SAUDI ARABIA
LAND SECTOR ASSESSMENT

BACKGROUND PAPER

GLTN
GLOBAL LAND TOOL NETWORK

الاراضي العربية
Arab Land Initiative

IHRC
UTI

ABOUT THIS PAPER

This background paper presents the results of an assessment conducted on land management and land administration in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia between 2020 and 2022. Good land governance is essential for realizing sustainable social, economic, and environmental development, peace and stability. The paper indicates the country's capacity to deliver good land governance by measuring its performance on the core land administration functions: land tenure, land value, land use, land development and land disputes resolution. It also maps the existing learning offer on land governance, identifying the key institutions and the courses available in Saudi Arabia. The paper was prepared as part of the work of the Arab Land Initiative, and its preparation was coordinated by the Urban Training and Studies Institute (UTI) of the Housing and Building National Research Center (HBRC), Egypt, under the leadership of UN-Habitat and the Global Land Tool Network.

THE GLOBAL LAND TOOL NETWORK AND THE ARAB LAND INITIATIVE – GLTN is a multi-sectoral alliance of international partners committed to increasing access to land and tenure security for all, with a focus on the poor, women and youth. The Network's partners include international rural and urban civil society organizations, research and training institutions, bilateral and multilateral organizations, and international professional bodies.

In 2016, GLTN Partners, led by UN-Habitat and the World Bank, launched the Arab Land Initiative to promote equal access to land, peace, stability and economic growth in the Arab region through good land governance and transparent, efficient and affordable land administration systems. The Initiative aims at empowering land champions from the region by developing capacities, increasing collaboration and promoting innovation, learning and sharing of best practices. It also supports the implementation of land gender-responsive and fit-for-purpose land tools and approaches at national and local level. The Initiative is supported by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of the Federal Republic of Germany (BMZ).

For more information visit **www.gltn.net** or **arablandinitiative.gltn.net**

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Abbreviations

GIS	Geographic Information System
GLTN	Global Land Tool Network
MODON	Economic Cities Saudi Authority for Industrial Cities and Technology Zones
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
SAR	Saudi Riyal
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UTI	Urban Training and Studies Institute

1. Introduction

Saudi Arabia

Spanning the majority of the Arabian Peninsula, Saudi Arabia is the largest country in the Middle East and the second-largest country in the Arab region, with an area of approximately 2,150,000 km². Saudi Arabia is the only country with a coastline along both the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, and most of its terrain consists of arid deserts, lowlands, steppe and mountains. Its capital and largest city is Riyadh, with Mecca and Medina serving as important cultural and religious centres.

Saudi Arabia is the world's largest oil exporter and the second-largest oil producer, controlling the second-largest oil reserves and the sixth-largest gas reserves (US EIA, 2017). The country is categorized as a World Bank high-income economy with a very high Human Development Index, 35th among 191 countries globally as of 2022 (Saudi Press Agency, 2022). It is the only Arab country in the G20 major economies (Wynbrandt, 2010).
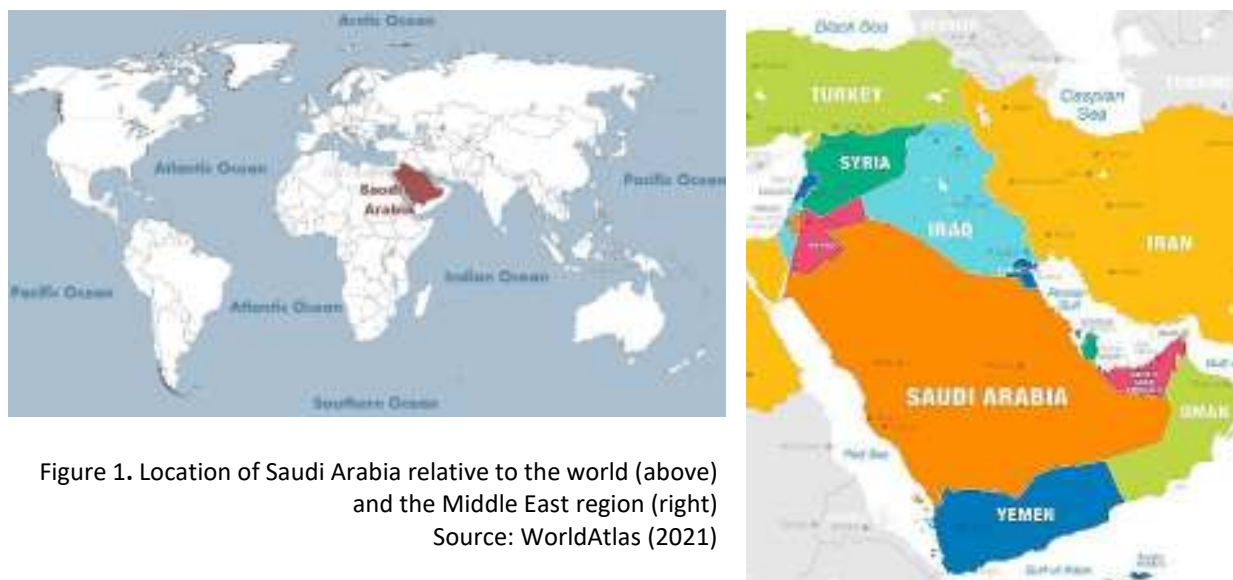
Figure 1. Location of Saudi Arabia relative to the world (above) and the Middle East region (right)
Source: WorldAtlas (2021)

1.1 Objectives of the study

This paper summarises the results of an assessment of the capacity of Saudi Arabia's land administration system to perform the core land administration functions (land tenure, land value, land use, land development, and disputes' resolution) to support the achievement of the overarching goal of sustainable social and economic development. The study provides a preliminary assessment of the current learning offers and related curricula for land governance in Saudi Arabia and contributes to a larger research project of the Arab Land Initiative that covers the Middle East region.

1.2 Methodology

The land management and administration system were assessed through indicators, questionnaires and interviews with land experts as key informants. It involved a wide range of stakeholders, including land professionals, decision-makers, civil society, and local land users. The study was carried out through the following steps:

- The first phase consisted of a literature review on various aspects of land administration through a comprehensive review of documents, including laws, legislations, international reports, and local studies conducted by the relevant ministries and agencies.

- The second phase was completed online. Semi-structured interviews were held with targeted stakeholders to obtain a final assessment for the five land administration functions mentioned above. Interviews were conducted to assess the statutory systems on land administration, land tenure, land use, land development and land information infrastructure, focusing on the main challenges, current performance, gaps and who or what can bridge the gaps. The project team formulated the interview questions based on comprehensive research of adequate indicators for this study.

- The third phase used the capacity assessment model for statutory land administration aspects based on "a global land management perspective" (Abukashawa et al., 2020; Williamson et al., 2010), Land Management Paradigm (Enemark, 2005) and Land Administration Toolbox-based Assessment Methodology (De Vries et al., 2016).

- Lastly, the study was presented, peer reviewed, and enriched through the contributions of experts during a 'writeshop' that took place in Ismailia, Egypt in June 2021. The information contained in this paper are therefore updated to that year and newer land sector developments are not included.

Stakeholders

For the purpose of the study, land stakeholders were categorised in four main types:

- **Government or public institutions**: National and local government branches that are part of different policy sectors such as land, agriculture, housing, infrastructure, etc. For example, the agriculture department may need information on the land uses permitted in a particular area. The water board will need to know the location of the pipes, and the police may need to check on the registered owner of a disputed land parcel. The state itself is often a significant landowner.

- **Private sector**: These include developers, architects, surveyors, estate agents, banks, investors, and community organizations who are likely to use the system frequently.

- **Academia:** Academics who produce data and knowledge about land in different disciplines (land management and economics, geography, architecture, urban planning, sociology, political science, etc.).

- **The public**: Individual men and women, households, farmers, pastoralists, and businesses who occupy, use and or own land. Many actively use the land information and administration system infrequently – perhaps even once in a lifetime, for example, when buying a plot to build a house. Nevertheless, they are continually affected by the construction of a new road, the development of a neighbouring parcel of land or the growth of informal settlements.

- **Civil society organizations** in the country focus on humanitarian issues and, to some extent, on gender and social protection. However, none of the civil society organizations specialize in land-related issues.

Respondents

Respondents were identified among the above-mentioned categories: individuals working in government, private and academic sectors with land-related specialities or experiences, land users, representatives of one of Saudi Arabia's 13 regions, individuals with professional working in the country, and experts identified by UTI, GLTN and UN-Habitat. Key informants were consulted through online questionnaires, virtual meetings, and phone interviews. A total of 82 people provided inputs to this study. Among the

respondents from government institutions, 20 per cent represented the national level (ministries), 55 per cent the regional level (*Amanat*), and 25 per cent the local level (municipalities).
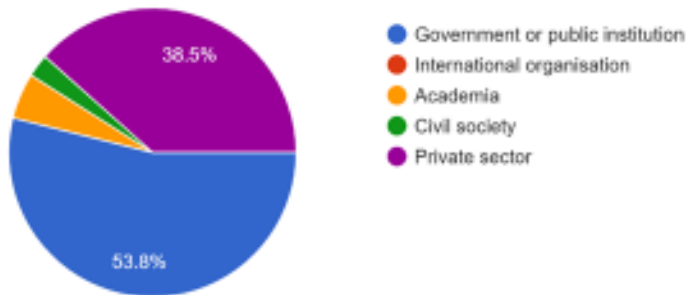
Figure 2. Type of respondents

Study limitations

The survey included both quantitative and qualitative questions. In some cases, particularly for quantitative questions, the information necessary to generate precise findings was unavailable - because the data is scattered across different institutions, not accessible and treated as confidential information (as a matter of government policy or practice) - or it simply did not exist. When this was the case, researchers made an informed estimate in consultation with experts. Researchers also had difficulty securing the participation of women experts on land issues. Several were contacted to participate in the study, but none answered the questionnaire.

2.   Land-related legal framework

Saudi Arabia is an Islamic country. Islamic Sharia is the basis of the constitution and the laws. The legislative framework supports a system where the highest level of power is with top governmental tiers including the king, the Council of Ministries, the Council of Economic Affairs and Development and the Shura (Consultative) Council. The central government has a very prominent role in decision-making and setting out the policy framework; however, the constitution provides regulations for lower (local) government levels. The executive and legislative arms report to the king and the Council of Ministers. The king appoints male and female members of the Shura Council, established to advise the king and the Council of Ministers on matters related to government's policies (see Figure 3).
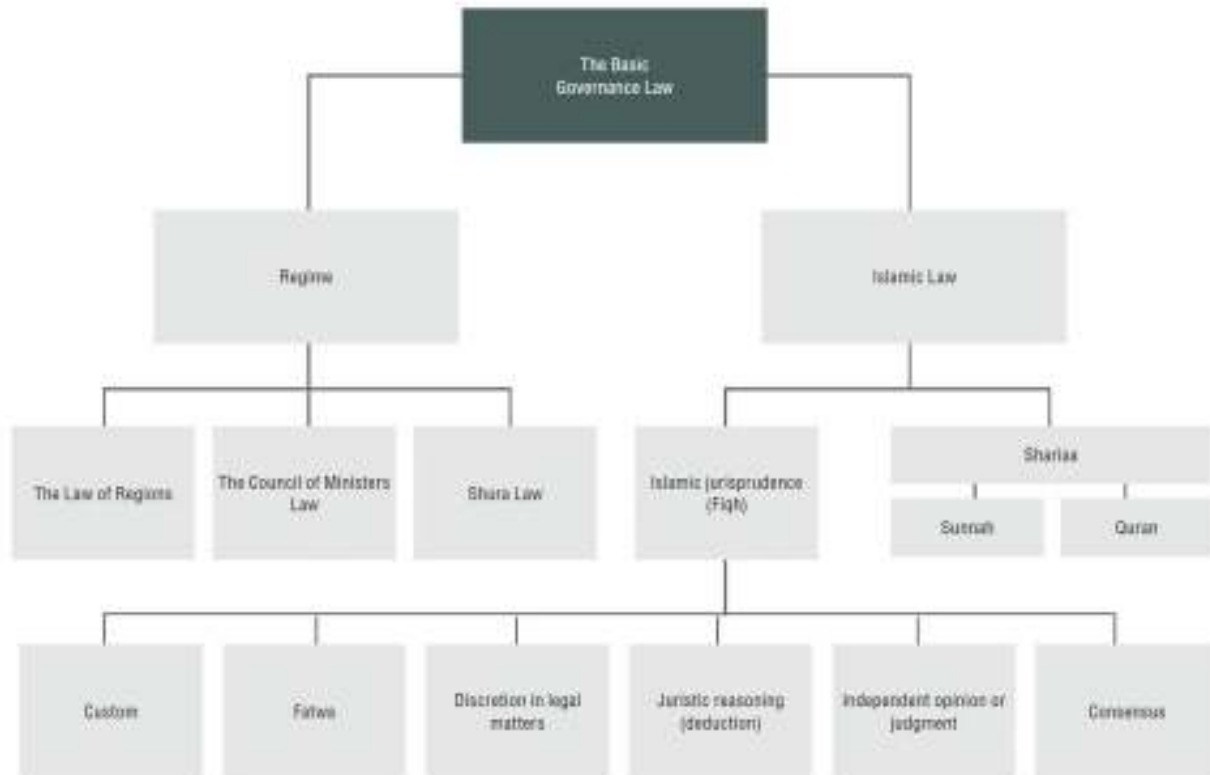
Figure 3. The Legislative Framework. Source: Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs (2018)

The higher-level government controls the legislative pillars that issue, adopt and approve legislation. These laws, implementation regulations, and circulars are issued by the Council of Ministers, a specific minister, or the king (SPRINT – Research, Evaluation and Implementation for an Active Regional Development, 2017). The five legislative pillars are shown in Figure 4.
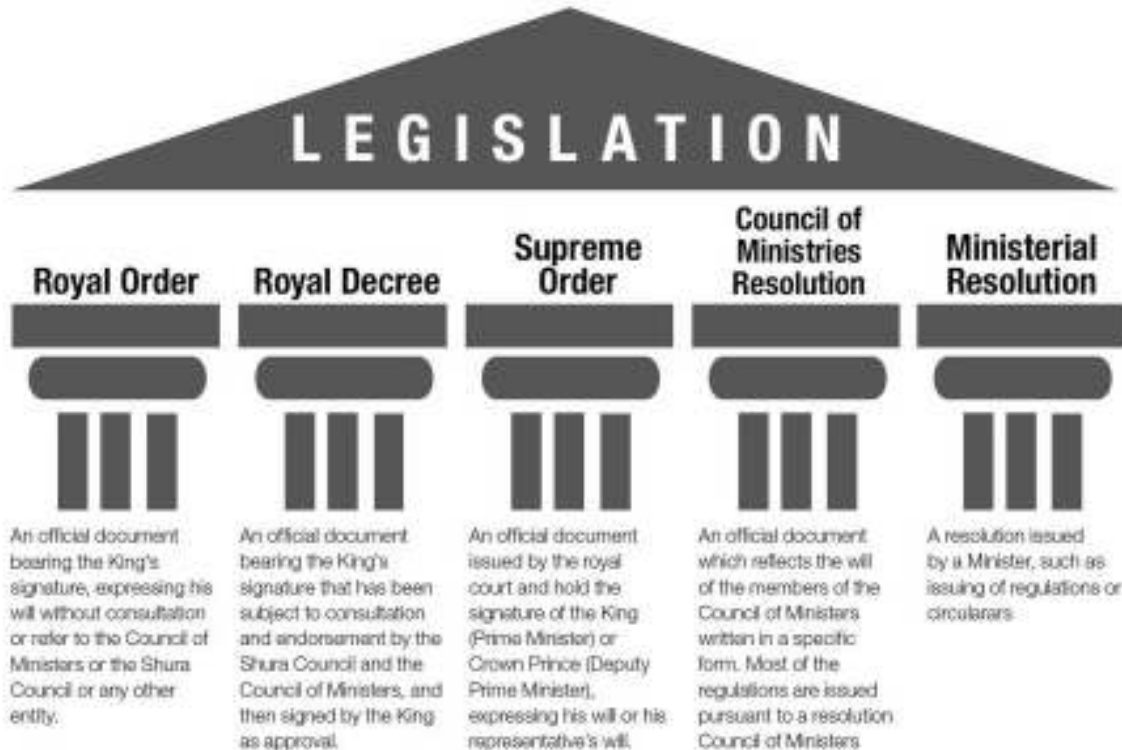
Figure 4. Pillars of Legislation. Source: Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs (2018)

Three early statutes form the basis of the spatial planning process in the country, namely the Roads and Building Statute in 1941, the Municipalities and Villages Law in 1976, and the Law of Provinces in 1992. The current spatial planning legislation is associated with multi-level spatial planning. Urban planning is governed by the National Spatial Development Strategy approved by Council of Ministers (Resolution No. 151 in 2001) and by the subsequent preparation of regional, structural, directive and local development plans. These constitute an integral part of spatial planning legislation.

Resolution No. 157 of 2007 is another important Council of Ministers resolution with a direct impact on spatial planning activities. It sets the rules for Urban Growth Boundaries called "*Nitaq Omrani*". It rationalizes the growth of cities in Saudi Arabia by delineating the appropriate future boundaries for localizing urban activities, accommodate of urban development and infrastructure. *Nitaq Omrani* follows the directions of the national spatial development strategy.

Resolution No. 320 of 2012 calls for the establishment of standing committees in all regional municipalities, or *Amanats*, to consider all matters regarding the coordination and monitoring of projects and to manage and resolve emerging issues and conflict. As part of the decentralization of power and responsibility of mayors and heads of municipalities, in 2005, the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs issued an extensive library of planning guidelines and design standards that have a focus on urban planning and urban development control responsibilities. These are Urban Design Standards, Community Centres and Neighbourhood Manual, Street Fixture Manual, Regional Plans Preparation and Updating Manual, Architectural Heritage Manual, Public Facility Planning Standards and other such manuals. Some of these are being updated to keep pace with the countrywide urban transition.

The main legislations concerning spatial planning and land management are:

- **Basic Law of Governance,** issued by Royal Order No. A/90 dated 1/3/1992, provides for the functions of the sovereign authorities of the state and sets out the legal tools for issuing laws and imposing taxes.

- **The Law of Regions,** issued by Royal Decree No. A/92 dated 2/9/1977, provides for the division of the Kingdom into regions under the supervision of rulers and governors. It also specifies the roles of each of the aforementioned in terms of regional and service development.

- **The Municipal and Rural Areas Law,** issued by Royal Decree No. M/5 dated 2/9/1977 as the System of Governance Resource Constraints law, addresses the functions of municipalities and entrusts the latter with all activities relating to restoration, enhancement and safeguarding of health, security and safety.

- **The Roads and Buildings Law,** issued in 1941, regulates planning and sets out construction formalities and requirements, including zoning, licensing health and safety measures.

- **The Municipal Property Law**, issued by Royal Decree No. M/64 dated 20/12/1972, governs the preservation and use of public and private assets owned by municipalities and *Amanats*.

- **The Law Governing the Distribution of Barren Lands**, issued by Royal Decree No. M/26 dated 28/9/1968, provides conditions for lands to qualify as barren and distribution to eligible individuals and companies for operation and potential ownership.

- **The Public Service Protection Law,** issued by Royal Decree No. M/62 dated 5/9/1985, requires that plans and instructions be obtained from the competent authority. Protection and continuous service should be done before taking action on any public service's networks and facilities.

