

Land Policy Development : Africa moves its agenda forward

Posted on Dec 01, Posted by [Mwathane](#) Category [Continental Initiative](#)

Inaugural Conference

Curtains came down on the inaugural Conference on Land Policy in Africa which took place at the African Union's head office in Addis Ababa on Friday 14th November 2014. The Conference had kicked off on Tuesday 11th.

This conference took forward a process which kicked off in March 2006 and went on to embrace all the five regions of Africa: Southern, Eastern, Western, Central and Northern Africa, in an effort to pick out region-specific issues. Issues from a previous background document were then informed by the various region-specific concerns collected then developed into the Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa which formed the basis for the African Union Declaration on Land Issues in Africa. Having been endorsed by the Heads of State and Government, this continental Declaration on land issues carries the necessary policy and political authority to guide member States and Regional Economic Authorities in local and regional processes on land policy development and implementation.

Process aspirations

Some of the continental process aspirations included mainstreaming regular conferences to promote the sharing of knowledge and lessons within the continent as happened during this conference. Another aspiration was the establishment of an African Center of Excellence in Land Governance whose efforts are under way. The Land Policy Initiative, a tripartite effort of the African Union, the African Development Bank and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa will also provide routine technical support to African Union Member

States in the development and implementation of land policies. Zambia, which recently restarted efforts to conclude its national land policy, has benefitted from such support. Uganda too, whose national land policy got cabinet endorsement after long process lull, has drawn symbolic support from the process. The process has also helped to develop some '*Guiding Principles on Large Scale Land Based Investments in Africa*

', which were launched during the inaugural Conference. These guidelines provide the first ever quick evaluation guide to African Union Member States faced with prospects of embracing large scale land based investments which have become vogue around the continent.

Some key 'drivers' and faces

During the conference, it was nice meeting some of the faces associated with the earlier phase of the process such as the indefatigable Sue Mbaya of Zimbabwe and the cool and level headed Odame Larbi, a former CEO of Ghana's Land Commission. Hubert Ouedraogo of Burkina Faso, who commands the French and English language (he has been making baby statements in 'Kiswahili' lately) with ease, was around too. He loves teasing me that his white hair denotes African wisdom. Hubert has been most helpful in bonding Anglophone and Francophone participants during the continental land policy process events. Chief Calangeh Romanus Che of Cameroon, who at times amazes with his ability to deeply draw from formal and traditional knowledge during land policy discussions, was also back in Addis, cleverly alternating formal and traditional attire to suit the various conference events. When challenged by a Nigerian participant that traditional kingdoms in Africa are dictatorial and undemocratic in one of the forums in which he made a presentation, this traditional ruler was quick to illustrate how in his chieftdom, such an allegation does not hold. He can be easily impeached and dispensed with should he go against the wishes of his people, he pointed out. He was quite convincing and believable as he made the assertion.

Abebe Haile Gabrielle, Chair of the Joint Working on Land and the LPI Steering Committee, who drew applause when the Ethiopian Minister for Agriculture who was officiating referred to him as his former teacher and mentor, kept patronage presence to the event, playing coordinator to key sessions. Abebe has been really helpful in ensuring that the AU fully harnesses the Land Policy Unit in addressing Africa's key land problems. His presence in key meetings helps with institutional memory and continuity. It was nice to see that Josue Dione, a former ECA Director but now retired after spearheading the earlier formulation phase of the land policy process, was with us. He easily demonstrates that active professional contributions do not end with institutional retirement. These familiar old faces have been invaluable to the continental process. There are of course many other players, some who were and others who weren't able to be in the Addis Conference and cannot be fitted into this short discussion, who have made great contributions to the LPI process. The results of their efforts now clearly show. Africa needs to greatly appreciate and besing the

efforts of the leadership, resource persons and stakeholders who have brought the continental land policy process this far.

Key Development Partners

Dignitaries from Africa's Development Partners including the European Union, FAO, the World Bank, USAID and the UN-HABITAT also participated. The French Cooperation, the German GIZ and the Swiss Agency for Development, SDC, were also in attendance. These groups have been quite supportive to the continental process and one hopes that they will intensify their support to land policy development and implementation at Country-level now that there is good support and synergy at the continental level. Some are already doing a great job in this regard. The ECA Director of Regional Integration, Infrastructure and Trade Division Steve Karingi and ECA's focal person and Chief of the Land Policy Unit Joan Kagwanja ensured that things kept on course. Joan continues to demonstrate the admirable wisdom and limitless energy in driving the continental land policy process.

Good media coverage

This recent LPI event had one perspective that never was in previous ones.....a proactive media strategy. One consultant Prof Kimani Njogu of Twaweza Communications supported communications. He mixed the efforts of a team of journalists with off and on-site press conferences, web announcements and intense social media. The experienced journalists from various parts of Africa had been carefully selected to provide focused coverage to the event. I was happy to for instance meet Murithi Mutiga who pens for the Sunday Nation of Kenya as well as the International Edition of New York Times. I hope that they will follow up with good write ups on the conference once back in their respective countries. As I sat listening and tweeting, I was amazed at Prof Kimani's terrific tweeting speed. The man had a way of processing rather difficult technical messages and converting them into easy crisp tweets which he quickly disseminated to his followers. He kept retweeting messages from other participants too. In sum, Kimani and his media team did such a good job that for the first time since I began attending the continental land policy events in Addis in 2006, one Ethiopian newspaper gave this land policy event a front page splash. This was befitting honour for Africa's first ever Land Policy Conference under the Land Policy Initiative.

Member States should intensify country-level efforts

But I hope that the participants from my country Kenya, among them Dr Fibian Lukalo, Director of Research and Advocacy in Kenya's National Land Commission, Paul Wambua, Chairman of the Institution of Surveyors of Kenya and colleagues from Pamoja Trust and Mombasa County Government, had opportunity to reflect upon matters and events here in Kenya. Despite the great strides made in delivering a land policy, a new constitution and some new land laws, major land sector challenges remain. Key and most worrying of all have been the differences between the key land governance institutions.....the Ministry of Lands and the Land Commission. These differences have undermined land administration in general and service delivery by the two institutions.

But we hope that a recent working agreement witnessed by the President and his Deputy will greatly thaw the differences. In a recent national stakeholders consultative forum organised by the Land Development and Governance Institute (LDGI), the Lands Ministry Cabinet Secretary Charity Ngilu and the Land Commission Chair Muhammad Swazuri were pretty optimistic that the President-driven agreement would hold and that the two institutions will work to complement each other in future. Stakeholders within the forum were quite relieved to hear and watch the optimistic body language from the two and look forward to a future where their institutions combine synergies for service delivery. A good result for Kenya would offer good lessons for Africa.

One hopes too that participants from other African countries, including Ghana, Ethiopia, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia among others, will intensify their land policy development and implementation for sharing during the next biannual Conference on Land Policy in Africa.

Ibrahim Mwathane(mwathane@landsca.co.ke) is the Chair of Land Development and Governance Institute, Kenya. He has been with the continental land policy process as a resource person and participant since it started in March 2006.

Tags: