



Global Experiences in Land Readjustment

Urban Legal Case Studies: Volume 7

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Foreword from the Executive Director

Land is an integral component of urbanization. The New Urban Agenda recognizes its ecological as well as social function with the aim of having sustainable cities and human settlements that are inclusive, safe, economically productive and environmentally sound. As part of its global mandate, UN-Habitat is actively involved in advocating for sustainable use of land through the development and promotion of various land tools, such as land readjustment. Through it, cities can grow in a planned and coordinated manner while increasing land values, being inclusive and promoting the security of tenure. Improvement in core infrastructure and basic services are also among the potential benefits of land readjustment.

UN-Habitat has a rich and fruitful experience working in countries where land readjustment has been implemented. In the course of its work in Africa, Latin America, Asia and parts of Europe, the Agency has become increasingly aware of not only the benefits of land readjustment but also possibility of negative yet unintended outcomes of the process. It realizes that inadequate appraisal of the likely effects may adversely affect the poor and the marginalized by reproducing existing inequalities.

This publication is a crucial part in UN-Habitat's effort to develop normative knowledge in appropriate land management practices. It presents case studies from various parts of the world with a specific focus on developing countries. The intention is to promote land readjustment as both a relevant and implementable tool in countries within the Global South.

I am pleased that UN-Habitat's Urban Legislation Unit has carried forward this initiative which was started during the tenure of my predecessor, Dr. Joan Clos. As the New Urban Agenda draws attention to the relevance of effective regulatory and institutional frameworks, the publication of this book marks a significant step in highlighting the role that laws and institutions play in urbanization. My hope is that countries will find this publication useful in the implementation of land readjustment within their specific contexts taking into consideration their varying resources and institutional capacities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maimunah', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif,
Executive Director, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

Letter from Dr. Joan Clos, Former Executive Director, UN-Habitat

Urbanisation is one of the most significant trends of the 21st Century with the global urban population growing from 732 million to 4 billion between 1950 and 2017. Urban areas are engines of economic growth, social, and cultural development and environmental protection. However, rapid growth presents numerous challenges to the ability of urban areas to provide these benefits and to satisfy the needs of their inhabitants in terms of infrastructure and basic services. In particular, cities have struggled, and continue to struggle, to provide adequate and affordable urban land for development. As urban areas continue to expand, they too often do so in an unplanned and spontaneous manner, limiting the benefits that urbanisation can provide.



To counter these challenges, national and local urban authorities have devised innovative tools to minimize the social, economic and political costs associated with the acquisition of land. Land readjustment is one such tool. It is a mechanism through which land parcels in a particular area are pooled and planned as a unit, regardless of their previous pattern or tenure. This approach limits burdens on public finances and unlocks the intrinsic value of land that was limited by plot fragmentation and land ownership patterns that were incompatible with the optimal use of land. It may also enhance citizen-government dialogue and facilitate the provision of infrastructure and basic services.

Land readjustment has been traditionally seen as a “developed country tool”, with the best known examples coming from countries such as Germany and Japan. Its utility in developing countries has been doubted due to its perceived complexity, reliance on strong local governance systems, and the relatively weak legal and institutional frameworks of countries in the global south. This book counters the misconception of land readjustment as a developed country tool. It shows that this mechanism is not only relevant but also provides examples of its implementation in a variety of developing countries and one country in transition. The case studies presented include experiences from Angola, Bhutan, Chile, China, Colombia, Ethiopia, India, Russia, Thailand and Turkey. The book also highlights the different circumstances under which land readjustment may be used as a tool and the diverse range of social, political, economic, and cultural contexts in which it operates.

This book does not aim at giving the perfect formula for a successful land readjustment or even that land readjustment is a magic bullet for the challenges of urbanisation. But this book does establish land readjustment as one of the most flexible tools available to all countries to bring citizens, planners and governments at all levels together with the aim of making ordered urbanisation at scale possible.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joan Clos'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Joan Clos
Former United Nations Under-Secretary-General and
Executive Director, UN-Habitat

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