Towards Actualizing the Continuum of Land Rights in Support of Sustainable Development Goals

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Key words: Access to land; Cadastre; Informal settlements; Land management; Low cost technology; Security of tenure; Continuum of land rights; fit-for-purpose; pro-poor land tools

SUMMARY

Pro-poor approaches to land administration are increasingly gaining impetus and getting promoted in global agreements, national land policies and NGO's briefs. The new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development covers four prominent land targets on poverty, food security, land degradation and gender. In addition, the role of land is well captured in the New Urban Agenda (NUA), with its social, ecological and economic functions well-articulated in the recently adopted document (Habitat III), which outlines a very prominent role for land tenure security and property rights in pursuit of sustainable land governance interventions for the next 20 years. Improved land governance and achievement of sustainable development underpin these global covenants. Thus, the need for efficient land management and administration systems and the recognition of the complexity of land rights cannot be overemphasized.

In most developed nations, land records are generally well kept and cover most of the territories. This however is not the case in developing countries where bridging the gap between formally registered land ownership units and those not registered or unaccounted for is far from being actualized. Despite the many years dedicated to land registration initiatives in developing countries and often at huge costs, only about 70 per cent of land ownership units are formally registered or accounted for. It is also estimated that it would take approximately 600-1000 years to capture the remaining units with conventional approaches. Land records in these nations are also often linked to the middle and commercial classes which can exclude up to 85 per cent of the population in some countries, the majority of whom are poor and vulnerable.

The existing cadastral divide thus demands the need for low-cost, high-speed, fit-for-purpose land administration designs in those contexts where property rights identification and registration is lagging. The Social Tenure Domain Model (STDM) is a pro-poor, gender responsive, participatory

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and affordable land information system for capturing person/s to land relationships cognizant of the land rights continuum. It is a socio-technical innovation that supports all forms of land rights and claims, (formal, intermediate and non-formal) and ensures that all realities on the ground in terms of the tenure relationships are captured regardless of the law or technical limitations.

This paper will look into the recognition and scaling up of the continuum of land rights and use of fit-for-purpose approaches to provide an opportunity to include the lower income groups to incremental access and improvement of tenure security. This is to be understood as a bottom-up approach that seeks to strengthen the identity, voice, choice and participation of the poor and marginalized in the land agenda. It will document different country experiences in Africa, Asia and Latin America piloting and implementing STDM, and explain how inclusive, participatory land information tools to land governance can play a significant role in accelerating and closing the security of tenure gap that exists in most developing countries.

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