- **The Implementing Regulations Setting out the Rules for Urban Until the Year 2029,** issued by Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs resolution No. 66000 dated 14/10/2014, sets out the phases for urban development and the corresponding implementation measures.

- **The General Environment Law,** issued by Royal Decree No. M/34 dated 15/10/2001, aims to preserve, protect, and develop the environment and safeguard it from pollution. It provides for the inclusion of environmental planning as an integral part of overall development planning in all industrial, agricultural, urban and other areas.

- **The Law Governing the Ownership and Allotment of Real Property Units,** issued by Royal Decree No. M/5 dated 24/4/2002, provides the requirements and procedures for the allotment of real property units.

- **The Law Governing the Registration of Real Property,** issued by Royal Decree No. M/6 dated 24/4/2002, provides the requirements and procedures for registering real property rights at a public register.

- **The Expropriation Law,** issued by Royal Decree No. M/15 dated 12/5/2003, entitles ministries, governmental authorities and other entities with public standing to expropriate real estate property for public interest in return for fair compensation.

- **The Law of Unpleasant, Health-Damaging and Hazardous Establishments,** issued by Royal Decree No. M/14 dated 19/6/2002, subjects the establishment, operation or expansion to prior licensing from competent authorities.

- **The Law Imposing Fees on Idle Lands,** issued by Royal Decree No. M/4 dated 24/11/2015, imposes a fee on unused lands allocated for residential or commercial.

Several regulations and standards are set across the many planning laws, circulars and miscellaneous regulatory documents (Althabt, 2013). For example, in the Roads and Buildings Statute of 1941, the regulatory concept of minimum lot size and minimum lot dimensions are introduced, among other unrelated matters. Another example is the Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 1270, which regulates how much space is to be assigned to streets and public spaces within any development. This seemingly unsystematic introduction of regulations into existing legislation to address specific emerging matters continues up to present days. Spatial planning and land development is directed by royal decrees, ministerial ordinances, instructions and manuals, rather than urban planning legislation. The country would need to **reform its legal framework to develop a holistic and well-structured regulatory system**, supported by spatial strategies, plans, harmonised laws, and standards.

No legal instrument has been developed to ensure active **public participation** in spatial planning. The current spatial planning system was validated only after unofficial public consultation, although it was a first good step to improve transparency. Appropriate urban legislation must be introduced to ensure the **quality, transparency and accountability of the spatial planning system**. The two types of spatial plans at the local level (the Comprehensive Strategic Plan and the Local Plan) are not distinguished by any legal instruction. Consequently, some major cities have developed Local Plans, not Comprehensive Strategic Plans, while some middle cities are planning to create Comprehensive Strategic Plans, not Local Plans (Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and UN-Habitat, 2016a).

Recently, the government has led the drafting of a Planning Act, which includes new laws on spatial planning and local governance. The **Planning Act** will provide legal background and clarification for the spatial planning system and improve and assure strategies, plans and policies' quality and effectiveness. To deliver a legal environment for spatial planning, the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, with the support of UN-Habitat, launched the "Future Saudi Arabia Cities Programme" in 2014. The programme contributed to shaping an advanced and comprehensive spatial planning system and developing relevant and pragmatic spatial strategies and plans that respond to the needs of cities in a sustainable manner.

3.   Institutional Framework and Stakeholders

Saudi Arabia has implemented various policies and reforms to lead the country towards socio-economic development and reduce regional imbalances and urban-rural disparities. These reforms and strategies have been carried out through multiple initiatives framed alongside other policies, such as the ten National Development Plans. These policies are part of Saudi Arabia's commitment to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and are monitored by the Ministry of Economy and Planning.

More recently, the government has adopted Vision 2030, a programme of economic, social and environmental transformation that impacts the country's economy, environment and society. Vision 2030 aims to reshape the economy and elevate Saudi Arabia's international standing and economic role in the world, thus improving opportunities for its citizens. The associated National Transformation Programme includes intensive initiatives in 2020 to reduce the call on government finances, improve government services, provide critical infrastructure, diversify the economy, reduce the national reliance on oil-based revenue and build a vibrant society. Cities are expected to address greater economic diversity and efficiency, environmental sustainability, social advancement and improve quality of life (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016).

Vision 2030 details the country's three-pronged approach towards its vision. The first goal, "A Vibrant Society", describes the ideal society where members benefit from the social and healthcare system and

enjoy a beautiful environment, cultural heritage and national identity. The second goal, "A Thriving Economy", aims to unlock promising economic sectors by building an education system that parallels market needs, simultaneously creating economic opportunities for any size of business or corporation. The third vision, "An Ambitious Nation", aims to develop an effective, transparent, accountable, enabling and high-performing government. Thirteen programmes have already been launched in pursuit of Vision 2030 (UN-Habitat, 2020).

The bodies responsible for such policies and strategies are the sovereign entities at the national level, which are the ministries and departments concerned with urban planning. The mainland-related entities in the National Transformation Programme are the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, through spatial strategy and associated sub-programmes, and the Ministry of Housing, which have been merged into one ministry, currently through the SAKANY sub-programme (see Figure 6).

Figure 5. Vision 2030 and its land-related programmes
Source: Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs (2018)

Policies relating to spatial development addressing social, cultural and ecological principles were progressively articulated in the National Settlement Strategies and Development Plans between 1980 and 2000. The first **National Spatial Strategy** was adopted in 2001. The main body responsible for its implementation is the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs (national/regional level) in cooperation with the Ministries of Interior, Agriculture, Transportation, and Economic and planning for the national level and government bodies of a special nature at all levels.

Enhancing the **capacity and expanding the coverage of municipal services** is key to implementing the National Spatial Strategy, which aims to reduce regional disparities by achieving balanced and sustainable development throughout different regions of Saudi Arabia. In response to the increase in cities, towns and villages (reaching 258 in 2014, more than four times than in 1968), the **Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs** has established new municipal agencies. It strengthened the institutional and staff capacities of existing agencies. The shift towards administrative decentralization was bolstered by expanding citizens' participation in the management of local affairs, electing half of the members of municipal councils, and establishing a total of 17 regional principalities or *Amanats*, to which local municipalities report. Municipal services and their geographical coverage also improved. However, considering the increasing number of cities and villages, there is a need to increase the number of workers in the municipal sector and develop their capabilities in line with Vision 2030.

In many of Saudi Arabia's more significant cities, special-purpose government agencies have been established to provide strong coordination with key **private sector organizations** in planning and managing urban growth. Normally designated as High Commissions, directed by decisions of the Council of Ministers and by royal decrees, these agencies are usually led by the regional governor and have membership from among the leading ministries, local municipalities and the private sector (the Chamber of Commerce, for instance). As an example, the High Commission for the Development of Riyadh is responsible for metropolitan planning and policy, the construction of major road projects in Riyadh, the development and renewal of key areas of the city, the restoration of historic districts such as Qasr Al-Hukm Area and Diriyah, and most recently, the construction of the city's new public transport system. Similar High Commissions assist in the industrial Jubail and Yanbu and the new mineral industrial city at Ras Al-Khair. However, some roles of these special bodies overlap with other bodies and lack clarity.

The order of government and institution bodies associated with urban planning in Saudi Arabia and their roles (Figure 6) are:

- **The sovereign entities (national level)**

  o Role: issuing legislation related to urban issues
  o Bodies: The king, the Council of Ministries, the Council of Economic Affairs and Development, Shura Council

- **The Ministries and Departments concerned with urban planning (national level)**

  o Role: actors in charge of proposing, implementing, and supervising the laws, regulations, plans and programmes at the national level
  o Bodies: planning bodies and national companies (such as water, electricity and gas)

- **The Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs (national/regional level)**

  o Role: authority in charge of urban planning in Saudi Arabia
  o Body: Deputy Ministry of Town Planning

- **Other key ministries (national/regional level)**

  o Role: in charge of five-year plans
  o Bodies: Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Economy and Planning, Ministry of Agriculture

- *Amanats* **(local level – province)**

  o Role: service bodies that have corporate personality[1]
  o Bodies: 17 *Amanats*

- **Municipalities (local level – city)**

  o Role: unclear, needs to be defined
  o Body: 268 municipalities

- **Regional councils (regional level)**

  o Role: in charge of economic, social and urban development; identify the needs of the regions; specify regional development projects
  o Body: His Highness the Prince (Amir) of the region

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[1] Corporate personality is the fact stated by the law that a facility is recognized as a legal entity distinct from its members. A company with such personality is an independent legal existence separate from its shareholders, directors, officers and creators.

- **Bodies with special nature (national, regional and local levels)**
  - o <u>Role</u>: varying depending on body
  - o <u>Bodies</u>: authorities linked to urban planning, for example, the High Commission for the Development of Arriyadh, Makkah and the Holy sites Development Authority, Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah Development Authority, Royal Urban Regeneration Company, AL-BALAD ALAMEEN for Development and Urban Regeneration in Makkah, the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, Saudi Organization for Industrial Estates and Technology Zones, Saudi General Authority for Investment and Economic Cities Authority
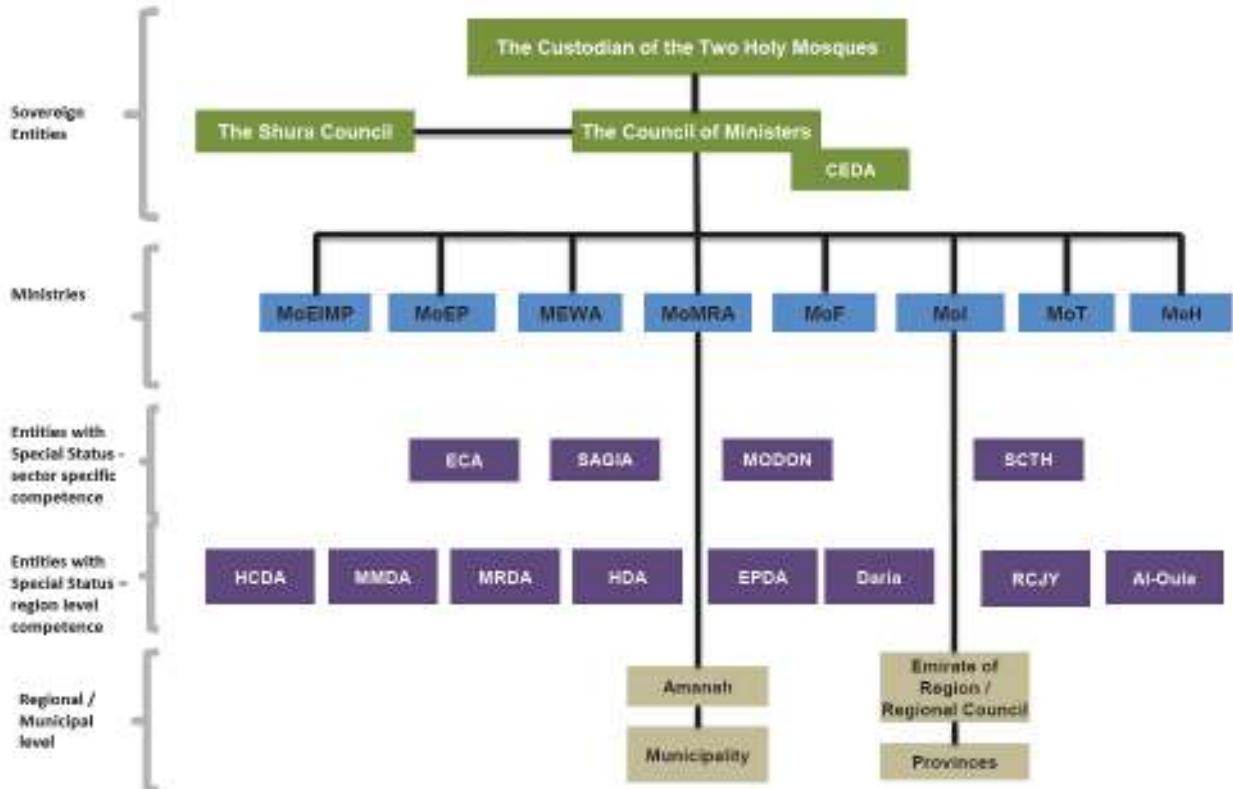
Figure 6. Order of governmental and institution bodies associated with urban planning in Saudi Arabia
Source: Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs (2018)

Challenges and opportunities - Challenges include: No comprehensive law on spatial strategies, plans, and policies; No legal instrument to ensure active public participation in spatial planning; Need to better consider urban growth and the rise in the number of cities and villages and to increase the number of workers in the municipal sector; Lack of accurate information and poorly defined roles and responsibilities and overlapping roles and responsibilities of some special bodies.

On the other hand, the Saudi Arabia government is making unremitting efforts towards issuing a new comprehensive planning act to solve existing problems in the current laws related to land, which is a key opportunity to improve the land sector.

4.   Analysis of Saudi Arabia's Land Management and Administration

The distribution and use of land are determined by land policies, defined as the rules governing access to land and the distribution of the benefits from land. It consists of complex socio-economic and legal prescriptions that dictate how land and land-related benefits are allocated. Land administration has been defined as "the process of determining, recording, and disseminating information about land ownership, value and use when implementing land management policies" (Burns et al., 2006). In analysing land management and administration, in this study each of the five key land administration functions has been studied separately, alongside political objectives and institutional infrastructure as these relate to and impact the land administration system.

4.1 Institutional and strategic aspects

This section describes the perception of respondents about institutional and strategic aspects of land management. Most respondents believe that the government is generally **aware of the importance of the land issue for sustainable development** and that land-related mandates are overall well-financed (giving a score of either four or five out of five, as in Figure 7a).

a.   Governmental awareness of the importance of the land issue for sustainable development

b.   Linkages between organizations with land-related mandates
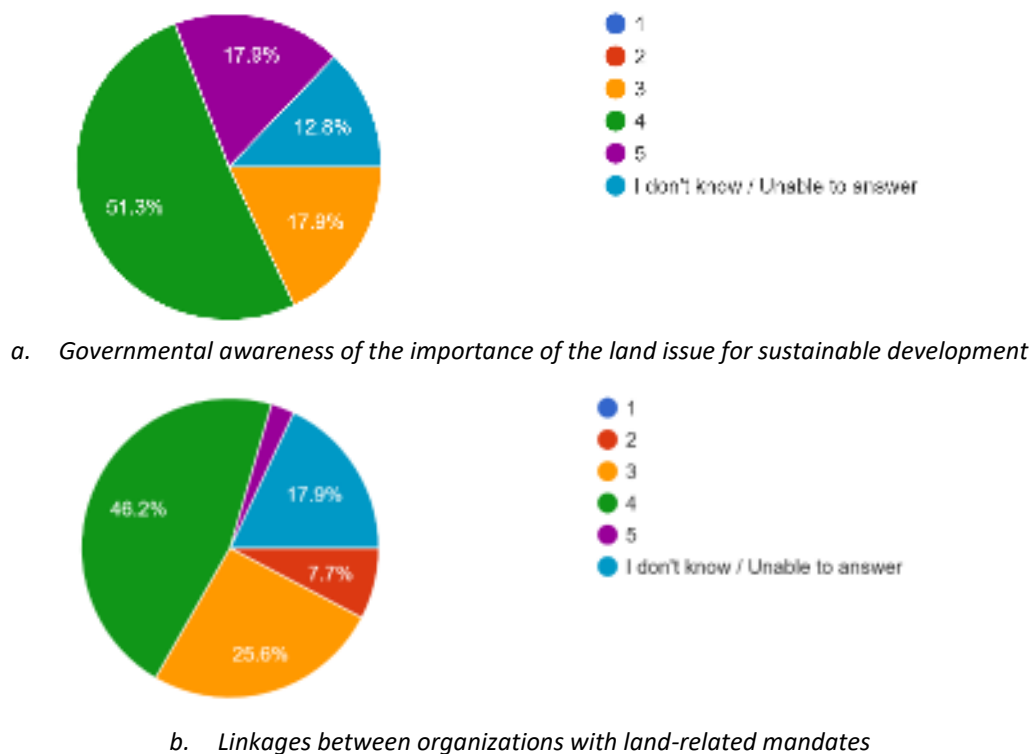
Figure 7. Evaluation of governmental awareness of the importance of the land issue for sustainable development and linkages between organizations with land-related mandates

The vast majority of respondents do not think **mandates of public institutions with land-related functions are very clear** (scoring them between one and three, where one is not at all clear, well-defined or manageable and five is very clear, well-defined, and manageable, as shown in Figure 8.a).

Respondents also indicated they believe that **linkages and cooperation between institutions is generally low** (with the vast majority giving a score of three or below, where one is not at all defined or resulting in bad institutional cooperation, and five is very well defined and resulting in very good institutional cooperation, as shown in Figure 8.b).

A similarly high proportion of respondents do not believe **institutions and organizations with land-related mandates are well-managed or well-organized** (largely giving scores of three or below, as shown in Figure 8.c) nor that there is **sufficient and competent staffing** in institutions with land-related mandates (**Error! Reference source not found.**Figure 8.d). The results show a perceived deficiency of land-related public institutions in terms of clarity of mandate, inter-organisational collaboration, management, and ability to deal with complex problems.
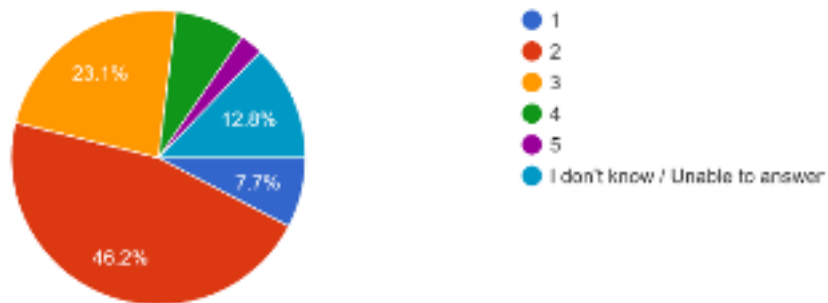
a.Clarity of mandates of various public institutions with land-related functions (1: very unclear; 5 very clear)
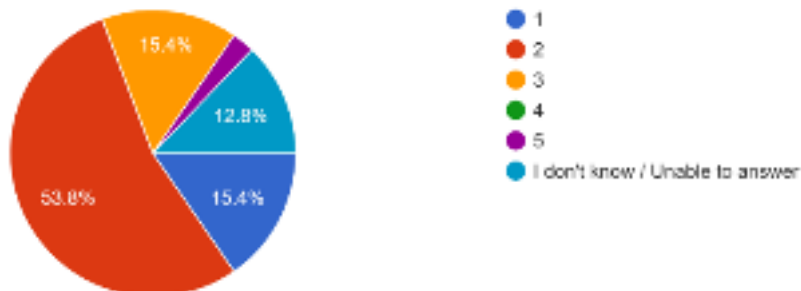
b.Linkages between institutions/organizations with land-related mandates (1: very poor; 5 very good)
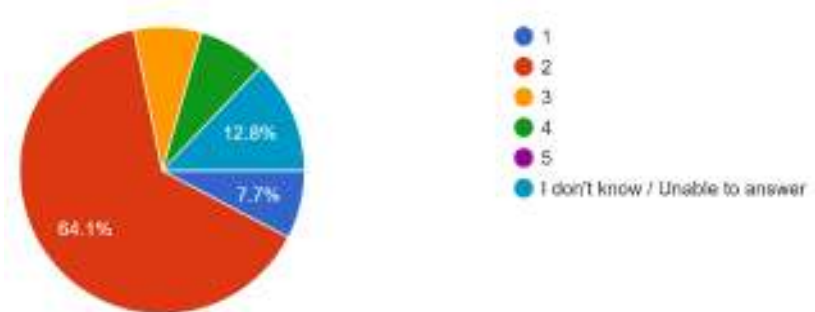
c. Management of the institutions/organizations with land-related mandates (1: very poor; 5: very good)

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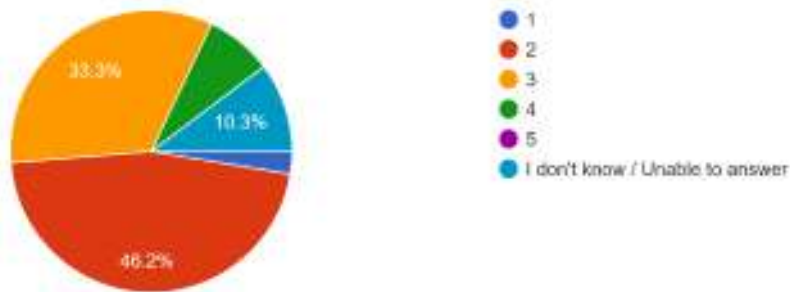
d. Adequacy of staffing in institutions with land-related mandates

Figure 8. Evaluation of public institutions and organizations with land-related mandates

4.2 Land tenure

Whether legally or customarily defined, land tenure is the relationship among people, as individuals or groups, concerning land and associated natural resources. Rules of tenure define how property rights in land are allocated within societies and related responsibilities and restraints. In simple terms, land tenure systems determine who can use what resources, for how long, and under what conditions. The Ministry of Justice (land tenure, cadastral survey, and registration regulations and standards) and the Ministry of Interior are responsible for land tenure in Saudi Arabia. The Real Property Registration Law[2] establishes a real estate area in each region to evidence real property rights, including all amendments, and gather deeds, judgments, and other relevant documents. Under this law, all real estate rights arising from acquisitions under Islamic sharia must be recorded in the real estate register.

