conflicting loyalties, and generational conflicts. These intergenerational relationships can complicate child–parent dynamics and relationships between the nuclear family and other relatives.

Expanding on this concept, the term “extended planners” draws parallels to the structure of an extended family. The extended planners’ family includes all stakeholders participating in urban planning activities, encompassing grassroots leaders, community organisations, residents, and others (Kombe & Kreibich, 2000; Lupala, 2002). They unite to create a cohesive urban land management community (Lupala, 2002). The unity among stakeholders strengthens the effectiveness of decentralisation by devolution (Kessy, 2023; Kombe & Namangaya, 2016; Lupala, 2015) in managing land use conflicts (Kessy, 2023) mainly through the inclusion of grassroots leaders in the decision-making process.

In this analogy, the nuclear family symbolises the gatekeepers, such as municipal planners whose roles are clearly defined by legal frameworks (United Republic of Tanzania, 2007). The relatives refer to all stakeholders, particularly the MLs. Together, they constitute a collective known as “extended planners,” which integrates with municipal planners to manage urban land use collaboratively. In this article, the MLs are called extended planners or relatives, and the municipal planners are the gatekeepers forming the nuclear part of the family. The primary concern is the extended planner’s value of their role in managing urban development. As leaders of extended families use the already existing or time-after-time established informal rules and social ties to manage families, the question raised on extended planners is: Which framework can help to understand how extended planners resolve land use conflicts and value their impact within urban planning and land management practices in rapidly urbanising areas?

### 3. Methodology

Due to the highly situated nature of the relationship between municipal planners and the MLs, this study employs an ethnographic design, specifically participatory observation (Kawulich, 2005; Lareau, 2021), to understand the behaviour, interactions, and context of land use conflict mediation at the MGO (Havel, 1986). Drawing from Kawulich (2005) and Lareau (2021), ethnographic research involves spending consistent time with individuals or institutions. Participant observation was used, with the researchers integrating into society as anthropologists, gathering data through verbal communication while aiming to remain non-intrusive to the culture (Lareau, 2021). This method involved researchers observing and participating in activities within their natural settings to understand their behaviours and experiences better (Lareau, 2021).

This research was conducted between July and September 2023 and throughout the research, we spent 50 days at the MGO and 10 at the MO. During this time, we attended nine meetings at the MGO and one at the MO. We also conducted 16 unstructured interviews, of which 12 were at the MGO and four at the MO levels. These interviews included four urban planners working with the MO, six MLs, and six residents involved in land use conflicts. Among the participants, there were seven men and nine women. The interviews with residents involved in land use conflicts aimed to assess their satisfaction with the adjudication process, particularly regarding the verdicts delivered. Additionally, discussions with Mtaa



government officials and municipal officers sought to provide a deeper understanding of the procedural nuances involved in these conflicts.

Data analysis, utilising CHAT, offered valuable insights into the functioning of the MGO in comparison to urban planners. CHAT was selected as the analytical framework due to its ability to illuminate human activity systems' relational dynamics (Engeström, 2000). Widely applied in fields such as human-computer interaction and education, CHAT provided a flexible approach to understanding the Mtaa government as an institution engaged in land use conflict mediation. The framework facilitates a deeper exploration of these processes by unpacking the critical elements of CHAT, as outlined in Section 3.2.

### 3.1. Case Selection

During fieldwork, we observed the resolution process of nine reported conflicts. The selection process was guided by specific criteria: (a) the conflict must serve a public interest; (b) the conflict should involve residents; and (c) the conflict should feature interactions between government actors. Furthermore, each dispute must relate to urban planning issues, particularly zoning laws and regulations. Additionally, it was established that one conflict should be resolved at the Mtaa level, while the other two should require resolutions at the MGO and municipal levels. Consequently, the selected conflicts are as follows (see Table 1): (a) a dispute regarding motorcycle parking in a public open space; (b) a contractual disagreement related to a change in land use; and (c) a boundary conflict between neighbours. Each case is community-based, involving residents, and all were mediated at various times, resulting in agreements that signify successful conflict resolution (Tudor et al., 2014).

