

Structural Holes in Academic Networks: Lessons from Bridging Competency Gaps in Land-Related Education and Learning in Africa

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Key words: Capacity building; Education; Africa; Academic network; Land administration; Land governance; Land management; Land policy; Professional education; Professional networking; Research; Sustainable development goals; SDG 4

SUMMARY

Higher-level competencies in adopting innovative land management approaches are becoming more critical in Africa amidst existing complex neo-liberalized land markets and globalization. In response to the exigencies of emerging land governance systems within Africa, many academic networks have been formed at various institutional and informal levels for capacity development among land administrators and land governance researchers to address pertinent challenges. Even though there are currently over five (5) such academic networks, they are yet to operate at their full potential and achieve their desired goals due to existing structural holes and competency gaps. This situation has arisen because these academic networks are constrained in diverse ways, including funding constraints, low levels research capacities, restrictions about institutional statutes, and poor publicity. To consolidate the modest gains so far and materialize the prospects of these land governance networks in Africa, this study explores the structural holes in academic networks in Africa. It interrogates the challenges and examines the lessons learnt in bridging competency gaps in curriculum development, spearheading policy analyses, and co-creating knowledge. The study is relevant for two reasons: (1) understanding the urgency of academic research networks will position them as more compelling within Africa; (2) understanding the challenges of and prospects for capacity development among land-related education and learning in Africa.

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FIG e-Working Week 2021

Smart Surveyors for Land and Water Management - Challenges in a New Reality

Virtually in the Netherlands, 21–25 June 2021