

# Setting the world to rights

30 June 2016

## The Fit-For-Purpose approach to land administration enables quick and affordable security of tenure, Robin McLaren and Stig Enemark maintain

---

Many developed countries have strong institutions and laws to protect citizens' relationship with land. Administration services secure and often guarantee rights and support the land markets that underpin modern economies.

However, in most developing countries this is not the case, and 70% of the world's population has no guaranteed security of tenure. People are excluded from formal land administration systems and cannot register or safeguard their rights. The majority of these are the poor and most vulnerable, who live at constant risk of eviction. This creates significant instabilities and inequalities, undermines better environmental stewardship and deters responsible private investment.

### Land administration

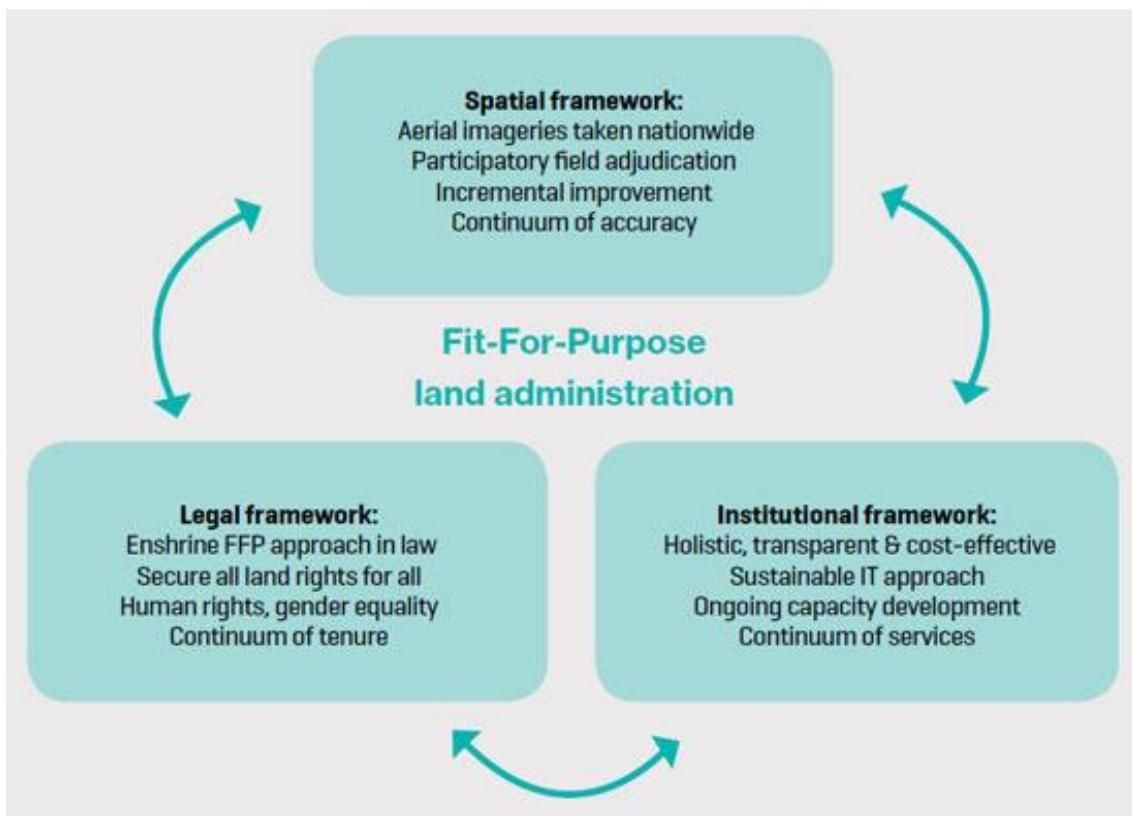
A land administration system provides governments with an infrastructure for securing land tenure rights, determining valuation and taxation of land and managing its use and development. It exhibits the principles of responsible land governance in the framework of national land policies.

Attempts to secure land tenure by introducing land administration practices from developed countries have failed as a result of weak institutions, inappropriate laws and regulations, high costs, complexity, lack of capacity, inadequate maintenance and long timeframes for implementation; in many cases, these practices only strengthen the elite's hold on land. New approaches are required to build affordable, scalable and sustainable systems that can help the poor.

