

**THE NATIONAL LAND INFORMATION SYSTEM (NLIS) IN UGANDA: SUPPORT TO
IMPROVEMENTS IN LAND GOVERNANCE AND TRANSPARENCY**

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Paper prepared for presentation at the
CONFERENCE ON LAND POLICY IN AFRICA, CLPA-2019
November 25 - 29, 2019 | Abidjan, Cote D'Ivoire

Abstract

The second phase of the Uganda National Land Information System (UgNLIS) which started in February 2015 and is expected to end in February 2020 is being implemented by the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD) together with a Consortium led by IGN FI, which was engaged with support of the World Bank. The UgNLIS fully integrates land registration, land administration, surveying and mapping, physical planning, property valuation functions and other land related records. Provided initially as a loan by the World Bank under the Second Private Sector Competitiveness Project (PSCP II) and followed by further financial support by the World Bank under the Competitiveness and Enterprise Development Project (CEDP), the total cost of the NLIS is valued at US\$ 65 million including the supportive infrastructural developments and construction of buildings associated with the system. The UgNLIS has been established in fulfilment of Government of Uganda policies and has made a substantial improvement in accountability and service delivery in terms of time, security and cost effectiveness. Over US\$ 114 million has so far been collected as total revenue and the UgNLIS has resulted in a significant reduction or elimination of 1) backdoor transactions, 2) forgeries and graft, and 3) challenges associated with missing land records. The UgNLIS has already demonstrated clear and solid contributions to Uganda social structure, economy, at all levels of governance and has promoted transparency in the delivery of land services.

Keywords: Land information, transparency, efficiency, land governance, backdoor transactions

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INTRODUCTION

The Ugandan Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development carried out various land sector reforms driven mainly by efforts under the Land Component of the Second Private Sector Competitiveness Project (PSCP II), followed by those under the Land Component of the Competitiveness and Enterprise Development Project (CEDP), which Projects were funded by the World Bank. One of the major areas of focus under both the Land Components of the Projects mentioned above was the development and implementation of the National Land Information System. A broad range of innovative land administration and management solutions have been implemented to ensure effective and sustainable management of land and strengthen land tenure security. The Republic of Uganda has embraced technology as an efficient tool in land governance and is among some of the Sub-Saharan countries computerizing the management of land with support of the World Bank as a key component of the Competitiveness and Enterprise Development Project (CEDP) to introduce reforms aimed at improvement of the business environment in Uganda.

This paper examines the implementation of the National Land Information System in Uganda and the implications for strengthening land governance and transparency. Following the success of the Pilot Phase from 2010 to 2014, to establish a National Land Information System (NLIS), The Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD) engaged a Consortium led by Institut Géographique National France International (IGN FI) to implement the Second Phase nationally from February 2015 to February 2020 known as the Design, Supply, Installation and Implementation of National Land Information System Infrastructure (DeSINLISI) Project. The UgNLIS has transformed MLHUD systems into digital format and integrated land registration, land administration, surveying and mapping, physical planning and property valuation and other land related records.

The World Bank has provided the Government of Uganda loans totalling almost US\$ 65 million for the implementation of the UgNLIS comprising US\$ 22 million for the Pilot Phase and US\$ 43 million including the supportive infrastructural developments and the construction of buildings for the national roll out of the UgNLIS under initially the Second Private Sector Competitiveness Project (PSCP II) followed by the ongoing Competitiveness and Enterprise Development Project (CEDP). Established in fulfilment of Government of Uganda policies, the UgNLIS has demonstrated substantial improvements in accountability and service delivery in terms of time, security and cost effectiveness. Almost US\$114 million in revenue had already been generated by 2017 and the UgNLIS has resulted in a significant reduction in: 1) backdoor transactions, 2) forgeries and graft, and 3) challenges associated with missing land records and demonstrated a solid contribution to titling and individual ownership, strengthening the operation of a free land market and has encouraged investment to promote sustainable development in Uganda.

