Realising **Solutions** for **Land Governance** Issues

'Securing Land and Property Rights for All' is the slogan of the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN). This alliance of global regional and national partners is aimed at contributing to poverty alleviation through land reform, improved land management and security of tenure, particularly through the development and dissemination of pro-poor and gender-sensitive land tools. *GIM International* took the opportunity to interview Oumar Sylla, who was recently appointed as the new leader of UN-Habitat's Land and GLTN Unit.

Mr Sylla, you have been the leader of the Land and GLTN Unit since September last year. How do you look back on the first six months in your new role?

It was my great pleasure to be appointed as the new leader of the Global Land Tool Network unit thanks to my long-standing work on land governance. I've been really impressed by the diversity within GLTN as a network comprised of land professionals, bilateral and multilateral organisations, wider society and researchers. This is a great opportunity to work comprehensively on land governance issues which require a mix of disciplines such as surveyors,

lawyers, researchers and policy specialists. GLTN has demonstrated that it can add value by being able to generate a rich ecosystem that is critical in realising sustainable land management and governance. I've also been impressed by the solid foundation I found in place with the variety of innovative tools that are making the implementation of land policy all over the world more efficient and effective. For example, the relevance of GLTN tools in implementing the Voluntary Guidelines (FAO's Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests or 'VGGT', Ed.).

The Global Land Tool Network has developed a global partnership on land issues pulling together global partners as well as many individual members to take a more holistic approach to land issues. How does this work?

GLTN works by promoting and supporting the adoption and implementation of land policies, tools and approaches that are pro-poor, gender-appropriate, effective and sustainable. Land issues are notoriously complex and involve extensive vested interests. To design, test and implement pro-poor, gender-responsive land tools that can be used at scale requires inputs from various disciplines, professions and stakeholder groups. One aspect of GLTN's success has been its ability to integrate these various inputs and put together multidisciplinary teams; another is its ability to scale up by working with and through partners to maximise their contributions. The network now has 72 partners – global stakeholders who contribute with substantial knowledge or financial resources.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by world leaders last September at the United Nations. What impact does this new agenda have on the activities of the GLTN?

The SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals, Ed.) coupled with other global agendas such as Habitat III provide a unique opportunity for GLTN partners to meaningfully engage in global events. As the perception of tenure security has evolved, challenges have also emerged in land and governance, and this

has called for fresh thinking that is relevant to and aligned with new political agendas at global, regional and national levels. The SDGs address the land question both directly and indirectly within the broader context of poverty reduction through combating hunger by stimulating agricultural production and access to basic services and agricultural land for women. In the past decade, the GLTN has made great strides and its unique achievements now provide a very solid foundation for the network to play an active role in the SDGs. Through coordination of the Global Land Indicators Initiative, the GLTN advocated for the inclusion of land tenure as an indicator in the SDGs. Today, under the SDG Goal 1 of 'End poverty in all its forms everywhere', Indicator 1.4.2 speaks directly to the core business of GLTN, that of securing tenure security. This opens up a new avenue for GLTN partners to become more relevant in the land governance arena and to devise new ways of partnering to inform the SDGs.

▲ *Oumar Sylla addressing the delegates at the opening session of the 6th GLTN Partners' Meeting in Nairobi, Kenya.*

Your website states that the network contributes to poverty alleviation through land reform, improved land management and security of tenure, particularly through the development and dissemination of what are called 'pro-poor and gender-sensitive land tools'. Where do we stand on that now?
GLTN has developed several tools that are at various stages in their cycle of development. It's high time for the tools to be implemented at country level in order to demonstrate their potential to improve land governance and contribute to the implementation of both policies and institutional frameworks. I will prioritise the country-level work where there is a need to support the government to improve land governance and also an opportunity to develop an integrated approach in tool implementation by bringing in more than one partner to collaborate. The innovative concept is to combine the tools at the country level for improved efficiency. I recognise the huge government demand for GLTN assistance in several areas: land policy development and implementation, capacity development and land use planning, among others. This demand presents a unique opportunity for GLTN to gain political momentum at the country level with governments and the regional bodies such as the African Union/Land Policy Initiative, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for Development. When a tool is being developed, the concepts

are proven in practice at the piloting/testing stage and this provides the developers with useful data and feedback about areas of improvement. We have 23 tools that have been finalised so far. Some of our more mature tools such as the STDM (Social Tenure Domain Model, Ed.) are already being used in parts of Kenya, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo and have received some recognition and even support from national and local governments alike. This is because they address the unique challenges faced by the land sector, particularly in the developing economies. Another GLTN tool that more than 40 countries have been exposed to is the Gender Evaluation Criteria. These criteria specifically address the gender responsiveness of the land tool development process.

Do you expect the GLTN tools to achieve better coverage of land administration?
Land administration and information is just one of the four areas that GLTN works in. The relevant tools address spatial units and the modernisation of land agency budget approaches. For sure, all those tools will contribute to improving land administration delivery. Today we should be proud of the paradigm shift in land administration: the novel >>> fit-for-purpose (FFP) land administration approach has broken down some rigid, traditional views of land administration <<<, particularly in developing countries. Land administration should be flexible and adaptable to any country context

and should take into account cost effectiveness and the social realities on the ground. Fit-for-purpose land administration demonstrates a new way of doing business and a readiness to serve the community, given the fact that 70% of land in Africa is not covered by the formal cadastre. The FFP approach brings flexibility in dealing with a range of land rights.

