

The Dilemma of Restructuring the Land Governance System in Nigeria

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SUMMARY

Land reform is essentially the process of examining land management patterns, introducing regulations and understanding customs relating to land ownership and tenure. Several countries have adopted different approaches including changing the laws, transfer of ownership, redistribution of land holdings and development of clear land policies as a way of reforming land tenure and land administration processes. Several efforts have been made in the past in Nigeria to improve land governance. The current emphasis is to provide title to land holders because less than 3% of the land in Nigeria has been duly titled. Low level of title registration has been a disturbing truism. There are no compelling provisions for title registration in the prevailing National land law. The Land Use Act enacted in 1978 was intended to radically restructure land governance approach. It was arguably revolutionary but 35 years after, Nigeria is still grappling with the reform process. The Federal Government of Nigeria constituted the Presidential Technical Committee on Land Reform to mid-wife fresh reforms in land. The work of the Committee is focused on providing title with greater ease to land holders. It is consequently piloting Systematic Land Titling and Registration (SLTR) in some States as a transparent, participatory and an all-inclusive fast method of issuing titles to land holders. Systematic Land Titling and Registration seeks to check the inherent problems of informal land transfers with poor documentation. It aims at delivering valid legal title to land holders at low costs, standardizing the system of land registration as well as building up a comprehensive database of land holdings. The idea is novel, requiring careful enlightenment to make it clearer for all the stakeholders to understand. Much progress is yet to be made because there are different dimensions of the challenges to its total success. There are institutional and socio-political obstacles whipping up mixed reactions about the intentions of the programme. There also appears to be some conflict between politics and technology. The problems of the poor implementation of the Land Use Act of 1978 appear to have resurfaced in the land reform process under a different garb. This paper highlights the seeming conflict between socio-economic and technological factors in the implementation of SLTR and the steps adopted to address them against poor acceptance. Systematic Land Titling and Registration, though good is yet to be fully understood and embraced by stakeholders. The pilots were successful but comprehensive implementation across the thirty-six States and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja in Nigeria is yet to be executed.