The Incredible Potential of Land Administration

‘Development aid’ is an umbrella term that encompasses many types of financial support provided by governments to stimulate socioeconomic development in developing countries. Although it aims to reduce poverty in the long term by contributing to a better economic and social situation, foreign aid has always been the topic of debate and opinions are divided on its effectiveness. The political situation in the recipient country is of course an essential factor in the distribution of foreign aid. In addition, there are huge differences in the success rates of the various types of development aid – and geomatics plays a surprising role in one of them, writes Wim van Wegen from '*GIM International*'.

It is important to note that development aid is not limited to funding alone. In fact, it is fair to say that foreign aid is as much about knowledge as it is about money. This perspective reveals a more objective view of a developing country’s long-term needs: the foundations for a well-functioning society, or – to be more precise – a well-governed country. The ingredients for this include a sound financial system, good access to education, well-organized infrastructure (including transport) and decent healthcare, for example. But another important pillar – and one that is often underestimated – is also required: a reliable land administration system. Just some of the benefits of good land administration include fair taxation, efficient land use, the resolution of conflicts of ownership, and the conservation of natural and cultural heritage. In other words, well-functioning land systems contribute to private wealth, stability and equal rights. To put it succinctly, since a solid cadastral system is an effective way to manage valuable land information, this approach deserves much more investment than it currently receives!

It should be the top priority of the biggest donors to put much greater emphasis on transferring their knowledge of land administration. The Netherlands serves as a good example, and the project in which the Dutch government is contributing to the implementation of the Peace Agreements in Colombia with fit-for-purpose (FFP) land administration is particularly worth mentioning. In addition to significant benefits for the recipient countries of this investment in land administration, it also opens up interesting opportunities for the geospatial industry. New techniques for surveying and mapping will be needed, as millions of land parcels will have to be surveyed in a quick and easy manner. In a nutshell, this is what makes geomatics as such an inspiring discipline. We have the necessary tools and expertise to truly make the world a better place. Stimulating socioeconomic development is not about investing in billions in aid, with the risk that much of it will not be well spent or won’t lead to real improvements for the people most in need; it is about providing countries with a strong foundation, about providing them with the right means for a flourishing future.

Recognizing and acting on land administration as a fundamental public good holds the key to a better and more sustainable future for many countries on our planet. In the interest of a more stable world and in order to accomplish the mission of reducing poverty and improving global inequality, we are compelled to act. As *GIM International*’s contributing editor Rohan Bennett and his fellow researchers wrote, failing to recognize land administration as critical public-good infrastructure impedes funding and maintenance regimes and puts the benefits of the systems at risk.

Further Reading

Bennett, R., Tambuwala, N., Rajabifard, A., Wallace, J., and Williamson, I., On recognizing land administration as critical, public good infrastructure, *Land Use Policy*, Vol. 30, Issue 1, 2013, pp. 84-93