The registration process starts with the delimitation of property, which includes an invitation for rights holders to produce evidence of their rights, followed by mapping and surveying. Authentication procedures are then conducted under the supervision of a judge appointed by the tribunal of the area wherein the property is located.

Following the registration process, all acts creating, transferring, and amending real estate rights such as real estate divisions, testaments, endowments, inheritance, mortgage, and all final judgments must be registered. The real estate registry issues title deeds to real property owners and real estate certificates.

4.2.1 Securing access to land and land-related resources: allocation, recording and security

Tenure security to land with legally recognized documentation: From the questionnaire responses, respondents are divided in their understanding of whether legally recognized documentation resulted in secure tenure rights (roughly one quarter stating they are not sure, as seen in Figure 9). A large majority of respondents also stated that they did not know what proportion of the total adult population or female adult population has tenure security.

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[2] Issued by Royal Decree No. M/6 dated 24/4/2002. An implementing regulation was issued for the Real Property Registration Law by resolution of the Minister of Justice No. 4497 dated 1/8/2004. The registration requirement applies to real property owned by public and private entities and was gradually put into effect under the resolutions of the Minister of Justice.
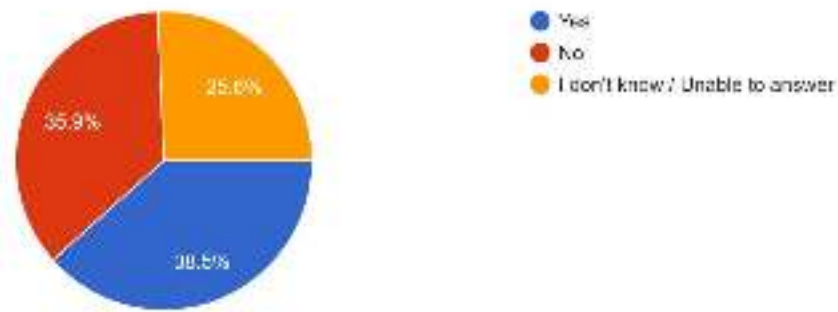
Figure 9. Perception of the link between documentation and tenure security

Citizens' perception of secure land tenure: most respondents believe it is unlikely or even improbable for people to be forcibly evicted or displaced (Figure 10). Unsecure tenure is not the leading cause of eviction, but rather flooding, natural disasters, large national development projects and conflicts.
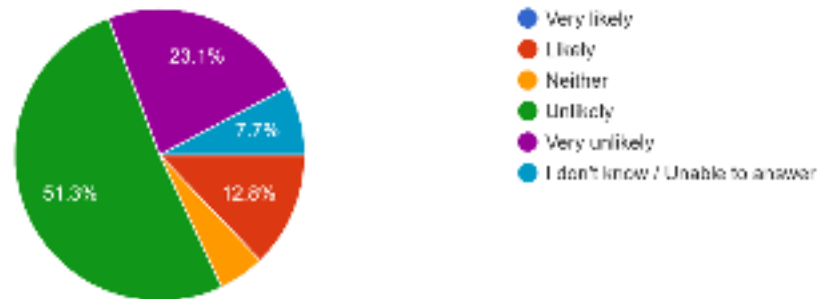
Figure 10. Perception of the possibility of forced eviction and displacement

Affordability: The housing sector is one of the most important economic sectors in Saudi Arabia. The government has strongly supported housing provisions throughout the past decades, particularly by financing private housing construction. Approximately two-thirds of respondents stated that **the cost of purchasing urban land and properties is highly to moderately unaffordable**, giving a response of three or lower (Figure 11.a). On average, people need to pay the equivalent of 50 to 75 months of their monthly income to purchase urban land or a private house. Land in rural areas for **agricultural land** use is more affordable, with nearly three-quarters of respondents stating that the cost of purchasing rural/agricultural land is affordable or very affordable, giving a score of either four or five (Figure 11.b).

More than half of respondents stated that it is **moderately to very easy for ordinary citizens to obtain funds to purchase urban land and properties**, giving a score of three or higher (Figure 11.c), even as the Real Estate Development Fund has provided no-interest loans for private housing construction since its establishment in 1974. Almost 80 per cent of respondents think it is either much or a little easier for men than for women to obtain funds to purchase land and property (Figure 11.d).
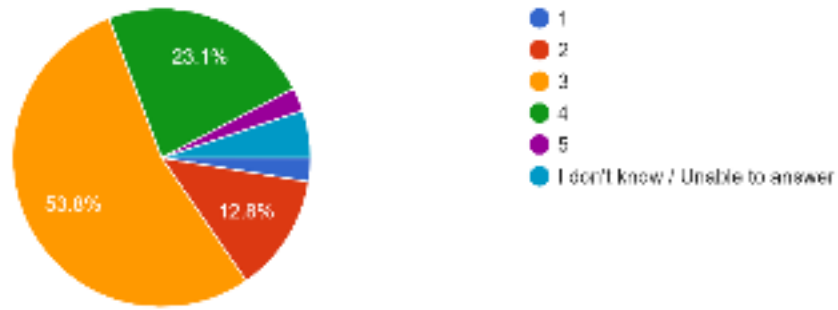
a. Urban land and property affordability (1: very unaffordable; 5: very affordable)
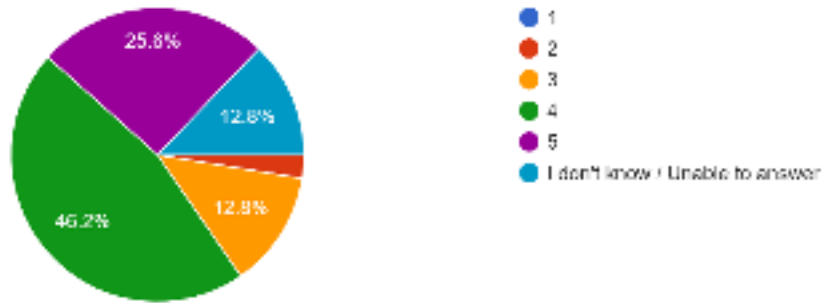
b. Rural/agricultural land affordability (1: very unaffordable; 5: very affordable)
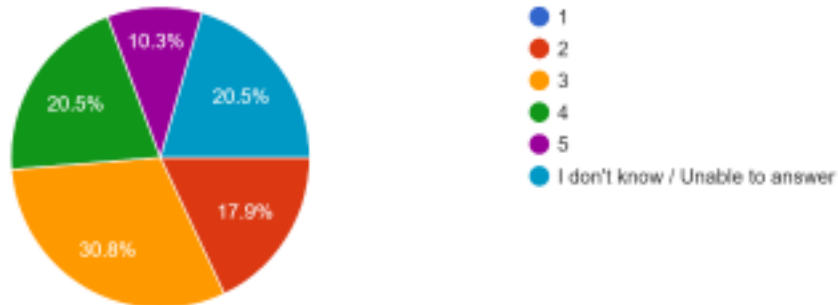
c. Degree of difficulty of obtaining funds to purchase urban land or property
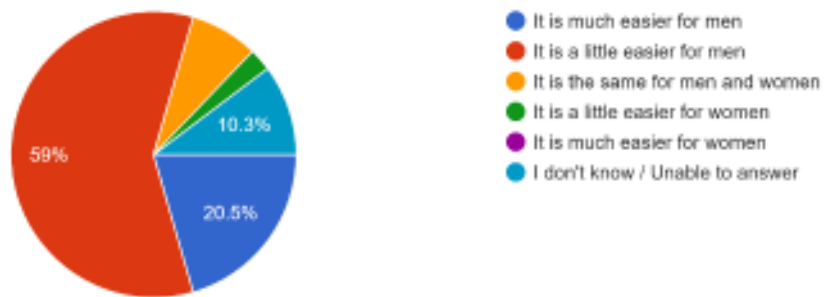
d.   Difference in difficulty between men and women in obtaining funds to purchase land and property

Figure 11. Perceptions of land affordability and degree of difficulty in obtaining funds

The Real Estate Development Fund has signed new agreements with private banks to help facilitate loan disbursement and collection. The government is working on mortgage laws to encourage new capital into the housing finance market. It is also promoting the establishment of the Saudi Mortgage Refinance Company, which is expected to impact the housing market positively in the future. Recent developments in housing finance available in the country include introducing the new Mortgage Law, new laws covering rented dwellings and tenancies, and new funding available through the Ministry of Housing. The Eskan housing support programme provides housing aid through a loan of up to SAR 500,000.

The citizens' understanding of the land rights-related processes: The majority of respondents believe that ordinary citizens do not understand or only partially understand how to access land rights and the associated processes. Roughly half of respondents believe that it is difficult for ordinary citizens to use their land or property as collateral for obtaining loans.

4.2.2 Cadastral mapping and legal surveys to determine parcel boundaries

The Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs is responsible for surveying, cadastral mapping and computerization activities. A cadastral survey is carried out directly by the municipality for the approved plans or by consulting engineers appointed by landowners under the supervision of the municipality for private plans or projects. The cadastral survey must follow technical standards and include determining content. All cadastral information is archived at the Ministry of Justice as it is the authority that registers and changes ownership in the cadastral record.

The vast majority of survey respondents are aware that Saudi Arabia has a cadastral system, and more than half are aware that the cadastral system is centralized. More than one third of respondents do not know how much the country is covered by the cadastral system, while more than half believe it covers 60 per cent or less of the country. Regarding digitalization of information in the cadastral system, roughly half of respondents believe that 60 per cent or less is digitalized, while slightly less than half did not know if cadastral information exists in digital format. More than half of respondents do not know either the number of cadastral offices nor the number of employees in the offices across the country.

4.2.3 Creation of new or alteration of existing properties

More than half of respondents characterize the procedures for creating new properties (Figure 14.a) or altering existing properties (Figure 14.b) as between very difficult to neither easy nor difficult. Roughly half of respondents also do not know how much time and money it takes to change or register a new parcel in a cadastral record. According to the procedures in the cadastral registration system law, any change in an existing parcel will not take less than 120 days.

Legend:
- Very difficult
- Difficult
- Neither easy or difficult
- Easy
- Very easy
- I don't know / Unable to answer
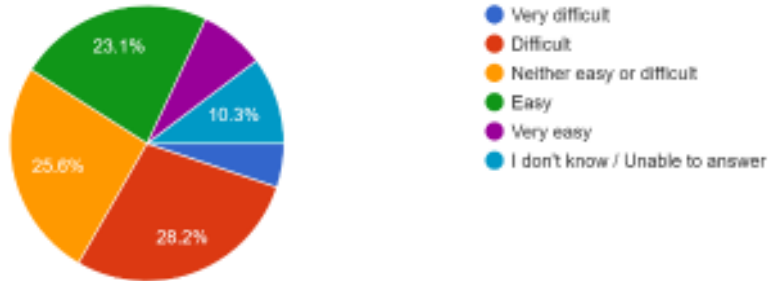
a.   Difficulty of procedures for registering new properties in the cadastre

Legend:
- Very difficult
- Difficult
- Neither easy or difficult
- Easy
- Very easy
- I don't know / Unable to answer
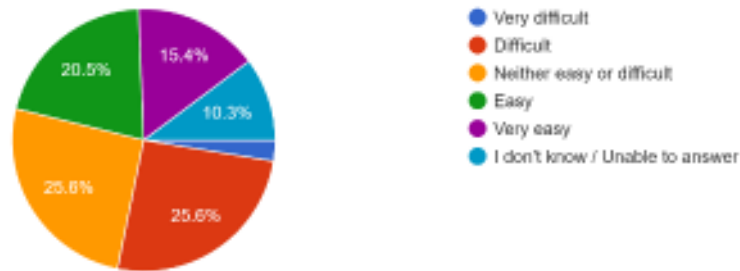
b.   Difficulty of procedures for altering existing properties in the cadastre

Figure 12. Perceptions of difficulty of procedures for registering new and altering existing properties in the cadastre

4.2.4 Transfer of property or use from one party to another

In general, while creating new properties or altering existing ones in the cadastre is perceived as generally difficult, respondents stated that transferring property or use from one party to another is easier, with almost two thirds of respondents stating it is either easy or very easy. More than two thirds of respondents said that affordability of the property transfer service is between fair and very reasonable (Figure 15.b).

Legend:
- Very difficult
- Difficult
- Neither easy or difficult
- Easy
- Very easy
- I don't know / Unable to answer

a.   Difficulty of procedures for transferring property

Legend:
- Very expensive
- Expensive
- Fair
- Reasonably priced
- Very reasonably priced
- I don't know / Unable to answer
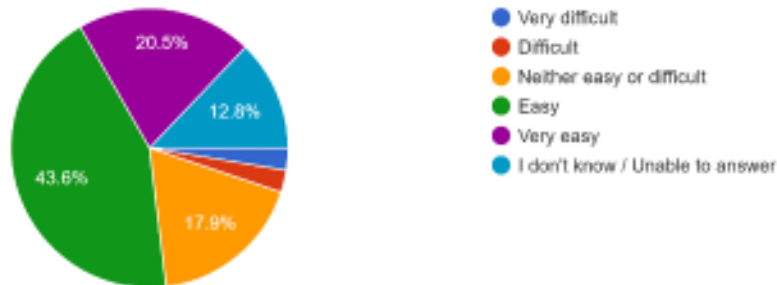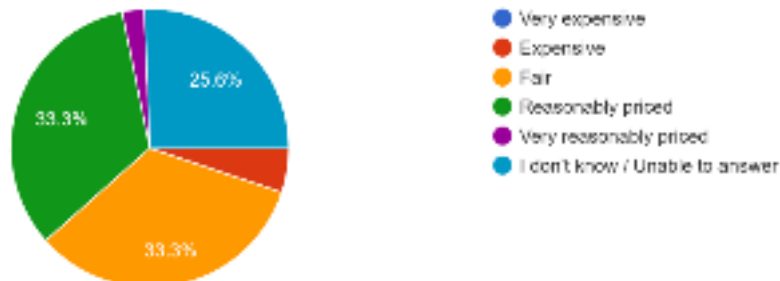
b. Affordability of the service to transfer property

Figure 13. Perceptions of difficulty and affordability of procedures for transferring property

4.2.5 Land tenure information and spatial data infrastructure

Cadastral information must be linked and interoperable with other spatial data (e.g., natural resources maps, land-use plans, etc.). Most respondents either believe that in Saudi Arabia cadastral information is not linked with other spatial data or are unaware if they are linked or not. The accessibility of cadastral data is needed for the decision-making process. However, most respondents believe such data is inaccessible or are unaware of its accessibility and are not aware if there are other types of land tenure allocation or registration (e.g., formal, informal, temporary, religious/customary) (Figure 16).
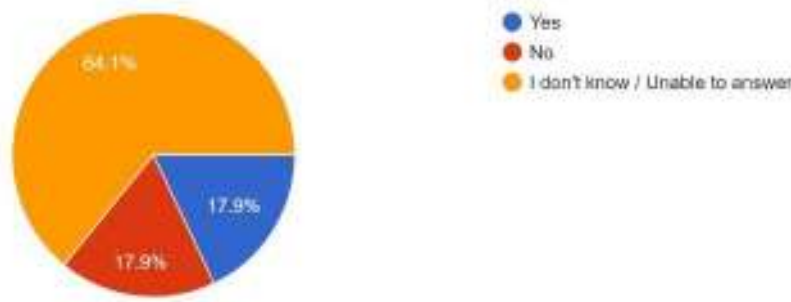
Figure 14. Knowledge of existence of other forms of land tenure allocation or registration (besides cadastre)

4.2.6 Land tenure: summarized findings

As seen in the summarized results for land tenure in Table 1, Saudi Arabia lacks published and accessible data on land tenure. Yet, most respondents do not worry about the lack of data. They feel that their land tenure is secure and that they are very unlikely to be forcibly evicted from their homes, except for reasons such as wars, natural disasters, floods, or major projects. On the other hand, most respondents believe that the proportion of female adult population with tenure security is significantly less than that of male. The aspect of tenure security of foreign labourers was not touched, although it might show different trends that would be worth investigating.

Table 1: Land tenure findings

Indicator	Measure (per cent of respondents)
Data availability	<20
Proportion of tenure security	Don't know/unable to answer (69.2)
Female with tenure security	<20 per cent (80)
Possibility of forced evacuation	Unlikely (75)
Land properties cost (urban, rural)	Affordable (53, 72)
Fund accessibility	Moderate to easy (53.3)
Cadastral function existence	yes (90)
Coverage	<40 per cent (49.2)
Level of difficulty of the process (new, change)	Difficult (25.6, 53.8)
Time (new, change)	1 month - several years

Affordability	Affordable (66.6)
Accessibility	Inaccessible (59.3)
Linkage with spatial data	No (71.2)

Governance institutions lack accurate information about each other's roles and responsibilities, and there are systematic financial and human resource constraints. These shortcomings are evident in how land expropriations have been conducted in recent years.

The government has staunchly provided housing throughout the past decades by financing private housing construction. It should also be noted that since Real Estate Development Fund's establishment in 1974, it has offered no-interest loans for private housing construction.

Regulations and circulars regarding the registration of cadastral surveyed plots and about the law of acquisition/ownership are minimal. There are also no implementation regulations dealing with the law of acquisition/ownership, and there is a need for consolidated regulations/laws that identify and explain the vocabulary of planning levels of different types.

The number of cadastral offices and employees across the country was unknown to the respondents. The lack of a fully effective land title system and a reliable nationwide cadastre also hamper land management progress.

Land tenure information is not accessible.