### 3.2. Framework for Analysis of the Mediation Process

CHAT helped to clarify the extended planning system's role in mediating land use conflicts. Rooted in Engeström's (2000) and Yamagata-Lynch's (2010, pp. 13–26) work, CHAT offers a framework for understanding learning and social interactions in diverse contexts. CHAT describes the relationship between a subject and an object, mediated by tools within a community, highlighting cultural and historical influences on activities (Engeström, 2000; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, pp. 13–26). Through this lens, the framework aims to elucidate how cultural and historical contexts mediate human actions and interactions within land use conflict resolution activity (Engeström, 2000; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, pp. 13–26). According to CHAT, activity systems and their inherent contradictions involve complex networks of interrelated activities embedded within specific social contexts (Engeström, 2000; Gedera & Williams, 2013).

Contradictions, a key CHAT concept, represent historical tensions within and between systems, acting as catalysts for transformation and system development (Engeström, 2000; Gedera & Williams, 2013). Engeström (2000) argues that disruptions create new conflicts and instigate innovative changes. In the same line of thought, Gedera and Williams (2013) conclude that a nuanced understanding of contradictions is crucial for fostering innovations that can enhance the effectiveness of systems.

Following CHAT, the study identified vital mediation steps by MLs and urban planners in each case, treating them as activities (unit of analysis) per Engeström's principle (see Section 3.1 and Table 1). We utilised CHAT elements—subject, object, roles, rules, and community—to construct an interconnected system that captures

the complex interactions within mediation protocols (see Section 4.3). Following Engeström's perspective, activities are inherently interrelated rather than isolated, allowing us to examine how these interactions shape and influence organisational dynamics (Engeström, 2000).

Subsequently, after delineating the activity sequences, we engaged with participants at various times to identify issues causing dissatisfaction with the mediation process outcomes. Several unstructured questions were posed: Were you satisfied with the outcome? Why did you display such deep distress in the meeting, even to the point of tears? What improvements do you think could enhance the success of our future meetings? After identifying these issues as contradictions, we connected them to the elements of CHAT to gain a deeper insight into the mediation process (see Table 2). This approach enabled us to trace the contradictions in the mediation back to specific CHAT elements.

The challenges identified were concentrated on tools, rules, and roles (see Table 2). A focused analysis examined how these affected mediation activities. Challenges presented as contradictions were discussed with participants in semi-structured interviews (see Table 2 and Sections 4.3.1–4.3.3) to foster reflection and explore resolutions.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.1. Types of Land Use Conflicts

In this section, we present the key findings and discuss the role of MLs and urban planners in land use conflict mediation processes. Objectively, the purpose was to understand a framework that can clarify how extended planners address these conflicts and evaluate their impact within the context of urban planning and land management practices in rapidly urbanising areas. The analysis contributed insights into the effectiveness of the frameworks for integrating the roles of local leadership and urban planning in conflict resolution and sustainable urban development. The section begins with a detailed overview of the resolved conflicts documented in Table 1, followed by the application of CHAT to illuminate discrepancies and their relation to CHAT elements within the mediation process.

Eight cases were filed at the MGO, one of which was referred to the MO. The reported conflicts at the MGO include: (a) a conflict between a property owner and tenant over unmet contractual obligations; (b) a neighbourly conflict on noise disturbance from late-night music; (c) a boundary conflict concerning property boundary; (d) a contractual disagreement on change of use; (e) a landlord–tenant conflict over unfulfilled resolutions from a prior meeting; (f) a conflict over motorcycle parking in a public space; (g) a community dispute related to roadside business activities; and (h) a community concern regarding recycling activities on a residential plot. The case referred to the MO is item (c). Three of these cases are further detailed in Table 1.