BACKGROUND

Since independence in 1962, the land size of Uganda has remained 248,000 square kilometers while the population has been increasing exponentially from six million people at the time of independence to approximately 45.7 million people (Republic of Uganda, 2019). It is projected that by the year 2035, Uganda's population will be 50 million people (Migereko, 2016). While approximately 18.2 percent of the population is already urbanized (UN Habitat and MLHUD, 2016), the rate of urbanization in Uganda is among the highest in the world. The majority of those in the rural areas pursue land acquisition for agricultural production for subsistence and economic livelihood, yet the same land is being competed for by other uses placing tremendous pressure on land and with a significant influence on the associated land governance framework. The ever increasing population, that directly depends heavily on land for survival is a compelling factor to exercise effective management and deal with land matters. The emerging opportunities in urban, peri-urban and rural areas associated with infrastructure development, fostering industry, commercial agriculture, mining, oil and gas production require the timely supply of reliable data on land use to ensure good governance (Migereko, 2016).

LAND GOVERNANCE IN UGANDA

Less than 20 percent of the land in Uganda is currently registered. Land legislation and administration in Uganda is a mixture of different statutory and customary tenure systems comprising colonial legacies, elements of reforms and an assortment of experimental initiatives implemented under successive post-independence governments. The 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda outlines four different forms of land ownership comprising freehold, mailo, leasehold and customary tenure systems (Republic of Uganda). Land laws and technical reforms have been put in place aimed at improving good land governance. This started with the enactment of the 1995 Constitution which was later followed by the 1998 Land Act and subsequent amendments to the Land Act. A comprehensive National Land Policy was approved by Cabinet in February 2013 with a Vision of: "a transformed Ugandan society through optimal use and management of land resources for a prosperous and industrialized economy with a developed services sector". Without the Policy, it would not necessarily be easy to appreciate the fact that land has a major influence on socio-cultural processes whose strategic management is important for significant and sustainable economic growth and social transformation.

Related Reforms

Government reforms that enhance management of the land sector include:

- Review and amendment of land related laws that may be outdated or conflicting with the Constitution and the Land Act;
- Development of the National Physical Development Plan

- Establishment of the Land Fund regulations whose purpose is to enhance access to land;
- Decentralization of land administration and management
- Mechanisms to address land disputes in a speedy manner;
- Enactment of the Physical Planning Act 2010 which declared the whole country a planning area;
- Physical development plans for Kampala and upcoming urban centres;
- Targeted efforts to strengthen women land rights

The National Land Policy (NLP) aimed to harmonize the different tenure systems, facilitate equitable access to land, modify the rules of transmission of land rights under customary land tenure, guarantee gender equality and equity and ensure that the decisions of traditional land management institutions uphold constitutional rights and obligations with regard to gender equality to improve security of tenure (Republic of Uganda, 2013). Underscoring the importance of land governance in Uganda, President Museveni chaired all the six Cabinet meetings which approved the National Land Policy in February 2013 (Migereko, 2016). Prior to the promulgation of the National Land Policy, the Land Sector Strategic Plan I (LSSP I) provided a framework for the implementation of land reforms and legislation including the 1995 Constitution; the 1998 Land Act and subsequent amendments; in addition to the integration of relevant plans and policies.

The Land Component under CEDP is a continuation and scale up of the reform process carried out under the Second Private Sector Competitiveness Project (PSCP II) under the National Land Policy. One of the requirements of the National Land Policy is to establish and maintain a reliable and user-friendly Land Information System (LIS) as a public good for planning and national development. The transformation and computerization of the land registry entailed an initial investment of US\$65 million which has already generated revenue amounting to almost US\$114 million in four years. The revenue generation will be further enhanced with the full adoption, popularization and rolling out of the new Land Information System, rendering the land sector a major source of revenue generation.

International Principles

The DeSINLISI Project is being implemented in accordance with various international and regional principles associated with land governance and complements Government objectives to strengthen Government structures and procedures in the implementation of decentralization to deliver services closer to the people. The international principles comprise the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT); the Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa (F&G) along with Government of Uganda policies and programmes comprising the National Land Policy and the Land Sector Strategic Plan (LSSP II). Good governance as such also contributes to the realization of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). (Migereko, 2016)

Government Objectives

The DeSINLISI initiative complements government objectives to strengthen government structures and procedures in the implementation of decentralization to deliver services closer to the people.

