

Improving Land Governance for Development: Opportunities and Challenges for the Survey Profession¹

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ABSTRACT

This article is an annotated version of a keynote address at the International Federation of Surveyors Working Week in Abuja held May 6-10, 2013. The central message of the article is that surveyors and other land professionals have an important role to play in improving land governance in Africa, which is critical to unlocking the continent's potential of abundant land to end extreme poverty and boost shared prosperity. Improving land governance and ending extreme poverty within a 10 to 20 year period is not an insurmountable challenge if all key stakeholders work in partnership to scale up successful innovations and adopt global best practices. A new World Bank report proposes how to do this via a 10-point program of reforms and investments estimated to cost US\$4.5 billion.

1. REFLECTING ON FIG'S AND AFRICA'S ACHIEVEMENTS

The International Federation of Surveyors (FIG) Working Week in Abuja, Nigeria presented an opportunity to reflect on the achievements of FIG since its establishment in 1878. FIG has grown in membership from one country to 120 countries over 135 years, and has achieved significant success in its mission. For example, while extending its global outreach, FIG has been able to set and maintain high professional standards globally within its membership.

The FIG Working Week also presented an opportunity to reflect on the development of Sub-Saharan Africa, the host of that event. Africa's economies have been going through a period of unprecedented growth. Excluding South Africa, which grew at 3 percent in 2012, Sub-Saharan Africa grew at 5.8 percent per year, consolidating more than a decade of growth at rates above 5 percent per year. World Bank projections indicate that Sub-Saharan Africa will continue to grow at about 6 percent per year for the next three years (except for South Africa, with projected growth of 3 percent), while the global economy is expected to grow at only 2.4 percent. In other words, Africa is projected to grow twice as fast as the global economy. This is good news.

2. BUT AFRICA'S RECENT GROWTH IS NOT REDUCING POVERTY ENOUGH

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While we were justified in celebrating Africa's achievements in Abuja, we cannot rest on our laurels. The greatest challenge to mankind today is the 1.2 billion people on this planet (about 22 percent of the population in the developing world) living in extreme poverty, on less than US\$1.25 a day. One-third of the people living in extreme poverty, 400 million, are in Sub-Saharan Africa, with nearly one out of every two Africans living in extreme poverty.

The co-existence of recent unprecedented growth and high levels of extreme poverty in Africa is paradoxical. There is no doubt that the strong economic growth of the last decade has reduced poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa (in fact, it reduced by 10 percent, from about 58 to 48 percent), but the growth impact on poverty has been substantially less than that achieved in other regions of the world. There are two main reasons: (i) inequality, and (ii) dependence on natural resources, especially oil and minerals. These have dampened the poverty-reducing impacts of income growth: growth has not produced jobs, and the revenue from oil and minerals has not been spent on the poor. Agriculture and manufacturing, the labor-intensive sectors that normally produce jobs, have not participated in this growth except in a few countries. To break the high-growth, high-poverty nexus, two critical actions are required: spending revenue from oil and minerals on people-centered investments such as education, health, and nutrition and encouraging growth in the sectors that generate jobs and incomes for the majority of the population, particularly agriculture. This article focuses on the latter action, as it is more relevant for the majority of African countries and is the one where surveyors and other land professionals can more readily make a difference.

3. AGRICULTURE CAN END POVERTY IF THE POTENTIAL OF AFRICA'S ABUNDANT LAND CAN BE UNLOCKED

In Africa, agriculture is the sector that produces the most jobs, providing a livelihood to 70 percent of the population. Growth in agriculture translates to a greater reduction in poverty than does growth in other economic sectors, with analysts estimating agriculture's poverty-reduction impact to be significantly higher (World Bank 2013). The challenge is to both boost agricultural productivity on currently cultivated land and to put into production the vast amount of currently unused land. Today, agricultural productivity in Africa is about 25 percent of its potential: yields of maize, a staple food for many people, stand at about 20 percent of that achieved at research stations. Clearly there is still a lot of room for productivity growth in agriculture for the sector to become a key driver of income and job growth. There is even more room to boost agricultural incomes and jobs from uncultivated land. Of the remaining and usable uncultivated land worldwide, 202 million hectares (representing 47 percent of total uncultivated land) are in Sub-Saharan Africa.

