

# Africa Reconvenes in Addis Ababa for Land Policy Talks

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## Rapidly changing city

I am back to Addis Ababa, post-Covid. The city, home to the African Union (AU) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), is referred to as Africa's political capital in continental banter. One can understand. Like Nairobi, it has been rapidly expanding, and its population exploded. Estimates place this at about 5.5 million currently. The construction boom remains on, with mega commercial spaces, high-rise buildings and skyscrapers interrupting the city horizon. Bole International Airport, now said to be the largest capacity airport in Africa, continues to expand. Kenya should take lessons.

There's been some drastic changes too. I last exchanged a US dollar at about 18 Ethiopian Birr; this time I received 55 for a dollar. I am told that the rate is a lot higher in the informal market. The changed rate reflects in the price of commodities too. Private sector reforms here have gradually impacted business space. It's a lot more liberal. The presence of multi-nationals and other foreign investors is evident. I am particularly excited to see brand Safaricom and Mpesa in the city. Indeed, one easily notices brand Equity Bank too, with a commercial office at Kazanchis neighbourhood, a walking distance from the UNECA offices. Kenyan entrepreneurs should continue to harness this liberalizing economy, driven by a population currently estimated to be over 120 million.

## 5th Conference on Land Policy in Africa (CLPA)

Africa's land sector players are currently in Addis. Representatives from governments, academia, traditional authorities, professional associations, civil society, development and technical partners are here. The 5th biennial conference on land policy in Africa is happening at the AU headquarters. The event is back to Addis city after Abidjan and Kigali played host to the

2019 and 2021 forums. I've spotted several faces from Kenya. It's good to see country folk engage big at this level. Big caucusing and professional networking on matters land governance happens during these events. A high-level meeting of Presidents of African Land Professional Associations, a first for them, is part of this year's convening.

## **African Union land agenda**

Africa has been advancing its land agenda, based on the African Union Declaration on land, in support of Agenda 2063. Land governance, embracing land policies, laws and practices, remains key to realizing the continental development blueprint, and the Sustainable Development Goals. Good land governance provides latitude for securing legitimate land rights, and the equitable access and use of land in Africa. It calls for the fervent protection of public, customary and private land rights by state organs, and the prompt and fair compensation of land compulsorily acquired by governments for public projects.

These conferences, which started in 2014 under the coordination of the African Land Policy Centre, continue providing stakeholders an opportunity to enhance their capacity to drive the continental land agenda through sharing lessons and best practices. They provide opportunity for stakeholders to create and deepen partnerships, and engage development and technical partners as well. It's hoped that these contributions will increasingly move Africa towards its development aspirations.

**Dated: 23rd November, 2023**

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