## The Fit-For-Purpose approach

UN-Habitat's Global Land Tool Network has recently released the reference document [Fit-For-Purpose Land Administration Guiding Principles](#), written by ourselves and Dr Christiaan Lemmen of the Netherlands' Cadastre, Land Registry and Mapping Agency, [Kadaster](#).

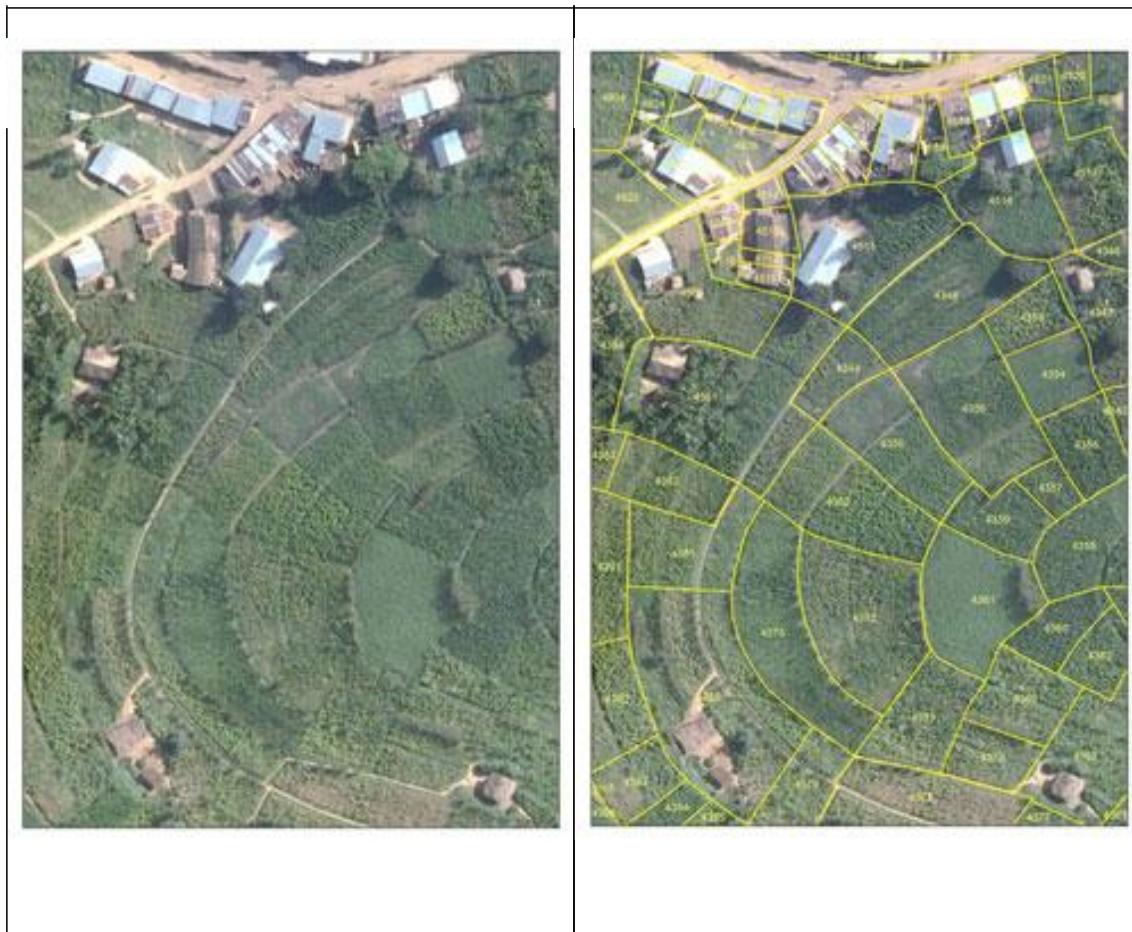
We recently agreed [UN Sustainable Development agenda](#) requires good land governance. New approaches have been tested by implementing nationwide land administration in countries such as Rwanda and Ethiopia, as well as in Central and South-East Asia. Many Eastern European countries also established such systems as they underwent transition from centrally planned to market-based economies in the 1990s.



