

The Readiness of the Trinidad and Tobago Cadastral System for Recovery from Disaster

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Key words: Cadastre; Informal settlements; Risk management; Security of tenure

SUMMARY

The cadastral system plays a key role in recovery from disaster. During the emergency response period, cadastral records can assist in providing information on the location of individuals to emergency personnel. In the recovery phase, records can be used to begin to re-establish boundaries and prevent conflict. They can also be used to site camps and emergency shelter. In the recovery phase, records can be used to plan new and improved spatial positioning. To be able to perform these functions, the cadastral system should be current, complete and comprehensive as well as backed-up, archived and safely housed. Both the records themselves and the boundaries that they protect are therefore vulnerable to disaster.

However, particularly in developing countries, if formal records do not comprehensively reflect all the existing tenure, then evidence of informal land rights should also be preserved as loss of this evidence in the event of a disaster can result in land-grabbing, conflict, and discrimination. Oral and documentary evidence held at individual, household, and community level can support land rights and therefore needs to be recorded, documented, and archived so that they can be located in the case of disaster.

The formal cadastral records in Trinidad and Tobago have suffered loss on previous occasions and therefore an assessment of possible risks was done and a post-disaster business continuity model was developed. In addition, because much of the evidence of land rights is informally held, this evidence was also part of the assessment of disaster impact and part of the larger business continuity model. An assessment was performed to determine where cadastral records exist and where they could be recovered from if a disaster were to arise. The assessment also investigated the location and status of evidence of informal land rights. It was found that action on the part of various stakeholders can be taken now to avert the eventual magnification of the disaster that will

result if the records were to be destroyed. A well-documented plan to deal with different emergency scenarios must also be prepared and disseminated so that all stakeholders would be aware of the procedures for preserving land tenure to be followed in a disaster in this country. Recording of oral, and other informal evidence is strongly recommended for the country using existing tools such as STDM or Open Tenure software.

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FIG Working Week 2016
Recovery from Disaster
Christchurch, New Zealand, May 2–6, 2016