

Land Narratives and Land Registration in State–Subsidised Housing in South Africa

Michael Barry (Canada) and Lani Roux (South Africa)

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SUMMARY

The paper reports on a number of case studies in state-subsidised housing projects in the Western Cape province of South Africa in which how people acquire land and the strategies that they use to defend their interests in their house were examined. As part of this it examines the role of title deeds, land registration and other official instruments and institutions in people's perceptions of land tenure security. There is a large body of literature that reports that land titling programmes do not produce the benefits envisaged by policy makers. Consequently, a number of alternative tenure forms and administration strategies are being proposed, such as the continuum of land rights and the social tenure domain model respectively. There is a gap in empirical work at the household level which shows how these alternatives are likely to improve a situation. The paper presents and compares a number of narratives taken from door to door interviews in a number of studies in the Western Cape province which explored beliefs and perceptions of tenure security, official systems of supporting tenure security and administering land, and alternative strategies to acquire land and secure land tenure. The results show that off-register transactions do occur, but that people do not necessarily have negative attitudes to land registration. In some cases people indicated very strongly that they will use official administration systems, in others they will use them part of the time. Thus consideration should be given to making minor changes in administration systems and taking note that where registration is part of a system that foments cultural change in the way people relate to land, far more effort and visible administration is required in order for the system to function.