

Provide befitting security to lands offices and digital systems

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Lands offices strategic

Speaking while on a visit to the Kwale County Land Registry, Nixon Korir, Principal Secretary for the State Department of Lands and Physical Planning, recently informed that he had written to the Internal Security Ministry to have Land Registries categorized as critical national infrastructure, and protected accordingly. Coming after an incident in which the Nyando Land Registry in Kisumu County burnt up, this is good prioritizing by government. Indeed, this should always have been the case. The measure should be extended to Survey of Kenya offices too, the repository of our cadastral maps.

The strategic importance of the Lands Ministry to national development need not be overemphasized. The ministry is responsible for our national cadastre, established from cadastral maps and the corresponding ownership details of all land parcels in Kenya. These records have been painstakingly constructed since the late 19th century, about 140 years ago. The loss of such critical records could lead to confusion and needless ownership disputes, a nightmare scenario for landowners and government. Therefore, the security of all offices holding such records must be prioritised at all times. Records officers in the various Lands offices, who are well trained on methods to safeguard the records, should also remain vigilant.

Digital records and cyberspace

However, now that we are going digital, the threat to such records goes beyond the physical space. For records in digital form and accessed online, these threats abound in cyberspace. The ministry must therefore stretch its forte to this space, and take measures to minimize the threat. These measures must be informed by the reality that the threat will play out at the level of people within and outside the ministry, the technology adopted and technical processes involved. If for instance insiders entrusted to vet, upload or update data played mischief, we could easily end up with the wrong data online, and defeat tenure rights. On the other hand, should the database for the records be easily accessible and alterable by unauthorized users,

then land records wouldn't be safe either.

Safe backup

Moreover, if the security protocols in the technology employed aren't robust enough, hackers would have a field day with it. This would pose significant threats to the digital records as well. Luckily, land information management systems have been in application around the world for a while, and it should have been easy for land administration and IT specialists involved to have shopped around for appropriate technologies in order to minimize the threat. It is however useful to remember that even with the best of intentions and defences, mistakes can occur, and accidents too. It is therefore important to ensure that some safe space, preferably outside the Lands offices, is identified and used to archive the physical land records as their conversion to digital progresses. Such space, which should also be classified and protected as critical infrastructure, would provide a backup for instances where the digital records are disputed, an accident or cyber-attack occur hence compromising the digital database.

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