#### 4.1.1. Defining Constituting Activities

From Table 1, the constituting activities in the first two cases involved (a) initiating a case, (b) gathering for a meeting, (c) making follow-ups, and (d) reporting the mediation proceeding to the Municipality through the Ward office. Case 3 involved initiating a case at the MGO and gathering for the meeting, where it was decided that the case should be referred to the Municipality for expert resolution. At the Municipality, the

**Table 1.** Mediated land use conflicts.

Case	Mediation activity	Problem	Mediation process	Meeting resolutions	Long-term impact
1	Conflict over motorcycle parking in public open space.	Motorcycle taxi drivers park their motorcycles on the public land adjacent to the residential plot. The gathering causes noise pollution, and among them, they are involved in theft, making the area unsafe for living.	The process involved filing a complaint with the MGO. The mediation meeting was held after just one day. The conflicting parties and the ML followed up on the matter, and the leaders then reported the proceedings to the ward office.	It was decided to register the parking space, and it is already registered.  It was decided to register a group and create rules to govern their conduct in space.  The conflict was resolved, and everyone signed the agreement document.	Both parties were content with the decision. Implementing the agreements from the meeting will enhance the area's sustainability.
2	Conflict over use change in landlord-tenant agreement.	The landlord and tenants' conflict revolves around rent and utility payment disparities and unauthorised activities like converting residential space for commercial use.	The process is identical to the one in Case 1 above.	Tenants must pay charges within 21 days and vacate the house within the same period. The landlord should register the change of her residential house to an apartment and involve the MGO in signing tenants' contracts.	Despite formally endorsing the meeting resolution, the complainant expressed dissatisfaction with the outcome, signalling concerns about the resolution's sustainability.
3	Neighbours' conflict regarding property boundaries.	Encroachment of neighbour's plot boundary: The complainant alleges that her neighbour erected a fence on her property.	The mediation occurred at the MGO, where the case was initially filed before being referred to the Municipality.	Due to a lack of expertise, the case was transferred to the Municipality so they could use survey instruments to resolve the boundary issue.	An expert restored the boundary, witnessed by all participants who signed the agreement, but the complainant was not satisfied with the verdict, raising concerns about the decision's sustainability.

case adhered to the same procedural norms implemented in the MGO, including conducting a site visit for boundary delineation and recovery. The procedural aspects of conflict mediation exhibit nuanced variations between the Mtaa and Municipal levels. For instance, while municipal experts typically conducted on-site visits during the mediation process in Case 3, interviews with the Mtaa chairperson and Municipal planners revealed a consensus that both entities undertake site visits as required by specific demands. This perspective highlights the unique appeal of local leaders, particularly chiefs, as their close connection to events often makes community members favour informal mediation over formal processes (Ahmed & Muhindi, 2023). Consequently, in terms of conflict mediation protocols, it is evident that the practices of MLs align closely with those of Municipal town planners.

#### **4.2. Contradictions in Conflict Mediation Processes**

As depicted in Table 1, all case participants signed the agreement document indicating their formal acceptance of the mediation verdict, as Chandrasekhara Rao et al. (1997) suggested. However, a subset appeared discontented with the outcome. Some expressed dissatisfaction with the mediation process during interviews but accepted the verdict. Through participant interviews, the presentation of challenges revealed dissatisfaction with the mediation process. Gedera and Williams (2013) posit that dissatisfaction indicates a contradiction within the system of activities. This study associated these challenges with specific issues related to CHAT elements and the involved activity, as detailed in Table 2.

#### **4.3. Contradictions With CHAT Elements and Mediation Activities**

Table 2 illustrates the relationships among the identified challenges, framed as contradictions, what was missed in the mediation process, and the CHAT elements explaining the contradiction(s)—primarily tools, roles, and rules—alongside the activities closely associated with these emerging challenges. In this context, the following sections provide an in-depth discussion of these contradictions, incorporating perspectives from the mediation process and participants and insights from other scholars to enhance understanding and explore diverse resolution strategies. The underlying perspective is that addressing these challenges will enhance the effectiveness of MLs in their roles, contributing to community harmony as they fulfil their responsibilities as extended planners.