The National Land Policy (NLP) and the Land Sector Strategic Plan (LSSP) are intended to provide the operational framework for advancing land sector reforms necessary to frame and safeguard Uganda's land tenure system and rights for land users; streamline and modernize land delivery; encourage optimal use of land and natural resources; and facilitate broad-based socioeconomic advancement without overburdening and threatening the national ecological balance. The NLP is a dynamic document that will continue to direct attention to key issues and concerns in the land sector to ensure the cumulative effects of land sector reforms and intervention activities promoted by the MLHUD and creates a positive environment for achieving national development goals. (Republic of Uganda, 2013a)

The principles of good land governance being pursued in Uganda include:

- Equitable access to land;
- Security of tenure to all members of the society with specific measures to enhance security of tenure and property rights of women;
- Transparent decision making regarding land and natural resources;
- Decentralised land administration; and
- Effective, efficient and responsive land administration services to all citizens. (Migereko, 2016)

IMPLEMENTATION TO DATE

The design, configuration and deployment of the Second Phase of the UgnLIS has been guided by a carefully planned roadmap of ICT activities and milestones that comprise 1) the modification and enhancement of existing functionalities, 2) a new critical functionality and 3) the utilization of new technologies. The implementation of the UgnLIS involves four primary components (System Design; Data Conversion, Registration and Cadastral Data Integration; and Roll-Out and Establishment) in addition to training and public awareness as detailed below.

Component 1: System Design

The unique software framework design developed by IGN FI's partners for software development, Innola Solutions Inc. and GEOFIT (Fr), is aligned with three other critical project components that focus on data conversion, registration and cadastral data integration, and capacity building and user training. The system provides a tightly integrated

cadastral management functionality and data model to include the cadastral surveying tasks, land valuation and physical planning requirements for land registration review and approvals. The UgNLIS has been configured around an Open-Source and full-web (utilizing HTML5/CSS3/JavaScript) global land and property management solution in accordance with the general requirements of the UgNLIS solution that requires a secure, scalable and sustainable system. (Oput, 2017) The new system is composed of the currently implemented modules, integrated with external systems supported by an Open API and the design of exchange file formats incorporating land valuation and physical planning modules in addition to a daily case management system, mobile office, mobile money services for fees and secure corporate and public portals to provide corporate and national users with access to the system. (Oput, 2017)

Component 2: Data Conversion

The main goal of the conversion of spatial and non-spatial data into digital format involves the rehabilitation, conversion and securing of land records, cadastral and other land administration data from Department of Land Registration, Department of Land Administration, Department of Physical Planning, and Department of Surveys and Mapping. This involves the production of the necessary digital data to be integrated into the UgNLIS in order to:

- Secure titles and registration documents by transferring them into digital form,
- Prepare digital non-geographic documents to be handled using the document management system,
- Create a land information layer of topological land parcel polygons, and
- Link land parcels to title registers data by unique parcel identifiers.

Component 3: Registration and Cadastral Data Integration

The primary objective of this component has been to prepare and supply each Ministry Zonal Office (MZO) with an integrated, complete and consistent dataset containing Registration, Land Administration, Cadastral, Physical Planning and Valuation data allowing them to perform their daily duties using the new system. The primary inputs are data from Component 2 “Data Conversion” and other relevant data provided by external stakeholders such as the Ministry of Water and Environment, National Environmental Management Agency, Uganda Wildlife Authority, Uganda National Roads Authority and National Forestry Authority.

Component 4: System Roll-Out and UgNLIS Establishment

The main objective of this component is to roll-out the UgNLIS to all twenty-one MZOs in addition to MLHUD Headquarters, Department of Surveys and Mapping and the National Land Information Centre (NLIC) and to provide public access to fast, efficient and secure land governance services. The inputs comprise the implementation, procured hardware and

general software, databases released by the Component 3, staff trained and capacitated within Training and Capacity sub-component will constitute the inputs for the Component 4. The System roll-out and NLISI establishment encompasses: testing of the solution, training, deployment, and transfer to operations' environment.