**Figure1: The FFP concept**

The experiences of these countries have informed the Fit-For-Purpose (FFP) approach (see Figure 1). In Rwanda, systematic, nationwide land registration began after piloting in 2009 and was completed in 4 years.

The parcel boundaries were identified on prints of orthophotos (see Figure 2) using locally trained land officers acting as trusted intermediaries. This reduced the need for conventional surveying techniques to a minimum.



**Figure2: Example from Rwanda showing aerial imagery (left), from which the parcelboundaries are easily identified (right)**

The approach resulted in 10.4 million parcels being registered and 8.8 million lease certificates being issued. The average unit cost was around \$6 per parcel, subject to specific national conditions. Benefits are already evident, especially in terms of social stability and economic development, and the national framework of land rights is providing opportunities to raise property-based taxes, improve state land management, increase inward investment and enable better land stewardship.

The FFP approach is shaped by a country's requirements and does not always need the latest technology or costly, time-consuming field surveys. It can be adapted to different regional topographies and development densities and deal with variations in tenure type.

A nationwide approach encompassing all tenure types and land is then affordable and can be achieved in a reasonable timeframe, depending on the size of the country. Finally, the approach can be sustained by a network of locally trained land officers, who expand the limited number of land professionals.

### **Key characteristics**

The 3 key characteristics to FFP are: a focus on the purpose and how best to achieve it; flexible design to work within constraints; and an emphasis on the perspective of incremental improvement to provide continuity.

1. **The purpose.** The focus is mainly on ensuring secure tenure for all, and then on how this can be achieved. The phrase ?As little as possible ? as much as necessary? reflects the FFP approach.
2. **Flexibility.** FFP is about flexibility in terms of demands for spatial accuracy and for shaping the legal and institutional frameworks to accommodate societal needs as best as possible. FFP also includes the flexibility for different kinds of tenure, ranging from social or customary tenure to more formal kinds such as private ownership and leasehold.
3. **Incremental improvement.** The systems should be designed to meet basic societal needs by balancing the costs, accuracy and time involved. This creates a ?minimum viable product?. Incremental upgrading and improvement can respond to societal and legal needs and emerging economic opportunities.

## The concept

There are 3 core components to FFP: the spatial, legal and institutional frameworks. Each is flexible and can be improved in response to societal needs and financial resources (see Figure 1).

The spatial framework aims to represent the way that land is occupied and used. The scale and accuracy should support security of legal rights and tenure, as well as managing these rights and the use of land and natural resources through the institutional framework.

FFP therefore needs to be enshrined in land law, and the institutional framework must be designed in an integrated, transparent and user-friendly way to administer this regulatory set-up. This administration again requires reliable and up-to-date land information, provided through the spatial framework.

## Distinctive features

While conventional cadastral systems use documentation of the surveyed land parcels as a basis for entering rights into a land registry, FFP uses aerial or satellite imagery to identify, delineate and adjudicate the visible parcel boundaries, and the rights are determined and registered. This is done by locally trained land officers and involves all stakeholders. Furthermore, while conventional cadastral systems are highly standardised, the FFP approach is flexible in terms of the accuracy demanded and tenure types to be secured. The land administration system can be upgraded and incrementally improved.

### Aims of the guide

It is hoped that the UN-Habitat guide will support the implementation of sustainable, affordable land administration systems in developing countries, enabling security of tenure for all and effective management of land use and natural resources. This, in turn, will foster economic growth, social equality and environmental sustainability.

FFP will involve significant change from all stakeholders in the land sector and has to be sensitively managed. There is increasing political pressure for change that can more effectively support the global land agenda and contribute to the global challenges of the 21st century.

Key elements of this are structured testing, knowledge sharing and especially advocacy from global land institutions. Bodies such as the World Bank, UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, UN-Habitat, the UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management and the International Federation of Surveyors as well as RICS have key roles.

StigEnemark is Professor of Land Management in the [Department of Development and Planning at Aalborg University](#), Denmark and Robin McLaren is Director, [Know Edge Ltd](#)

## Further information

- Related competencies include [Mapping](#), [Cadastral and land management](#), [Access and rights over land](#)
- This feature is taken from the RICS *Land journal* (May/June 2016)