##### **4.3.1. Contradictions Related to Tools**

Based on Table 2, we identified 10 contradictions related to the instruments or tools employed during the mediation processes. This aligns with arguments put forward by Engeström (2000) that mediation tools are instruments that mediators use to accomplish their objectives. In this regard, each activity within the mediation process was designed to contribute to the overall success of the mediation. Hence, knowledge of laws and regulations was critical, particularly in Activity 2 (see Table 1 and Section 4.1.1), which involves participants convening in meetings and emphasises the importance of accurate record-keeping. Therefore, laws, regulations, and documentation practices are the main pillars of the discussion.

**Table 2.** Contradictions that arose following the verdict and their relation to CHAT elements.

Case	Participant (P)	Participant status	Contradictions identified by participants during the mediation process	What is causing the contradiction?	CHAT elements explaining the contradiction						
					S	O	T	Ru	Ro	C	
1	P1	Complainee	We are being looked down upon because we do not have money. The complainant wants us evicted because they do not understand the struggles of earning a living.	Equal opportunities for participants to present their cases and mechanisms to address expertise disparities affecting fairness.							
	P2	Complainant	These motorcycle taxi riders had to be removed before returning to the procedure; the chairman defended them because they were his voters.	Impartiality, consistent rule application, clear roles, strong procedural enforcement, and adequate stakeholder representation, undermine trust and fairness.							
	P2	Complainant	I submitted the contract during the case initiation, but in the meeting, they needed help locating the document.	Proper document management system.							
	P2	Complainant	Unhappy with the case filing process—too many questions, seems they have no resident records, it is tedious.	Efficient tools for data management that simplify the processes.							
2	P3	Complainee	I was displeased with the language used. Insults went unpunished. There is no freedom to speak, and favouritism is evident; some get more time while others are ignored.	Equal opportunity to participate and enforce respectful communication.							
	P3	Complainee	The office insists on witnessing contracts, but their genuine interest is in collecting money and not in maintaining proper records.	Transparent communication about contract witnessing, accountability to prioritise record-keeping over profit, and reliable tools for effective record management.							
	P4	Witness	The chairman favours residents, while outsiders are mistreated.	Inclusive treatment to prevent perceived favouritism based on origin.							

**Table 2.** (Cont.) Contradictions that arose following the verdict and their relation to CHAT elements.

Case	Participant (P)	Participant status	Contradictions identified by participants during the mediation process	What is causing the contradiction?	CHAT elements explaining the contradiction					
					S	O	T	Ru	Ro	C
2	P5	Complainant	To rent my house for income, I must get permission to change its use. These legal requirements are very difficult.	Clarity and efficiency in legal processes.						
	P5	Complainant	Youth don't respect leaders or elders, use foul language, and speak disrespectfully to leaders. This is a bad thing.	Clear norms for respectful communication.						
3	P6	Complainant	I have doubts about this expert's measurements.	Transparency in expert methods and the application of expertise.						
	P7	Complainee	Experts should consider reality. Do they want us to demolish a wall to move it to the boundary? This creates an unnecessary new conflict.	Practicality in enforcing regulations.						
	P8	Complainee	Experts demand permits for building fences, but we know permits are for houses, not fences. They should educate us, not blame us.	Public education on building regulations.						
	P9	Witness	It is surprising to be informed of such an important exercise only during implementation.	Community participation.						

Notes: S = Subject; O = Object; T = Tools; Ru = Rules; Ro = Roles; C = Community.

#### 4.3.1.1. Inadequate Understanding of the Laws and Regulations

The results have demonstrated that inadequate understanding of the laws and regulations is often the main missing element of the mediation process on land use conflicts. Participants expect mediators to comprehend these legal frameworks better. However, various cases highlight contradictions and misunderstandings of the legal provisions and some terms in the existing regulations. For instance, in Case 1, there was a need for more clarity about responsibility for a public area next to a house, with conflicting views on whether the individual or the government should manage it. The mediator redirected the focus to finding a solution, emphasising adherence to government regulations for community parking. After a lengthy discussion, the chairperson responded:

The matter of ownership of public space is unnecessary; let's focus on the problem and find a solution. We must adhere to government regulations to secure a parking space in the community.

