

Resourcing the Democratisation of Land Rights



A number of initiatives are emerging, led for example by Rights and Resources Initiative, Rainforest Foundation UK, FLOSS SOLA and MapMyRights Foundation, that are based on the concept of democratising land rights through citizen empowerment and crowdsourcing. This involves citizens and communities capturing their evidence of land rights on mobile devices and recording it on a platform that is accessible globally. These fit-for-purpose approaches are trust-based rather than legally based systems and increase security of tenure through societal evidence and global publicity.

With only 350,000 land professionals worldwide and the challenge of registering the 4.5 billion parcels which are currently outside of formal land administration systems, there is the need to create a new, scalable model. Otherwise, at current rates, it will take several

hundreds of years to register all properties in some countries. The initial phases of implementing these crowdsourced initiatives plan to use trusted intermediaries (sometimes called 'para-surveyors' or 'barefoot surveyors') to collect evidence of land rights on behalf of communities and citizens. This approach has been successfully used in Rwanda and the Kyrgyz Republic, for example, to provide national registration coverage in around three to five years.

These trusted intermediaries would be trained by land professionals and NGOs/CSOs. They would initially be vetted by the NGOs, but over time the network of intermediaries would self-organise into collaborating networks and provide the essential scalability. To increase trust among the citizens, the intermediaries could obtain qualifications as has happened with the BRAC property rights initiative. The BRAC's Land Entrepreneurship Model is a unique model where government-certified land measurement training is provided to a cadre of land entrepreneurs who provide free-of-charge services to ultra-poor clients.

The trusted intermediaries could support a number of information services, including health, finance, agriculture and weather, for example, as well as land rights. Land rights could simply be a by-product of other services, e.g. microfinance or micro-insurance. This would add further trust between citizens and the trusted intermediaries and limit unintended consequences.

Such innovative models for service delivery are having a major impact on land professionals and are rapidly redefining their role, shifting it from measurement to management. New opportunities are being created in communities for training, quality control, information management and the delivery of land-governance capacity building. Democratisation of land rights will create a significantly larger base of customers, many of whom will require upgrading of their land rights under the fit-for-purpose approach. This is a great opportunity for land professionals. However, if land professionals do not quickly embrace this new paradigm then other professions will fill the vacuum.

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