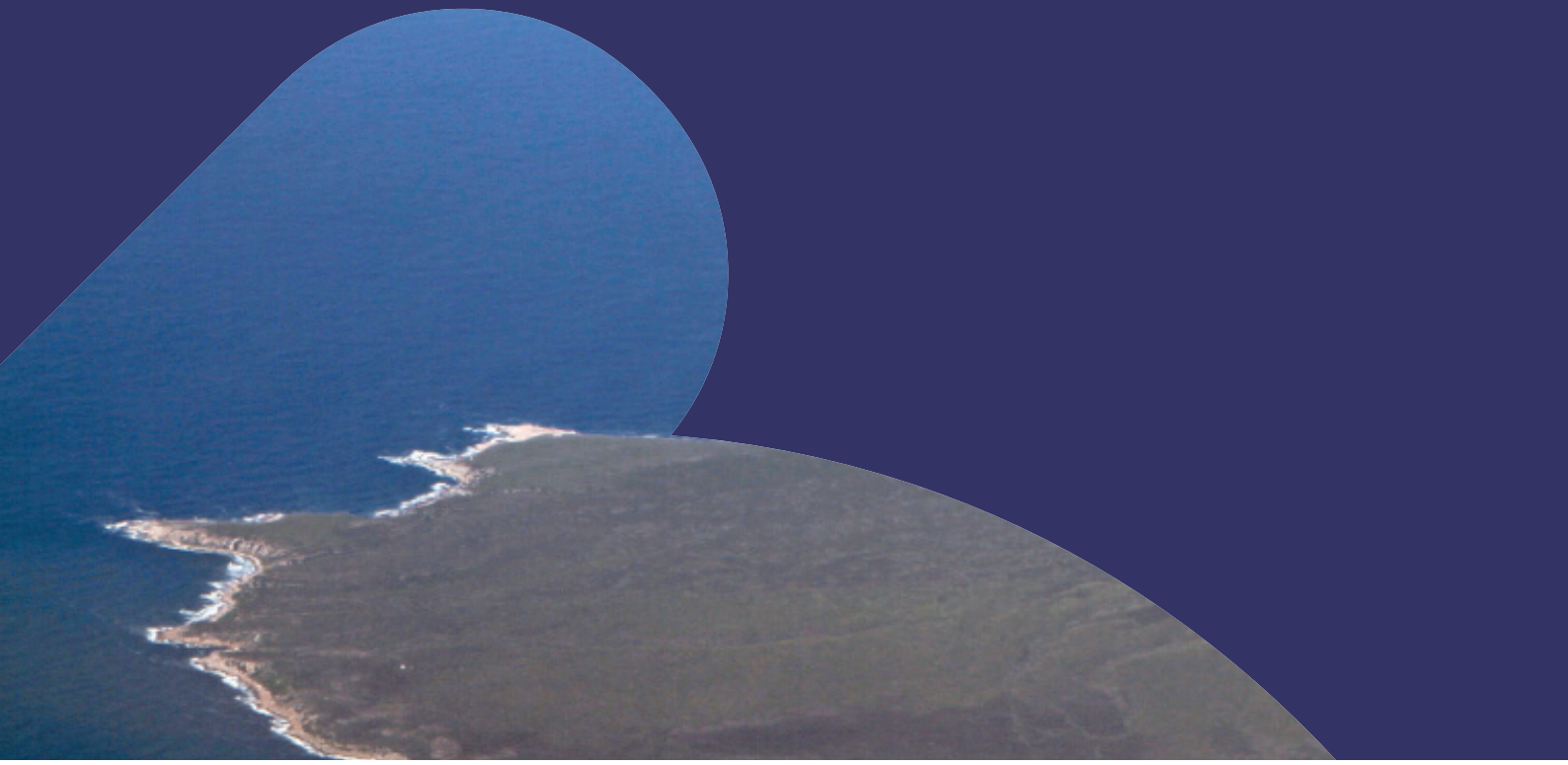
The State of Land Information in South Africa

Webinar Report



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What is the state of land information in South Africa? Is there really a lack of land data to support decisions and to improve land governance? This was the point of departure that a team of specialists grappled with to uncover the many different sources of land data and information available in South Africa. For the very first time, they attempted to systematically review and categorize the entire ecosystem of data and information related to key land topics in the country, assessing over 104 land datasets from 59 different sources. This robust scoping exercise is now documented in the report "State of Land Information in South Africa," jointly published by the Land Portal Foundation and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research.

For this webinar, we invited experts from various sectors to reflect on the open data assessment for South Africa. We reflected on the power dynamics around open data. Participants were invited to discover the key findings of the report, and to discuss what challenges and opportunities still exist to promote openness, transparency and quality of land data as building blocks to improve governance and security of land tenure.

