



Tanzania – March 2020

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Could land rights help build climate resilience in Tanzania's cities?

As cities come under climate pressure, governments need to find equitable ways to provide safe urban land for growing populations

In sub-Saharan Africa, two thirds of all urban residents live in informal settlements in areas that are likely to be disproportionately affected by climate change.

New research by the Coalition for Urban Transitions and the University of Leeds shows that there are different ways national governments can develop fair and transparent urban land tenure systems - and that doing so can contribute to economic development, poverty eradication and climate change adaptation.

Flooding and informality in Tanzania

According to the World Bank, Tanzania is the country most at risk of flooding in East Africa.

The east African country is also home to the fastest growing city in the region - Dar es Salaam. Here, rapid unplanned urbanisation means that more and more people are building homes in areas that are vulnerable to climate change, such as on flood plains.

Delivering land at scale

If cities like Dar es Salaam are to build resilience against climate-related shocks, they will need to start by providing residents with homes in safe locations.

In the early 2000s, the government of Tanzania started the 20,000 'Plots Project' to deliver formal parcels of land for homes. Over a period of 8 years, the program delivered 40,000 plots of land in Dar es Salaam and almost 60,000 nationwide.

Research confirms that the financing and implementation of the 20,000 Plots Project are widely considered a great success.

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The project was funded by a loan, based on its expected returns: the value of the land was "unlocked" by being surveyed and developed (with roads and services), and "captured" to cover the costs of rolling out the project to secondary cities.

Political will and support from the highest levels of government meant that professionals from all over the country were mobilised. This, and the use of modern technology, reduced the surveying time of the first 20,000 plots from around six years to just 20 months.

Filling gaps from the ground up

All too often, unintended negative consequences of top-down land reforms can undermine their success, especially for marginalised groups like the urban poor.

The 20,000 Plots Project was no exception. Only 14% of all plots were affordable to low-income groups; many plots were developed on the urban fringe, leading to urban sprawl and disconnecting residents from their livelihoods; and land speculation was controlled only in the short-term - today, plots are selling for as much as 20 times their original price. Many of the low-income families who acquired a plot have since sold their land and returned to informal settlements in the city centre.

Tanzania could make its land delivery more equitable by learning from and working with its citizens - especially the urban poor.

Various grassroots approaches to land governance are helping to fill the gaps left by top-down programs in Dar es Salaam. These include participatory mapping, cost-sharing models for land registration, and the formation of housing cooperatives.

For example, in the Ubongo area, the Human Settlements Action Company (HUSEA) shares the cost of land registration with informal communities. Each household pays 200,000 Tanzanian shillings (US\$86) for their land to be surveyed, plus a little extra for every square metre they occupy. This covers the surveying costs and what's left goes towards community infrastructure upgrading.

HUSEA has registered almost 5,000 plots of land since 2017.

In Kurasini, local residents who were to be displaced by the port expansion, formed a housing cooperative and collectively saved enough money to buy a 30-acre plot of land in the ward of Chamazi. Between 2007 and 2012, the community- together with the Centre for Community Initiative (CCI)- built 42 homes.

Homes were built incrementally and take up just half of the minimum plot size prescribed by national standards. The Chamazi resettlement is a case study in affordable, liveable densification, which is both accessible to low-income populations and environmentally favourable.

Implications for national governments

As cities worldwide come under greater pressure from climate change, governments will need to find efficient and equitable ways to provide safe urban land for both growing populations and those displaced by natural disasters.

There is, of course, no one-size-fits-all solution.

Land-based financing mechanisms like land-value capture can help generate the much-needed capital required to cover the costs of land registration. Reinvesting the captured value in infrastructure and services could create a self-sustaining, climate-proof land delivery fund that helps build the resilience of citizens.

Complementing top-down land reforms with bottom-up projects and partnerships with community-based organisations can help increase the participation of the urban poor in these programs.

Flexible national leadership that empowers cities and communities to adopt locally appropriate land governance arrangements, will lead to the most satisfactory and sustainable outcomes for society, the economy, and the environment.

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