In Case 2, tensions arose over converting a residential plot to commercial use, primarily stemming from the complainant's lack of awareness regarding the formal requirements for land use change. The tenant operated an online business from a residential property without obtaining a license or establishing a formal agreement with the landlord. This situation highlights the need to enhance public awareness of licensing requirements among tenants and land use change procedures among landlords.

In Case 3, stakeholders expressed surprise that professionals require permits for constructing fences. They were also perplexed when a professional conducting boundary recovery instructed them to demolish an already-built wall to align with the actual boundary. This directive was perceived as introducing a new conflict (see their remarks in Table 2, P7 & P8).

Wehrmann (2008) underscores the critical role of legal knowledge in conflict mediation, asserting that it enables mediators to make decisions that are beneficial and compliant with legal frameworks. He advocates empowering mediators with a robust understanding of laws and regulatory frameworks and proficient mediation skills to improve decision-making (Wehrmann, 2008). Ngowi et al. (2022) support this perspective, emphasising that MLs often lack sufficient legal knowledge despite being central to conflict resolution. Similarly, Emanuel and Ndimbwa (2013) underscore the necessity for village leaders to be well-versed in conflict resolution laws. Furthermore, Babeiya (2016) and Kombe and Namangaya (2016) stress the importance of empowering local authorities and strengthening legal governance at the grassroots level, a group that includes extended planners.

Our findings highlight specific legal challenges in areas such as the management of public spaces (Case 1), land use changes and business operations (Case 2), and building permit processes (Case 3)—all of which fall within the scope of urban planners' responsibilities. Given these challenges, we recommend specific training for extended planners on critical provisions of the urban land management laws and regulations to strengthen their capacity in these domains.

#### 4.3.1.2. Transparency and Trust in Expert Methods

Wehrmann (2008) emphasises that transparency is critical in fostering trust among participants in the mediation process. He underscores the importance of trust as a fundamental tool for mediators as neutral

third parties. In this context, the approach employed during the mediation left participants questioning the validity of the findings, as evidenced by a complainant's expressed surprise: "I have doubts about this expert's measurements." The complainant expressed his feelings and emotions during a conflict resolution case. This reflects the presence of contradictions in the tools employed and the roles of the experts. It highlights a lack of transparency in experts' tools or methods, questioning the validity of their measurements and conclusions. In response, the expert stated: "The findings are based on science. You can hire another surveyor to confirm. I didn't manipulate any data."

The responses from the complainant and the expert underscore that trust in tools and experts is heavily reliant on the transparency and comprehensibility of the methodology employed. The contradiction arises from stakeholders' lack of understanding of the methodology, highlighting the importance of clarity in communication. Akintayo et al. (2024) argue that mediators must employ simplified language to ensure participants can fully comprehend the processes involved. Therefore, this issue should be addressed by increasing collaboration between experts and mediation participants to enhance trust and understanding. This is consistent with Wehrmann's (2008) assertion that building trust is a fundamental requirement for successful conflict resolution. Consequently, it is essential to employ technology or tools so stakeholders can easily comprehend and verify the process, ensuring transparency.

#### 4.3.1.3. Documentation

The mediation process revealed significant deficiencies in documentation practices, leading to unsatisfactory outcomes. As Table 2 illustrates, Participant 2 highlighted frequent document misplacement, reflecting issues with record-keeping, inconsistent minute-taking, and difficulties reporting to Municipal authorities. For example, in Case 1, an Executive Officer's report was lost and subsequently resubmitted; in Case 2, signed contracts were not retained, and essential documents were missing during meetings. Addressing the lost report, the MEO explained:

Our mobile phones have limited storage, so we often delete photos to save memory. However, I sent the report through WhatsApp, and it got lost. The Ward Officer probably couldn't find it when he asked for the report, but I sent it to him. The hard copy must have been misplaced among the papers, but it is there.

Case 1 further demonstrated how outdated register books complicated resident identification, as Participant 2's account contradicted details from Table 1. The records consisted of meeting resolutions without the necessary details for comprehensive tracking. The chairperson emphasised the need for efficient tools for data management that simplify the process and suggested potential technological upgrades to improve efficiency:

This office serves many people. We should have a computer to keep and maintain records and simplify information retrieval. Searching through these cabinets is challenging and may cause respiratory problems as you open them.

