

## **Taking Matters Into Their Own Hands: Why Innovation in Community Land Data Collection Matters**

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Effective land registries and cadastral systems that reach most of a country's people in emerging economies are few and far between. By some estimates, 70% of the world's population lives without securely documented and and resource rights. This leaves them highly vulnerable to land disputes, land grabs, illegal extraction of natural resources, and the effects of unchecked development and climate change.

The lack of data and information on land rights, property boundaries, and infrastructure is a constraint, not only to economic development, but also to household- and community-level decision-making, advocacy, and access to benefits. Communities themselves usually lack basic knowledge of national land governance systems and laws. Governments are unable to cost effectively and equitably document and manage land rights, and the communities lack the tools and skills to collect, document, and manage land information or engage in community-based processes that address land claims, mitigate conflict, and provide workable solutions to land insecurity. As a result, informal communities exist in a data vacuum, invisible to government and commercial service providers, and lacking the voice and power to affirmatively advocate for their own rights.

For decades, communities have led their own efforts to create community maps through participatory processes. Exercises to produce collectively-drawn paper maps of assets--buildings, infrastructure, WASH facilities, sacred or religious sites, natural resources, disaster-prone areas, and land use provide valuable information and build important social cohesion and social capital, particularly when there are known conflicts and disputes to be negotiated or local planning and development decisions to be made. And although these processes are effective at mobilizing community buy-in, they often lack the outputs to effectively analyze and raise issues to local, regional, and national authorities whose support and services are needed.

Why Innovation, Why Now? If government authorities are the only ones who can issue formal land tenure, then why focus on community-led data collection? Why does it matter? Given the current state of formalized land titling efforts, the massive number of vulnerable people left out of the system, the limitations of paper-based efforts, and the urgent need for communities to share and use geospatial and household-level data to advance their own development

objectives, it is time to re-think community-based mapping and land documentation strategies. Even communities currently using digital tools face challenges in securely managing, storing, analyzing, and reporting their data in ways that support their land claims and allow them to access public and private resources.

This paper will address practical, on-the-ground solutions to bridging the gap between government land systems and undocumented or informally documented communities through case studies of how communities are using community-driven, digital data collection to analyze data for decision-making, advocate for land rights and tenure recognition, and access public services and private sector offerings, such as loans, insurance, and other goods and services.

The paper will share data on how putting accessible and appropriate land documentation technologies and training into the hands of local partners and vulnerable communities has transformed and empowered communities left out of the land registry system to collect and use their data strategically.

Case studies will include examples from:

Zambia, where OpenStreetMap Zambia, a volunteer community mapping group, mapped and documented the property rights of residents living in an informal settlement to improve water and sanitation infrastructure;

In Tanzania, a non-profit organization, Seed Change worked with smallholder oil palm farmers to document farmers' land rights and farming practices to create an evidence base for sustainable farming certification. These efforts are improving livelihoods for smallholder farmers, protecting the environment, and documenting a transparent, sustainable palm oil supply chain.

Other examples from Indonesia, Kenya, and Colombia that span environmental, community, indigenous, and other land and resource rights cases in which innovation in community-based land and resource documentation has empowered communities to advance their own tenure security, land rights, protection of community assets, and development.

The paper illustrates demonstrations of the tools, analytics, and reporting used by partner organizations and communities. Various strategies and tactics for evidence-based advocacy will be shared, as well as how these innovations in data collection and management resulted in positive changes.