

A practical guide to preparing,  
implementing and ensuring  
sustainability of reforms to property  
rights registration systems.

# Real Estate Registration and Cadastre

Practical Lessons and  
Experiences - Forewords

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## Forewords

Professor Peter Dale

As in many areas of professional activity, there is theory and there is practice. The former tends to be based on the ideal, or what is assumed to be, while the latter deals with hard facts and reality and is the starting point for this book. Gavin Adlington and his co-authors have each worked at the sharp end and have learnt the hard way what works and what does not. They share their experiences in what follows.

Land is a fundamental without which we simply would not exist. It is as important as the air that we breathe and the water without which no living thing can survive. It is so important that we take it for granted. It is not just a physical substance consisting of the earth and rocks that underpin us and the vegetation that grows upon it. It is also an abstract concept of rights and responsibilities that embraces law, cultural behaviour and economics. The ways in which we use and value it determines how well we and all living creatures can and will survive.

Land raises complex issues, many of which are touched upon in the experiences shared by the authors. Solutions to the resulting problems vary across the globe, although within such diversity there are many common threads. We can all learn from each other, even though we may draw different conclusions for our own environment or see only a few sides of a multi-faceted spinning coin. We need to understand land within its wider context before we adopt measures to administer it for the good of all. Too often there has been a silo mentality, overlooking the bigger picture while we address small parts of a vast jigsaw. This often manifests itself in competing objectives between government agencies. As a result, land administrators need to address institutional issues every bit as much as technical ones.

Our understanding of land depends on access to accurate information, and hence techniques of land information management, especially using modern computer technology, underpin the ensuing chapters. For starters, we need to compile records of who claims what areas of land. Territoriality applies to individuals, to communities and to nations as a whole. Social and economic stability require us to address this and since patterns of land ownership change over time, the system of recording must be dynamic and capable of continuous updating. Designing complex Information Technology (IT) systems is no easy matter and there are many examples around the world of IT systems that have failed at great expense. Lessons are there to be learnt and, in the context of land, many appear throughout this book.

IT is, however, only a means to an end, not an end in itself. The aim is better land management and, with it, improved social security and cohesion thus underpinning economic development. This requires a legal framework that is fit for purpose and a set of land policies that embrace both human and environmental needs. Even these are insufficient without good administrative management. It is no surprise therefore that the text makes references to the need to listen to the people on the ground, to check the reality of everything and to build the capacity to deliver what is required. Management skills are all important and capacity building is the means to achieve these. The experience of the authors and the lessons that they pass on in the ensuing chapters should help to that end. There is much wisdom here for readers to mark, learn and inwardly digest.

Kate Fairlie

Secure tenure is linked to multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 2, 5, 12, 16). It is a fundamental safety net and basis for empowerment for vulnerable women and men around the world. It's an essential precursor to many land-based climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, an enabler of food security, the basis for infrastructure and economic growth.

A wealth of recent publications recognise these facts, particularly those publications calling for fit-for-purpose land administration to address the significant 'land tenure gap' that many developing countries face<sup>1</sup>. Yet few address the actual practice – being the day-to-day slog, for want of a better word – of realising secure tenure at scale. This slog is experienced by practitioners around the world – be they World Bank or donor country staff, government counterparts or private sector consultants.

At the same time it is a well-recognised paradox that young practitioners are unable to find jobs in the sector without experience and are unable to get experience without jobs. This at a time of low surveyor numbers internationally – and at a time when professions of the future are increasingly likely to transcend disciplinary boundaries. This 'how to' guide of sorts, then, is a welcome response from such seasoned professionals as Gavin, Tony, Robin and Rумыana.

Knowledge management itself is of paramount importance - not simply in the context of an ageing (and retiring) surveying profession, but in the international development arena at large (where wheel reinvention is a favourite pastime). Yet knowledge management is frequently poorly implemented. It is certainly not an easy thing to tap out the knowledge of your years in a cohesive manner on paper – or on screen in this case – but Gavin and colleagues have managed this admirably. It is to be hoped that greying(!) professionals in their footsteps likewise find the time to document and impart the key lessons – and crucially, the mistakes alongside the wins - of a lifetime of experience.

It is refreshing also to see a practitioner perspective, not simply because the existing, more theoretical takes are typically more difficult for those less experienced to translate from theory into practice, but because such practical examples typically demonstrate how one moves 'beyond the silo.' This practical handbook provides a unique step-by-step guide to approaching land administration projects; it spends a significant proportion of its length on those essential soft skills, emphasising how the application of such skills can make, or break, projects. Whilst it begins – as many land administration tomes do – with the economic case, it is the socially-embedded nature of land that is at the heart of subsequent chapters. There is likewise significant emphasis placed on devising a team with complementary skills and the essential nature of early and ongoing stakeholder engagement alongside the more technical elements of land registries and boundary mapping.

I take some issue with Gavin's statement that 'good consultants in the land sector are very rare' – but in the style of this book, having identified the problem, he seeks to solve it. Having had the privilege to work directly with Gavin and Robin, and indirectly with Tony and Rумыana, I am pleased that their knowledge and experience is captured here and look forward to the possibility of future updates and addendums.

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, there is a lengthy and valuable bibliography that provides an essential reading list for any and all seeking to work in this field.