4.3 Land value

This section describes land valuation, land taxation and the availability of information on land values. In 2022, the Saudi Authority for Accredited Valuers (TAQEEM) published a manual to provide harmonized guidelines for the actors in the sector (TAQEEM, 2022).

4.3.1 Assessing the value of land and properties

Most respondents believe that an institutionalized approach to assessing the value of urban and rural land exists, but it is rather inadequate (Figure 15.a) and does not cover all types of land tenure (Figure 15.b).
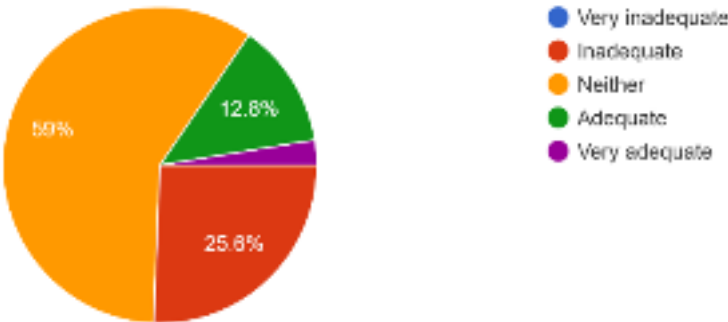
a.   Adequacy of an institutionalized method to assess land value (urban and rural)
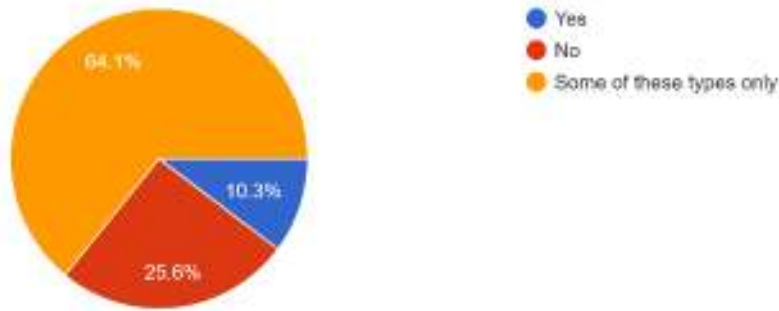
b.   Coverage of the method for all land tenure types.

Figure 15. Perception of the adequacy and tenure type coverage of an institutionalized method to assess land value.

Regarding an institutionalized methodology to assess the value of buildings, most respondents believe this exists, however, almost half assessed the methodology as inadequate or neither adequate nor inadequate (Figure 18.a). More than three quarters of respondents indicated that the methodology does not cover all the types of land tenure (Figure 18.b).

Just over half of respondents believe that professional valuers are officially recognized and registered. Most, however are unsure if professional valuers are trained, and do not know the cost their services.
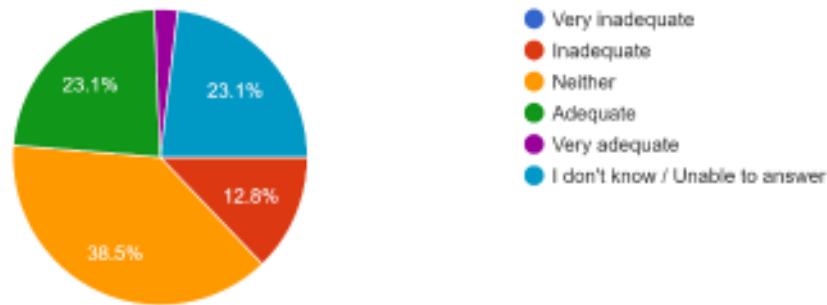
a.   Adequacy of the methodology to assess the value of buildings
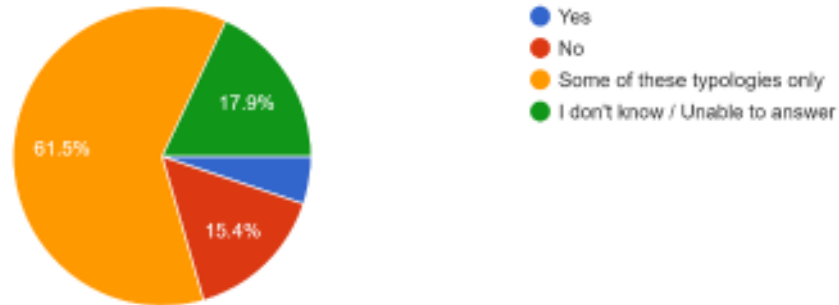
b.   Coverage of the building assessment methodology for all land tenure types

Figure 16. Perception of the adequacy and coverage for all land tenure types of the methodology to assess the value of buildings.

25

4.3.2 Calculating and gathering revenues through taxation

To increase the availability of developed lands, ensure residential lands are affordable, protect fair competition and combat monopolistic behaviours, the Law Imposing Fees on Idle Lands issued by Royal Decree No. M/4, dated 24 November 2015, imposes an annual fee on idle lands owned by one or several non-governmental physical or moral entities at a rate of 2.5 per cent of the value of the land. Idle lands are defined, under the same law, as "vacant lands allocated for residential or commercial residential purposes within the urban boundaries".

Fees and penalties collected are deposited in a special account maintained before the Saudi Arabia Monetary Agency and spent on housing projects, including public services and public utilities. The Ministry of Housing is entrusted with implementing the Law Imposing Fees on Idle Lands in coordination with relevant authorities.

The study results show that most respondents are aware that there is a taxation system in Saudi Arabia, and most are aware that this system is applied in urban areas. Less than half, however, are aware that it applies in rural areas.

Within municipalities, services have improved substantially, attributed to the government's financial support to the municipal sector. The government recognized the importance of expanding public services and facilities in Saudi cities, towns and villages and developing the technical and administrative capacities of municipal agencies. The government service sector has grown at an annual rate of 3.7 per cent (9th National Development Plan 2010-2014), although the target growth rate in the 8th Development Plan was 3.8 per cent from 2005 to 2009. The government paid particular attention to enhancing the capacities of municipal agencies and allocated a considerable proportion of government expenditures to strengthen municipal and local finance. Investment in the government services sector rose by 12.8 per cent per annum.

These developments improved the coverage of municipal services in all administrative regions and increased the proportion of the population covered by municipal services. All regions, especially those experiencing a shortage of services in the past, developed and updated their municipal services, contributing to a regionally balanced development in the country. Such development based on land taxation is still limited compared to the municipalities' total expenditures.

Expansion of the municipal services sector provided local economic opportunities, particularly for the private sector. Implementing municipal projects, including the physical construction of roads, infrastructure and public facilities, contributes to local economic activity and supports the private sector. Municipal agencies also seek effective and efficient measures to improve their services by privatizing certain public services, including transport, collection of municipal revenues, cleaning, waste management and investment management in municipal properties. The government's efforts focus on less developed regions to reduce disparities regarding available municipal public services and infrastructure among regions, which are prerequisites for a balanced social and economic development.

Most respondents either did not know the percentage of land and properties that are taxed or believed that only a small percentage of land and properties are taxed (Figure 20.a). It is worth noting that municipalities in Saudi Arabia do not raise income from taxation since their funding comes from the national budget, though roughly a quarter of respondents believe that land and property taxes contribute up to 20 per cent of total municipal expenditures (Figure 20.d). However, some municipalities seek to utilize their land assets to earn income. Most respondents believe that the taxation rates are fair, responding four or five, where five is most fair (Figure 20.b), though most respondents do not know the percentage of land revenues collected. (Figure 20.c). Additionally, only 15.4 per cent of respondents believe that decision-makers have considered the impact of taxation on the use of land and land markets.
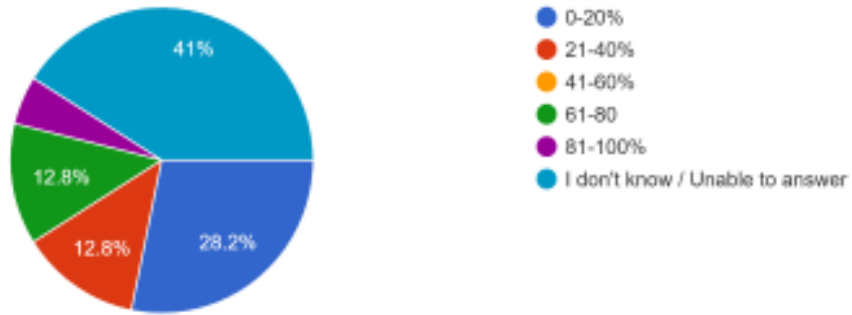
a.   Percentage of land/properties taxed
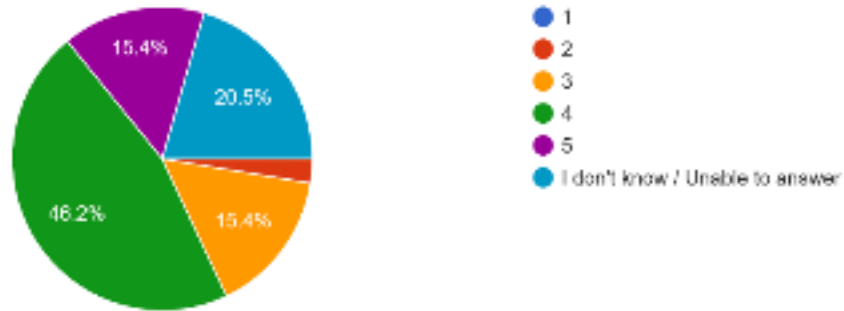
b.   Fairness of the taxation rates
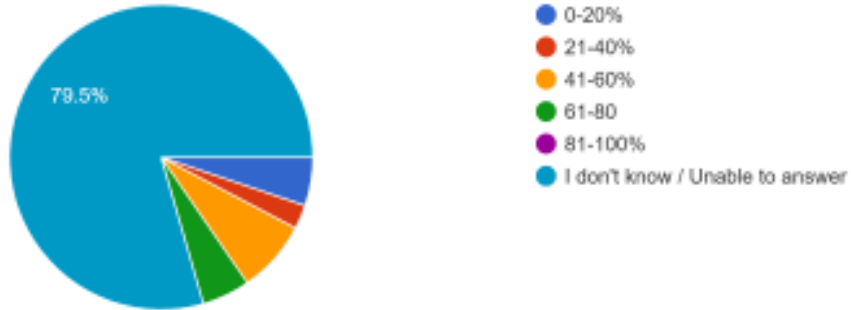
c.   Percentage of land and property revenues collected
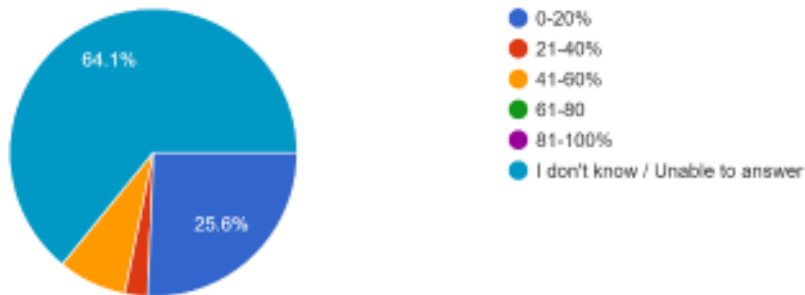
d.   Percentage of municipal expenditures paid through income from land and property taxes

Figure 17. Perceptions of land and property taxation.

4.3.3 Land value information

One of the main issues affecting the land value's function is the lack of a complete and accessible/digital land information system recording land values. Nearly half of respondents believe that no such information exists in Saudi Arabia, while only a very small proportion believes that complete and accessible records exist (Figure 18).
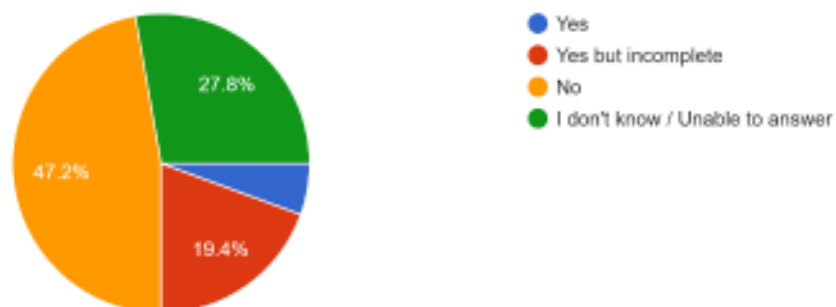
Figure 18. *Understanding of the existence of a complete, accessible and digital land value information system*

4.3.4 Land value: summarized findings

Although there is a methodology for valuating land and properties in Saudi Arabia, it is now widely known and comprehensive. Real estate appraisers are available, but they are few and their services are considered very expensive. With municipal expenditures coming directly from the government budget, income from land and property taxes is considered an irrelevant source of municipal budget (or not an avenue to collect municipal revenues at all). There is no complete information on land prices and when this information exists, it is scattered, not digitized, and difficult to access. Table 2 presents the summarized findings about the land valuation and taxation function.

Table 2: Land value findings

Indicator	Measure (per cent of respondents)
Institutionalized approach to assess value (lands, buildings)	Exist, (76.9, 69.2)
Methodology adequacy (lands, buildings)	Moderate to inadequate (85, 50)
Coverage of all types of land tenure (lands, buildings)	No or some of these types (90, 76.9)
Official recognition of the professional valuers	Yes (53.8)
Affordability	Unknown (64.5)
Training situation	Unknown (64.1)
Taxation function existence	Yes (92.3)
Taxation application (urban, rural)	Yes (64.1, 40)
The percentage of land and properties taxed	0-40 per cent - Unknown (41)
Fairness rate	Fair (77)
Revenues collected	Unknown (79.5)
Accessibility	No (66.6)
Institutionalized approach to assess value (lands, buildings)	Exist (76.9, 69.2)

4.4 Land use

The responsible agencies for land use at the national level are the Ministry of Municipalities, Rural Affairs and the Ministry of Economy and Planning. At the local level, these are the *Amanats*, Municipalities and Cities Development Authorities (Riyadh, Mecca, Hail, Eastern Province, Al-Madina Al-Mounawwara, Al-Dariah).

The Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs led the setup of a spatial planning system comprised of strategies at different levels (Figure 22): a) National Spatial Strategy; b) Regional Spatial Strategy; c) Comprehensive Spatial Strategy, for major cities; d) Local Plans, for medium and small cities at the local level; e) Action Plan, at the neighbourhood level; and f) Urban Growth and Development Boundaries which set additional standards for land subdivision in suburban areas for each city to control urban expansion.
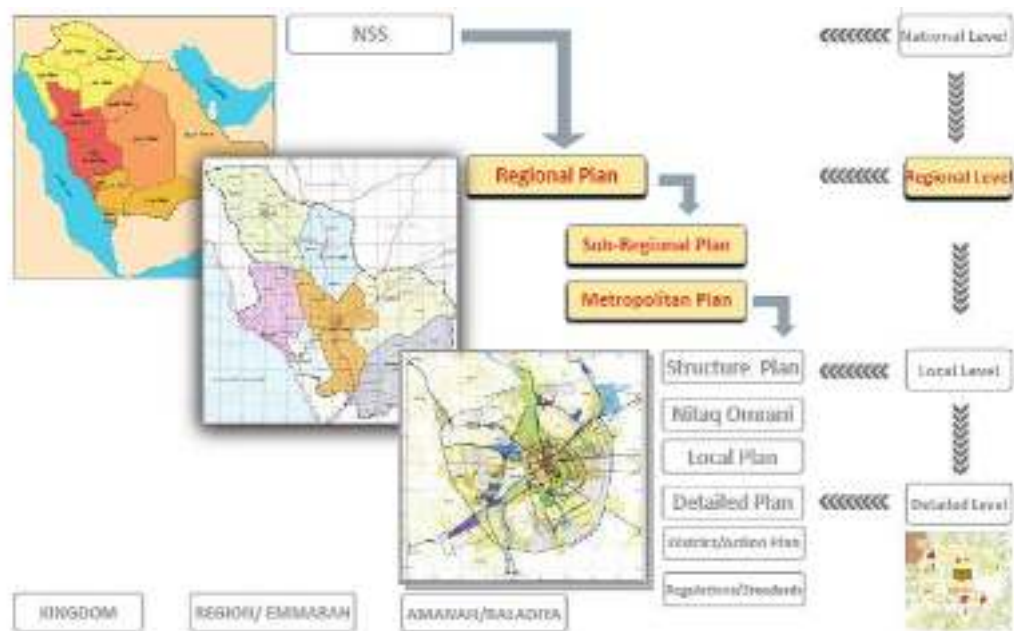
Figure 19. Levels of the spatial planning system, as implemented by the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs (2018)

4.4.1 Land use control and enforcement

In addition to the Comprehensive Strategic Plans and Local Plans by the urban development agencies and municipalities, the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs sets Urban Growth and Development Boundaries called the *Nitaq Omrani*. To rationalize the physical growth of Saudi cities, local plans are developed for areas defined within the *Nitaq Omrani*. These plans aim to apply regulatory controls through land use, planning, building controls, and provision of infrastructure and provision of urban services. *Nitaq Omrani* delineates the appropriate future boundaries for localizing urban activities and urban development during a specific period and providing public services and facilities to realize the maximum economic efficiency of available resources. Additionally, it aims to reach the optimal sizes of cities and villages following the directions of the national spatial development strategy.

The vast majority of respondents believe that **local land-use plans** are adequate and updated (Figure 23.c), while roughly two thirds of respondents said the same for national plans (Figure 23.a) and regional plans (Figure 20.b).
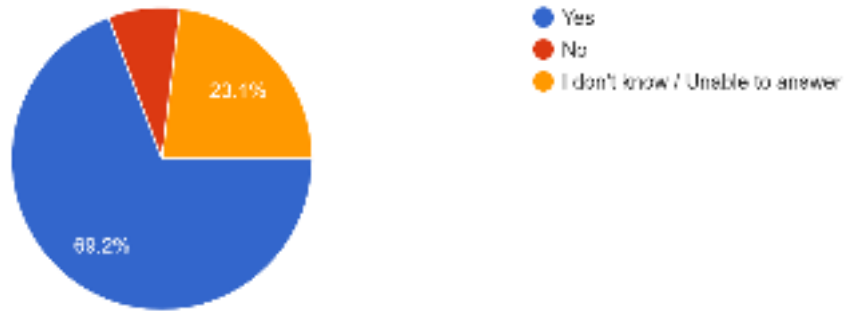
a. Existence of adequate and updated land-use plans at the national level
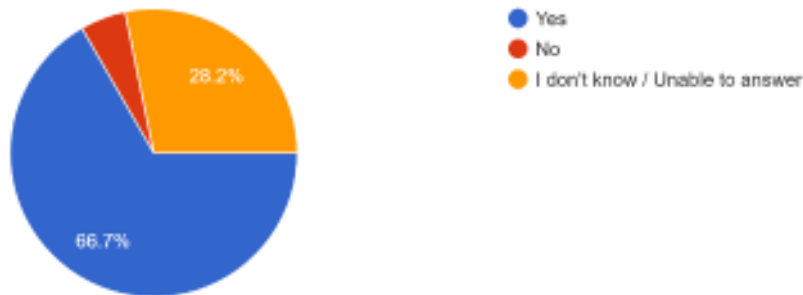
b. Existence of adequate and updated land-use plans at the regional level
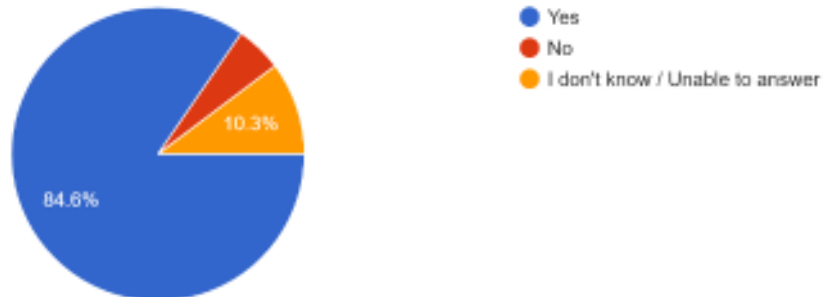
c. Existence of adequate and updated land-use plans at the local level

Figure 20. Perception of the existence of adequate and updated land-use plans at national, regional and local levels.

