

Protecting women and children's land tenure for the future: Innovative data correlations to strengthen land institutions to protect the weak

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SUMMARY

The quality of data about family dependants captured in land information systems affects the Sustainable Development Goals for gender, equality and just institutions. Deeds registries were historically heavily informed by patriarchal values, with dependants' protection seen more as a privilege than a right. Titles are now registered in the names of women, but many registry processes remain contaminated by past worldviews. A child or spouse's implicit right to housing and support from a land-owning guardian is a second class right if land can be sold free of this responsibility. This paper analyses the impact of invisible data on legal and land audit processes in three practical areas where the duty of support is affected, with references to the Land Administration Domain Model and the Social Tenure Domain Model. South Africa is used by way of example, but the concepts are pertinent for all geomatics professionals interested in strategic data-driven action. The first context analysed is formally registered state-subsidised housing, which constitutes a third of the titles for residential land in South Africa. Beneficiaries move to the top of the housing waiting list based on declarations about dependants, but much of this information is not brought forward into the electronic housing databases. The second discussion focusses on naming conventions for children in customary communities. This is compared with a Constitutional Court judgment about gendered naming practices at Home Affairs, and the new race and gender classifications required by the South African deeds registry in 2025. Lastly, religious land tenure is analysed against the backdrop of the eco-womanist perspective, which sees devaluation of women as an early warning for 'ecological sins'. Data about dependants of leaders in mainline churches is tested against a land rights continuum as a practical example of data gap outcomes. Three processes to mitigate the harm are conceptualised for deeds registry, customary and religious databases, with a call for more child-focussed ISO standards to build effective, accountable and inclusive land institutions.

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