Moderator:

- Laura Meggiolaro, Team Leader, The Land Portal Foundation

Panelists:

- Mark Napier, Principal Researcher, CSIR
- Siyabu Manona, Land information Specialist, LandNNES
- Serena Coetzee, Professor and Head of Department, Geography, Geoinformatics and Meteorology, University of Pretoria
- Maroale Chauke, Director, National Spatial Information Framework, Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development
- Nicolás Grossman, Researcher and Data Lead, Global Data Barometer

A complete recording of the webinar is available on YouTube: https://youtu.be/2h_yffoi5uE

Key Takeaways

- **The State of Land Information in South Africa report creates understanding of how data creates value as a public good to deliver public services.**
- **Mapping the data ecosystem in South Africa helped identify data stewards responsible for managing and ensuring access to datasets, the different types of data that exist in the country, the ways people are engaging with data and how data is being accessed, used and shared by a variety of organizations.**
- **The report helps the South African government to improve their data planning and data management practices, such as documenting metadata and using standards.**
- **The report reveals gaps and shortcomings in land data, which point to the research topics that need to be further explored.**
- **The report is useful in exploring the power dynamics of land data and information in South Africa.**

Webinar Summary

1) DOES THE REPORT CAPTURE THE ACTUAL INFORMATION LANDSCAPE IN THE COUNTRY? AS A GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVE, ARE THERE ANY FINDINGS THAT SURPRISE YOU? IS THE REPORT USEFUL TO PROVIDE INDICATIONS ON WHAT NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED TO INCREASE DATA SHARING AND DATA USE? (MAROALE CHAUKE)

- What is important from a government perspective is to assess how the report is contributing to the bigger plan of government. One of the government's key focus areas is the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP). In this plan, the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) - Priority 5 is about Spatial integration, human settlement and local government. The District Development Model identifies land that can be used as a center of service delivery and economic development.
- The SOLI report provides an opportunity to see what is available, identify the gaps in terms of land information. We wish the report went beyond assessing the availability and accessibility of information, but also would cover the issue of usability, but we understand it was not part of the scope.
- It is expected that the government will be the main custodian of most of the land information because that responsibility is assigned through legislation. The finding on the role of research institutions is not surprising, as they have to compete for projects with the private sector.

2) CAN YOU GIVE US A SENSE OF WHAT IS HAPPENING IN SOUTH AFRICA FROM A CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVE? HOW DOES THE REPORT HELP CAPTURE IT? (SIYABU MANONA)

- The report provides a useful straw-dog as a starting point. Open Government Data is by its nature a moving target, and the report provides a useful global picture.
- Land data in South Africa is fragmented and incoherent, and fragmentation is by its nature inherently an impediment to access.
- Some crucial land data is not published in South Africa, such as land claims data, land reform (redistribution) projects, etc.
- While transparency and accountability are constitutional imperatives, the imperatives have not been filtered into law, and consequently the principles remain illusive and relative.

3) WHAT IS YOUR GENERAL IMPRESSION ON THE SOLI REPORT? DOES IT HELP UNDERSTAND THE SOUTH AFRICA INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM AND CAPTURE WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE COUNTRY? (SERENA COETZEE)

- The report could be useful for postgraduate students as an introduction into land information in South Africa.
- South Africa is struggling to meet pressing needs and address challenges related to land information, including those related to rapid urbanization, customary land tenure and land use and resource management.
- It would be useful for the ISO 19152 standards on the land administration domain model to be referenced.

4) DOES THE STUDY HELP UNDERSTAND HOW INFORMATION RESOURCES ARE CURRENTLY BEING PUBLISHED - WHAT ARE THE GAPS IN RELATION TO DATA AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT IN THE COUNTRY AND HELP YOU DO YOUR JOB AS A GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVE? (MAROALE CHAUKE)

- As an employee of the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), the Department's key projects are the Integrated Land Administration System (ILAS) to fast-track issues of land tenure security and a Fit-for-Purpose Cadastre system centred around a tailor-made solution to cater for the needs of the community, particularly communal and customary land.
- The Department is the custodian of most of the land data and information, hosting Land Boundary, Land Ownership, Land Cover, Land Use, Land Capability, etc. Understanding the entire business model of land administration and management and information resources required for decision making is very crucial to deliver on these key projects.
- From a National Spatial Data Infrastructure perspective, the report gives a current

state of affairs regarding land information. It provides an opportunity for the Directorate: National Spatial Information Framework to support the organs of the state and enforce certain prescripts such as the capturing of metadata and use of standards, for the Committee for Spatial Information to better define data governance laws, such as Data Licensing and for Data Custodians to improve data management and clarify the role of data contributors from local to national level.

- Open data is the ideal, but there are challenges with and limits relating to personal information as well as proprietary issues.
- Data is not the be all and end all of evidence-based decision making; it's a key ingredient, but still open for interpretation, subject to bias and purpose matters.
- Accountability and transparency are key – reporting back to citizens and communities is important (not least to build trust), but is often a weak link in (urban) governance.

5) HOW DO YOU SEE THE STUDY CONTRIBUTING TO UNVEILING THE SA DATA ECOSYSTEM AND IMPROVING ACCESS TO DATA? (MAROALE CHAUKE)

- The study provides an opportunity for all stakeholders to work together and collaborate with one another to close the identified gaps. All components of the land value chain must work together to have a functional ecosystem.
- Proposed measures such as capturing of metadata, consistent use of standards, democratization of data and URIs provide an indication of where things are ,and eventually provide a plan of action for those entrusted with taking care of the land information resources.