To cultivate the unused land and narrow the productivity gap, Africa needs to invest substantially more in agriculture. Investment in African agriculture has historically been low. But since around 2008, a combination of factors (including the food crisis, the commodity boom, and the financial crisis in America and Europe) has led to increased interest from investors to acquire land for large-scale agriculture globally. Two-thirds of the land acquired has been in Africa, prompting some critics to call it the "New Scramble for Africa." But why has this become a

bigger issue in Africa than in other regions of the world? The answer is that virtually all (about 90 percent) rural land in Africa is undocumented. As is commonly known, undocumented land is vulnerable to land grabbing and to expropriation with little or no compensation. Documentation of land is critical not only to protect local communities but also to provide security to investors. Increasing the bargaining power of local communities to reach a win-win agreement with investors is good for investment. In turn, increased investment and local participation are good for agriculture, the economy, employment and incomes, yielding a considerable impact on reducing extreme poverty (World Bank 2013). This is where land surveyors, other land professionals, and FIG can best contribute professionally.

4. ACCELERATING LAND DOCUMENTATION AND GOVERNANCE IS KEY TO BOOSTING AGRICULTURE AND ENDING POVERTY

But the million dollar question is this: If Africa has documented less than 10 percent of its rural land in the last 50 years of its independence and if only about 25 percent of the total land worldwide is documented, is it really feasible to document the remaining 90 percent of Africa's rural land in the next 10 to 20 years? And the challenge does not stop with rural land; there are also urban slums to reckon with, home to 70 percent of Africa's urban population. In my view, the answer is yes, if we are strategic and focused in our approach. Expedited documentation of land is an area in which surveyors and other land professionals can make a real difference, but we need to change the way we do business. We must ensure that we serve more people and accomplish more with less, and in a much shorter time than we have done in the last 135 years when FIG was first founded. It can be done but we need to learn from the contemporary history of land administration reform and act on recent lessons.

China and Vietnam provide relevant examples. China in 1978 and Vietnam in 1988 dismantled their collective farms and used long-term leases to allocate land rights to farming households. In China, this policy action launched an era of prolonged agricultural growth that transformed rural China and led to the largest reduction in poverty in history. The percentage of people living in extreme poverty declined from about 80 percent of the population in 1981, the highest in the world at that time, to only 13 percent in 2008. Similarly, Vietnam's land reform has also engineered remarkable agricultural growth and economic transformation in the last two decades, reducing extreme poverty there from 58 percent in the early 1990s to 14.5 percent in 2008.

Surveyors and land professionals should note that the land tenure reforms that introduced long-term leases in China and Vietnam were not accompanied by use of any spatial frameworks or cadastral mapping to delineate household land. In fact, Vietnam started developing a spatial framework for rural land holdings about five years ago, while China is only starting to do so now using satellite imagery. In other words, both China and Vietnam allocated land rights to households without a spatial framework, and certainly not one based on a detailed survey of boundaries. Similarly, when Thailand developed its Land Code in 1954, it provided for recognition of a continuum of rights, with seven categories of land rights recorded using spatial frameworks of varying degrees of detail, from doing without a cadastral map (not even a sketch) to using orthophotos to ultimately using cadastral maps based on detailed surveys of boundaries.

It is not just Asian countries that have exercised flexibility in allocating a continuum of land rights to their people and in surveying their land. England and Wales have long used the general boundaries rule to document rural land using large-scale base maps. In Africa, significant progress in this direction has been made in the last 10 years. In three years, from 2003 to 2005, Ethiopia issued land use certificates for 20 million land parcels without even a sketch map. In June 2012, Rwanda completed a country-wide program to adjudicate and demarcate 10.3 million land parcels mainly using orthophoto maps. These land administration reform programs, combined with other agricultural and economic interventions, have done wonders for the economies of Ethiopia and Rwanda. Both economies have grown at 8-10 percent per year in the last half decade. As a result, Ethiopia reduced extreme poverty from over 40 percent to 30 percent in the last 10 years, while Rwanda reduced it from 55 percent to 40 percent in the same period.