Public Information and Awareness Campaign

Public Information and Awareness Campaign (PIAC) has been coordinated with other components of CEDP in close cooperation with MLHUD. The PIAC also includes measures to inform the MLHUD staff about the project activities and increase involvement of the personnel in decision making to foster a greater sense of ownership by the MLHUD and its staff. The primary objectives of the Public Information Campaign are to:

- Increase the public awareness regarding advantages of the formalisation of property rights;
- Inform the public about the advantages of a new system for land acquisition and registration;
- Promote new registration and cadastral services and encourage citizens of Uganda to formalise their property rights;
- Receive feedback on public acceptance and evaluate of the land administration services provided;
- Inform the project stakeholders including MLHUD staff, government agencies and business about the project progress, achievement and benefits for the stakeholders.
- Inform the public of the benefits of Physical Planning and permitted development rights.

The PIAC events and materials include public briefings, workshops, seminars and publications comprising the project web-page, signs, newsletters, press releases, leaflets, posters, radio and television programmes. An important aspect of the PIAC includes internal information dissemination among MLHUD staff and offices. Certain materials have also been translated into vernacular languages.

Training and Capacity Building

Training and capacity building is one of the important challenges of this project and essential to ensure the uptake, use and sustainability of the UgNLIS. A comprehensive training program has been implemented to ensure all staff engaged in the UgNLIS receive adequate and appropriate training to operate and maintain the system. The training and capacity building component is composed of workshops, seminars, study tours trainings and On-The-Job (OTJ) training. It focusses on the managers and technical personnel of the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD), National Land Information Centre (NLIC), Ministry Zonal Offices (MZOs) and District Land Officers (DLOs). The intent is to build an efficient operational network of collaborators for the MLHUD, the NLIC and the MZOs intended to become the reference in UgNLIS use for Ugandan stakeholders in all the

fields relevant to land governance including: land administration, GIS systems, spatial data integration, satellite imagery, digital map for cadastral data management, property valuation, environment, sustainable development, land use, planning, GPS, etc. Over 305 MLHUD staff have been trained to operate and maintain the system in the 18 Ministry Zonal Offices (MZOs) comprising Jinja, Mukono, Wakiso, Kampala, Masaka, Mbarara, Lira, Kabarole, Kibaale, Gulu, Arua, Masindi, Mbale, Kabale, Rukungiri, Mityana, Mpigi and Luweero operational as of July 2019. Soroti and Tororo MZOs will be operationalised by early August, 2019. The staff have been trained on a wide range of topics comprising all the tasks required to operate and maintain the UgNLIS. The objectives of the training are listed as follows: Facilitate learning amongst beneficiaries at each stage of the project as the components are being implemented; transfer essential technical elements to allow the beneficiaries to use and maintain the systems including the software conveniently and sustainably; and to coach trainers and monitor the transfer of skills and know-how.

Four Study Tours have also been organized to Georgia (Register), Australia (Land Equity), UK (HM Land Registry) and France (Land Registry) to provide participants with an opportunity to see firsthand the implementation of a Land Information System (LIS) and examine the technical components of the land administration solution.

On completion of the national roll-out, 21 Zonal Offices (MZOs) will be operational across Uganda providing the public access to fast, efficient and secure land governance services. As of June 2019, a total of 784,000 freehold, leasehold and mailo titles have been indexed, digitized and entered into the UgNLIS in addition to approximately maps 80,000, comprising the conversion of historical data and ongoing transactions including the integration of over 500,000 parcels that have now been vectorised.

CHALLENGES TO PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

As expected, the paucity of infrastructure including intermittent power supply and in some areas limited internet connectivity have presented challenges. These challenges have been handled to a large extent with the use of generators and batteries and the innovative application of technology to back-up and transfer data as internet connectivity allows. The challenges associated with infrastructure are expected to quickly diminish as Government pursues an aggressive infrastructural development campaign focused on improving the delivery of roads, electricity and telecommunications across the country.

