

Good Land Governance for the 2030 Agenda

BY

Utoni Nujoma (MP)

Minister of Land Reform

Republic of Namibia

1. I wish to express my gratitude to the organizers of this important meeting for the invitation to the **Fourth High Level Forum on the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management Session**. Namibia was present at the First High Level Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management held in Seoul, Korea in October 2011 and has attended all the subsequent sessions thereafter. Your commitment in sustaining this important meeting in the quest to finding solutions to our common challenges is commendable.

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished Delegates,

2. Allow me to also use this opportunity to express my appreciation and that of my delegation to the host, the **Government and the people of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia** for their warm reception and for accepting to host this important event, the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) for jointly organizing the **Fourth High Level Forum on the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management Session**.

Mr. Chairman,

3. As a Nation, **Namibia will continue to support the joined initiatives** on geospatial information management aimed at strengthening collaboration and advancing the development and use of geospatial data and tools to support global sustainability.
4. This is the **Fourth High Level Forum on the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management Session**, and every session brings more participants. This demonstrates the growing importance of land issues in development. Land issues are increasingly at the center of today's conversation as they cut across different elements of the sustainable development agenda. Working on sustainability issues through the lens of land is key to finding integrated and long-lasting solutions to poverty eradication and shared prosperity.
5. Last year, the United Nations General Assembly adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals, many of which focus directly on the importance of land and its many uses and functions, Paris held the Conference of Parties [COP21], where the importance of land and its uses featured in the conversations about ways to increase both mitigation and adaptation mechanisms in light of climate change. Undoubtedly, the land question will feature prominently in the dialogue on forced displacement at the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul this May. This growing and clearly welcome focus on sustainability is driven by the unrelenting progression of many long-term global trends focused on the urgent need for nations to take action.
6. Urbanization is also accelerating rapidly putting pressure on existing space and infrastructure, increasing land prices and reducing land access especially for the poor. The UN Habitat estimates that 900 million people are currently living in slum conditions, and this number is rising rapidly. The impact of climate change on agricultural production by 2030 will place great responsibility on us to ensure adequate land is available to generate carbon-neutral energy. Recently we have seen escalating forced displacement of people due to conflict, environmental disruption and lack of access to productive land. In 2014, 60 million people were displaced and these require land to be resettled elsewhere.

7. As nations we need to do a number of things to address these increasing and competing demands on land:
 - Ensure that property rights can be transferred in transparent ways to get better and more economic uses while at the same time, protecting against arbitrary allocations.
 - Ensure that women have an equal chance to acquire resources and make decisions about their use in ways that benefit them and their families.
 - Improve access to land and other productive assets to the youth so they can contribute to economic growth.
 - Provide functional property registration and information systems in urban areas for planning purposes, service provision to populations and for Municipalities to capture revenues from land rents and taxes.
 - Prevention of weak and overlapping land rights in rural areas that are often a driver of conflict that contribute to population displacement and prevent the investments needed for significant growth.

8. Arguably land governance is key to achieve sustainable development and to support the global agenda. It talks to our domestic land policies, processes and institutions by which land, property and natural resources are managed. This includes decisions on access to land, land rights, land use, and land development. At the same time, the impact of the legal and institutional frameworks that determine how land related issues are managed has only recently been fully appreciated in most of our countries.

9. The post 2015 Agenda, represented by the 17 Goals is in line with Namibia's overall priority to eradicate poverty as articulated in various domestic policy documents that include, Vision 2030, the Fourth National Development Plan and the 2016 Harambee Prosperity Plan, which is premised on accelerated development on targeted priority areas. This Plan is a product of wide consultations in the fight against poverty. Achieving good governance in land is not easy. Policy reforms to strengthen governance require the political will to overcome opposition from those who benefit from non-transparent decision-making and corruption. Improving governance demands the strong commitment of the people involved, and the development of capacity in order to make changes

possible. A number of countries around the world have recognised the link between improved land governance, poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. While notable achievements have been made, much of the emphasis to date has been on technical improvements of systems and procedures. The political and policy aspects of good governance of land tenure have not yet received the same attention.

10. Key elements of good governance are political and economic principles. Political principles are encapsulated in accountable and representative form of government, equity and racial balance, transparency, rule of law and impartial judiciary, public trust and transparency. This should be complimented with sound economic principles that will engender sustainable economic development. All these are essential in building public trust. The Government of the Republic of Namibia recognizes the importance of these core values, hence their incorporation into the Public Service Charter. The development of the performance management system and its potential deployment in the public service is aimed at institutionalizing these core values. As a land sector our priority is to translate these principles of good governance to the land reform process.
11. The importance of secure and equitable access to land and related resources and the need for responsible governance is recognized by most Pan African organizations. The consortium of the African Union Commission, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, and the African Development Bank have prepared a continental framework and guidelines on land policy development and implementation for use by African Union member states in their efforts to improve the performance of the various land sectors.
12. To make the land reform process more effective, the Ministry undertook a process of reviewing, amending and consolidating the Agricultural Commercial Land Reform Act, Act 6 of 1995 and the Communal Land Reform Act, Act No. 5 of 2002 into one Land Act. The Bill is currently under scrutiny. In order to further the prospects of good governance in land issues, the Ministry of Land Reform is proud of the role it is playing

in keeping good land records, thereby enhancing the integrity of the land market. Our land valuation roll is updated regularly. This has enabled the Government to levy and collect annual land tax that is ploughed back into the land reform programme.