What are the lessons learnt?
In the short term, we can acknowledge that collective action is key in achieving efficient land governance and management. GLTN partners have demonstrated their ability to work together and this has contributed to improved efficiency of financial resources and effectiveness of actions. One good experience has been the Global Land Indicators Initiative whereby GLTN direct and indirect partners successfully brought land into the SDGs process and content. The GLTN secretariat should continue to empower partners on the ground. The convening role of the GLTN secretariat can be best used to improve coordination and collective action at the country level, which is where we now want to make a difference. There is also a need to involve the local communities in tool development, with a focus on a people-centred bottom-up approach as a way of entrenching human rights in the GLTN tools.

How can governments improve their policy skills when it comes to land administration?
As we are all aware, land administrations in ▶

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developing countries are facing lot of challenges. The recurring question is, which model of land administration should be promoted in those countries? The answer must take into consideration the following factors: cost, accessibility, quality of service delivery and design. Unfortunately, land administration has not been given lot of attention in the public arena, especially in terms of financial decision-making. Financial resources are rarely allocated to land administration in many developing countries. The first step is for the decision-makers to prioritise this sector, taking into consideration its contribution to revenue generation and attracting investments. Secondly, there is the need to develop comprehensive land policies to address the issues of land administration in the broader spectrum of land governance and ensure equal access to the services, including for women and young people. This calls for a fit-for-purpose land administration system that accounts for the social context on the ground. Policies should also help address the tenure need for a variety of land rights including customary and informall. The continuum of land rights brought about a major shift in the perception of land rights, going beyond titling. There is now a solid foundation for country-level land policy to become more efficient and relevant to address all governance and tenure security needs.

What is your advice with respect to how the geomatics industry can help countries to develop well-functioning cadastres and land administration policies?

The geomatics Industry should act as a 'solutions provider' and should be flexible in adopting and implementing solutions for the specific needs of the country. We can no

longer continue providing the same conventional solutions for various needs and contexts, particularly in developing countries. This is where fit–for-purpose land administration comes in. This approach should be mainstreamed in the geomatics industry, both at educational and training level as well as in project implementation. The shift should start with the geomatics industry and, if this happens, we can be confident that more appropriate, affordable and fit-for-purpose technical solutions will soon become better available.

Good land policy requires educated professionals. How would you describe the current situation?

The lack of capacity to deal with land governance issues efficiently has become a challenge in many developed countries. Because of that low capacity, national governments are facing numerous constraints in land policy development and implementation. Countries have relevant

policies, but they are still unsure of how to go about implementing them. Land experts are in short supply, and even completely non-existent in many countries. In terms of education, few schools and universities provide teaching about land and natural resources. In view of these circumstances, it comes as no surprise that there is a shortage of land experts in developing countries. It is for this reason that GLTN places emphasis on capacity development for institutions and on the inclusion of land governance in training. Kenya's University of Nairobi has already incorporated the STDM into the curriculum. There is, however, still a need to strengthen collaboration among institutions dealing in land issues and to give students an opportunity to embrace the subject matter in the early stages of their training. The universities of Twente and Munich have a critical role to play in this. Without capacity, land policy may suffer from ineffective implementation and an inability to serve the needs of the vulnerable communities.

Do you have a message for our readers?

I would like to thank the land professionals for their contribution to GLTN's relevance in improving tenure security for all. We should keep the momentum going and continue to develop collaborative action, both at country level and global level. The professionals are reservoirs of knowledge when it comes to land administration issues and I encourage them to further strengthen knowledge sharing in order to bridge the gap between them and the decision-makers in the land sector. I also acknowledge the contribution of FIG to the GLTN as we count down to the FIG Working Week in New Zealand in May. This will be another opportunity for us to strengthen our collaboration, guided by the new SDGs. ◀

Oumar Sylla

Oumar Sylla holds a master's degree in local government law from Saint Louis University in Senegal as well as two other MAs: one in African legal studies and legal anthropology focused on land and natural resources from Paris 1 Sorbonne and the other in territorial project management from Paris 13 Creteil. He brings to GLTN a wealth of both academic and practical experience in land, natural resources, conflict resolution, urban development and planning, urban safety and security, slum upgrading, regional cooperation and partnership. Oumar is continuing the efforts towards expansion of GLTN's work and networks at the country level. He advocates a wider incorporation of land governance in the overall urban agenda to bridge the gap between rural and urban to improve tenure security for the vulnerable. Prior to joining the Land and GLTN Unit, Oumar served as a senior advisor in UN-Habitat's Regional Office for Africa. Before that, he supported implementation of the GLTN programme and managed the UN-Habitat land programme in the Democratic Republic of Congo in a peace-building context as chief technical advisor. He also gained experience with the European Union framework as a land policy advisor in South Sudan and Burkina Faso.