In terms of the **level of adequacy**, less than one fifth of respondents believe that either the national or regional plans are adequate, while nearly half of respondents believe that local plans are adequate or highly adequate, as shown in Figure 21. a, b and c, respectively.
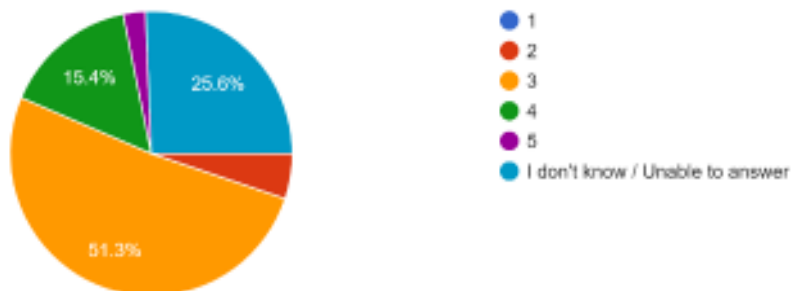
a. Level of adequacy of land-use plans at the national level
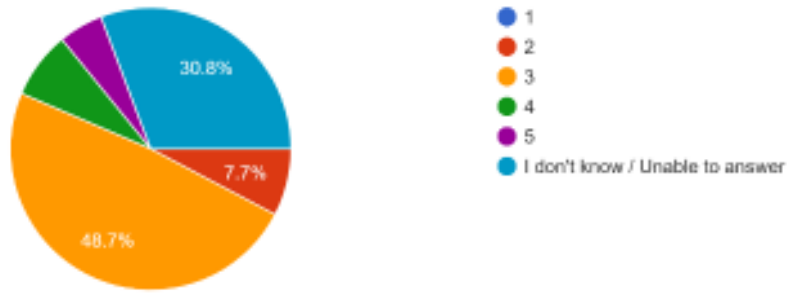
b. Level of adequacy of land-use plans at the regional level
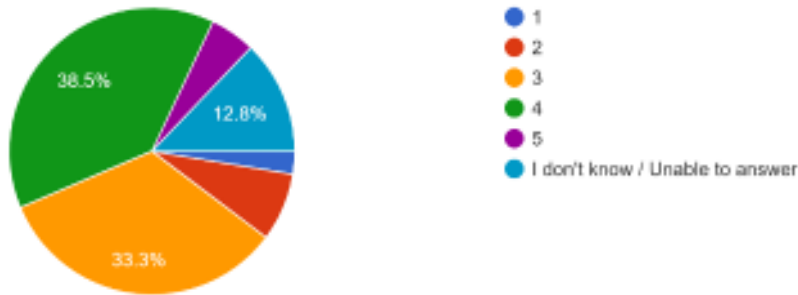
c. Level of adequacy of land-use plans at the local level

Figure 21. Level of adequacy of land-use plans at the national, regional and local level.

Similarly, regarding **enforcement of plans**, almost half of respondents believe that local plans are enforced (Figure 25.c), while again less than one fifth of respondents believe that national (Figure 25.a) and regional plans (Figure 25.b) are enforced.
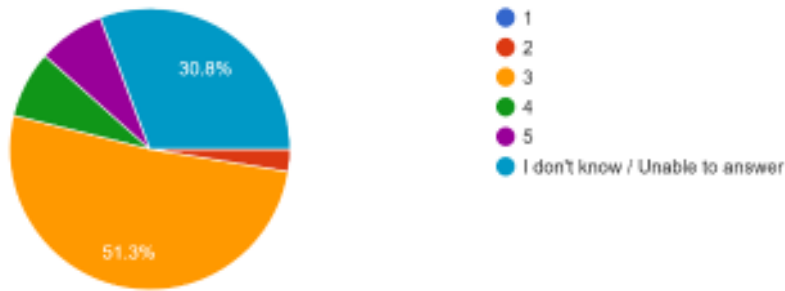
a. Enforcement of land-use plans at the national level
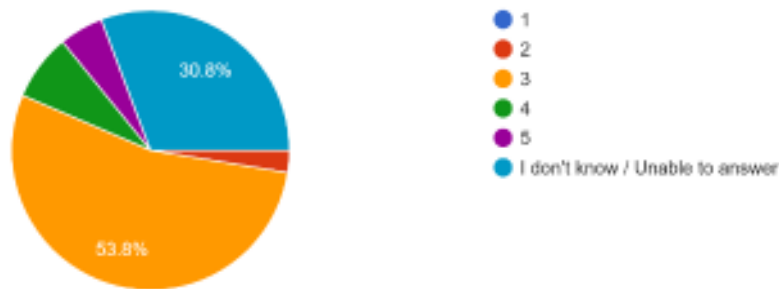
b. Enforcement of land-use plans at the regional level
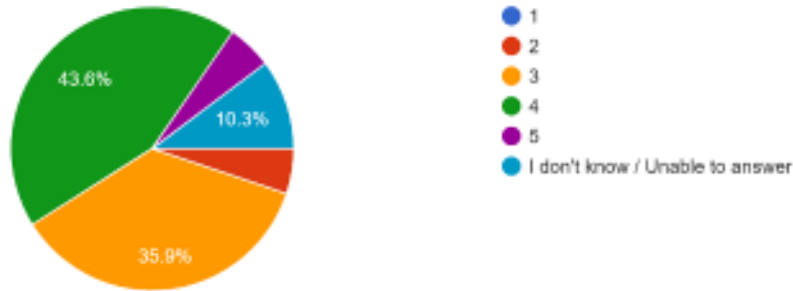
c.   Enforcement of land-use plans at the local level

Figure 22. Perception of enforcement of land-use plans at the national, regional and local level.

Regarding urban plans for the main/fast-growing urban centres, two thirds of respondents believe that these exist, though less than one quarter believe they are adequate, and only one third believe they are enforced, as shown in Figures 26. a and b, respectively.
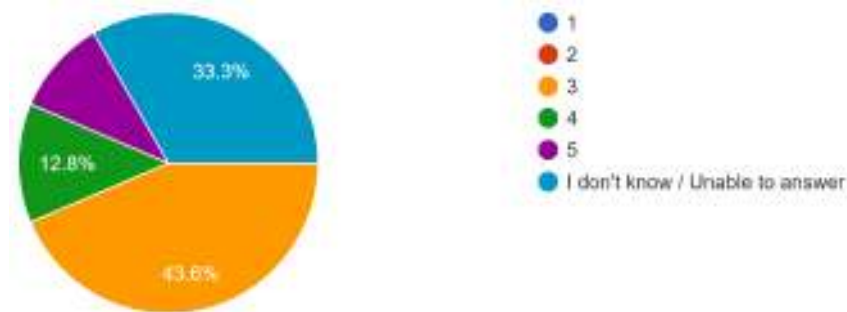
a.   Adequacy of urban land-use plans in the main and fast-growing urban centres
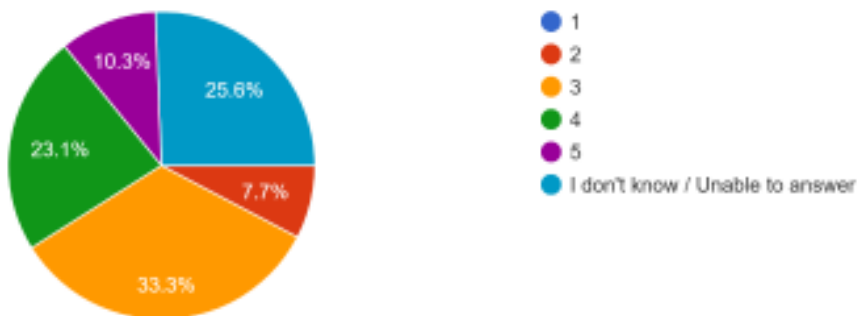
b.   Enforcement of urban land-use plans in the main and fast-growing urban centres

Figure 23. Assessment of adequacy and enforcement of land-use plans in the main and fast-growing urban centres.

For **informal, temporary or displaced population settlements**, nearly two thirds of respondents assured that there are regulations or schemes to address these concerns. However, very few respondents believe that these regulations and schemes are either adequate or enforced (as shown in Figure 24. a and b, respectively).
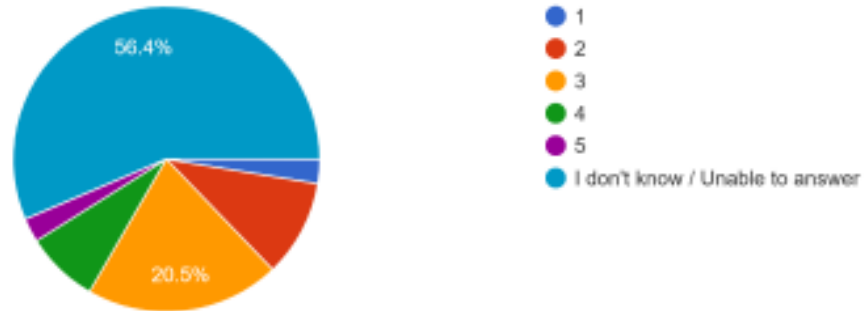
a. Adequacy of regulations or schemes addressing informal, temporary or displaced population settlements in the main and fast-growing urban centres
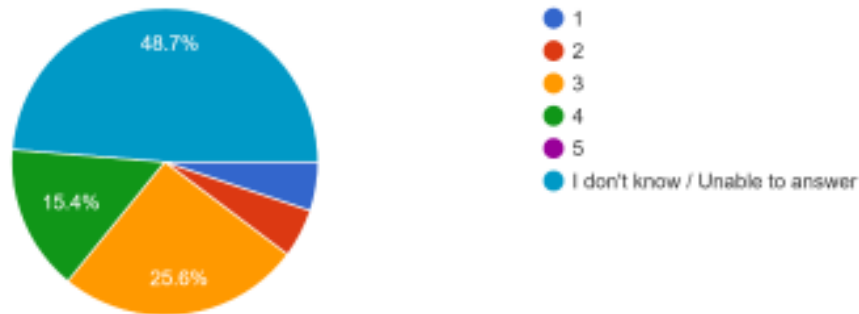
b. Enforcement of regulations or schemes addressing informal, temporary or displaced population settlements in the main and fast-growing urban centres

Figure 24. Assessment of adequacy and enforcement of regulations or schemes addressing informal, temporary or displaced population settlements in the main and fast-growing urban centres.

For **building permit regulations**, most respondents assured that they exist and are adequate and enforced, as shown in Figures 28. a and b, respectively. However, these plans and other existing standards controlling suburban developments are not effective enough to control and manage land subdivisions in suburban areas and non-urban localities around the larger cities in the country. Large numbers of land grants and affordable housing projects implemented by municipalities in remote areas combined with free government land means that such areas, especially the land grant areas, are subdivided and allotments are allocated without infrastructure. This represents a massive urban management and investment problem in the future. Moreover, the social tradition of relying on land as a form of investment leads to demand for residential allotments, which hampers progress with land management and far outstrips the requirement for actual housing allotments.
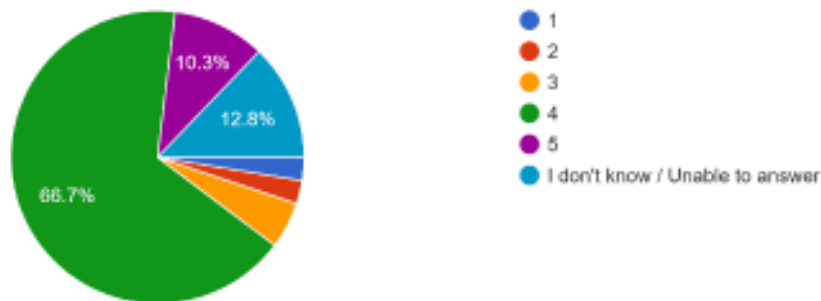
a. Adequacy of building permit regulations
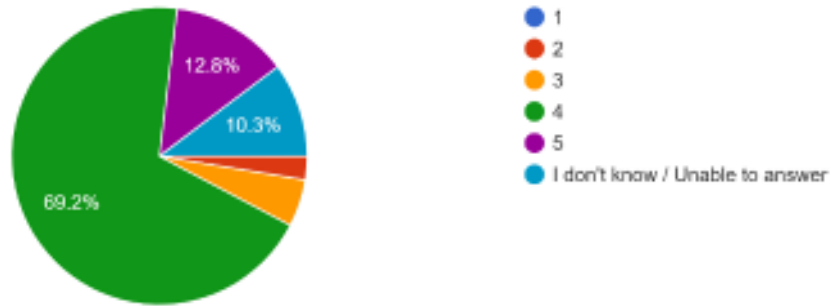
b. Enforcement of building permit regulations

Figure 25. Assessment of the adequacy and enforcement of building permit regulations.

Roughly half of respondents assured that **regulations regarding rural/agricultural land** use exist, however, only a small minority believe they are adequate and enforced, as shown in Figures 29. a and b, respectively.
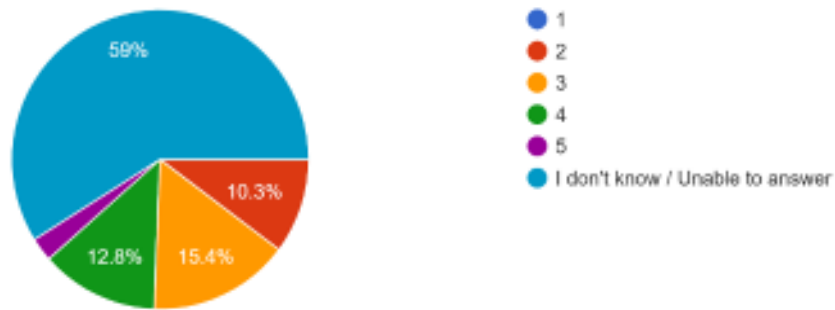
a. Adequacy of rural/agricultural land-use regulations
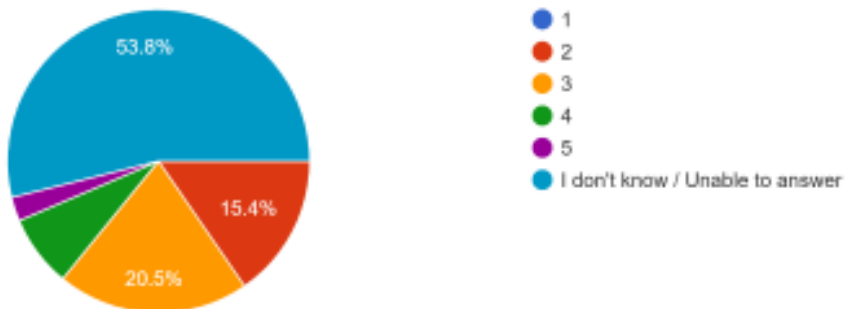
b. Enforcement of rural/agricultural land-use regulations

Figure 26. Assessment of adequacy and enforcement of rural/agricultural land-use regulations.

Regarding **environmental protection land-use regulations**, the regime of pasture and forests is addressed under the Law Governing Pasture and Forests[3] issued by the Minister of Agriculture. Pasture lands[4] and

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[3] Through Royal Decree M/55 dated 12/12/2004 G and its Implementing Regulations.

[4] According to the Law Governing Pastures and Forests, a forest is a cluster of plants consisting of one or more varieties of trees, shrubs or herbaceous plants in a pure or mixed condition with a density of not less than 10%, whether the said cluster is natural or cultivated.

public forests[5] are identified, safeguarded, developed and managed by the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture in coordination with the Regional Councils. The Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture assigns guards and controllers to protect pasture and forests; enhances pasture and forests when required; and sets out an annual plan for grazing in coordination with the Ministry of Interior. The development and investment of pasture and public forests products are subject to the procurement of a licence from the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture.

Most respondents are aware of the existence of environmental protection and land-use regulations, and more than half believe these to be adequate and enforced, as shown in Figures 30. a and b, respectively.
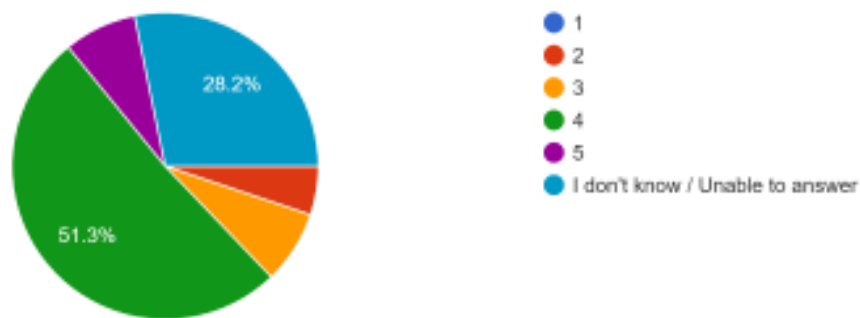
a.   *Adequacy of environmental protection land-use regulations*
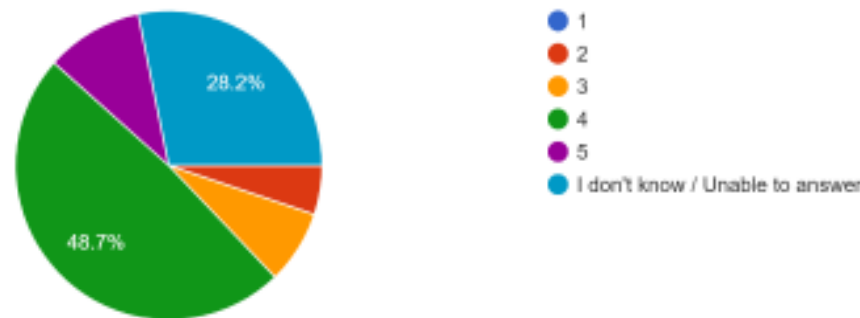
b.   *Enforcement of environmental protection land-use regulations*

Figure 27. Assessment of adequacy and enforcement of environmental protection land-use regulations.

Most respondents were uncertain of the government's role in inhibiting private land rights, managing state lands, and acquiring private land for public development.

4.4.2 Land-use information

Among the respondents, only one quarter are aware of the existence of a **land-use information system** in Saudi Arabia, and more than half do not believe that land-use information is complete or accessible (Figure 28.b). Very few respondents, around five per cent, believe that land-use information covers more than 80 per cent of the country, with most believing it covers less than 60 per cent (Figure 28.a).

