

Implementing Land Administration Systems That Will Fast-Track Land Delivery

• **MENARE ROYAL MABAKENG**

IMPLEMENTING improved land administration immediately will save Namibia from having to fix urban development problems in the future. While the proliferation of informal settlements creates alarm, it is also an opportunity to get to the root of the urban housing challenge. Informal settlement growth is indicative of poor implementation of the land administration system.

Land administration has been a specialised field for 25 years and embraces a range of skills. The UN Economic Commission for Europe defines land administration, widely recognised by researchers and practitioners in the field as all-encompassing, as “the process of determining, recording and disseminating information about ownership, value and use of land and its associated resources”.

It’s aimed at supporting efficient land markets and effective land management. Among others, it includes the determination (sometimes called ‘adjudication’) of land rights, land surveying and

maintaining detailed land records for the benefit of society.

The importance of land administration in improving land delivery should not be ignored as it can be at the cost of revenue collection, improved service delivery and creating housing opportunities for the urban poor.

Currently, land administrators, politicians and others are focused on the rights to private property and profit, forgetting the rights of individuals who live on land without security of tenure, individual water points, toilets, electricity and proper sanitation. Some informal settlement residents are resigned to living a rural lifestyle in the city and believe that services available in formal areas are not for them. This should not be anyone’s fate.

Urban areas are places where strangers congregate and become family. Everyone has the right to the city and the right to dignity through access to services and improved infrastructure. Better land administration systems can make a difference in how residents settle and in this way reduce the effects of natural disasters (such as flooding and shack fires) as well as help avoid waterborne diseases

CORE ISSUES

A well-developed land administration system provides authorities with a complete inventory of land occupation and detailed ownership information, which can support planning for future growth. Using population growth estimates and current land stock provides an opportunity to implement approaches that are pro-poor and cost effective.

Using analyses of past trends on land demand and delivery, innovative approaches to solving housing problems can be implemented.

Some local authorities have done well, while others continue to struggle. If challenges persist, local authorities should consider using land administrators with the capacity to deal with the people-to-land relationship. Specifying how to improve tenure security.

Importantly, for Namibia to reap the benefits of improved land administration systems, there is a need for high-level political support and recognition of the need for land administration systems.

A contributing factor to poor land delivery is that Namibia adopted Western approaches without applying context-specific updates to systems. For the last 20 years, the focus has been on customary land registration. It does have some benefits such as improved tenure security and



Menare Royal Mabakeng

women’s access to land rights. Government’s recent move towards more robust urban land reform is commendable. This should be supported through implementing improved land administration, focusing on the registration of land occupation and linked to spatial referencing.

Are shack fires avoidable? Is it possible to provide each Namibian in need of housing with secure land and to decongest informal settlements? The answer is yes.

Is it possible to provide solutions using current approaches, which focus on contractor-led housing delivery, no participation by residents in planning, and not using land information systems. The answer is no.

POSSIBILITIES

The poor administration of

land raises many questions: Do planning authorities only plan but not administer land? Shack fires can be avoided, while the relocation of residents in flood-prone areas is possible before floods occur. How often are sites inspected for compliance? Land doesn’t move, why does it seem as if the planning authorities can’t locate the land before a problem emerges?

In addition, we seldom learn from the past. A quick proposal that will not require setting up a committee or commission: Start by capacitating local authorities with land administration skills to help guide solutions.

For anyone observing the growth of informal settlements at Okahandja and other towns across Namibia, it is clear that local authorities do not have a good management approach to how land is administered.

Urban land is now encroaching on rural areas as town boundaries are extended because of the high demand for housing. In most urban areas, the remnants of apartheid town planning are still visible.

Land administration before independence focused on land rights for whites, insecure land rights for blacks, prevention of freedom of movement, and relocation at the behest of the authorities. What are the similarities to how business is done today? The poor are at one

end of the city, the wealthy on the other, divided by long highways. Low service delivery for some, limited trees in some neighbourhoods and an abundance in others. All this affects how people in the city experience life.

Urban planning cannot take place in isolation. It should be embedded with an improved land administration system. Any effective land administration system will bring about benefits for local communities and local authorities. Local landgrabbing can be avoided, as it is mostly the result of misinformation on land allocation, a lack of transparency, the heartbreaking cost of land and slow delivery. The illegal occupation of unused land (land grabbing) usually increases during, nearing and post elections.

Those who make promises possibly don’t grasp the full nature of the problems, and solutions become elusive once they take office. All levels of government need to be provided with the capacity to implement improved land administration. If not, we will continue enabling problems that make the poor poorer to the detriment of all of us.

** Menare Royal Mabakeng is a lecturer in the Department of Land and Property Sciences at the Namibia University of Science and Technology. This article is written in her personal capacity.*