An Innovative Land Information Tool for Documenting Tenure Rights of the Urban Poor in Namibia

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SUMMARY

Namibia is undergoing a rapid and major transition from a rural-based society to increasingly based in urban areas, with 50% of the population now urbanized. This transition is most visible in rapid urban expansion areas, especially in informal settlements that accommodate poor families in shacks on the outskirts of towns. It is estimated that the number of urban shacks will outnumber the number of formal urban brick houses by 2023, as well as outnumber all the rural houses by 2023 (Weber & Mendelsohn, 2017). As a result of this high rate of urbanization, Namibia has been struggling with pressing land tenure challenges such as providing security and services for recently urbanized families. In many cities and towns, there is frustration at the slow pace of the current registration process to plan, survey and register land rights. In the rapidly expanding urban areas, many poor people have no official rights to the land, cannot invest in it and often have no access to basic services.

To address these challenges, the government conceived the Flexible Land Tenure System (FLTS) as an alternative land tenure system catering for low-income groups in urban areas (Christensen, 2004). The FLTS was developed parallel to, and interchangeable with the existing formal land administration system. It was designed to be Fit-For-Purpose, affordable, secure and upgradeable to meet the government needs. The FLTS, as envisaged in the Flexible Land Tenure Act of 2012 and corresponding of regulation of 2018, introduces two new tenure types, that is, the starter title and land hold title. The Flexible Land Tenure Regulations also stipulates that the information in the starter and land hold title registers may also be recorded in a computer system, also known as the Computer-Based Flexible Land Tenure System (CB-FLTS).

This paper outlines the application of fit-for-purpose technologies, such as the Social Tenure Domain Model (STDM), used in the development and operationalization of the CB-FLTS at the

Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform. It also highlights the importance of: 1) stakeholder engagement in capturing the requirements and validating the solution; 2) automating business processes and supporting standards; 3) capacity assessment and development targeting different stakeholders within the Ministry; and, 4) change champions in sustaining institutional support in the uptake of the system. Finally, this paper reflects on the key lessons learnt and experiences to help inform the maintenance of the system as well as guide future development of future (or upgrade of existing) information systems within the Ministry.