Among the most salient challenges in the roll out of the system are associated with human resources. The identification of capable personnel present a persistent challenge throughout the implementation of the programme. The prevalence of capable individuals with the requisite skills and experience was anticipated from the onset and is the reason training is a core component of the DeSINLISI Project. Another challenge, especially in the initial stages of the project was the mind-set of MLHUD staff and the personnel engaged in the implementation and management the UgNLIS. These challenges have been addressed with the effective implementation of an awareness campaign focused on raising the

understanding among staff engaged in the DeSINLISI Project and key stakeholders in addition to the security and accountability measures inherent in the UgNLIS system.

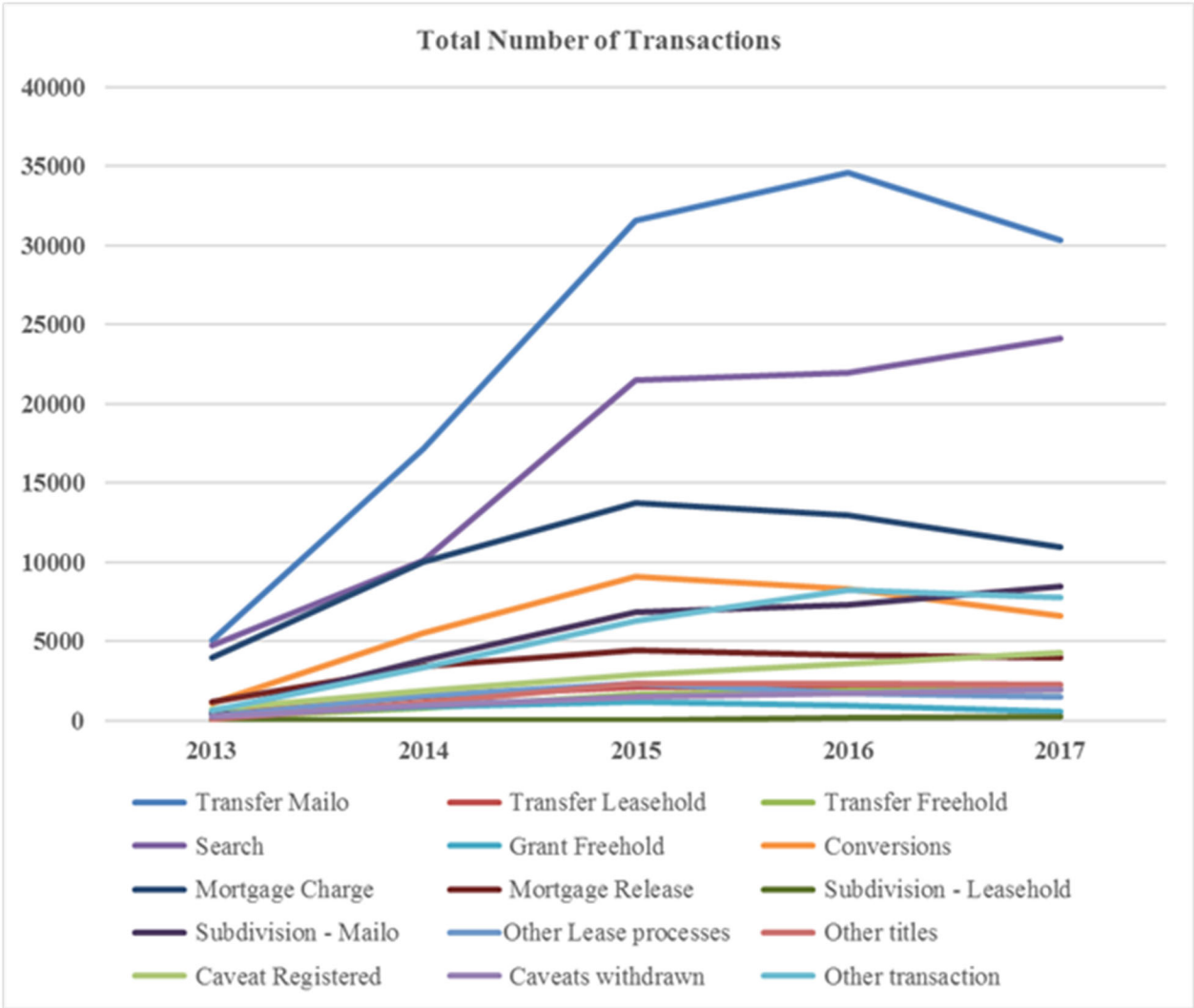
IMPACT OF THE UgNLIS

The Uganda National Land Information System (UgNLIS) has already made a profound contribution to the improvement of service delivery across the land sector with a substantial reduction in the time required for land transactions, minimization of opportunities for corruption, increase in accountability and strengthening of tenure security. The results registered since the implementation of the UgNLIS include; (Migereko, 2016)

- Increase in the number of land transactions.
- Decentralization of the cadastral and registration services,
- Securing of land records and maps,
- Establishment of audit trail of land transactions,
- Improvement in the quality of records and their management,
- Instant retrieval of land related information,
- Better service delivery to the stakeholders,
- Improvement in public perceptions of land service delivery,
- Increased sustainability of land governance.

Increase in Land Transactions

The graph below illustrates the drastic increase in transactions recorded by the MLHUD between 2014 and 2017. The slight reduction in the transfer of mailo and leasehold titles reflects the dampening effect of the 2016 election period on the national economy and the general economic slowdown experienced in Uganda over a year during that period; however, the steady increase in the number of searches reveals increasing familiarity with the UgNLIS and activity in the land sector.



Sustainability