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[5] According to the same law, pasture lands are all state-owned, public lands that are not used for agriculture, housing or public benefit, wherein wild plants grow. Pasture lands include such lands wherefrom pastoral plants were removed due to tillage, wetting or overgrazing.
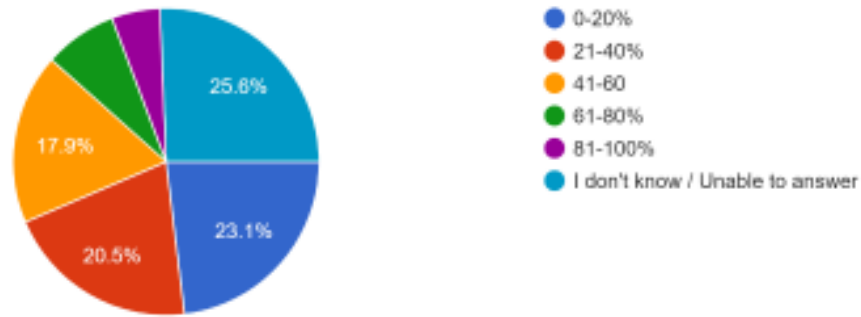
a. Coverage of land-use information (as percentage of total country area)
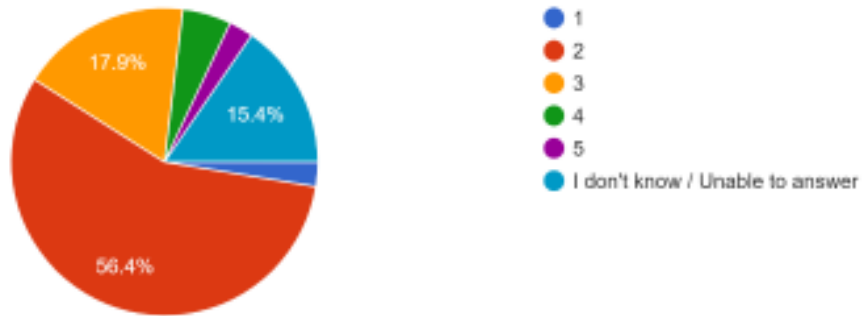
b. Degree of completeness and accessibility of land-use information

Figure 28. Perception of coverage and degree of completeness and accessibility of land-use information.

Regarding **natural resources information**, less than one fifth of respondents are aware of the existence of a land-use information system. While many respondents did not have an idea of how much land is covered in official natural resource information, nearly half believe that less than 60 per cent of the country is covered (Figure 33.a). In assessing the completeness and accessibility of natural resources information, almost half of the respondents noted that the information is inaccessible, giving a rating of one to two, where five is the most accessible or with most data digitized, as shown in Figure 29.b.
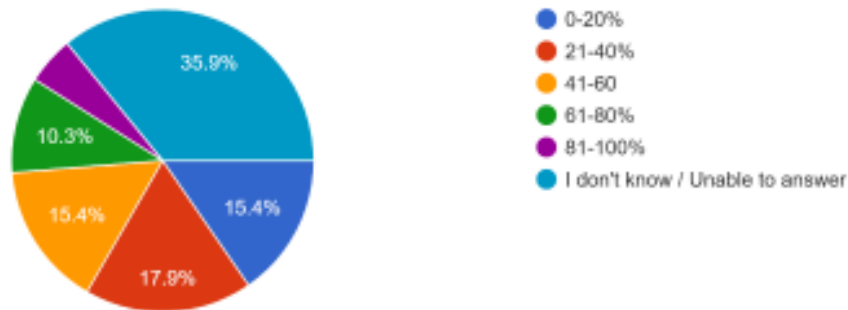
a. Coverage of natural resources information (as percentage of total country area)
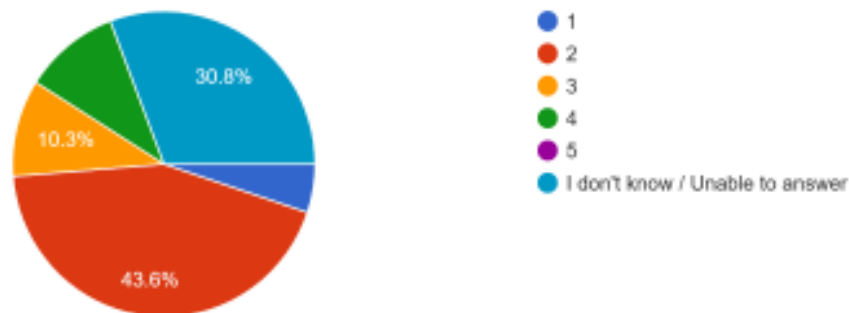
_b._ _Degree of completeness and accessibility of natural resources information_

Figure 29. Perception of coverage and degree of completeness and accessibility of natural resources information.

4.4.3 Land use: summarized findings

Table 3 presents a summary of the results for land use. The local plans are perceived as the most adequate and enforced. Leading and fast-growing urban centres have updated urban plans, but they have deficiencies and lack enforcement. Regulations addressing informal, temporary or displaced population settlements exist, but are still considered inadequate and lack enforcement.

Environmental protection land-use regulations also exist and are considered reasonably adequate and enforced. Building permit regulations are the most enforced type of regulation, especially in urban areas.

Although there are many plans and existing standards for suburban developments, these need to be more effective in controlling and managing land subdivisions in suburban areas and non-urban localities around larger cities in the country.

The social tradition of relying on land as a form of investment leads to high demand for residential allotments, hampering progress in land management.

Information on land use is inaccessible and incomplete.

Table 3: Land use findings

Indicator	Measure (per cent of respondents)
Adequate and updated land-use plans (national, regional and local level)	Exist (69.2, 66.7, 84.6)
Enforcement of plans (national, regional and local level)	Enforced (15.4, 12.6, 48.7)
Existence of urban plans for the main or fast-growing urban centres, schemes addressing informal, temporary or displaced population settlements	Exist (66.7, 64.1)
Building permit regulations: existence, adequacy, enforcement	Yes (87.2), adequate (77), enforced (82)
Rural/agricultural land-use regulations: existence, adequacy, enforcement	Yes (51.3), adequate (15.4), enforced (10.3)
Environmental protection land-use regulations: existence, adequacy, enforcement	Yes (71.8), adequate (59), enforced (59)
Assessment of the clarity of the government's role regarding interfering in private land rights	No (64.1)

4.5 Land development

Land development is the application of resources[6] to improve land and enable different, better or more efficient land use.

National level responsible agencies:
- Ministry of Economy and Planning (setting the framework for sectoral and regional plans),
- Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (setting regulations for heritage),
- Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority (establishing regulations and standards for Economic Cities Saudi Authority for Industrial Cities and Technology Zones – also known as MODON),
- Ministry of Interior (setting up Urban Development Committee, e.g. in Mecca).

Local level responsible agencies:
- Royal commissions (Jubail and Yanbu, Al-Oula).

4.5.1 Acquiring land for the public

According to most respondents surveyed for this study, there are mechanisms for the public to acquire land for public use. However, most respondents indicated that they are unsure about the degree of fairness of these mechanisms, while around one third believe they are fair, selecting a score of 4 to 5, where five is most fair. Most respondents are also unsure if these mechanisms are cost-effective, while less than one quarter believe they are (Figure 30. a and b).

In urban areas, particularly in major cities, land acquisition for government land grants and public housing has become increasingly difficult as landowners are reluctant to release their land for public investment. Additionally, small pastoralist groups may be affected by mega projects constructed in Saudi Arabia (e.g. Neom).
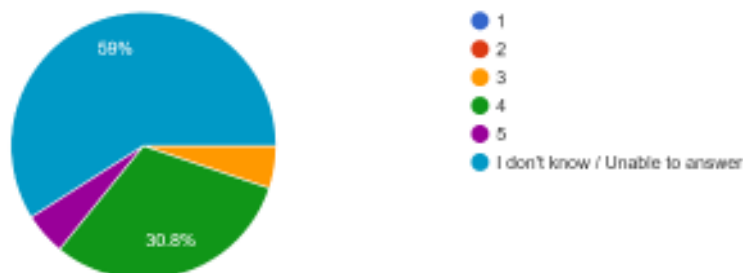
a.   Fairness of mechanisms for the public to acquire land for public use

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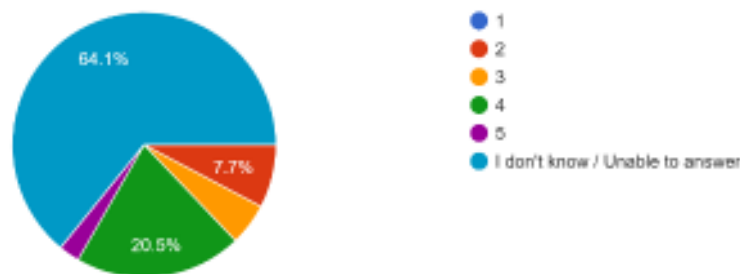
[6] These resources may include capital investments (e.g., constructing buildings, services, or infrastructure), labour (e.g. clearing or draining land for agriculture), or administrative processes (e.g. securing or revising planning permissions).

Figure 30. Perceptions of fairness and cost-effectiveness of mechanisms for the public to acquire land for public use.

Most respondents surveyed assured that there are mechanisms for **land expropriation**, with most believing these mechanisms to be fair, giving a score of 4 or 5, where five is the fairest. More than half of respondents also believe the mechanisms are cost-effective, as shown in Figure 31. a and b, respectively.
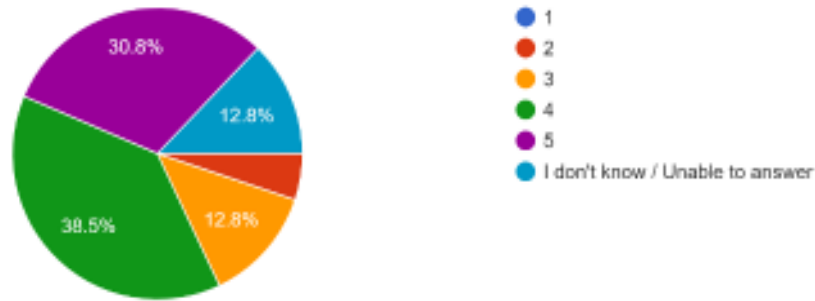
a.   Fairness of the land expropriation mechanisms
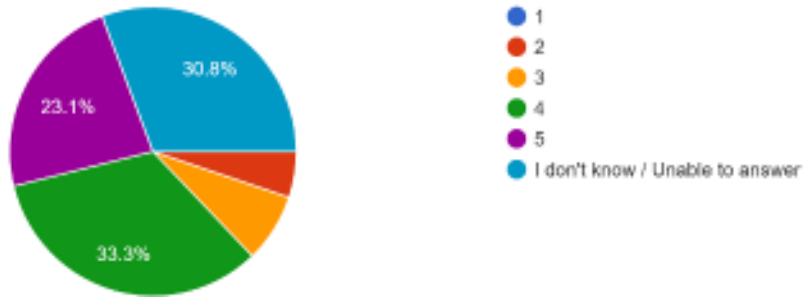
b.   Cost-effectiveness of the land expropriation mechanisms

Figure 31. Perceptions of fairness and cost-effectiveness of land expropriation mechanisms.

Regarding whether there are efficient **regulations to control land subdivisions or consolidation** in urban areas, most respondents are aware of such regulations. More than two thirds of respondents believe the regulations are fair, and more than half believe that they are cost-effective, as in Figures 36. a and b, respectively.
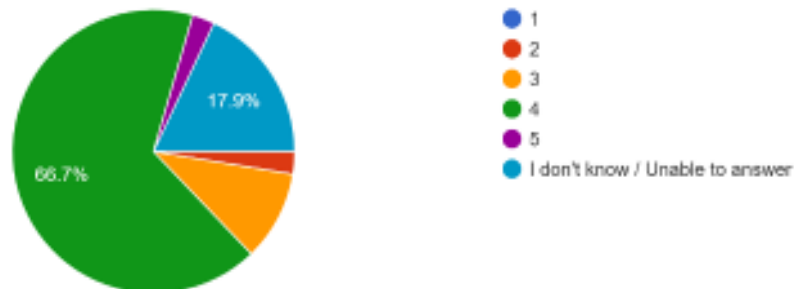
a.   Fairness of regulations to control land subdivisions and consolidation in urban areas
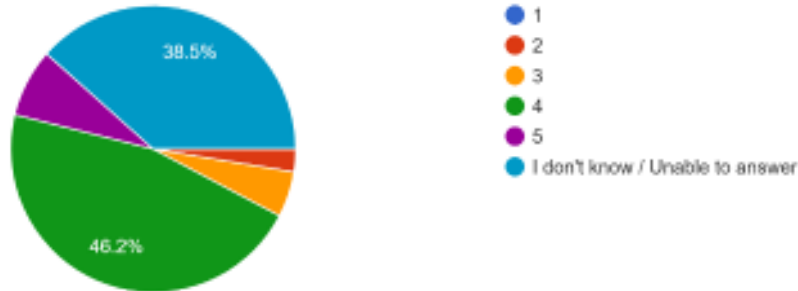
b.   Cost-effectiveness of regulations to control land subdivision and consolidation in urban areas

Figure 32. Perception of fairness and cost-effectiveness of regulations to control land subdivisions and consolidation in urban areas.

Just over a third of respondents are aware of regulations to control land subdivisions or consolidation in rural areas, and most were unable to answer regarding their fairness and cost-effectiveness.

4.5.2 Planning and construction

Mechanisms or regulations that ensure construction is aligned with land-use regulations exist in Saudi Arabia according to most respondents. Whether these mechanisms or regulations are cost-effective, most respondents gave a score of 4 or 5, where five is the most cost-effective, as shown in Figure 38.
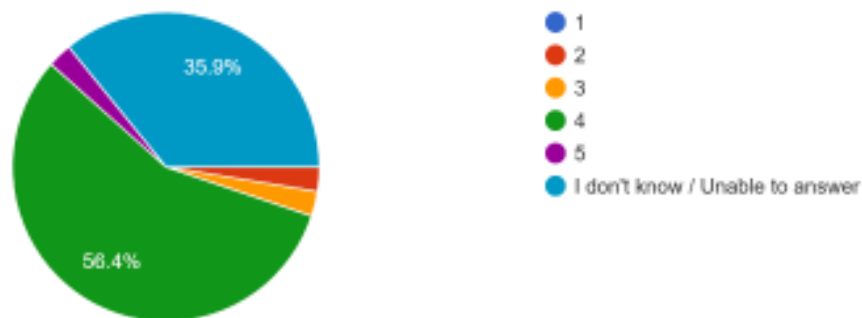
Figure 33. Perception of cost-effectiveness of mechanisms or regulations that ensure construction is aligned with land-use regulations

Regarding the **property development process**, most respondents believe it is easy for landowners (Figure 39.a). Only one fifth of respondents believe the process is easy for professional developers, while the majority believe it is moderately difficult (Figure 39.b). According to more than three quarters of respondents, the property development process is least difficult for public authorities (Figure 39.c).
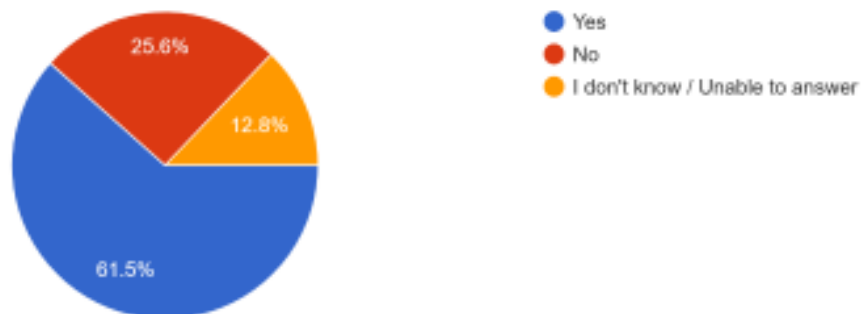
a.   Difficulty of the property development process for landowners

40
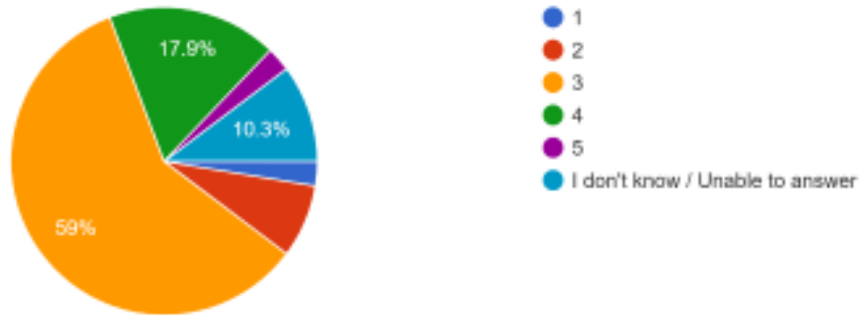
b. Difficulty of the property development process for professional developers
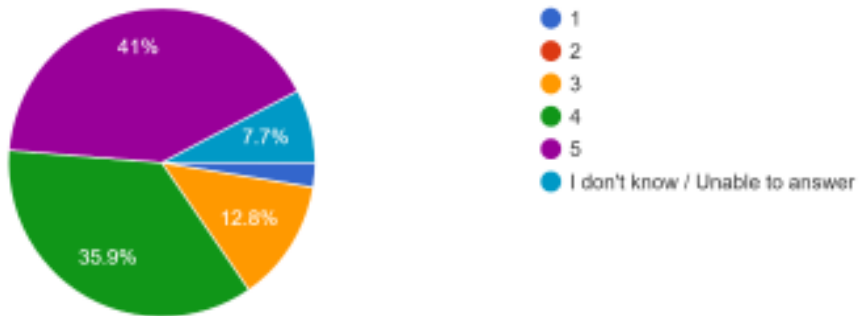
c. Difficulty of the property development process for public authorities

Figure 34. Perceptions of difficulty of the property development process for landowners, professional developers and public authorities.

Most respondents confirmed that there are effective mechanisms to change land use by granting planning permissions and building permits in Saudi Arabia. However, only a quarter believe they are cost-effective, as shown in Figure 35. a and b, respectively.
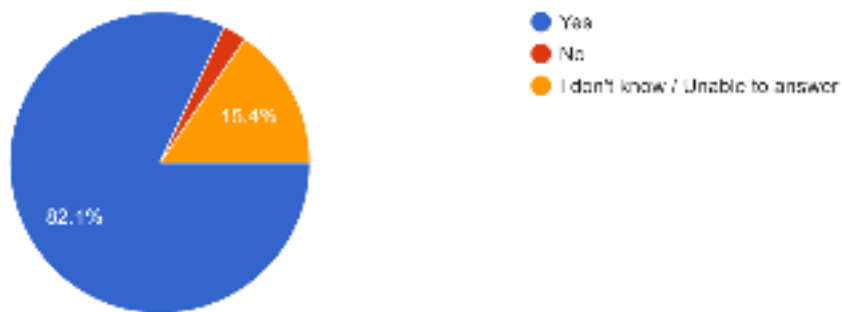
a. Existence of effective mechanisms to change land use by granting planning permissions and building permits
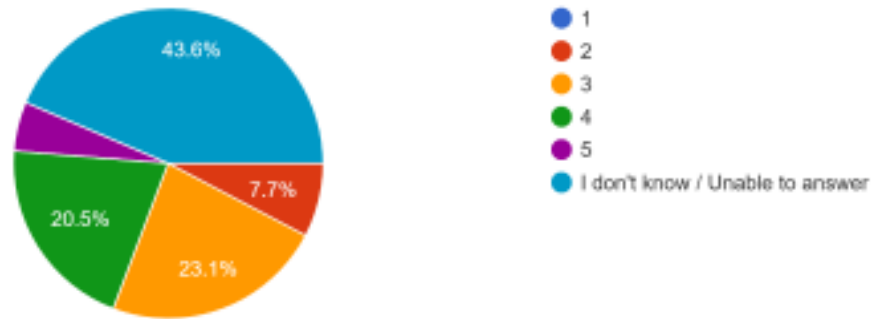
b. Cost-effectiveness of mechanisms to change land use by granting planning permissions and building permits

Figure 35. Perceptions of the existence and cost-effectiveness of effective mechanisms to change land use by granting planning permissions and building permits.

