Early Success in Reforming Land Management in Cape Verde

In Cape Verde, land rights are unclear and inefficient land-related processes can result in delayed or cancelled investments. The significant amount of time and money citizens, businesses and investors often have to spend just to clarify land parcel boundaries and register land rights are major deterrents to investing, which does not benefit the island nation's economy.

The Land Management for Investment Project—part of the Millennium Challenge Corporation's five-year, $66 million compact with Cape Verde—aims to reduce land transaction-related time and costs and make information about land parcel rights and boundaries more conclusive. The $17.3 million project will improve the legal, procedural and institutional environment by developing and installing a new computerized land administration system in national and municipal governments and clarifying parcel rights and boundaries on islands with high investment potential. An estimated 13,000 Cape Verdeans are expected to benefit from the project.

The Government of Cape Verde has already made an important contribution to the project's future results by financing the scanning and digitizing of record books that guarantee existing land property rights in Praia, the capital, and on the island of Sal. This will decrease the time it takes to register land rights and conduct other land-related transactions and contribute to a new more efficient system whereby all land information is integrated into one system. The government has also built an early software system to computerize transactions at the land registry offices on both islands.

MCC will fund the scanning and digitization of paper land rights records throughout the rest of the country and build a nationwide land information and transaction system. The initial computerization of the registries in Praia and Sal is a first step toward a new nationwide software system that will bring together legal, administrative and geographic information about land parcels. This process also will link the core land administration agencies so they can perform their work more quickly and with more complete and reliable data.

Antonio Sergio Barbosa is pleasantly surprised with the speed of the new land record system.

Reform has already begun

The compact entered into force in November of 2012, and change is already visible.

The new software allows land registry officials to access needed information in a quick, efficient way. In Praia and Sal, all transactions related to property rights registration are now being done in the new software system; the transition took about four months.

Maria do Céu Rocha is a land registry official who can now access information in a quick, efficient way.

 "For years and years, I handwrote all the registrations and certificates of registration information after searching in the books," said Maria do Céu Rocha, who has worked at the Praia land registry department for 30 years. "Today, with the new system, we are delivering certificates of registration in three days."

Previously, a certificate of registration could take 15 days or more to deliver.

Carla Andrade, a customer at the Praia land registry office who sought to obtain a certificate of registration on behalf of a relative who emigrated to Portugal, called the process "quick and efficient."

"I spend less money with transportation because I don't need to come many times to clarify the information," she said.

Gains in transparency and legal certainty

The search for information in handwritten books often led to errors. Verifying or completing information provided by customers could be time-consuming and could result in an incorrect registration entry.

"This does not happen now," do Céu Rocha said. "Today, I just click on my computer to search information or print documents certain that I am providing the correct information to our customer."

Rita Ramos, the head of the Praia land registry office, believes the new process has helped increase transparency and support efficiency in land registry transactions.

"I can follow each procedure step by step, who is the staff handling it and the time it took," she said

Ramos added, "I can now easily locate procedural mistakes and errors, which was extremely difficult with the books system. Now, at the end of the day or whenever needed, I can access accounting, statistical or other reports regarding the transactions."