Other African countries are following in the footsteps of Ethiopia and Rwanda in exercising flexibility to award and document land rights. Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, Mozambique, Namibia, Madagascar, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso have land legislation that permits flexibility in measuring rural land boundaries. Pilots have been undertaken in these countries to take advantage of the favorable legislation.

5. NEED TO ACT DIFFERENTLY, FASTER AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY

The lessons from experience are inspiring and provide hope and guidance. To continue and expand on these successes in Africa, we land professionals must lead the way. We need to act with a sense of urgency. We need to move away from rigid surveying standards and technologies to more flexible ones that meet today's needs while anticipating those of tomorrow. Relevance has to be our guiding principle, not accuracy: given limited budgets, we must balance accuracy with speed and cost when designing spatial frameworks. And we must take advantage of the opportunities offered by modern technology.

A growing number of people are already advocating and carrying forward these ideals in various forms and shapes, with a variety of names and labels. For example, Stig Enemark (2012) calls it "Spatially Fit-for-Purpose". Robin McLaren (2011) calls it "Crowd Sourcing". Michael Barry, Molero and Muhsen (2013) call it the "talking titler" while the Global Land Tool Network calls it a "Social Tenure Domain Model" (UN-Habitat 2008). Common to all of these high-flying initiatives is the desire for simple, affordable, fast, and community-supported approaches to designing spatial frameworks and to recording land rights and related information. The initiators are not mere research academics, intellectual dreamers, or knuckleheads, but rather well-meaning social innovators. Let us work with them to test these initiatives, scale up the successful ones, and most importantly, learn from those that fail. We need to appraise these and other investments and technologies to ensure that they are technically, economically, socially, and environmentally sound to meet the needs of society. The bottom line is that we need practical and bold new solutions to document the land rights of billions of people in rural areas and urban slums to get

them out of informality and extreme poverty.

We must redouble our efforts to remove inflexible surveying regulations, but we must also go beyond regulations. We must deal head on with educational and research institutions to ensure those education curricula for surveyors and other professionals move away from serving only a few people with over-engineered and costly solutions. We must instead be able to serve the masses, to recognize a continuum of land rights, and to focus on recording rights quickly and cheaply. We should not fix land boundaries in a costly way and in lengthy processes that take decades to complete national programs. The required changes go beyond educational and research institutions. The organization of work in ministries of lands, Land Commissions, and survey and mapping agencies must also change. Change is also needed among suppliers and service providers such as consultancy firms; and change must also reach advocacy groups and development partners. Simply put, the mindsets and attitudes of all key stakeholders in land governance must change

6. NEED TO SCALE UP SUCCESSFUL INNOVATIONS AND GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES

Surveyors and other land professionals must be at the front and center of this massive change. Let us modernize and simplify surveying and mapping regulations to take advantage of modern technology to do things faster and cheaper. Let us also move forward with piloting new innovations and scaling up global best practices and pilots that are successful. For those that fail, let us learn from them to do better. Let us learn from the experiences of China, Vietnam, Thailand, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and many others. As professionals, we can and should position ourselves to play a central role in fighting extreme poverty, today's greatest challenge to mankind.

We at the World Bank are ready to work in partnership... We have prepared ourselves to support sound land governance with a combination of policy reforms and investments. In July 2013, after four years of review, we launched a report on improving land governance in Sub-Saharan Africa in a 10-point program that includes not only documenting land rights but also increasing land access for the poor, increasing efficiency in land administration, developing land administration in post-conflict countries, developing capacity, resolving land disputes, improving land use planning, improving management of public land, and strengthening property valuation and land tax policies (Byamugisha 2013). This US\$4.5 billion program will be implemented over 10 years, and we are looking forward to the support of all stakeholders to make it a reality.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Eradicating extreme poverty is a formidable challenge but surveyors and other land professionals should see this as an opportunity to make a positive difference and improve the lives of people. But we have to act differently and with a lot of flexibility and urgency. The World Bank is seeking to strengthen partnerships in all possible ways, especially at the country level and with FIG, to improve land governance for development.

With support from all our partners, we are confident that extreme poverty will be eradicated by 2030, precisely when FIG will be 152 years old. Our work must begin now. And we must do so with a sense of urgency.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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