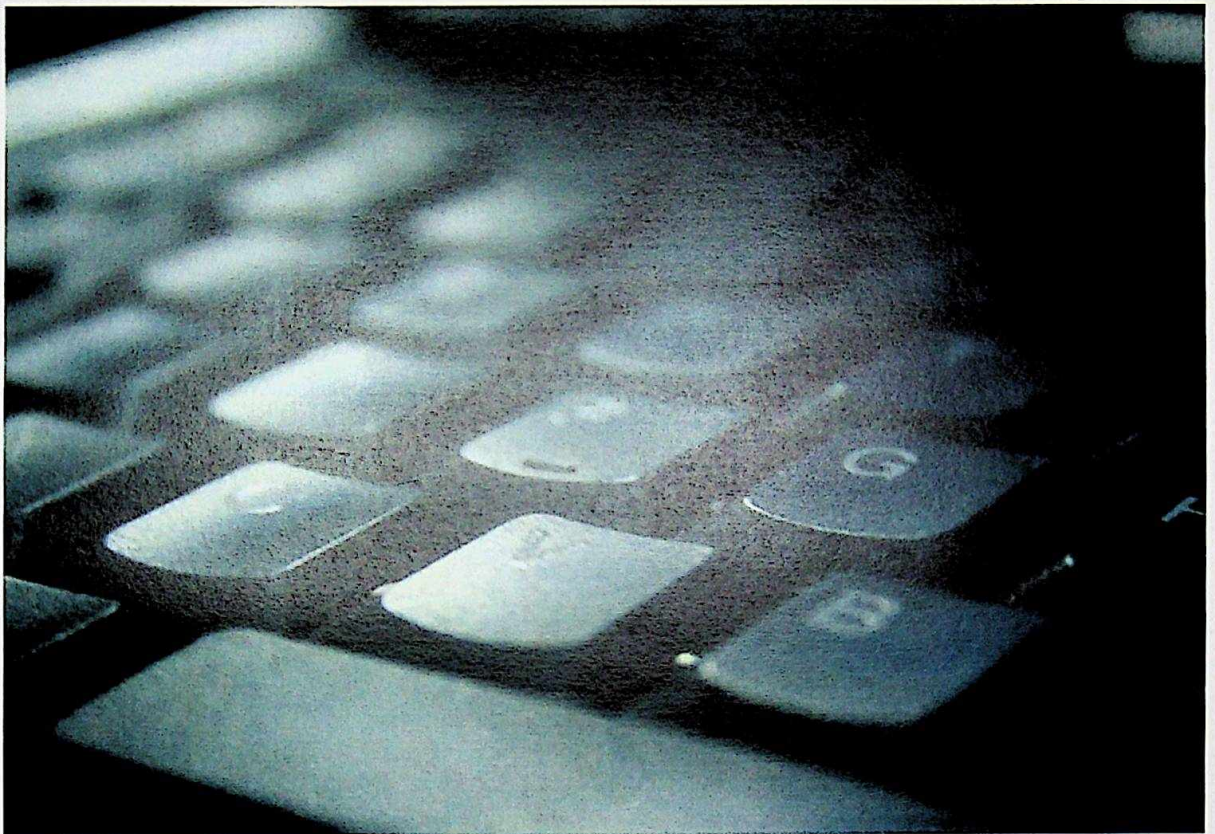


Beating a track through the land rights maze: Land Registry reforms in Lagos



Land transfer in Nigeria is becoming far quicker and more secure – and State Governments are increasing revenues by making it more difficult to avoid paying land taxes. All this comes from the Land Registry reforms taking place in several states throughout the country.

What has changed at the Land Registry?

In 2005, a project was begun to computerise records at the Lagos Land Registry with the help of a private IT company. One main aim was to simplify the process of issuing a certificate of occupancy, which was taking 5 to 10 years. Deeds and agreements dating back as far as 1863 were scanned onto microfiche and stored in a database, the Electronic Documents Management System (EDMS). Shift working meant that within a year, over 2.5 million

pages had been scanned and entered into the system. New documents are now scanned, processed and filed on a daily basis. The new system was unveiled by the Governor of Lagos State in January 2006.

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How is it different now?

Thanks to EDMS, manual searching of documents has been eliminated. Documents are more secure – originals are kept in a strong room and cannot be altered or removed by users. Access to land title records and land transfer is faster and more transparent. Citizens can now do online searches at the Land Registry in about 45 minutes, instead of the several days it used to take ploughing through records and searching for misplaced files in the old manual system.

Where else is this happening or not happening?

During the project, visitors from other states saw the improvements and planned similar reforms. In some cases, computerised systems have been developed, but in others, there have been no changes. For example, a team from Oyo visited the Land Registry on a fact-finding tour. But when they returned home, their report went no further than the office of the Permanent Secretary, because he was not in a position to submit it to the State Executive Committee. In addition, there was no political will to implement change at the Executive level.

What's different about Benue?

By contrast, there have been more changes in Benue State, from where the Governor sent a team led by the State Commissioner for Lands to Lagos and Abuja to find out how Benue could set up a geographical information system (GIS) to map agricultural land.

The team visited the Lagos Land Registry and identified EDMS features that they could use – what's more, they built in a few improvements of their own. For example, for additional security, they added a photograph of the owner to certificates of occupancy. The same IT company that worked on EDMS helped Benue upgrade their system, and included procedures to digitise maps and data, developing a GIS to enable the Governor to see what agricultural lands were available, which were the most valuable and what they could best be used for. Benue also linked revenue collection to the system – something that Lagos had not yet done – to make sure that owners were paying land taxes.

Who supported this work?

Land Registry reform in Nigeria is supported by the UK Department for International Development's

Security, Justice and Growth Programme, through the British Council, with technical assistance from H.M. Land Registry, UK.



For more information on Land Registry reforms, please see the Security, Justice and Growth Programme's new publication "Land Administration Reform" which is available at: www.sparc-nigeria.com/SJG2

What lessons have we learned?

- There must be the political will at the executive level to bring about genuine reform in the land registry systems.
- The status of people on fact-finding missions must be such that they can influence decision makers when they return to their states.
- There must be the financial, human and other resources available to support replication of the lessons learned.
- The public now has increased confidence in the land transfer and acquisition process – which has led to increased revenue for the State Government.
- The integrated computerised systems in use at the Land Department mean that State land revenue projections are now possible.
- The new ways of working at the Land Registry have blocked the corrupt activities of unscrupulous staff and touts.

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