The UgNLIS has made a substantial improvement in accountability and service delivery in terms of time, security and cost effectiveness. Clients already receive safer faster service and the enhancement of land governance procedures has resulted in a significant improvement in the collection of fees from US\$100,000 a month in 2012 to US\$ 5.6 million a month in 2014 with a total cumulative collection since the inception of the NLIS of US\$88 million by December 2016 which grew to US\$ 113.5 million by June 2017. This revenue has been dispersed to central government and local government institutions as prescribed by law and the collection of these revenues represents a significant contribution to the sustainability of the system from a cost perspective.

While the full economic impact of the UgNLIS Project remains to be quantified with a comprehensive cost benefit analysis, the early returns realized by the UgNLIS Project run counter to persistent concerns relating to low returns from public investments in capital infrastructure (Manishimwe , 2018; World Bank Group, 2016). MLHUD has demonstrated an

exceedingly high level of success in the effective and efficient implementation of the UgNLIS and managed the “turn around” in an exceedingly short space of time with close support of the IGN FI and the World Bank. The cumulative generation of US\$113.5 million in revenue before completion of the project represents a 200 percent return on the US\$65 million investment.

Improved Service Delivery and Transparency

A significant improvement in delivery of land services has already been observed in land governance as a result of decentralization of land administration and management services to the Ministry Zonal Offices (MZOs). The interface with clients was enhanced, through the appointment of Customer Care Officers and making the MZOs one stop centres for delivery of land services. Clients no longer have to travel to MLHUD Headquarters in Kampala, but can simply visit the MZO closer to their home. Transaction times have been reduced substantially. The World Bank Cost of Doing Business Report indicates that the number of days to complete a transaction was reduced from 77 days in 2010 to 42 days in 2018 (Actual reported average at the various MZOs stands at 25 days). During the same period, Uganda climbed in comparative ranking from 149 across 183 economies to 124 in 190 economies (World Bank, 2009; World Bank, 2017).

