

Land and Poverty Conference 2019: Catalyzing Innovation

“Information is power only if used “-Improving Tenure security in informal settlements using participatory data collection: The case of Informal settlements in Gobabis Namibia

The paper looks at understanding the land tenure security of informal settlers, and how socio-economic and spatial data generated by communities themselves has been used in aiding the implementation of solutions that are pro-poor and Fit for Purpose. Additionally, it provides a description on how enumeration has an influence on the perception of tenure security. Could participatory enumerations be a catalyst for improving services and registering land rights? Can the data that informal settlers produce be suitable for using in planning and land rights registration?

The paper considers the data producers and the data users, in the investigation. There is a consensus that information is power, the paper investigates how effective the data produced by communities is in improving conditions in informal settlements.

Currently about one billion people in the world live in informal settlements/Slums. For the urban poor, staying in informal settlements in substandard structures is the only alternative for housing due to high land prices and the cumbersome land delivery process. Majority of informal settlement residents are faced with tenure insecurity, limited access to water and toilets. The lack of sanitation facilities has been a contributing factor to the spread of disease in informal settlements. Dwellers have no other options but to use open defecation as the only alternative for toilets, which is a danger for women and children. It has been recorded that 40% of Namibians are living in informal settlements. While tenure security is the determinant for development. Priorities of governments are at firstly on delivering services and security of tenure is secondary. Insecure tenure influences the confidence of households in informal settlements to invest in their structures due to uncertainty over development priorities of government for the land they occupy. Conventional land registration methods are lengthy and expensive for the urban poor; adding to the challenge for the urban poor to obtain secured land titles. Secured land rights has been identified as an important determinant for investment. Various solutions have been implemented for registering of land rights. The Namibian government is in the initial stages of piloting the Flexible Land Tenure Act, twenty plus years after its conception. The objective of the act is to provide alternative titles, that are easier and cheaper to administer than the conventional system.

Tenure insecurity affects the confidence of settlers to invest in infrastructure and the upgrading of their homes. For effective land administration, tenure security is a vital aspect; as it allows the land occupiers to use land on a continuous basis, free from interferences from outsiders. Moreover, land tenure security is important for poverty reduction. For households to be tenure secure there is a need for a positive interaction between various elements of the land tenure system. While there is a consensus that tenure security leads to improvement of living conditions and higher investments, there is not a uniform definition on tenure security. This is a challenge for stakeholders in collecting data for monitoring progress. To understand levels of tenure security, there is a need to have comparable data on the conditions of the informal settlements. The lack of data on informal communities has been a challenge for planning agencies to either monitor progress or prioritize improvements. Moreover, it has been used as an excuse to exclude the poor from planning platforms, furthering the economic discrimination poor communities are faced with. Poverty and land tenure insecurity are linked to exclusion and injustice. In finding solutions, there is a need to recognize that tenure security is a determining factor in poverty reduction; in that way, it was linked to the first goal under the Sustainable Development Goals set by world leaders is ending extreme poverty and hunger.

For a land administration system to support the efforts of the poor, by recognizing the continuum of land rights for informal settlements, there is a need for data that is generated involving the affected communities.

In recent years, contrary to the norm the urban poor who form part of federated saving groups, have demonstrated that they can provide solutions to their own challenges. Federated groups have used participatory enumerations as a tool to advocate for improvements, form and enhance partnerships with stakeholders. With one billion people living in informal settlements and diminishing government budgets, the inclusion of participatory methods in delivering secure tenure through land rights registration, provides an opportunity to enhance cooperation between government and affected communities. Participatory enumerations have been effective in preventing evictions. Enumerations are further used to count residents in informal settlements and prioritize development. The power of information is demonstrated by how data derived from participatory enumerations has been used by communities to access services such as water, sanitation or roads and achieve tenure security. The process followed by groups are; profiling to get a general overview of informal settlement. Participatory enumerations, are used to collect household level data accompanied by participatory mapping of settlement spatial features. There is a consensus among affiliates of Slum/Shack Dwellers International is that participatory data collection methods provide tenure security, although for some settlements it does not happen immediately. Countries that have used participatory methods in registration have achieved complete registration in ample time. The prime example is the land rights registration in Rwanda, where political commitment, full public participation and consent were some of the vital elements for successful land registration. Success of the systems was supplemented by technical and financial donor support.

Recently the Namibian government started the process for implementing the flexible land tenure system. The system provides an opportunity to improve tenure security and improve living conditions of people in informal settlements. Implementing agencies have an opportunity to use system thinking in delivering Flexible Tenure System titles. Using available data on informal settlements to determine baselines by involving the communities in collecting and updating data on their own settlements.

The study uses primary and secondary data to understand the power of information and the influence of enumeration on perception of tenure security. This was carried out by analyzing the socio-economic and spatial data on informal settlements in Gobabis to understand whether authorities are planning for informal settlers using available data. The study was carried out using a mixed method, through semi-structured interviews with local authority officials working and representatives from civil society supporting the informal settlers in implementing participatory data collection and planning. To understand the effectiveness of participatory enumerations for tenure security, households from three different informal settlements in Gobabis were interviewed using close and open-ended questions. In this study, tenure security relates to how households perceive their tenure security, if they think and feel they are protected against forceful eviction and can further seek legal recourse in the instance that their residency in the settlement is disturbed. Additionally, the degree of confidence of households in bequeathing the structure, selling, and making improvements which are components associated with de facto tenure security.

Data generated by communities shows that local authorities can implement the continuum of land rights approach for improving the tenure security levels in informal settlements. This study shows how communities have used socio-economic and spatial data on their living conditions as a tool for advocacy. It presents a continuum of data generation and use, that illustrates how the engagement of stakeholders has contributed to improved living conditions in the informal settlements that are active in data collection and use. The continuum of data generation and use showed how settlements

that have only used enumerations for counting of residents, have a lower level of tenure security, compared to settlements that have discussed findings with local authority and started negotiations for secure land rights. The study recognizes that the process followed by saving groups are complex and not linear. The continuum generated, provides a step to test it further, to explore if this applies to other communities that have collected data. Additionally, it illustrates the power that data has when it is used as a tool for negotiation.

The analysis shows that when data is not used for the purposes it was generated it limits the effectiveness of the data. The data collectors and users all must be vital participants in the delivering of solutions. Finding a way to effectively coordinate the interactions of local authorities, national government, civil society and communities affected is vital.

The paper concludes that, if the data generated by the community is to be used for; land recordation, decision-making or to prove ownership, there is a need for direct involvement of local authority officials in the management of the data. Allot of time and funds is invested in the community data collection, if this is not properly managed, it will be unusable in the future. The limited participation of respondents in informal settlements in the participatory enumeration process, provides an element of concern in the sustainability of data collection processes to achieve desired objectives, for tenure security and service improvement. The participation and ownership of community in enumerations is the element of power.

Keywords: Tenure security; Informal settlements; participatory data collection; Flexible Land Tenure System; Continuum of Land Rights