



Socio-Economic Land Data and Land Improvement Strategy for Uganda

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Abstract

At least 75% of Ugandans resident in rural areas depend on agriculture and access to land is major determinant of the sustainability of their livelihoods. Land ownership in Uganda is characterized by overlapping land rights i.e., the recognition of private ownership as well as customary ownership of the same land parcel. A challenge faced by the land sector in Uganda is that most of the land in the country is not registered. Estimates indicate that only about 27% of land in Uganda is registered partly due to the cost of acquiring secure tenure documentation. In 2013, Uganda adopted a new National Land Policy to guide

Uganda's land resources development and use. As part of the policy, a National Land Information System (NLIS) was established that digitized hardcopy land titles, maps and other land documents. In addition, the country is implementing a *Systematic Land Adjudication and Certification (SLAAC)* program that offers free and subsidized titles for unregistered land. Despite the above land reforms, the availability of socio-economic data and sharing of land information among the various land stakeholders remains a challenge. Existing efforts geared towards finding solutions to various land-related issues and challenges are often implemented in a stand-alone manner. A National Help Desk would offer an opportunity to establish a platform that can support both setting up a database and identifying key issues to be addressed during land surveys. Given varying institutional mandates and usage of land data, legislation is required to enable the integration of different forms of land data, e.g. geospatial land data and socio-economic land data—to promote sharing and raising awareness of available land data.

Introduction

Land tenure security is critical for the development of the agricultural sector in Africa. Women account for 70% of the African farmers, and most are locked out of land use due to lack of ownership due to customary land laws (World Bank, 2013). Tenure security hinges on the attainment of good land governance. Uganda is located in East Africa, bordering South Sudan in the North, Kenya in the East, Tanzania in the South and Rwanda and DRC Congo in the West. The size of the Ugandan economy in 2020/21 was at US\$ 36.5 billion (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Over time, the agricultural sector's contribution (which employs the majority of the population) to GDP has declined from 55% in 1992 to about 23% by 2020. Land ownership in Uganda is characterized by overlapping land rights, i.e. the recognition of private ownership as well as customary ownership of the same land parcel and the fact that most landowners in the country do not have any formal registration of their interests on the land. Due to the overlapping system of land rights, Uganda faces a concurrent situation of land shortages amidst large tracts of unused land. This challenge relates to the historical phenomena of “absentee landlords”—landed families given land by the colonialist in neighboring kingdoms under the 1900 agreement (Bret, 1973).

At least 75% of Ugandans resident in rural areas depend on agriculture for their livelihood, and access to land is a major determinant of the sustainability of livelihoods for the majority of them (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2017). In 2013, Uganda adopted a new National Land Policy to guide Uganda's land resources development and use. One of the primary policy objectives included a re-orientation of the land sector in national development by articulating management coordination between the land sector and other productive sectors in the economy. A major drawback for the land sector in Uganda is that most of the land in the country is not registered partly because the cost of

acquiring secure tenure documentation is prohibitive to ordinary Ugandans. To increase tenure security and increase the speed of settling land transaction, the government of Uganda adopted an electronic National Land Information System (NLIS). The NLIS has progressively overhauled the colonial institutional framework for land administration and land management, especially through decentralizing land services by bringing land services nearer to the populace to make them more efficient, cost-effective, and accessible. This policy brief highlights the main findings of a study that aimed to assess the infrastructure and resources available towards establishing a help desk in Uganda.

Methodology

A scoping and situational assessment was undertaken in November 2019. The assessment established the needs, challenges, existing efforts, data gaps, technical gaps, and current decision-making status regarding access to land data. The objective was to help determine the value and niche for the proposed Uganda National Land Help Desk. The scoping mission undertook institutional visits to various land users and performed a situation analysis of land administration, including stakeholder identification and available data inventory tools. In addition, institutional mandates were analyzed, focusing on challenges and existing efforts. The following institutions were visited during the scoping period (representing the following stakeholders, i.e. government, academic and private sector). Within the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, the team interacted with: (i) Department of registration, (ii) Department of Physical Planning, (iii) Department of Land administration, (iv) Directorate of Surveying and Mapping as well as the NLIC and the Kampala zonal office for the NLIC. Other government departments visited included: Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries, Ministry of Water and Environment and National Forestry Authority. Beyond the scoping mission, national household surveys were analyzed to provide a snapshot of Uganda's land's socio-economic status.

Towards a socio-economic land data inventory

Uganda has four recognized forms of land tenure: (i) *mailo* land—that confers ownership in perpetuity; (ii) customary land—land owned and used by the community collectively; (iii) freehold land—land provided by the colonial government to individuals and other institutions; and (iv) leasehold land—land acquired from both government or individuals but only for a limited duration—usually 49 or 99 years. Table 1 shows that, on average, a household owns 4 acres of land. In terms of distribution, customary land parcels- allocated by chiefs or clan heads to individual households- are the most prevalent (an average of 2.8 acres). Indeed, customary tenure is the most dominant system, with at least 73% of the household land owned under this system.

