

Making an impact

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Surveyors and other land professionals can play a vital role in improving land governance in Africa, which is critical to unlocking the continent's potential, says Frank FK Byamugisha

Improving land governance and ending extreme poverty within 10 to 20 years is not an insurmountable challenge if key stakeholders work together to scale up successful innovations and adopt global best practices. A [World Bank](#) report launched in mid-2013 proposes how to do this via a 10-point, US\$4.5bn programme of reforms and investments to be implemented over 10 years.

The [International Federation of Surveyors](#) (FIG) Working Week in Abuja, Nigeria, in May 2013 presented an opportunity to reflect on FIG's achievements since its establishment in 1878. While extending its global outreach to 120 countries, FIG has set and maintained high professional standards globally within its membership. The week also presented an opportunity to reflect on the development of sub-Saharan Africa. Africa's economies have been going through a period of unprecedented growth. Excluding South Africa, which grew at 3% in 2012, sub-Saharan Africa grew at 5.8% per year, consolidating more than a decade of growth at rates above 5% per year.

World Bank projections indicate that sub-Saharan Africa will continue to grow at about 6% per year for the next three years (except for South Africa, with projected growth of 3%), while the global economy is expected to grow at only 2.4%. In other words, the region is projected to grow twice as fast as the global economy.

Poverty remains a challenge

The greatest challenge to mankind today is the 1.2 billion people (about 22% of the population in the developing world) living in extreme poverty, on less than US\$1.25 a day. One-third ? 400 million ? are in sub-Saharan Africa, with nearly one out of every two Africans living in extreme poverty.

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The strong economic growth of the past decade has reduced poverty in the region (from about 58% to 48%), but at a substantially slower rate than that achieved in other parts of the world. The main reasons for this are inequality and dependence on natural resources, especially oil and minerals. Growth has not produced jobs, and oil and minerals revenues

have not been spent on the poor. Agriculture and manufacturing, the labour-intensive sectors that normally produce jobs, have not participated in this growth, except in a few countries.

To break this nexus, two critical actions are required: spending revenue from oil and minerals on people-centred investments such as education, health and nutrition, and encouraging growth in the sectors that generate jobs and incomes for most of the population, particularly agriculture. This article focuses on the latter, because it is more relevant for the majority of African countries and an area where surveyors and other land professionals can more readily make a difference.

Unlocking potential

Agriculture is the sector in Africa that produces the most jobs, providing a livelihood to 70% of the population. Growth in agriculture translates to a greater reduction in poverty than in other economic sectors. The challenge is to boost agricultural productivity on cultivated land and to put into production the vast amount of unused land.

Agricultural productivity in Africa is about 25% of its potential: yields of the staple food maize stand at about 20% of that achieved at research stations. There is still a lot of room for the sector to become a key driver of income and job growth, and even more room to boost incomes from uncultivated land. Of the remaining and usable uncultivated land worldwide, 202 million hectares (47% of total uncultivated land) are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Africa needs to invest substantially more in agriculture. Such investment has historically been low, but since around 2008 several factors have led to increased interest from investors to acquire land for large-scale agriculture globally. Two-thirds of the land acquired have been in Africa, prompting some to call it the 'new scramble for Africa'. This has become a bigger issue in Africa than in other regions because about 90% of rural land on the continent is undocumented, and such land is vulnerable to land grabbing and to expropriation with little or no compensation. Documentation of land is critical not only to protect communities, but also to provide security to investors. Increasing communities' bargaining power to reach win-win agreements is good for investment. In turn, increased investment and local participation are good for agriculture, the economy, employment and incomes, yielding a considerable impact on reducing extreme poverty. This is where land surveyors, other land professionals and FIG can best contribute professionally.

Accelerating land documentation

If Africa has documented less than 10% of its rural land in the past 50 years and worldwide only about 25% of total land is recorded, is it really feasible to document the remainder of Africa's rural land in the next decade or two? And the challenge extends to urban slums, home to 70% of Africa's urban population. I believe the answer is yes, if we are strategic and focused. Expedited documentation of land is an area where surveyors and other land professionals can make a real difference, but we must change the way we do business, serving more people and accomplishing more with less, in a much shorter time than we have done in the 135 years since FIG was founded. We must learn from contemporary land administration reform and act on recent lessons.

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China and Vietnam provide relevant examples. China in 1978 and Vietnam in 1988 dismantled their collective farms and used long-term leases to allocate land rights to farming households. In China, this launched an era of prolonged agricultural growth that transformed rural China and led to the largest reduction in poverty in history – the percentage of people in extreme poverty declined from about 80% in 1981 to only 13% in 2008. Vietnam's land reform also engineered remarkable agricultural growth and economic transformation in the past two decades, reducing extreme poverty from 58% in the early 1990s to 14.5% in 2008.

