



Briefing Note

Land-use planning

The background

Access to natural resources such as land and water is an essential basis for food security and to safeguard economic livelihoods. However, available land is limited and with the growing global population it is becoming ever scarcer. The primary task of land-use planning is to harmonise the differing land-use interests in a particular area so that the land can be used sustainably for the general good. Land-use planning specifies the purposes for which land in rural areas may be used. The guiding principle in this decision-making is that land, as a scarce resource, must be used optimally and sustainably. This serves to secure the economic livelihoods of the rural population over the long term, while simultaneously establishing a solid basis for investment. Land-use planning follows specific basic principles, including participation, integration, methodological diversity, subsidiarity and feasibility, to name but a few.

However, such planning faces a broad range of challenges. Climate change is affecting the availability of land for certain types of use. For example, irrigable agricultural land is becoming increasingly scarce. Population growth and poverty are forcing people to settle on land that is highly prone to natural disasters. Increasing privatisation of land in rural areas and rapid growth in competition for land and its use exacerbate the pressures. The growth of cities and the rising demand for resources in the world economy also fuel the interests of global actors in using local resources.

Land-use planning has developed new answers to these worsening problems. These include preparation and assessment of climate scenarios, designation of land for alternative production methods, mapping areas at risk from natural disasters and defining resultant proposals for appropriate land use.

Moreover, sustainable land-use planning now faces much more complex and demanding requirements than in the past. Copious data are required to identify appropriate land for certain uses, or the best use for a given plot. The methodological and technological fundamentals and possibilities of land-use planning have undergone major advances thanks to technical progress in the field of remote sensing and geographic information systems (GIS). However, the key challenges remain the availability of data and the ability of those concerned to analyse them and use them correctly in planning processes. Up-to-date information on existing and planned land use remains patchy. In particular the inadequate availability and transparency of data on national projects is increasingly hampering reliable, long-term land-use planning at local and regional level.

Land-use planning delivers information on current and future land use. Effective, transparent and participatory land-use planning contributes to responsible government action. It is a key approach to clarifying differing interests in land use and avoiding land-use conflicts.

Our position

In light of these considerations, GIZ's position is as follows:

1. Land-use planning ensures reconciliation of interests and resolution of conflicts

Land-use planning goes far beyond the zoning recommendations of preparatory land-usage planning or community development planning. It creates the preconditions for sustainable, socially and environmentally compatible, socially desirable and economically productive land-use arrangements. To this end, local needs and interests must be combined with measures at higher decision-making levels (vertical integration). This can only be achieved in a sustainable manner if actors at all levels of decision-making are involved and represented in the process and negotiations.

This is why land-use planning puts in motion a number of different processes over the course of which decisions are reached and consensus built on how best to use and protect private, communal and/or public land. The participatory character of this approach empowers the local population to make its own decisions about the distribution of resources. This enables a balancing of interests and a resolution of conflicts where competing demands for or entitlements to land use arise.

Planning is based on knowledge, existing institutions, conflict resolution modalities at the local level, and on transparent processes. This ensures the feasibility of solutions as well as the economic effectiveness and efficiency of implementation.

2. Good institutional infrastructure and horizontal networking are important

Interdisciplinary cooperation and coordination between all relevant sectors – i.e. horizontal networking – are absolutely essential to land-use planning. In general, this requires long-term support for the development of institutions and the improvement of cooperation between governmental ministries and authorities in different sectors. In this way, land-use planning helps all participants to build and expand their capacities and competencies.

3. Land-use planning in development cooperation

Participatory spatial and land-use planning is a valuable instrument for merging traditional and modern land law systems. That is why international cooperation should promote it more vigorously. Land-use planning also safeguards existing land rights, and helps to prevent potential conflict and, for example, overlapping planning by different ministries.

Our recommended action

The impacts of climate change and other developments such as mounting competition for agricultural land pose major challenges for land-use planning.

GIZ's key recommendations for action are as follows:

1. Recognise, codify and strengthen entitlements (rights of use and ownership)

Certain aspects of land regulations still remain underrepresented in land-use planning. Ownership rights are often uncertain, which among other issues can lead to land conflicts and illegal transactions. Land-use planning and efforts to secure land rights therefore need to be linked, e.g. when identifying overlapping planning or competing demands on land and framing solutions.

2. Improve land governance

Land-use planning should be used in more targeted fashion to promote good land governance and equitable management of land and other natural resources. This requires building and broadening capacities, competencies and skills among the institutions involved. Transparent and participatory land-use planning can avoid the misuse of the land resource.

3. Strengthen monitoring of land markets and land transactions

Without the necessary control of the land market and of land transactions as a response to increasing investment in land worldwide, there is a risk of speculation and illegal parcelling and land development. Such abuse can thwart even the best efforts of sustainable land use. Preventing this



from happening requires forward-looking, broad-scale land-use planning. Implementation must be strictly monitored for full compliance, and building regulations and land-use rules must be effectively enforced.

4. Establish legal obligation

Land-use planning is increasingly being enshrined in institutional frameworks. Nevertheless, it often lacks legally binding force. The goal must therefore be to secure land-use planning as a legal process as well. It must be feasible to enforce the land uses specified in land-use plans, for example through the courts, arbitration services or local committees. This requires that the relevant institutions are strengthened, and their responsibility clarified. It is essential that the role of traditional legal institutions is integrated as far as possible. This creates transparency far beyond the local level. Establishing these foundations will empower decision-making on direct foreign investment in land and awarding of concessions.

5. Improve cooperation and data availability

The data needed are frequently incomplete or out of date. Local data gathering requires both the cooperation of the population concerned and of the different authorities. Capacity building for participatory data collection and evaluation is the way to improve data quality and availability and to win competent partners over the long term.

6. Tailor efforts to focus on regional needs

Land-use planning must be adapted in each case to the prevailing conditions in the partner country. Although the core instruments of land-use planning remain the same, they must be introduced in quite different ways in different national contexts, i.e. adapted to the influence of codified law and state-administered justice vis à vis traditional institutions (norms, rules, bodies), the administrative structure, the type of governance, the level of public co-determination, and the degree of decentralisation.

7. Integrate planning in the budget process

Long-term funding of land-use plans using the partner's available resources plays a crucial part in their implementation. Land-use planning should therefore be integrated in the existing budget system at the start of the planning process.

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