

Law and Policy Implications of Multimedia Land Records: The Talking Titler Project

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SUMMARY

Talking Titler is an initiative to provide appropriate systems and technological support for land occupation and ownership rights for people in developing countries and post-conflict situations. Technology has advanced to the stage where it is becoming feasible to apply multi-media technology to provide additional evidentiary support in land records systems. The first author tested video-evidencing systems in land reform projects in South Africa a few years ago with promising results, but issues such as memory capacity and video authentication have hindered technical implementation. This paper provides an exploratory examination of how such a system can be designed in participation with a community and the legal and policy implications of incorporating audio-visual evidence into land records which, to date, have typically been limited to written text and survey plans or sketch plans. The Talking Titler system holds the promise of increasing social and political stability in complex social settings such as informal settlements where land tenure practices tend to draw on both customary and western concepts of land use and ownership. In one configuration, the system records digital video images of a land owner (beneficiary) in front of their dwelling to produce a video affidavit of what is owned, and the origin and extent of ownership, all of which can be spatially referenced through the use of global positioning (GPS) data. The ubiquitous and accessible nature of video camera technology makes it an excellent tool for application where administrators of conventional land record systems are susceptible to intimidation and subversion. The significance of this work rests, in terms of social process, in augmenting the land record through community involvement, incorporating records in indigenous languages, and providing an additional tool to strengthen local capacity to adjudicate and re-negotiate land tenure relationships. As a technical exercise, this exploration of the use of a multimedia source in the land record anticipates the penetration of digital media into the little-explored application of land tenure security enhancement.