Moreover, in Case 3, unauthorised documentation practices were mainly employed as a precaution. The MEO often oversees records but struggles with the workload. These record-keeping issues also extended to the



Municipality, where urban planners faced challenges locating files, underscoring the need for more robust document management systems.

The aforementioned record-keeping challenges align with those highlighted by Ngowi et al. (2022), especially in Eswatini, which point to inefficiencies in information collection, storage, and sharing within local systems. The authors recommend enhancing college curricula to improve executive record management skills and defend increasing staffing at MGO to improve efficiency. In this paper, we stress the importance of documenting conflict resolution structures and defining community jurisdictions, as inadequate documentation systems within the MGO often lead to document loss and difficulty registering complaints.

#### 4.3.2. Contradictions Related to Rules

Table 2 reveals five contradictions in the rules used during the mediation processes. The rules governing community relationships during mediation are culturally accepted practices that mediators use to structure interactions. For instance, initiation rules often assume local residency, becoming embedded as cultural norms within the community. The findings indicate that mediation rules within the MGO are predominantly traditional rather than formal, as Ahmed and Muhindi (2023) noted. This contrasts significantly with the expert-driven practices employed at the municipal level. The Mtaa chairperson highlighted the absence of formal rules, noting that participants rely on community culture and the respect afforded to leaders and elders. Interviews (Table 2) further revealed contradictions in the mediation process, underscoring power imbalances. In Case 1, a respondent complained that wealthier individuals often disregard those with fewer financial resources and that the chairperson favours the wealthy. In Case 2, a tenant who was not a resident felt unfairly treated, while the complainant pointed to a lack of respect from the youth toward the elders. These power imbalances foster mistrust within the community, aligning with Ahmed and Muhindi (2023), KaraniOnyiko et al. (2021), and Marfo (2019), who emphasise that local leaders' mediation roles should focus on de-escalating tensions and facilitating dialogue.

Several scholars have highlighted inconsistencies in how mediation bodies handle land use conflicts. Emanuel and Ndimbwa (2013) describe these bodies as ineffective, noting widespread negative perceptions from participants complaining about favouritism in conflict mediation processes. The authors observe villagers' dissatisfaction with the conflict resolution process, citing delays and perceived bias toward the elite. Conversely, well-managed grassroots mediation processes have garnered more positive feedback for their potential to prevent conflict escalation. Furthermore, Emanuel and Ndimbwa (2013) note that while grassroots leaders play a crucial role in mediation, they often struggle to maintain impartiality. To mitigate power imbalances during meetings, Engeström (2000) and Wehrmann (2008) stress the importance of establishing clear, agreed-upon rules, which the mediator enforces to ensure the objectives of the mediation are achieved.

#### 4.3.3. Contradictions Related to Roles

Table 2 reveals 11 contradictions in the roles used during the mediation processes. Roles involve participants taking on specific responsibilities to ensure the efficient facilitation of the mediation process. Despite these efforts, Table 2 reveals concerns about inequalities stemming from power imbalances, unequal speaking opportunities, and mutual distrust among participants. During the mediation process, mistrust between

participants and mediators was evident. This dissatisfaction, particularly among respondents and complainants, suggests that while resolutions are reached, underlying issues remain unaddressed. Specific incidents which highlight these challenges are presented below.

#### 4.3.3.1. Bias and Favouritism

Participants perceived bias in mediation sessions. For instance, in Case 2, a complainant accused the chairperson of partiality:

He gives her plenty of time to speak but interrupts me when insulted, perhaps because I am not a native resident but just a tenant.

This perception of inequality suggests marginalised treatment of non-native residents or tenants, undermining trust in the mediation's fairness. Similarly, in Case 1, favouritism towards certain groups was observed:

He defends motorcycle taxi riders because they are his voters. He should remove them until they follow the procedure for conducting business in the area.