Payments for all land transaction are now tracked electronically. Access to the UgNLIS is strictly limited to authorized personnel and mistakes entered into the UgNLIS can be traced to the individual responsible as their identity and all transactions and changes made within the system are indelibly recorded. The work performance of all staff utilizing the UgNLIS is recorded and available to monitor performance including log in times and the number of transactions completed on any particular day. Protected by state of the art security protocols, the UgNLIS authenticates titles and will not permit double plotting or double referencing for titles that were not uncommon in the manual system of operation. All information added to the system is synchronized with existing data on neighbouring plots and appropriate zoning to prohibit the registration of land on forest reserves, waterways, wetlands, national parks, road reserves and other public land reserves. Systems are in place to detect illegitimate data and all information entered into the UgNLIS is subject to thorough and instantaneous cross referencing against data captured by other government agencies including National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA), Uganda Revenue Authority (UNRA), Uganda Registration Services Bureau (URSB), Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA), National Forestry Authority (NFA) and the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA).

Public confidence in the Government’s capacity to deliver land security and efficient land governance has increased as a result of the improved accountability with multiple cross checks to ensure faster resolution of land disputes and the prevention, reduction or elimination of 1) backdoor transactions, 2) forgeries and graft, and 3) challenges associated with missing land records. According to the East Africa Bribery Index 2017 collated by Transparency International, while the incidence of bribery increased across the vast majority of other sectors examined, the probability of paying a bribe for land services

plummeted from 46.5 percent in 2014 to 19.2 percent in 2017. Furthermore, the reported average value of bribes paid dropped from UGX 550,113 (US\$150) to UGX 130,590 (US\$36) over the same period (Transparency International, 2017). Furthermore, the average value of bribes payable for land services has plummeted from UGX 550,112 (US\$150) in 2014 to UGX 130,589 (US\$36) in 2017 representing a 76 percent decrease in only three years that can be directly attributed to the implementation of the UgNLIS Project (Transparency International, 2017). Land now presents less challenges to potential investors with increased security of tenure and reduced costs associated with property transactions.

Other Support Activities

Finally, the development and implementation of the UgNLIS is supported by other activities under the ongoing CEDP Project, which include construction of purpose built Ministry Zonal Offices based on the open plan office layout; development and implementation of the National Physical Development Plan (NPDP), modernisation of the National Geodetic Network – including installation of 12 Continuously Operating Reference Stations (CORS); production of base maps in digital format (40 cm resolution for the whole country and 15 cm resolution for urban areas); Systematic registration/certification of individual and communally owned land; support to alternative land dispute resolution; training and capacity building; information, education and communication and support to implementation of the Gender Strategy.

CONCLUSION

The Government of the Republic of Uganda, specifically the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD) has achieved remarkable success in the implementation of the UgNLIS to date with support from IGN FI and the World Bank. The UgNLIS has successfully integrated land registration, land administration, surveying and mapping, physical planning, property valuation and other land related records. Even before full completion, the UgNLIS has clearly demonstrated substantial improvements in service delivery, accountability, security and cost effectiveness with almost US\$114 million revenue generated since the commencement of the initiative against the total cost at US\$65 million including the construction of buildings. The UgNLIS Project has made a significant contribution in reducing backdoor transactions; forgeries and graft; and the challenges associated with missing land records. Furthermore, the UgNLIS has already resulted in a tremendous improvement in public perceptions of corruption associated with the land sector as quantified and acknowledged by the independent and internationally reputed civil society watchdog Transparency International.

Reforms to policies, laws, institutions, procedures and processes relating to land implemented by the Government of Uganda including the implementation of the UgNLIS under the Competitiveness and Enterprise Development Project (CEDP) have strengthened land tenure security of individual ownership and titling in support of free land market

mechanisms on the assumption that land allocated among the most efficient users will promote investment and economic development.

With Uganda's progress on the modernization of land governance, Government delegations and other organizations from across Africa including Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia, Mali, Ghana, Malawi among others have visited the MLHUD to witness the implementation of the UgNLIS and to share experiences and consider ways they might implement similar systems. The UgNLIS reinforces and strengthens land governance at all levels and compliments a broad range of other Government programs in the land sector and beyond. The implementation of the UgNLIS has already made a very positive contribution to the social and economic development of the country and provides a solid pillar for achieving Uganda's Sustainable Development Goals.

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