To Crowdsource or Not to Crowdsource?

Anything is better than nothing so why not crowdsource it? Neighbours measure their shared boundaries, agree on the results, and the cadastre is updated. Is that not cheap, quick and fit for purpose? The adoption of crowdsourcing may be justifiable in countries without an effective land registry, but what about in developed countries? Some people believe that crowdsourced cadastres will eventually become reality there too. The authors explore potential uses of crowdsourcing in cadastres, and argue that just as the requirements of developing and developed countries are different, so too is the role of crowdsourcing in improving cadastres in these two distinct situations.

As the heart of the land registry, the cadastre should unambiguously identify people’s entitlements on the ground and assist in resolving boundary disputes that arise from lost or damaged boundary marks. The cadastre’s affordability has always been debated in developing countries, where cadastral surveying is usually too costly in relation to the nation’s average income and hence unaffordable. The cost of surveying is usually high, and productivity is low because of the limited number of qualified surveyors. Establishing a partnership with citizens so that they can survey themselves in certain situations can be a quick and cheap solution for defining title boundaries. Dividing a land parcel into two lots by a qualified surveyor could cost anywhere from USD500 to USD1,000, whereas crowdsourcing the same would cost only USD3 to USD5. While the quality of data is not comparable, establishing a cadastre through crowdsourcing can be an efficient way for countries lacking in resources to support land registration. Figure 1 schematically outlines the components involved in crowdsourcing for cadastral purposes in developing countries.

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