6) WHAT IS THE GLOBAL DATA BAROMETER (GDB) AND HOW DOES IT RELATE TO SOLI, AND HOW DOES THIS PARTICULAR COUNTRY EXERCISE THAT ATTEMPT TO IDENTIFY LOCAL DATASETS AND INFORMATION ABOUT ACCESSING AND REUSING DATA, CONTRIBUTE TO THE GLOBAL RESEARCH FRAMEWORK OF THE GDB? (NICOLÁS GROSSMAN)

- The Global Data Barometer is a global study with an ambitious objective of mapping the landscape of data for the public good all around the world. We are going to gather information about data governance, capabilities, availability and use and impact in 100+ countries. That research will serve a wide range of stakeholders that need to have national, regional and global insights to track the so-called data revolution.
- We chose land data as a key thematic area where data plays a role for public good, and we are going to assess data ecosystems in each country. Afterwards, we will study to what extent policies provide for well-managed data, to what extent capacity exists to use that data and whether the data is being used in ways that we anticipate can contribute to the public good.
- SOLI presents a very deep research and also summarizes findings and reconstructed processes behind data, and all of this helps to understand data dynamics and are really valuable inputs to build our framework.
- The SOLI matrix that has key categories and main potential sources is a solid ground for our global survey.

7) DO YOU THINK THAT THE METHODOLOGY UNDERLYING THIS REPORT HELPS GET THE RIGHT BALANCE BETWEEN COMPARABILITY VERSUS GRANULARITY? HOW IMPORTANT IS COMPARABILITY? (NICOLÁS GROSSMAN)

- The GDB has a much broader focus and therefore faces different methodological challenges. The GDB methodology must be able to build comparable metrics from different cultural, economic, political and linguistic contexts.
- GDB makes an effort towards this through a research governance process (global network, regional hubs, reviewers, national researchers). In this context, SOLI really helped us to sort the tension between granularity and comparability.
- When shaping our methodology, local studies such as SOLI help in several steps of the development process.
- Additionally, knowing what you can find in a country is as important as knowing what you will not find with certain approaches.

8) HOW DOES THIS STUDY CONTRIBUTE TO THE CONVERSATION AROUND OPEN DATA AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND PUTTING DATA SHARING HIGHER ON THE AGENDA? (NICOLÁS GROSSMAN)

- SOLI not only helped us to understand and define land data, it served to zoom into the power dynamics around data in general.
- Some tendencies that SOLI show are also pertinent to other data issues and open data in general. For example, land data issues sometimes also occur in other topics, such as ways of dealing with information that tends to be fragmented
- When we think about SOLI, it is a whole process that becomes very useful institutionally and strategically.
- Institutionally, tracking data requires partnerships with different expertise, and knowing the actors involved in thematic fields is very important. And that is something that we learned from SOLI in SA.
- SOLI SA strategically strengthens the importance of data for good governance by putting the importance of data in the agenda and starting the conversation between key actors.

Notable Quotes from the Panelists

"IF YOU WANT TO BUILD A VERY LOCAL AND GRANULAR STUDY YOU MUST ALSO BE AWARE OF GLOBAL TENDENCIES. THE SOLI SOUTH AFRICA REPORT WAS REALLY USEFUL AND HELPS US TO THINK HOW TO MAKE A COMPARABLE INDEX."

- NICOLÁS GROSSMAN, RESEARCHER AND DATA LEAD, GLOBAL DATA BAROMETER

"THE LAND INFORMATION SYSTEM IN SOUTH AFRICA REMAINS FLUID, FRAGMENTED, AND INACCESSIBLE TO LARGE PARTS OF SOCIETY. WE NEED TO WORK FROM MANY ANGLES TO IMPROVE IT."

- MARK NAPIER, PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER, CSIR

"MANY DEPARTMENTS AND MUNICIPALITIES ARE CUSTODIANS OF DATA, AND EACH ONE HAS ITS OWN CULTURE OF CAPTURING, STORING AND SHARING THIS INFORMATION, YET THEY ARE ARE MAINLY IN CONTRADICTION WITH THE CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES OF TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY."

- SIYABU MANONA, LAND INFORMATION SPECIALIST, LANDNNES

"UNDERSTANDING THE ENTIRE BUSINESS MODEL OF LAND ADMINISTRATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT AND HAVING ACCESS TO LAND INFORMATION RESOURCES FOR PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING IS VERY CRUCIAL TO DELIVER ON GOVERNMENT PROJECTS."

- MAROALE CHAUKE, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL SPATIAL INFORMATION FRAMEWORK, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, LAND REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

"THE STATE OF LAND INFORMATION IN SOUTH AFRICA IS A VERY USEFUL DOCUMENT TO GIVE TO STUDENTS SO THAT THEY CAN GET AN UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IS AVAILABLE IN SOUTH AFRICA IN TERMS OF LAND INFORMATION."

- SERENA COETZEE, PROFESSOR AND HEAD OF DEPARTMENT, GEOGRAPHY, GEOINFORMATICS AND METEOROLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

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