4.5.3 Distribution of development costs

Real estate property in Saudi Arabia is either owned by public sector entities (i.e., the state under the supervision of the Real Property Administration at the Ministry of Finance, *Amanats* or municipalities) or by private entities and individuals. Most respondents believe there is no mechanism to ensure that development costs are fairly distributed between public and private actors, and less than one quarter of respondents believe it is cost-effective for public and private actors.

4.5.4 Land development: summarized findings

Land acquisition for government land grants and public housing has become increasingly difficult as landowners are reluctant to release their land for public investment. There is a lack of information about state lands and rights of the state. There is a lack of defined policies concerning the use of state land or standard for its management. Table 4 summarizes the findings regarding land development.

Table 4: Land development findings

Indicator	Measure (per cent of respondents)
Existence of mechanisms for the public to acquire land for public use, Fairness	Exist (61.5) Unknown (59)
Existence of land expropriation mechanism Fairness	Exist (61.5) Unknown (59)
Existence of efficient regulations to control land subdivisions Fairness	Exist (84.6) Fair (69.3)
Existence of mechanisms ensuring construction is aligned with land-use regulations	Exist (87.2)
Difficulty in the property development process for landowners, professional developers, public authorities	Easy (61.5, 20.5, 76)
Existence of effective mechanisms to change land use Cost-effectiveness	Exist (82.1) Not cost-effective (74.6)
The existence of mechanisms to ensure that development costs are fairly distributed between the public and the private actors	None (56.4)

4.6 Land disputes resolution

Some of the implications of weak governance include encroachment, exclusion of access to land, informal modes of service delivery, limited land markets, increased administrative corruption, state capture, and land disputes. Several typologies of disputes can arise over access to, use of and control over land and land-based resources. Such disputes can have different scales: individual, family, communities, or whole societies. Some land-related conflicts can lead to violent confrontations; others lead to land tenure insecurity and constrain the effective use of land resources. The capacity of countries to successfully address and resolve land-related disputes is an essential characteristic of an effective land sector.

This section assesses (a) whether a country has affordable, clearly defined, transparent and unbiased mechanisms for resolving land disputes and (b) whether these mechanisms function effectively in practice. The Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior are responsible for land disputes resolution in the country.

4.6.1 Management and adjudication of disputes on land rights and parcel boundaries

According to most respondents, a well-structured formal system to resolve conflicts and disputes related to land rights (e.g. ownership, inheritance, rights of use, etc.) and parcel boundaries is in place. Respondents also assessed how fast the dispute system resolves conflict, with more than half saying it is slow, giving a score of one or two, where five is very fast (Figure 42.a). Regarding the system's affordability for the poor and other vulnerable groups, less than one third of respondents said it is affordable, giving a score of four or five, where five is very affordable (Figure 42.b). About one quarter of respondents believe that people are generally familiar with the procedures to access the formal disputes resolution system, giving a score of four or five, with five indicating that most people know how to access it (Figure 42.c). Nearly half of respondents believe that people generally trust the land dispute system, giving a score of 4 or 5, where five indicates that most people trust the disputes resolution system (Figure 42.d). Most respondents are not aware of the proportion of land-related cases in the formal courts or the existence of mechanisms other than legal courts to solve land rights disputes.
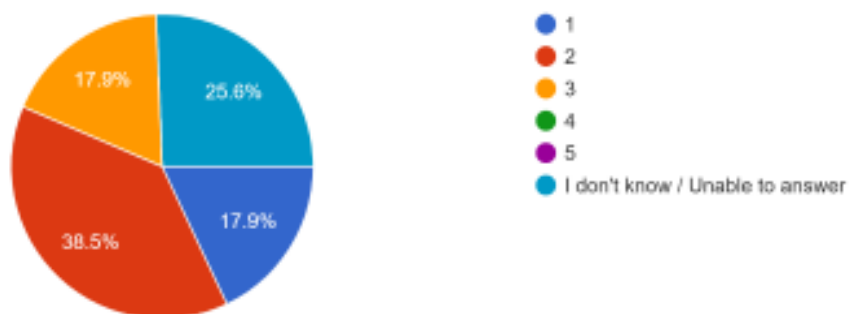
a.   Speed of the land dispute resolution system
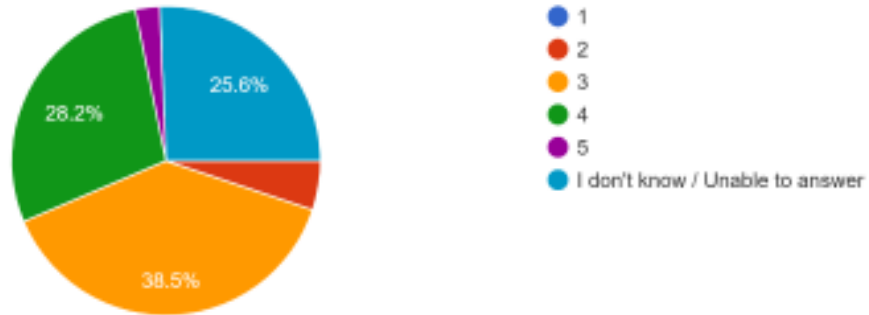
b.   Affordability of the land dispute resolution system
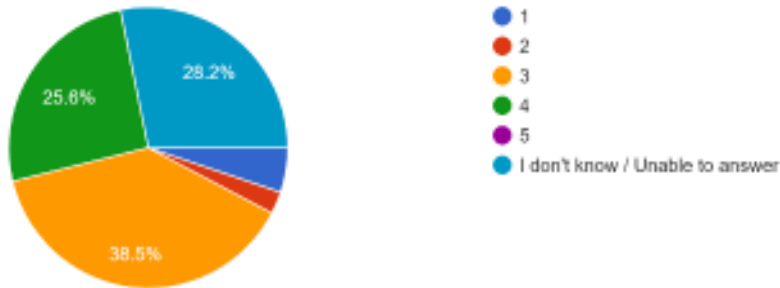
c.   People's familiarity with the land dispute resolution system
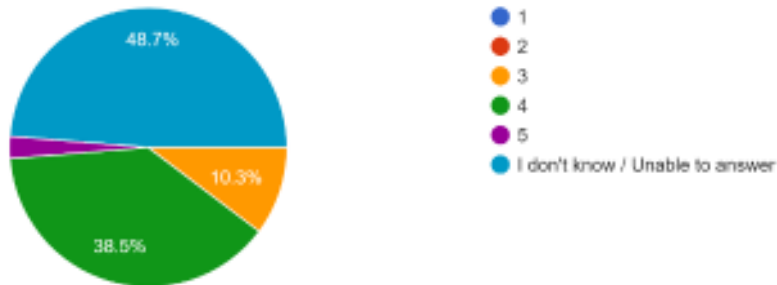
d.   Reliability of the land dispute resolution system

Figure 36. Perceptions of the speed, affordability, familiarity and reliability of the land dispute resolution system.

4.6.2 Land disputes resolution: summarized findings

A well-structured formal system exists to resolve conflicts and disputes related to land rights and parcel boundaries. However, there is no system of judicial precedent, giving judges the power to use independent legal reasoning to decide. Saudi judges tend to follow the principles of the Hanbali school of jurisprudence and are noted for their literalist interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith.

Because the judge is empowered to disregard previous judgments (either his own or of other judges) and may apply his interpretation of sharia[7] to any case, divergent conclusions arise even in apparently identical cases, making predictability of legal interpretation difficult.

The juridical system is affordable for the poor and other vulnerable groups. However, it could be more familiar to citizens. Most people trust the disputes resolution system.

The proportion of land-related cases in the formal courts and the existence of mechanisms other than legal courts to solve land rights disputes are unknown. See Table 5 for a summary of the findings on land disputes resolution.

Table 5: Land disputes resolution findings

Indicator	Measure (per cent of respondents)
Existence of a formal system	Exist (74.4)
Time of process	Slow to very slow (56.4)
Affordability	Affordable (30.8)
People are familiar with the system	No (74.4)
Reliability of the system	Yes (41.1)
Other mechanisms	Unknown (87.2)

4.7 Overview of the land sector assessment's findings

Table 6 gives an overview of the findings of the Saudi Arabia's land sector assessment, disaggregated by land administration function. There are moderate challenges regarding these functions on coverage, effectiveness, time, cost, and accessibility for vulnerable groups. There are significant challenges regarding the availability of data and clarity of mandates.

Table 6: Saudi Arabia's land administration system functions

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[7] The sharia court system constitutes the fundamental judiciary of Saudi Arabia, and its judges (*qadi*) and lawyers form part of the country's Islamic scholars.

LAS Functions / Criteria	Land Tenure	Land Value	Land Use	Land Development	Land Disputes Resolution
Existence of the system	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
Coverage\ effectiveness	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🔴
Time (fast-moderate-slow)	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟢	🟡
Cost (low-moderate-high)	🟡	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟡
Accessibility (vulnerable groups) (high-moderate-low)	🟢	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟠
Data Availability (high-moderate-low)	🔴	🔴	🟡	🔴	🔴
Mandates clarity (high-moderate-low)	🔴	🔴	🔴	🔴	🔴

🔴 Significant challenge   🟡 Moderate Challenge   🟢 No/ Limited Challenge

5. Analysis of learning offers and research efforts on land governance

Analysing the current learning offers and related curricula on land governance in the country is essential to identify gaps in the current efforts and propose solutions to bridge these gaps. The current learning offers and related curricula for land governance in Saudi Arabia support resolving land issues and challenges for better land policy development and implementation. The main concerns in these curricula are financial and technical capacities. Learning offers on land governance in the country are often limited, producing land professionals ill-equipped to respond to the country's realities and dimensions of land governance and administration within the region. The curricula also tend to be too technical, lacking in the social, cultural, political, economic and environmental aspects crucial to land governance. Further challenges include a narrow focus on land tenure, the political economy of land and cultural or traditional land governance.

5.1 Existing learning offer on land-related topics

The mapping survey was conducted using the matrix demonstrated in Table 6. The results show that the private sector is not involved in offering any training on land-related topics. Three quarters of the current learning offers are provided by public universities (King Saud University, King Abdelaziz University, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Qassim University, Om Al Qura University, etc.).

5.2 Overview of the curricula in Saudi Arabia

The main topics the learning offers cover are land use, urban land development, planning law and administration, surveying, housing theories and economics and urban planning. There are 13 identified courses of study in the country. Public universities, training institutes and professional bodies are the main learning providers (Figure 43).
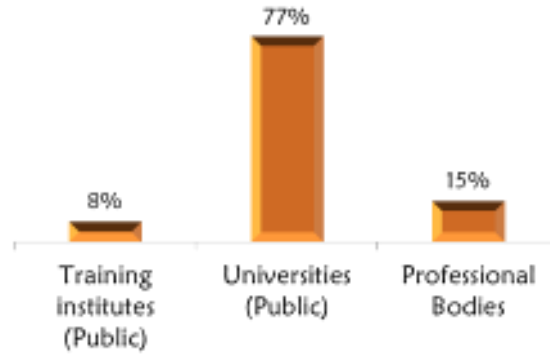
Figure 37. Learning offer providers

Curricula analysis

Grade/level of the existing learning offer: The Saudi Real Estate Institute (real estate financing) and the Saudi Authority for Accredited Valuers (land expropriation) are the central bodies that provide short courses for professionals. These learning offers are classified in Figure 44.
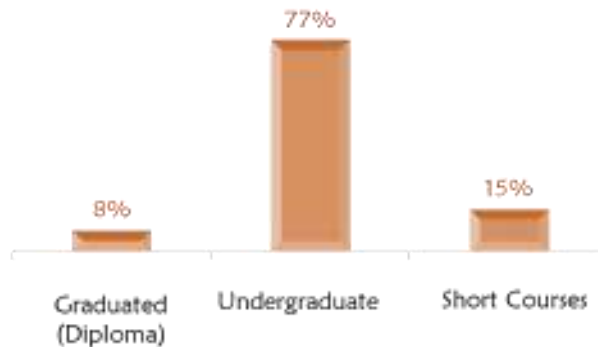
Figure 38. Learning offers grade/level

The Saudi Real Estate Institute is an educational institution that specializes in providing training in real estate sciences. Launched in 2018, it aims to qualify the real estate market workforce with professional certificates to work in the real estate industry. It is one of the initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Housing within the National Transformation Plan 2020 to achieve Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 in cooperation with local and international partners and consulting firms in the real estate field. The Institute provides paid, certified courses regarding real estate financing.

Other learning offers are those provided by the Saudi Authority for Accredited Valuers aimed at professionals, land valuers and urban planners. The Authority organizes the evaluation profession in the country, setting regulations and legislation that allow them to practice their work in line with international evaluation standards. The Authority also offers qualifying programmes to accredit and qualify practitioners for this profession based on scientific foundations and international practices. Evaluation contributes to preserving rights and achieving justice among beneficiaries by providing professional services and high-quality evaluation reports. The Authority also provides certified courses on Land Expropriation, with fees paid by the students. All the courses provided by the Authority are certified.

The different types of learning offers are shown in Figure 45.
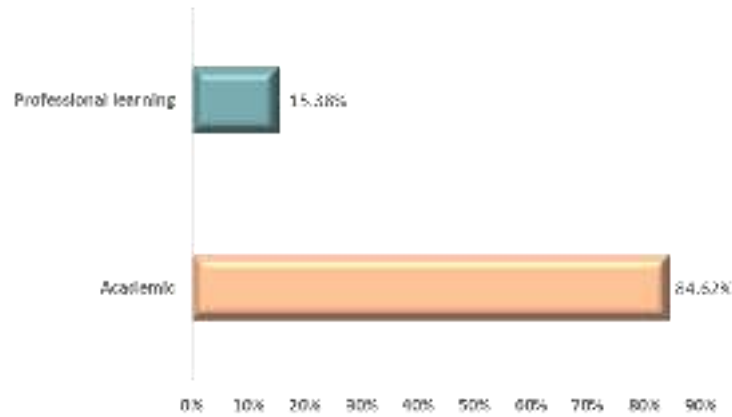
Figure 39. Types of learning offer

Fees and funding options: All undergraduate courses are free for students and supported by the government. Applicants pay for graduate and professional courses. There are no other options for funding. The fees required and funding sources are shown in Figures 46 and 47, respectively.
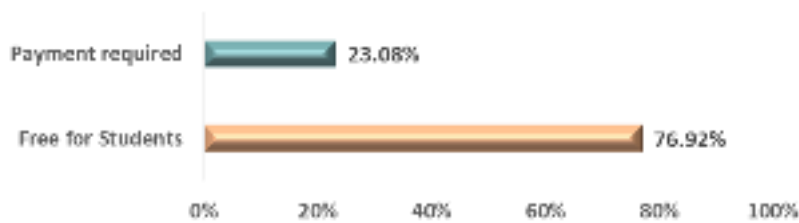
Figure 40. Fee requirements of learning offers
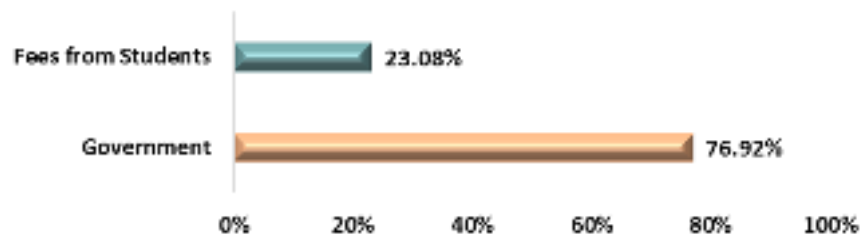
Figure 41. Funding sources for learning offers

Proportion of available learning offers on the five functions of land administration: Land disputes resolution and land tenure are the functions that are least covered by the learning offers; land use and land development are the most covered (Figure 48).

Land Disputes Resolution — 0.00%
Land Development — 23.08%
Land Use — 46.15%
Land Value — 15.38%
Land Tenure — 7.69%
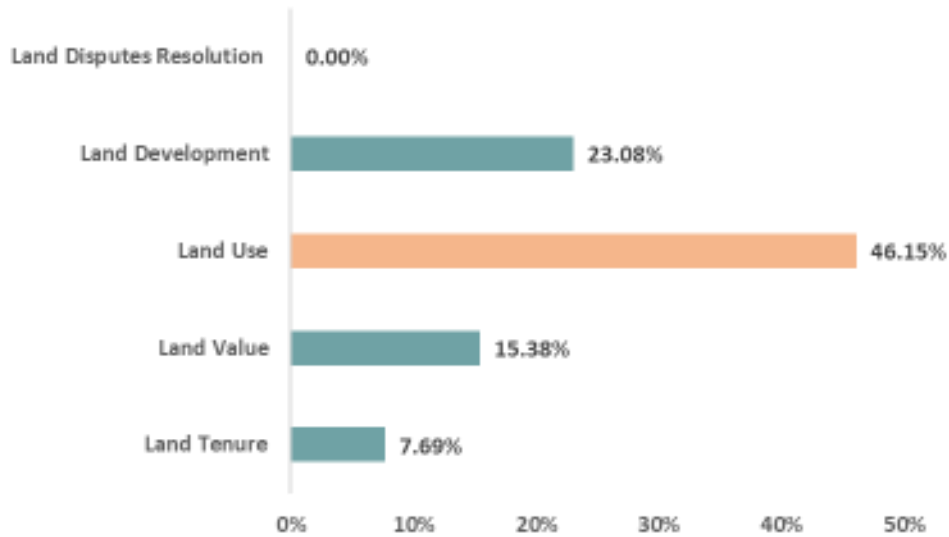
Figure 42. Proportion of available learning offers on the five functions of land administration

Figure 49 summarizes the available learning offers on land administration and management in the country.