The land tenure reforms introducing long-term leases in China and Vietnam were not accompanied by use of spatial frameworks or cadastral mapping to delineate household land. In fact, Vietnam only started developing a spatial framework for rural land holdings about five years ago, while China is only now starting to do so using satellite imagery. So, both allocated land rights without a spatial framework, and certainly not based on detailed boundaries surveys. Similarly, when Thailand developed its [Land Code](#) in 1954, it provided for recognition of a continuum of rights, with seven categories of land rights recorded using spatial frameworks of varying degrees of detail, from doing without a cadastral map (not even a sketch) to using orthophotos to ultimately using cadastral maps based on detailed surveys of boundaries.

England and Wales have long used the general boundaries rule to document rural land using large-scale base maps. In Africa, significant progress in this direction has been made in the past 10 years. From 2003 to 2005, Ethiopia issued land use certificates for 20 million land parcels without even a sketch map. In June 2012, Rwanda completed a country-wide programme to adjudicate and demarcate 10.3 million land parcels mainly using orthophoto maps. These programmes, combined with other agricultural and economic interventions, have done wonders for their economies. Both countries have grown at 8%-10% per year in the past half-decade, with Ethiopia reducing extreme poverty from more than 40% to 30% in the last 10 years and Rwanda from 55% to 40%.

Other African countries are following in their footsteps. Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, Mozambique, Namibia, Madagascar, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso have land legislation that permits flexibility in measuring rural land boundaries.

Different, faster action

To expand on these successes, land professionals must lead the way, moving away from rigid surveying standards and technologies to more flexible ones that meet today's needs while anticipating those of tomorrow. Relevance, not accuracy, has to be the guiding principle, and we must take advantage of modern technology.

A growing number of people are already advocating these ideals. Stig Enemark calls it 'spatially fit for purpose', Robin McLaren calls it 'crowd-sourcing', Barry, Molero and Muhsen call it the 'talking titler' (See [More information](#)), while the [Global Land Tool Network](#) calls it a 'social tenure domain model' (UN-Habitat 2008). Common to all is the desire for simple, affordable, fast and community-supported approaches to designing spatial frameworks and to recording land rights and related information. The initiators are social innovators and we should work with them to test and appraise these initiatives and other investments and technologies to ensure that they are technically, economically, socially and environmentally sound to meet society's needs. The bottom line? We need practical, bold new solutions to document the land rights of billions of people in rural areas and urban slums to get them out of informality and extreme poverty.

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We must deal with educational and research institutions to ensure that curricula for surveyors and other professionals move away from serving only a few people with over-engineered, costly solutions and instead be able to serve the masses, to recognise a continuum of land rights, and to focus on recording rights quickly and cheaply. The organisation of work in ministries of lands, land commissions, and survey and mapping agencies must also change, and transformation must reach suppliers and service providers, such as consultancy firms, and advocacy groups and development partners.

Global best practice

Surveyors and other land professionals must champion this change, modernising and simplifying surveying and mapping regulations to take advantage of modern technology to do things faster and cheaper. We should pilot new innovations, scale up global best practices and successful pilots and learn from the experiences of China, Vietnam, Thailand, Ethiopia, Rwanda and many others. The World Bank is prepared to support sound land governance with policy reforms and investments. Its US\$4.5bn programme on improving land governance in sub-Saharan Africa will include not only documenting land rights but also increasing land access for the poor, increasing land administration efficiency, developing land administration in post-conflict countries, developing capacity, resolving land disputes, improving land use planning and management of public land, and strengthening property valuation and land tax policies.

Conclusions

Eradicating extreme poverty is a formidable challenge, but surveyors and other land professionals should see this as an opportunity to improve people's lives flexibly and urgently. The World Bank seeks to strengthen partnerships, especially at country level and with FIG, to improve land governance for development. With support, we are confident that extreme poverty will be eradicated by 2030, when FIG will be 152 years old. Our work must begin now.

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Further information

- This article is a shortened version of the original that was published as an [International Federation of Surveyors article of the month](#) (September 2013). It is based on the author's book, [Securing Africa's land for shared prosperity](#), published by the World Bank in July 2013
- Barry M., Molero R., and Muhsen A., Evolutionary land tenure information system development: the talking titler methodology, International Federation of Surveyors article of the month, February 2013
- Enemark S., 2012, Sustainable land governance: spatially enabled, fit for purpose, and supporting the global agenda, paper presented at the Annual World Bank Conference on Land and Poverty, Washington DC, 23-26 April
- McLaren RA., 2011, Crowd-sourcing support of land administration: a new, collaborative partnership between citizens and land professions, [RICS Research](#)
- UN-HABITAT, 2008, [Secure land rights for all](#), Nairobi
- Africa's pulse: An analysis of issues shaping Africa's economic future, April 2013, Vol. 7, World Bank, Washington, DC

- Related competencies include: [T007](#) , [T057](#) , [T072](#)