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Intermediate Land Tenure Instruments for the Urban Poor: Concepts and Realities

The Case of Land Proclamations in the Philippines

Urbanization is unstoppable. Alongside with this development trend, comes the challenge brought about by the “mushrooming” of informal settlements inside and around the city proper which, relatively on a rapid rate, transform city landscapes and provide another set of consequences as well as tremendous challenges. Too bad, the Philippines which hosts one of the mega cities in the planet and home for about 3.7 million households with poor housing conditions is not an exemption.

At the center of these discussions is how to best secure tenure for the urban poor, particularly those living in the informal settlements. The on-going global debates have focused on two approaches whether to issue titles or secure rights for the urban poor. As the debate continues, the more the need for evidence in the field is highlighted. This is the intention of the whole research which is to contribute to the scarce documented “realities” on the ground by studying the impacts of intermediate land tenure instruments in providing secure tenure for the urban poor through a close analysis of land proclamations in the Philippines. In particular, the research objectives are implied in the research hypothesis wherein land proclamations are considered as politically-motivated measures that bring no positive impacts on people’s livelihoods but rather serve as a catalyst for informal land and housing markets. To come up with a good analysis, the researcher has adopted sustainable livelihoods framework as a research methodology in itself and an analytical tool that assisted him in the final analysis and integration of data gathered from theoretical background on property rights and conceptual analysis of securing tenure either through title issuance and securing rights, case study research through the conduct of “conversational” semi-structured interviews and observation techniques, conduction of experts’ interviews and collection of secondary data.

The research findings highlight that intermediate land tenure instruments can definitely increase tenure security in the short-term but may reduce its usefulness in the long-term and may even cause some

backlash, if the promised form of tenure will not be met in a reasonable time. Likewise, the research confirmed that land proclamation is a politically motivated measure but nevertheless has a lot of advantages and will also require a strong political commitment through allocation of adequate resources and capacity building efforts to reverse its present slow implementation status and unleash its fullest potential. It has also been proven that land proclamation which actually goes beyond securing land tenure by providing infrastructure and social services, intentionally or otherwise, produce positive impacts to the people's livelihood. Finally, land proclamations, or probably all interventions to increase security of tenure of the urban poor, will trigger some increase in the informal land and housing markets but the same can also be minimized by adopting appropriate mechanisms.

Key words: Urbanization, informal settlements, secure tenure, urban poor, land proclamations, property rights, intermediate land tenure instruments.