

GIM INTERNATIONAL INTERVIEWS TONY BURNS

Equality as an Underpinning Element



Land Equity International operates worldwide and is well known for its involvement and support in land policy formulation and land administration reform. Apart from the technical dimension to its activities, the company gives prominence to the social dimension – ensuring that land is managed and administered in an equitable manner, protecting the interests of all. GIM International interviews managing director Tony Burns on his motivations and his involvement in projects such as the World Bank’s Land Governance Assessment Framework and a cost and revenue analysis for Land Administration Services.

The name of your company sounds ambitious and also idealistic. What’s the story behind it?

Land Equity International was established in 2001 by a team of specialists that had been working on land sector projects since the early 1980s as part of larger consulting organisations. We had been involved from the start on the Thailand Land Titling Project, which was awarded a World Bank Award for Excellence in 1997, and had built on this experience to win work throughout Asia, South America, Europe and Africa. The founding partners of Land Equity International all came from a survey background – but we approached our work in a very non-technical manner. It was important to us that land initiatives were grounded in the local legal, socioeconomic and institutional context. Technology was becoming an increasingly important element in any land administration reform initiative, but it was only a tool. I can remember in the nineties, when we were designing a project in Peru, the head of the property formalisation institution there commenting that I was the most ‘non-engineering’ engineer that he had ever met. I was very happy with that comment as I saw that it encapsulated our whole approach. We put a lot of thought into our ‘brand’ when we set up the company, and eventually settled on Land Equity International as we felt the name reflected our approach to land policy formulation and land administration reform.

Could you tell me about your company and its activities?

Our core activities are working with government and private-sector counterparts to improve systems for land regularisation, registration, adjudication, surveying and mapping. We then assist in training trainers to carry out the activities in the field. When developing new systems and approaches, it is important to work closely with counterparts to ensure every aspect of local knowledge and practice is accounted for. All of our activities embrace equality as an underpinning element, and often this specifically requires resources at the conceptual and inception phases to analyse where these must be proactively addressed, particularly in the area of land rights for women and vulnerable people.

You are one of the key authors of the Land Governance Assessment Framework developed by the World Bank. Could you explain a little more about it?

The Land Governance Assessment Framework (LGAF) is a diagnostic tool that aims to identify the key land sector issues in a jurisdiction and agree on appropriate steps and strategies that might be adopted to address these issues within a framework that enables land governance to be monitored over time. It takes at least four months for a team of local experts to implement an LGAF study; this long process with wide participation is necessary since land and land governance is more complex and more nuanced than assessing a topic such as public expenditure and financial accountability. The LGAF Country Scorecard can be used to assess both areas where things are going well and areas where things could be improved. The way the LGAF dimensions are structured and the wording of the pre-coded statements are such that policy or strategic action is evident. The 80 core LGAF dimensions are structured under thematic areas such as the legal and institutional framework, land use planning, management and taxation, the management of public land, the public provision of land information, and dispute resolution and conflict management. The LGAF broadly covers the land sector and the LGAF methodology can be extended by adding further modules. Modules have been developed to cover large-scale land acquisition, forestry and regularisation.

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