

# Towards a Spatially Enabled Namibia

Opinions | 2019-05-24

Page no:



Celina Awala

## CELINA AWALA

**EXPANDING economic activities and increasing human requirements place growing pressure on the capabilities of national land administration systems around the globe. Namibia is no exception. The relationship of humankind to land is dynamic due to rapid developments and population growth.**

Current and future land administration systems must manage the increasingly complex relationship between human beings and land in terms of land rights, restrictions, responsibilities, value, use and development.

Spatial data and information are catalysts in the determination of the ongoing demand for responsive and sustainable land administration. They support the decision-making process, and the management and use of land as a national asset.

Spatial data are geographically referenced data. The term has been used interchangeably in research and practice, with names such as geographical information, geospatial data, land information, geoinformation, to mention just a few. Spatial data can be used in various

technological applications to study and analyse spatial-related phenomena. It can aid in answering spatial-related questions of “what happens where”?

Data and information about land is a major asset to governments as it facilitates good governance, and is essential for informed policy decision-making in the public and private sectors. In general, spatial data is crucial for better analysis and understanding of phenomenon patterns in relation to space on land.

Namibia aspires to become an industrialised nation by the year 2030, as stated in the Vision 2030 objectives and the fifth National Development Plan (NDP5). Subsequently, the African Union (AU) agenda 2063 and the United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs) call for economic growth, sustainable development and improved living standards, and the well-being of all citizens.

These high-level objectives place enormous pressure on the capacity and capability of the current land administration systems to provide up-to-date, fit-for-purpose spatial data and related information and services. Spatial data and information are the backbone of a well-functioning land administration system, and play a crucial role in answering location-based questions of who owns which parcel of land? What is the parcel extent? Where in the country the parcel located?

Generally, transportation, environmental protection, housing, agriculture and disaster management are some of the functional areas that could benefit from the use and integration of spatial data in their work processes.

As a country, Namibia has laid a good foundation with regards to the legal and institutional framework through the enactment of the Land Survey Act 1993 (Act No 33 of 1993), Statistics Act 2011 (Act No 9 of 2011), the national spatial data infrastructure policy of 2015 -- and other sectoral laws that guide and facilitate the collection, management and distribution of spatial data.

These and other reforms are an indication of commitment by the Namibian government to improve the use of spatial data for effective and efficient decision-making, which will lead to improved land governance and economic growth.

The importance of spatial data in land administration and governance have been recently demonstrated with the production and publication of the land statistics report (Namibia Land Statistics 2018) by the National Statistics Agency (NSA). The report is crucial and unique due to

its ability to visualise the distribution and extent of commercial farming units in the country. Additional analysis based on different attributes can be done on a live database.

This and other benefits could be realised in a more effective and efficient manner if we embrace the power of a spatially enabled society. A “spatially enabled” society and government is one that makes use and benefits from a wide range of spatial data, information and services to organise its land and water resources-related activities (FIG, 2012).

However, the abovementioned benefits and many more cannot be realised with the status quo in our public sector employment structure. We currently do not have provision for positions of geo-information analysts/practitioners on the public service employment structure, except for land surveyors and land valuers, who are merely data producers.

This has demonstrated the gap and lack of personnel with capabilities to carry out a spatially intelligent analysis. Consequently, our graduates who can integrate and manipulate the data are either unemployed, or employed in wrong positions.

In addition, up-to-date data and information can be achieved through the decentralisation and deconcentration of power and responsibilities of collecting and management to the lower levels of governance and administration: regional and local authorities.

Hence the call for the government to amend the public service employment structure to make provision for the geo-information specialists and practitioners, specially to place them in local authorities and regional councils. In addition, the government should provide funding to train more people in the field of geo-information sciences and technology.

In light of the current economic challenges, the country may not be in a position to place personnel at all the relevant institutions, but gradual efforts can be made by making provision for geoinformation specialists on the public service employment structure.

Furthermore, efforts should be made to fund more trainees, awareness creation and employing the few available graduates in the field to speed up the process of spatial data integration in land administration services and other functional areas to provide visually convincing information.

\* Celina Awala is a lecturer in the department of land and property science at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (Nust). She writes in her personal capacity.