13. Land Reform in the Namibian context is aimed at ensuring equitable redistribution of agricultural land. The minimum requirement would therefore, be that the location, quality and quantity of agricultural land available should be known. Spatial information is essential in this context.

14. To fulfil this demand, Namibia embarked on a systematic acquisition and revision of spatial data. This is being augmented with the modernization of Namibia geodetic infrastructure. Having established seven Continuously Operating Reference Stations, the establishment of 72 first order geodetic beacons based on the international terrestrial reference frame will be concluded in the coming months. A revision cycle of 10 years for the topographic maps has been maintained. I am therefore proud to say that in addition to having a national coverage of ortho-photos at between 5 meter and 1 meter resolution, no part of Namibia has topographic data that is older than ten years. All these data are in digital formats.

15. Land administration, being an essential component of good governance, it is important that any system developed for its implementation must have the robustness to deal with the conflicting demands of land as an important economic, social and cultural resource. To assist us in this regard, we have developed a land information system that is now being populated with existing cadastral data. An automated Unique Parcel Identifier system operates as a module in this system.

16. Ladies and gentlemen, rapid urbanization is a reality in Africa. With this comes its challenges, prominent of which include, scarcity of serviced land leading to mushrooming of informal settlements. To give security of tenure to informal settlers, Namibia promulgated in 2012 the Flexible Land Tenure Act. This Act provides for a

graduated approach to securing freehold ownership, starting with a starter title. Due to time, I will not be able to expand on the provisions of this Act. My officials are available to assist in this regard. The accelerated servicing of urban land and the implementation of the Flexible land Tenure Act will benefit from the geo-spatial data that the Ministry provides.

17. The Ministry's Directorates of Survey and Mapping, Valuation and Deeds Registry are also currently undergoing computerization. This will enable the re-engineering of the processes and would make the land transactions accessible, efficient and more transparent. The long term goal is to have computerized front desks and date stamps, thereby ensuring that transactions are processed on the basis of first in first out.
18. The Ministry has also taken seriously the concept of integrated regional land use planning which provides the mechanism for making comprehensive decisions about the use of land and resources. It sets the coordinated management direction for future uses of land and resources and allows for the evaluation of the success of management activities over time. It is future-oriented and iterative, allowing plans to be adjusted in response to changing societal values and new circumstances. Its purpose is to provide information to enable stakeholders to select and put in practice those land uses that will best meet the needs of the people while safeguarding the natural resources for the current and future generations. The Integrated Land Use Plans project aims to identify the natural resources potential, alternatives for land use, economic and social conditions in order to select the best land use options.
19. In the past individual line ministries and stakeholders used to carry out planning and implementation on a sectoral basis with little input from other stakeholders. Such an approach always left behind important natural resources role-players, leading to uncoordinated development activities, mismanagement and/or depletion of natural resources. Hence the decision of the Ministry of Land Reform to take leadership in the process of making decisions about how to use land based on the assessment of land

capabilities in relation to actual local needs and priorities. Thus shaping the future development on the land at village, constituency and country level.

20. Namibia has piloted this new approach of land-use planning with the preparation of integrated regional land-use plans. Based on the systematic assessment of land capability, socio-economic viability, environmental and human needs, these plans are designed as tools for the promotion of sustainable land use and land management. Following this pilot land-use planning is now guided by the principles of sustainability, equity, stakeholder participation, efficiency, integration, fair and good governance, in order to enhance regional and national development planning capabilities of Government, and to lay the foundation for sustainable development of rural communities.
21. Agenda 2030 aims with Goal 15 at the protection and sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems as well as the halt of land degradation and loss of biodiversity. Land-use planning plays a crucial role to contribute to the achievement of this goal. Through the allocation of suitable and sustainable land-use options environmental degradation is addressed and resilience to climate change is enhanced. Therefore, Namibia's integrated regional land-use planning is based on an ecosystem approach for the assessment and planning of sustainable land uses.
22. Permit me at this juncture, to raise one critical issue, being the shortage of skilled and experienced technical and professional staff in the utilizing of geo-spatial information for good governance. This challenge affects many of our African countries. To overcome this challenge, countries need to cooperate more with each other. I wish to acknowledge the role being played by the Economic Commission for Africa in providing a regional focus and leadership for geo-spatial information activities in Africa. We hope ECA will enhance their capacity to assist African countries in utilizing the opportunities offered by geo-spatial technology.
23. This meeting has brought together an enormous amount of expertise and experience to address the specific challenges of governance of land and natural resources. Let us

capitalize on that, let us use our knowledge and experiences and let our voices be heard beyond this week and outside this meeting. In short, let us make a change towards a responsible governance of land and other natural resources, so that it becomes successful, productive and more responsive to poverty reduction!

24. In closing I would like to commend all those who contributed in developing the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management [UN-GGIM] knowledge base. I understand that this platform will enable easy access to a global database of information and knowledge to support the management of global geospatial information. The compendium of case studies, training manuals and best practices will no doubt support capacity development in this important area of geospatial information. I will therefore join in the call for Member States and Regional Committees to provide relevant materials to the Secretariat for the “population” of the knowledge base.

25. I thank you.