

# Sharing and Exchange: The Land Information Ecosystem in the Arab region

A Webinar Report



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It is widely understood that effective use of land, the sustainable production of food and development are linked. Yet, creating effective policy, which takes into account broader notions such as economic prosperity and social justice, especially in the context of competing claims to land use and title, still presents significant challenges. The difficulties are compounded by the fragmented nature of information resources about land.

There are many sources of information about land, but their visibility, accessibility, consistency and completeness vary enormously. Finding solid evidence upon which to base policy and practice is a daunting task, and consequently, progress on land governance is threatened by lack of good information. It is paramount that awareness is raised among key policy makers on the importance of building an effective land information ecosystem. It is a crucial moment for the land sector in the Arab region to work together effectively to share knowledge about land rights issues.

The webinar “Sharing and Exchange: The Land Information Ecosystem in the Arab region” explored the most effective way forward to nurture an information ecosystem on land in the Arab region, while stimulating knowledge sharing, collaboration and exchange. This webinar addressed how land stakeholders in the Arab region, including practitioners, governments, development organizations, civil society and researchers, can work in partnership to increase access to information and build a land information ecosystem that is beneficial for all, especially the most vulnerable groups, including women.

**Moderator: Romy Sato, The Land Portal Foundation**

**Panelists:**

- **Laura Meggiolaro, The Land Portal Foundation**
- **Dina Naguib, Housing & Building National Research Center, Cairo**
- **Everlyne Nairesiae, UN-Habitat**
- **Rafic Khouri, Arab Land Initiative**
- **Raed Gharib, SEEDS Jordan**

**A complete recording can be found here:**

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtR1Sp5USwY>**



## Objective

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The objective of the webinar was to discuss how land stakeholders in the Arab region can build a land information ecosystem, namely, a system where a large amount of data and information can operate with each other, hence, making data and information more easily accessible and discoverable. This plays an important role in securing land tenure to all and particularly to vulnerable groups as information about land is unlocked. Towards this goal, panelists and participants identified gaps in land information in the region and ways to bridge these gaps and simple steps that we can all commit to about sharing knowledge in a systematic and open way.

## Webinar Summary

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### **1) HOW LAND PORTAL CONTRIBUTES TO BUILDING AN INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM IN THE LAND SECTOR?**

- The Land Portal has been building a culture of information sharing and collaboration. There is an incredible value in sharing data openly, including transparency and accountability, but also improving monitoring, avoiding duplication of efforts and ultimately, getting better results.
- Secondly, Land Portal works to build a better data infrastructure in the sector for data management, publishing and sharing. There is a lot of work to do on this infrastructure in terms of closing gaps. We have been building tools and services for data sharing.
- Thirdly, in terms of building capacity, we encourage people to think about whether they are using metadata when publishing publications or consider the license? When data is published in this way we have a functional ecosystem and data becomes a public good.

### **2) WHY DOES DATA NEED TO BECOME A PUBLIC GOOD?**

- We all play different roles within this ecosystem and now land rights are at the point of global attention because of the SDGs, and due to many initiatives collecting and monitoring land data. Now is a unique opportunity to use this momentum around land issues to make data more accessible and open to all. This is a pledge to work together and we can help make this ecosystem more coordinated and structured in the Arab region.

### **3) IN YOUR RESEARCH AND CONDUCTING TRAINING, WHERE DO YOU SEE THE MOST CRITICAL INFORMATION GAPS?**

- There is an urgent need to integrate the legal and customary systems, local actors and beneficiaries - but more information and more accessible information is needed for that. There are actors who can act as intermediaries in between to propel discussions at local level. More generally, in terms of better land governance, some of the deficiencies are the lack of participatory decision making over land claims, also growing levels of corruption and low level of transparency.

For all governments the most challenging part is the inability of the current system to deal with the rapid change in land access and land use.

#### **4) ON PROMOTING OPEN DATA AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION, WHAT ARE THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE ARAB CONTEXT?**

- We have several problems with geographic information. First of all, we have a tradition of geo - mapping being done or produced exclusively by the military. We have a problem where it has become a tradition that the state has the monopoly on creating maps. We also have a big centralization which does not allow people, citizens, NGOs or whoever, to take part in the job. We have to build capacities of course, building capacity is a fundamental issue, but we also have to build confidence. Confidence is also a matter that requires that all the people who know how to deal with these issues of mapping get together. It is essential that we try to build a kind of club or association to coordinate, discuss technicalities. In short, all actors should meet.

#### **5) IN SPEAKING ABOUT YOUTH, HOW CAN WE BUILD THEIR CAPACITY TO USE INFORMATION TO SECURE LAND RIGHTS?**

- There is a lot of information about land that is sitting like an island, everyone has their information in their own boxes without being shared. Youth can be essential in breaking these siloes.

#### **6) WHAT ARE THE DIFFICULTIES IN ACCESSING INFORMATION AND WHY DON'T SOME INSTITUTIONS WANT TO SHARE DATA? HOW DOES THIS AFFECT THE GOVERNANCE OF TENURE?**

- Firstly it is about resource constraints, both technically and financially. Most of the institutions that are mandated to collect data often do not have the appropriate budget from governments. Another important aspect is the political will and secrecy is a big issue. Land is often considered a highly territorial secret. Any ability to open it up, presents security threats.

#### **7) HOW CAN WE TRANSFORM AVAILABLE DATA INTO KNOWLEDGE FOR THE CASES WHERE DATA IS AVAILABLE ?**

- Scientific knowledge is displayed, for example, as a mathematical equation, but is often not understood by different practitioners or users. We need to understand the context in which this information is posed and how to shape the future in terms of developing a vision with this information.

#### **8) IF YOU HAD TO TELL DONORS AND GOVERNMENTS WHAT THEY NEED TO BE SUPPORTING, WHAT WOULD YOU BE TELLING THEM? WHAT ARE THE BEST PRACTICES THAT WE AS LAND PRACTITIONERS IN THIS FIELD CAN BE ADOPTING OURSELVES?**

- We need to start relatively small and to give support to secondary cities, for example. They also need geographic information and they need to strengthen their municipalities. Launching some experiences with crowd-mapping, allowing people training to produce their own maps in smaller cities, would be very interesting. We could draw a lot of lessons out of such an experience and to show that this is not a danger to the security of the country.

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## Notable Quotes from the Panelists

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**“CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IS ONE OF THE MAIN TOOLS THAT CAN BE USED IN ORDER TO BUILD THE MISSING KNOWLEDGE OR TO ASSIST IN USING THE EXISTING KNOWLEDGE AND TRANSFORM IT INTO PRACTICAL TOOLS.”**

**- DINA NAGUIB, HOUSING AND BUILDING NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER**

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**“IN JORDAN, WE FOUND THAT WE HAVE A LOT OF INFORMATION, BUT THIS INFORMATION IS STUCK ON ISLANDS. EVERYONE HAS HIS OWN INFORMATION, BUT THE INFORMATION IS STUCK IN A CLOSED BOX.”**

**- RAED GHARIB, SEEDS JORDAN**

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**“WE HAVE BEEN WORKING TOGETHER TO EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN CAPACITY OF NATIONAL STATISTICAL ORGANIZATIONS”**

**- EVERLYNE NAIRISIAE, UN-HABITAT**

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**“IN THE ARAB REGION WE HAVE A PROBLEM WITH GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION. THE STATE HAS THE MONOPOLY OF CREATING MAPS.”**

**- RAFIC KHOURI, ARAB LAND INITIATIVE**

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