

Supporting the 2030 global agenda

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The Sustainable Development Goals call for a 'data revolution' by 2030. Sound land governance and administration are also fundamental and land professionals have a key role to play, argues Stig Enemark

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were superseded by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 ? 17 objectives (see Figure 1) and 169 targets to which UN member states are committed in setting their agendas and policies over the next 15 years.

There is an urgent need to build simple and basic systems by taking a flexible and affordable approach to identifying the way land is occupied and used

These goals and targets integrate economic, social and environmental objectives and recognise the connections between them if comprehensive sustainable development is to be achieved. While the MDGs did not mention land directly, the SDGs include a number of goals that directly refer to land issues, putting its governance at the top of the global agenda.

Land governance concerns the policies, processes and institutions by which land, property and other natural resources are managed. This includes decisions on access to land, and related rights, use and development.

The operational component of land governance is the range of administrative functions, including:

- tenure: securing and transferring rights in land and natural resources;
- value: the valuation and taxation of land and of properties;
- use: planning and controlling the use of land and natural resources
- development: constructing utilities, infrastructure and urban and rural developments.

Figure 1

The Sustainable Development Goals; goals one, two, five, 11, 15 and 16 are land-related



The SDGs

The SDGs include 6 goals with a significant land component specified. For example, goal 1 calls for ending poverty in all its forms everywhere. Target 4 of goal 1 states that by 2030 all men and women will have equal rights to ownership and control over land and other forms of property. This calls for closing the security of tenure gap that exists in most developing countries where less than 30% of the land and the people are included in formal registers.

Similarly, land is referred to in target 3 of goal 2 on ending hunger and, more generally, in goal 5 on gender equality, goal 11 on sustainable cities, goal 13 on climate action, goal 15 on life on land and goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. These goals and targets will never be achieved without good land governance and well-functioning nationwide administration systems in place.

Monitoring

Effective monitoring and assessment of progress towards achieving the SDGs is essential, while robust, reliable data is also necessary so appropriate policies and interventions can be devised and governments and the international community held to account.

About 240 indicators have therefore been established to measure progress towards the targets, which will be reported annually by the UN. In conjunction with the World Bank and other partners, the UN has also developed the Land Governance Assessment Framework to benchmark and monitor core areas, such as national legal and institutional frameworks.

Global agenda

The wider global agenda includes a range of land-related issues.

Land tenure

Responsible tenure governance is incorporated into the global agenda through the [Committee on World Food Security's Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure](#) .

The guidelines place tenure rights, whether legal or just locally recognised, in the context of human rights. They represent a global consensus on principles and responsible practices. Actors can then determine whether their proposed actions and those of others constitute acceptable practices.

The UN-Habitat programme has developed an innovative approach to addressing land tenure in the form of the [Social Tenure Domain Model](#) . This includes a range of steps from informal to more formalised land rights.

This continuum of rights does not mean that societies will necessarily develop into freehold tenure systems. Rather, each step in the process can be formalised, providing stronger protection to ensure that legitimate rights such as customary tenure are recognised.

Human rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 states that the rights of human beings are based on the principle of respect for the individual. In relation to land governance, the declaration states:

'that everyone has the right to possess property (security of tenure) and the right to adequate food, clothing and housing'.

This right to housing should be seen as the right to live in security, peace and dignity. Women's access to land also needs to be seen as a universal human right under these terms, independent of any other arguments for it.

Climate and disasters

One consideration in achieving climate-resilient urban development and sustainable rural land use is the degree to which climate change adaptation and disaster risk management are connected to 2 major components of land governance: securing and safeguarding land rights, and land-use planning and control.

Responsible land governance should be underpinned by land administration systems that are fit for purpose and include security of tenure rights as well as effective land-use planning and control.

Urbanisation

The incredibly rapid growth of megacities ? that is, those with a population of more than 10m people ? is causing severe ecological, economic and social problems, and it is increasingly difficult to manage this growth in a sustainable way.

More than 70% of urban growth currently happens outside the formal planning process, while

30% of urban populations in less-developed countries are living in slums or informal settlements where vacant state-owned or private land is occupied illegally. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 90% of all new urban settlements are taking the form of slums.

Land professionals

Responding to global land issues involves alleviating poverty, ensuring social inclusion and stability, securing investments and economic development, protecting the environment, and the management of natural resources.

Embedded in the SDGs, these matters will fall to the professionals who are the custodians of land governance systems and provide land administration services: lawyers have a major role by setting legal and regulatory frameworks, and land surveyors normally enjoy a monopoly on boundary determination in their own countries, though in most developing countries there are not enough such surveyors to meet demand.

Fit for purpose

Most developing countries are struggling to find remedies for many land problems that are causing conflicts, hampering economic development and preventing them achieving their true potential. Investments in land administration and management have been piecemeal, and have not ensured the required changes and improvements at scale.

Neither have the measures taken helped the neediest ? the poor and disadvantaged who lack security of tenure. In fact, the beneficiaries of this unsustainable land management have been the rich, the elite and bodies involved in land grabbing.

It is time to rethink these approaches. We need to ensure security of tenure for all, which should be quickly developed and scalable; the recent Global Land Tool Network publication on fit-for-purpose land administration (**see Land Journal May/June 2016 p.20**) is designed to help with this, and the guidelines it offers are currently being considered for implementation in Indonesia.

Opportunities

Land professionals need to understand and embrace the fit-for-purpose approach. This will require clear articulation of the benefits of such a move so that any perceived threats are dissipated.

Unsustainable management of land has benefited the rich, the elite and organisations involved in land grabbing

The fit-for-purpose approach will create even greater demand for land professionals as security of tenure is provided for all and the need for services increases significantly. For example, new services will be required to maintain and upgrade evidence of land rights, to train and supervise local land officers and to manage and assure the quality of land information. This is a great opportunity for land professionals.

Conclusions

There is a general consensus that governing the relationship between people and land is at the heart of the 2030 global agenda. There is an urgent need to build simple systems using

a flexible and affordable approach to identify the way land is occupied and used, whether land rights are legal or locally legitimate.

Systems need to be simple and flexible in terms of spatial identification, legal regulations and institutional arrangements to meet actual needs in society, and they can then be incrementally improved through time.

Developing such frameworks will establish the link between people and land. This will enable the management and monitoring of improvements in meeting the aims and objectives of adopted land policies, as well as fulfilling the global agenda. Land professionals have a key role to play.

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Further information

- [UN. Transforming our World: The 2030 Global Agenda for Sustainable Development. 2015](#)
- [Stig Enemark, Robin McLaren and Christiaan Lemmen. Fit-For-purpose Land Administration ? Guiding Principles for Country Implementation. UN-Habitat/Global Land Tool Network, Nairobi. 2016](#)
- Related competencies include [Access and rights over land](#) , [Cadastre and land management](#) , [Property records/information systems](#)
- This feature is taken from the RICS *Land journal* (March/April 2017)