The opinions in the quotes imply allegations of electoral considerations influencing mediation outcomes, and they equally highlight political dynamics that can compromise neutrality and fairness.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that urban land management is a critical yet often overlooked area in both academic literature and policy discussions. While there has been notable work in urban planning, particularly by scholars such as Kironde (1995, 2000, 2006), Kombe (2006), and Lugalla (2010), who focus on informal settlements and tenure security, research on urban land governance remains lacking in practical insights. This gap includes the diversity of ownership documentation and polycentric governance institutions, as well as the interactions between residents and government agencies in land transactions. Chigbu et al. (2021) highlight that key institutional and individual roles remain under-explored, signalling a need for strengthened land education, research, and competency-building. Furthermore, academic networks essential for knowledge-sharing and capacity-building in Africa are still developing (Kuusaana et al., 2021). However, progress toward locally adapted, people-centred land management is ongoing (Mabakeng et al., 2021).

Building on the work of Manara and Pani (2023), who advocate for institutions that integrate traditional and modern, formal and informal, and local and global practices to enhance sustainability in urban communities, our research demonstrates that Municipal Governance Organizations play a crucial role in making communities more livable. These institutions facilitate the acceptance of conflicts from community members, create platforms for mediation, and generate resolutions similar to those of Municipal Organizations. This aligns with Akintayo et al.'s (2024) emphasis on strengthening out-of-court mechanisms for conflict resolution, particularly in Africa, where many still report conflicts outside formal court systems, contributing significantly to social harmony.

MGOs utilise a conflict resolution framework that mirrors the approach of municipal planners, involving case reception, discussion sessions, and protocol oversight by the Mtaa chairperson. However, challenges were identified, such as a lack of consensus on session rules and record-keeping issues, such as inaccurate or poorly maintained hardcopy records. These challenges underscore the need for clear procedural guidelines and improved documentation practices to enhance the mediation process.

This study, employing single-case analyses, underscores the need for further research to explore the long-term activities of extended planners. Specifically, investigations are needed to determine whether their approach is reactive or proactive and how they adapt to contradictions. The analytical framework used in this study represents an initial step in understanding the role of extended planners within MGOs. The findings highlight the vital yet under-acknowledged role of MGOs in managing land use conflicts, and it is recommended that policymakers, especially the MLHSD, consider formalising the recognition of MGOs as extended urban planners. Furthermore, comparative studies across different regions are essential to identify best practices and inform policies supporting proactive conflict resolution in rapidly urbanising areas within Tanzania and internationally.

### Acknowledgments

We sincerely thank stakeholders in urban planning and management in Ubungo Municipality for the technical and professional input, and Sinza Mtaa and Ward leaders and residents for the practical insights on urban land use development. We also acknowledge ChatGPT for its assistance in brainstorming and refining ideas for this work.

### Funding

This study was financed by the VLIR-UOS IUC through the partnership between the University of Hasselt, Belgium, and Ardhi University, Tanzania.

### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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## About the Authors



**Manyama Majogoro** is a PhD candidate at Hasselt University, Belgium, specializing in digital technologies for participatory land use planning and conflict resolution in urban settlements. He holds a BSc in urban and regional planning from Ardhi University and a Master of Engineering Management from the University of Dar es Salaam. A registered town planner and member of the Tanzania Institute of Town Planners (TITP), he serves as a tutor at Ardhi Institute Morogoro, Tanzania.



**Oswald Devisch** is a professor in civic urbanism at the Faculty of Architecture and Arts, Hasselt University, Belgium. He coordinates the research cluster Spatial Capacity Building, focusing on strategic collective learning, serious participation, autonomous transformation processes, and the gamification of participation. His work explores innovative approaches to urban planning, emphasising collaboration and participatory methods in transforming urban spaces.



**Fredrick Bwire Magina** is a senior lecturer and head of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the School of Spatial Planning and Social Sciences of Ardhi University. He holds a BSc in urban and regional planning, an MSc in housing, and a PhD in urban planning. With 15 years of experience, his research focuses on land access, urban housing, regional development, participatory planning, and informal settlement regularisation. Magina is a registered town planner and a member of the Tanzania Institute of Town Planners (TITP).