

## **Examining the Real Costs of Community-led Rights Documentation from USAID's Experience in Burma and Zambia**

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As mobile technologies, crowd sourcing and batch processing of data offer the potential to scale-up national efforts to document land rights, there has been pressure to reduce the per-unit cost of documentation, in order to make large-scale systematic registration viable. However, many global programs cite the cost purely of data collection in the field, and not the full range of other activities that lead to a successful registration (and ultimately administration) program or the challenge of addressing ongoing disputes.

Over the past five years, USAID's TGCC program has undertaken household land documentation in Zambia and community land documentation in Burma offering lessons on the real costs of rights documentation approaches. We find that data collection costs represent only a fraction of the total cost and effort and broader considerations should be accounted for. This paper explores costs associated with piloting and estimated costs for a scalable approach in Zambia for household documentation and in Burma for community documentation.

Communities, households and local leaders request communication, outreach and engagement with those supporting rights documentation, noting that these investments will result in more community buy-in and long-term sustainability. In both Zambia and Burma household and communities understand the value and importance of having documentation of landholdings and both recognize government products, like leasehold title in Zambia or Form 7 land use certificates in Burma. However, in each case communities do not necessarily understand the eligibility requirements for accessing these documents or the limitations that they pose on households either through tax or restrictions on land use. As a result, USAID programs have looked at complementary mechanisms to document land rights under existing uses through customary land documentation in Zambia and community boundary demarcation in Burma. Both communities and government officials require substantial outreach and communication to understand the options and limitations associated with the customary/community documentation approach. As programs move beyond pilot phases, the unit costs of these outreach efforts could decrease, as radio and television can be used to reach more households, yet at the same time for voluntary activities each household/community requires facetime to achieve buy-in.

With respect to technology, initial efforts hoped to decrease costs of documentation through the use of spatial mobile data collection tools. In Burma and Zambia, USAID found great value in the use of technology for data collection, but this did not eliminate the need for paper forms or paper maps. Paper/vinyl in the form of physical maps and receipts for communities to engage with remained central to the process and digital tools just allowed for data to be collected while in the field. Rather than speeding up data collection, in some ways it slowed down collection, as para-surveyors wrote information on paper for beneficiaries and spent time digitally entering the same information in the field. We argue that in an age of digital penetration into rural areas, hands on engagement with large-scale paper or vinyl maps still represents an important technology for inclusive participation and democratization of processes.

Both activities used open-source tools and software. These allowed the local partners to dive into the details of form development and data management, however this also occasionally distracted from the

need to produce a quick, off-the-shelf form. Thus the development and maintenance costs of open source tools and software alongside the costs of local capacity building and international expertise to address quality assurance, meant that proprietary software may have been competitive with the open source approach. Local partners and government often do not appreciate these benefits to proprietary software and as a result may cut corners on the quality control and integration of best practices into their open source platforms.

Administration and rights documentation delivery pose a surprising challenge. In both Burma and Zambia, the program works in rural parts of the country and every visit to a household/village/chiefdom/township must consider transport costs and the chance that the target beneficiary may not be present. As a result, even after bulk data has been collected, validated and printed, there is a substantial challenge of getting certificates signed or recognized by relevant authorities and actually in the hands of the communities and community members associated with the work. These challenges persist in the USAID work. Community maps were relatively easier to get into the hands of communities, but the public process of getting communities together with government officials meant substantial effort was required to transport a significant mass of community members to a district capital or to move government officials to the countryside. With respect to household certificates, the challenge of getting appropriate signatures from authorities like chiefs took, in some cases over two years. In other USAID countries chiefs pushed for signing fees that exceeded the total cost of undertaking the work. These dynamics and costs of managing the production, signature and distribution of thousands of products are often forgotten in the excitement of mapping and documenting initial claims. A relatively untested element of this framework therefore is how to manage the distribution process and at the same time inform communities and households of the administrative requirements and opportunities for actually using their newly documented rights.

The paper will explore these issues with real costs generated from the bottom-up based on assessments of ideal scale as well present on the actual costs experienced under USAID pilots.