Training institutes (Public) Graduated	Universities (Public) Undergraduate	Professional Bodies Short Courses
8%	77%	15%
30 Days	90 Days	4-5 Days
Fees from Students	No fees	Fees from Students
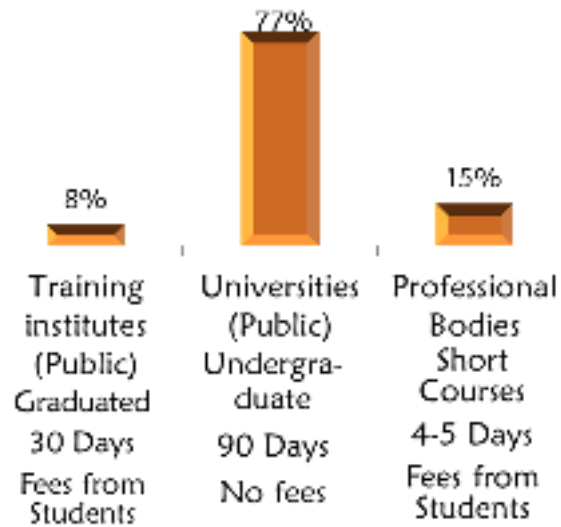
Figure 43. Learning offers providers, type, duration and fees

Organization	Type of org.	Country	Type of Content	Name of the course/learning offer	Duration	Type of Course	Grade/Level	Certification	Funding	Payment	Information on the curriculum	Website and contacts
Training institutes (Public/Private)	Public	Saudi Arabia	Spatial Planning/land-use planning, Project management	course about learning a new method of planning	30 days	E-Learning	Diploma	Yes (Issued by a government-recognized institution and/or international education bodies)	Government, Fees from students, Donors	No (it is free for users/students)	None	no website
Universities (Public/Private)	Public	Saudi Arabia	Spatial Planning/land-use planning	Bachelor's in Architecture and Urban Planning (land use)	Three months	Professional Learning (compulsory, optional, etc.)	Other (specify)	Yes (Issued by a government-recognized institution and/or international education bodies)	Government	No (it is free for users/students)	None	https://cap.ksu.edu.sa/ar
Professional Bodies (Syndicates, Associations, CPD)	Public	Saudi Arabia	Real Estate/ Valuation/ Taxation	Land Expropriation	Five days	Continuous Professional Development	Short Course	Yes (Issued by a government-recognized institution and/or international education bodies)	Fees from students	Yes (users/students pay)	None	https://www.taqeem.gov.sa/
Universities (Public/Private)	Public	Saudi Arabia_ Jeddah	Spatial Planning/land-use planning, public administration (land-related), Land Management	BSc in architecture and urban planning (Urban land development)	Three months	Professional Learning (compulsory, optional, etc.)	Undergraduate	Yes (Issued by a government-recognized institution and/or international education bodies)	Government	No (it is free for users/students)	None	https://urp.kau.edu.sa/Default-137010-AR
Universities (Public/Private)	Public	Saudi Arabia-Dammam	Spatial Planning/land-use planning, public administration (land-related), Legal/Justice	BSc in architecture and urban planning (Planning Law & Administration)	Three months	Academic	Undergraduate	Yes (Issued by the government-recognized institution and/or international education bodies)	Government	No (it is free for users/students)	None	https://www.iau.edu.sa/ar/colleges/college-of-architecture-and-planning/departments/department-of-urban-and-regional-planning
Training institutes (Public/Private)	Public	Saudi Arabia	Real Estate/ Valuation/ Taxation	Real estate financing	4 days	Professional Learning (compulsory, optional, etc.)	Short Course	Yes (Issued by a government-recognized institution and/or international education bodies)	Fees from students	Yes (users/students pay)	None	https://www.srei.sa/StaticContent/AboutIndex
Universities (Public/Private)	Public	Saudi Arabia	Spatial planning/land-use planning	BSc in architecture and urban planning (Introduction to city planning)	3 months	Academic	Undergraduate	Yes (Issued by government-recognized institutions and/or international education bodies)	Government	No (it is free for users/students)	None	https://cap.qu.edu.sa/
Universities (Public/Private)	Public	Saudi Arabia	Geospatial studies/Survey/Mapping	BSc in architecture and urban planning (Surveying)	3 months	Academic	Undergraduate	Yes (Issued by a government-recognized institution and/or international education bodies)	Government	No (it is free for users/students)	None	https://uqu.edu.sa/isarch.dep

Universities (Public/Private)	Public	Saudi Arabia	Social sciences (land-related), Economics/ Finance/ Business Administration	BSc in architecture and urban planning (Housing theories and economics)	months	Academic	Undergraduate	Yes (Issued by a government-recognized institution and/or international education bodies)	Government	No (it is free for users/stude nts)	None	https://cap.qu.edu.sa/
Universities (Public/Private)	Public	Saudi Arabia	Geospatial studies/Survey/Map ping	BSc in architecture and urban planning (surveying for architects)	3 months	Academic	Undergraduate	Yes (Issued by a government-recognized institution and/or international education bodies)	Government	No (it is free for users/stude nts)	None	https://cap.qu.edu.sa/
Universities (Public/Private)	Public	Saudi Arabia	Spatial planning/land-use planning	BSc in architecture and urban planning (History and theories of urban planning)	3 months	Academic	Undergraduate	Yes (Issued by a government-recognized institution and/or international education bodies)	Government	No (it is free for users/stude nts)	None	https://uqu.edu.sa/isarch.dep
Universities (Public/Private)	Public	Saudi Arabia	Spatial planning/land-use planning, Legal/Justice	BSc in architecture and urban planning (Urban systems and regulations)	3 months	Academic	Undergraduate	Yes (Issued by a government-recognized institution and/or international education bodies)	Government	No (it is free for users/stude nts)	None	https://uqu.edu.sa/isarch.dep
Universities (Public/Private)	Public	Saudi Arabia	Spatial planning/land-use planning, social sciences (land-related), Land Management	BSc in architecture and urban planning (Urban Planning Studio)	3 months	Academic	Undergraduate	Yes (Issued by a government-recognized institution and/or international education bodies)	Government	No (it is free for users/stude nts)	None	https://uqu.edu.sa/isarch.dep

5.3 Existing research efforts on land-related topics

There are two main approaches to understanding the meaning of current research concerning land-related curricula. The first is research through published reports and scientific papers. The second is research resulting from learning efforts in the land sector by universities, government and private institutions. Due to the lack of published content regarding the courses and other learning efforts outlined here, this study reviewed and analysed the following published research, reports and projects.

Lessons for national spatial strategy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia - The Regional and Metropolitan Planning Unit and UN-Habitat authored this report. It discusses similar National Spatial Strategy projects undertaken in Korea, Germany, Malaysia, Morocco and China. These case studies are used to study the approaches through which national spatial strategies are developed and implemented. Among the lessons learned is the need to address environmental challenges. Environmental policy and integrated land use nurture a sustainable environment, help mitigate climate change, protect the natural environment, and sustain biodiversity (UN-Habitat, 2016).

National Report: Third UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) - This report shares the experiences of Saudi Arabia in addressing challenges of urbanization in specific areas of urban demography, land and urban planning, environment and urbanization, urban governance and legislation, urban economy, housing and basic services (Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and UN-Habitat, 2016a).

Review of Regional Planning in Saudi Arabia, 2016 - The review consists of three main sections. Part 1 showcases case studies from Germany, South Korea, Malaysia, South Africa and Canada, providing a vivid picture of the diversity of regional planning worldwide and inspiring development in Saudi Arabia. These cases of varied metropolitan regions demonstrate the need for comprehensive regional planning to integrate cities and the importance of citizen engagement to address conflicts of emerging land uses (Adolsary, Elhefnawi, and Graute, 2016).

This research produced two primary documents: The Green Paper and The White Paper. The **Green Paper** affirms commitment to the new Spatial Planning Act as a legal and governance framework for the Kingdom's urban and spatial policy framework. It presents the government's Policy Orientations to stimulate discussion and guide the ultimate path and policy content of the Spatial Planning Act, established in the White Paper. The **White Paper** details policies that establish the direction for and guided the content of the legislative orders to be taken forward into the next stage of drafting the Act.

Spatial Planning Act and Strategy - The Spatial Planning Act sets a framework for a planning system and crucially enables the management of land, land use and development across the country. As a research effort, it gives clear direction to planning and developing management systems, providing certainty in decision-making and encouraging the best type of development. This research project was conducted for the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs by the IBI Group in 2018 (Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, 2018).

The more recent National Spatial Strategy reflects and aligns with Vision 2030 and the National Transformation Programme 2020 to provide a better future for urban and regional development and liveable, sustainable communities across the country. It will provide the coordination and integration required of the planning system to deliver spatial economic, social and environmental transformation programmes.

The Act, its planning processes and the National Spatial Strategy are crucial in driving development and achieving the country's aspirations in reshaping the economy through more efficient governance and a whole-of-government approach.

5.4 Existing learning offer and research efforts: summarized findings

The results of the review of existing learning offers and research efforts show that the private sector is not much involved in offering any training on land-related topics. Public universities provide more than 75 per cent of current learning offers as short courses for undergraduate students in engineering, architecture, and urban planning faculties. These courses are certified and funded by the government.

Although some provide learning efforts related to the curriculum for land governance, such as the Saudi Real Estate Institute and the Saudi Authority for Accredited Valuers, these are very limited compared to the offers of universities.

There is almost no contribution from private academic institutes to land administration and management governance learning.

There needs to be more information regarding the content of the courses offered by learning providers.

Civil society and non-public institutions and stakeholders are not involved in land governance learning in Saudi Arabia.

Numerous reports about Saudi Arabia have been published, especially during the preparation of the National Spatial Strategy (2001) and Saudi Vision 2030 (2016). The existing research offers operational documents and reports mainly for the international community or organizations (such as UN agencies).

The New Planning Act is an ongoing research project that aims to determine comprehensive legal documents containing the rules and appropriate processes and procedures for spatial plan-making and implementation through land/development management, regulation, coordination and integration across all levels and jurisdictions, with clear roles and responsibilities for all parties involved.

6. Conclusions

Land governance institutions in Saudi Arabia are struggling to cope with challenges, such as increasing land values, skyrocketing demand, economic development, urbanization, population growth and the development of administrative units, which have contributed to the growing complexity of land issues.

According to the results of this study and supported by the results from a study of the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs with UN-Habitat (2016b), land tenure issues in Saudi Arabia can be summarized as follows: There is no legislation obliging landowners to register their plots. Landowners do not register their land except upon construction or development of the land/plot. Due to this non-registration, *Amanats* face problems upon approval of development projects. The legislation is obsolete; for example, land acquisition/tenure circulars are dispersed and not adapted to the current situation. The multiple legislations on cadastral plot registration are inappropriate and conflicting. The Law of Public Utilities is one of the inflexible laws in its application. While some are obsolete, other laws are limited; for example, there are no implementation regulations on acquisition/ownership other than the different types of ownership.

Other challenges include difficulties in identifying vacant land for resettlement from disaster-prone areas; land speculation hindering effective land-use planning by the government; limited transparency and community engagement hindering large-scale investment in the land sector; property tax collection is

below potential; lack of consolidated regulations/laws in determining the levels of planning which identify and explain the vocabulary of planning levels of different types; and required additional oversight on expropriation to ensure that people's rights are respected in the process and with timely and sufficient compensation.

Linkages to the judicial system will be critical to ensure that the applicable rules are followed, including adequate notice, fair and prompt compensation and alternative resettlement. Civil society organizations can help raise awareness about people's rights under Saudi Arabia law and improve justice for affected individuals and groups. They should also make a concerted effort to monitor demolitions and forced evictions more closely and regularly report on the number of people involved.

Regarding changes in land use, more regulations in dealing with land-use transactions within the municipalities are needed (UN-Habitat, 2016). Such regulations are generally referred to as detailed or indicative plans, particularly for cities with a current and approved plan to regulate land-use change transactions. In contrast, other municipalities with a current and approved plan may have recourse to judgments or look to the relevant ministry to adopt the appropriate decision on a particular transaction. In all cases, the process generally takes an extended period of time. More circulars and regulations on organizational support for social housing are needed.

Based on existing legislation and institutional framework, there is a lack of integration between higher and lower governmental levels (central, regional and local) and overlapping powers and authorities. Thus, authority amongst government tiers in decision-making and policies should be allocated according to the specific local situation. In this regard, some potential concerns are the inability to sort conflicts of sectoral interests among various ministries and departments; the budgetary allocation struggle between quick win project development versus fundamental change with long-term impacts; the inability to replicate international benchmarks to full potential due to socio-cultural dimensions; delay in implementing governance reforms and setting up new institutes to strengthen the planning system; and emphasis on creating new greenfield mega projects is seen as an economic driver outside an overall planning framework.

Surveying, restricting and registering community land rights need to be codified and streamlined. Community landholdings need to be clearly mapped, and this process needs to include conflict management aspects to deal with problems emerging from the formalization. The rights of those most vulnerable – including women and children, as well as minority groups – need to be safeguarded. Also, lessons learned from past projects should be collected to identify gaps and upscale interventions.

Additional research can examine the role of traditional authorities, typologies of land-related conflicts, land registration and other issues, such as expropriations. Future studies could strive to gather complete data for the region to substantiate the study's results with other examples.

In terms of human, technical and financial resources development, it is highly recommended to expand university training, including undergraduate, postgraduate and professional short courses to support the development of a professional cadre of urban/spatial/town planners. A central coordination and information hub is needed, such as that of the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs ePortal, which can host all relevant data, plans, regulations and standards, approvals, licences, plans and layouts, urban design and guidelines. It will provide all citizens and stakeholders with access to relevant planning information about any land parcel before investment decisions are made. To support resource planning and development, the primary Government Policy Orientations for Financial Mechanisms should align with the Vision 2030 call for new financial tools.

6.1 Preliminary recommendations

6.1.1 Legal reforms

Saudi Arabia operates under a unique system of urban governance. For example, most of the ministry's operations are based on resolutions of the Council of Ministers or ministerial ordinances, not laws and legislation. There is no comprehensive legislation governing planning and urban development. Instead, Saudi Arabia has established a spatial planning and land management framework based on government resolutions and technical manuals. As a result, there is no comprehensive and systematic structure for spatial planning and land management that is underpinned by by-laws and legislation. Even though there are spatial plans in place, their quality is mixed, and the relevant procedures for drafting plans are not yet consolidated. With no holistic law for urban planning in the country, the many royal decrees, circulars, ministerial decisions, regulations, standards and requirements create a piecemeal regulatory/standards framework. This leads to inconsistent, contradictory and varying levels of implementation.

Preliminary recommendations for the consideration of Saudi national and local actors:

- A unified act and associated subsidiary law(s) to harmonize all the royal decrees, circulars, ministerial decisions, regulations, standards and requirements. Understand what can go in the Planning Act and what will need to go into subsidiary law(s), e.g. the Planning Act provides the framework for dealing with land and subdivision. In contrast, subsidiary laws deal with detailed processes, licenses and fees.

- A standardized approach to regulations and standards, even across all ministries, must be set to be binding and enforceable. This would include a review of Urban Growth Boundaries and related development standards to harmonize levels of plans, integration, requirements and standards for subdivision and improve the management and sustainability of suburban development.

- The approach should be flexible enough to consider different and more local circumstances. This could be implemented by giving the local authorities more power in decision-making according to the local context.

- Expand the standards to encompass policies on critical issues that affect communities beyond just facilities. This includes the efficient use and management of land and infrastructure, protecting the environment and resources and ensuring appropriate employment and residential development opportunities, including support for mixed or multiple land uses. These standards may be complemented by lower-level plans or locally generated standards regarding matters of municipal interest.

- The Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs should consider providing a framework for comprehensive, integrated, place-based and long-term planning that supports and builds upon the objectives of Vision 2030.

- The reservation, allocation and acquisition processes should be clearly defined and transparent.

- Precise mechanisms, processes and procedures for implementing plans, policies and strategies should be clear, binding and enforceable.

- A framework for monitoring the implementation of plans, regulations and standards should be established, to trigger revisions if the intended objectives are not achieved.

- Empower civil society organizations and NGOs as active players in urban governance.

- Increase public participation and governance on spatial planning.

6.1.2 Institutional reforms

The main issues in institutional reforms are the disjointed and conflicting urban planning standards and regulations from multiple bodies. Accordingly:

- Roles and responsibilities must be determined within the planning framework for the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, the regions, *Amanats*/municipalities, and other ministries and authorities.

- Ensure standards are consistent and provide clarity of implementation.

- Set a framework for multiple roles, responsibilities and procedures with the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, the legal system (courts) as well as other ministries where they all need to be involved, especially where planning and legal processes are related and may involve multiple license types issued by different ministries.

- Establish a Saudi Planning Institute, a professional body for Saudi Planners to oversee professional standards and the accreditation of professional and appropriately trained planners.

- Bring all special authorities into the planning hierarchy and align them with clear jurisdictional boundaries to ensure cohesive growth and development patterns throughout the country in the long term, regardless of jurisdiction.

6.1.3 Human and financial resources development

Local authorities must be well-equipped to control private development, planning and cadastral land administration, requiring local-level funding and taxation. Once planned and approved, infrastructure, services and developing capacities must be financed through land and development-related mechanisms with the broader planning institutions. Accordingly:

- It is appropriate to think of forms of administrative decentralization which apply primarily to regions, *Amanats*, or even crucial municipalities, giving them authority to coordinate with the regional councils and departments providing basic services.

- Financing infrastructure with the private sector's involvement is crucial considering changing economic dynamics. A national Public-Private Partnerships legislation is a practical step forward.

- A high-level central unit responsible for Public-Private Partnerships implementation and coordination is needed.

- There should be a clear definition and categorization of Public-Private Partnership projects, including infrastructure projects of national and regional importance.

- As innovative mechanisms, user and development charges, including taxation, can be administered. Enforcement can vary in cities and should be at the municipalities' discretion. Other countries have practised this with varying levels of success.

- Budget allocation mechanisms within a specific timeframe for directing funds and financing infrastructure for local, regional and international connectivity need to be determined.

- Standardized development contributions and cost charges can help support infrastructures such as roads, water distribution services, sewage collection, transit, electrical facilities, etc., or services/facilities such as mosques, community facilities, open spaces, etc.

- Development agreements whereby a developer or landowner agrees to pay to recover the cost for or to construct infrastructure services/facilities or services/facilities should be put in place.

- Other suggestions on where to charge cost: parking facilities in non-residential parking lots, waste management and collection facilities and services, White Land Tax (already in place, set on vacant undeveloped land with urban boundaries), Betterment Taxes (related to open space developments, provision of parks and public placemaking, etc.).

6.1.4 Technical reforms

Clear communication and agile technology enable rapid planning mechanisms to support the country's planning system governance.

There is a need for a central coordination and information hub, such as the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs ePortal, to host all relevant data, plans, regulations and standards, approvals, licences, urban design and guidelines. The ePortal will also provide citizens and stakeholders access to all relevant planning information about any land parcel before making investment decisions.

Digital media can be used to engage stakeholders through Information and Communication Technology. The system can collect and disseminate information from citizens and stakeholders to reduce gaps in obtaining feedback during different phases, from planning to operations and impact assessment.

Integrate planning mechanisms, processes and data into the existing whole-of-government digital approach being developed through the ePortal system, supported by a framework to help the government and its entities deploy technology and software in a coordinated and consistent manner under the Spatial Planning Act.

Artificial Intelligence systems can help automate and speed up a range of planning processes, such as providing an Intelligent Development Management System.

6.2 Training, education, and research

The land sector would benefit from enriching the curricula and expanding the land-related courses offered by universities and institutions of higher learning and research. It is recommended to expand university training (including undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional short courses) to support the development of the land professional cadres. Continuous professional development courses for those who will lead the development and implementation of the new planning system is one of the priorities. Additional focus areas include:

- Train professionals working with key institutions such as the Saudi Real Estate Institute and the Saudi Authority for Accredited Valuers and the Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation.

- Provide training programmes or short courses for ministries and professionals interested in land-related issues on government guides and manuals and web-based information resources under the supervision of the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs.

- Link broader national programmes, initiatives and processes. These could be with the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs, the National Project Management Office, and the Ministry of Economy and Planning as primary partners, alongside the whole-of-government programmes from the Ministry of Finance (Bureau of Spending Rationalization) and project processes from the Ministry of Economy and Planning (Mashroat – National Project Management Office) and the Spatial Planning Act. Mashroat is setting up the General Directorates of Management and Projects within each government entity as part of this more comprehensive process. These will have a Strategic Planning and Studies Department, the leading agency to work with the spatial planning system and authorities in all government entities, from the *Amanah* up. All need extensive training for the leaders at the relevant agencies.

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