Table 1: Household ownership of land by size (acres) and tenure status

	All	Type of tenure			
		Freehold	Leasehold	Mailo	Customary
All	4.07	5.7%	5.2%	18.9%	69.8%
Female Headed Households	2.92	5.8%	5.8%	21.6%	66.4%
Urban	5.51	2.9%	36.7%	12.3%	47.7%
Rural	3.91	6.1%	2.0%	19.7%	72.9%
<i>Regions</i>					
Central	4.27	1.6%	17.3%	74.7%	4.4%
Eastern	3.46	3.8%	0.3%	0.3%	95.7%
Northern	4.40	0.7%	0.7%	-	98.0%
Western	4.51	13.7%	1.6%	0.4%	83.8%

Source: Author's calculations from the 2005/06 Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS)

Although the National Land Information Centre (NLIC) is responsible for handling socio-economic data, Uganda has a wide variety of other land stakeholders. Key public stakeholders include Uganda Land Commission, District Land Boards, National Forestry Authority, Courts of Law, and the Uganda Gazette. Table 2 shows the level of engagement of public stakeholders in data collection and archiving. The same table shows that the major private stakeholders include: registered proprietors, commercial banks, registered surveyors, religious institutions, real estate agents, and Trustees. The significant strengths of land stakeholders include the: availability of competent technical staff, enabling policies, Laws and regulation, clear roles and responsibilities of the relevant committees as stated in the Physical Planning Act, establishment of Ministerial Zonal Offices (MZOs) as a strategy of services' decentralization. Furthermore, hardware and software availability is available for data collection, cleaning, storage, analysis, and an established Uganda Geodetic Reference Frame. Finally, there are well-established links to banks and professional bodies vital in resource mobilization for sustainability.

The weaknesses of public institutions include significant staffing gaps coupled with inadequate financing to various sectors. Other challenges relate to the lack of system integration and significant delays in land registration. Related, surveying services are privatized, and this affects the cost of land surveys. On the other hand, there are opportunities to develop the land sector in Uganda. For example, the National Spatial Data Infrastructure Framework and policies have been developed to free data access to the public; however, the legislation to enable the integration of different stakeholders is still missing. This is because the current institutions were established and are governed by stand-alone legislation.

Table 2: Key Land Stakeholders in Uganda and nature of decision making

	Stakeholder/Organization/Institution	Type	Data Collectors/Generators	Data Analyzers/Processor	Intermediary	Decision Makers	Enablers	Beneficiary	Data Archivers
	National Land Information Centre (NLIC) /MZO	Public							
1	Registered Proprietors	Private							
2	Commercial Banks	Private							
3	Courts of Law/Administrator General	Public							
4	Real Estate Agencies	Private							
5	Registered Surveyors	Private							
6	District Land Boards	Public							
7	National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)	Public							
8	Uganda Gazette	Public							
9	National Forestry Authority (NFA)	Public							
10	Religious Institutions	Private							
11	Non Government Organization (NGOs)	Private							
12	Trustees	Private							
13	Uganda Land Commission	Private							

Land improvement strategy

Following the successful establishment of the National Land Information System (NLIS) in 2013, the MLHUD has since 2015 implemented a project on Design, Supply, Installation, and Implementation of National Land Information System Infrastructure (DeSINLISI). The primary objective of the DeSINLISI project is to transform the MLHUD systems into digital format and integrate land registration, land administration, surveying and mapping, physical planning and property valuation and land records. Digitization of hardcopy maps and documents related to land is also critical to promote sharing and information access. The project also covered the construction of new land administration buildings known as Ministerial Zonal Offices (MZOs). The project has also addressed previous land malpractices in the system and generated public revenues to the tune of USD 114 million arising from accurate land valuation and increased frequency of land transactions. The project outsourced the provision and deploying the software used to run the system and is presently part of the overall structure of MLHUD.

In addition, Uganda has also implemented a ***Systematic Land Adjudication and Certification (SLAAC) program*** meant to hasten land registration and tilling. The SLAAC project offers free as well as subsidized titles for unregistered land. Given that large parts of Uganda are not yet surveyed. As such, the lack of essential documents to support land markets and the fact that the SLAAC project is geographically restricted to selected districts need to lobby for external and national resources to expand the SLAAC program.

Policy implications

The need to learn and have platforms that encourage sharing and learning from various ministries and the private sector is necessary. There is fragmentation and no coordination amongst the various existing efforts to find solutions to various land-related issues and challenges. Therefore a platform to promote sharing and awareness is critical in communicating all the work done in various ministries. This platform should also act as a knowledge sharing platform. With the development of the national spatial data infrastructure (NSDI) by the National Planning Authority—the policies and framework under which the NSDI is to be anchored—public access remains key in the success of the NSDI.

There is a need to build the capacity of various land institutions in deriving information from earth observation satellite. Various application example Use of earth observation in Topographical Map updating is required. This is meant to provide updated topographical maps for various users. The Department of Surveying and Mapping

under the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development is currently undertaking this process. Still, there is a need to build more capacity of the staff in map updating as well. The required capacity building includes training in EO applications, database management, invasive species mapping, Wetland demarcation, Valuation of Land and market prices, Knowledge management technologies, and staff development (both individual and institutional skill development).

The following were agreed upon as the next steps towards the implementation of the National Land Help Desk.

- Establishment of a working group from various sectors. This is meant to act point of contacts in multiple ministries, academia and the private sector.
- System to system integration assessment: This is meant to understand which systems exist and the possibility of integration.
- Data collection, training and prototype development based on an integrated approach. The development of the National Land Help Desk should follow the integrated approach with all the point of contacts involved in the various components/elements indicated in image 1.
- Testing, Dissemination. This has to be done before public access is initiated. There is a need to inform the public of the necessary steps and the benefits of the service. The already existing communication channels with the Ministries can be used.

Conclusions

There is a need for legislation to enable the integration of geospatial land data and socio-economic land data. Without the requisite legislation, the various land stakeholders face legal loopholes regarding integrating and sharing data. Some legislation that established land management agencies does not allow sharing of data- especially with non-public entities. Beyond legislation, system-to-system integration is also critical in strengthening institutional linkages and awareness. This will call for a system-to-system integration assessment to determine the ease and possibility of the integration.



Mission

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