

**W**ith corruption having permeated various spheres of society in many parts of the world, it has emerged that the land governance sector within the southern African region is not immune to this scourge. Many countries admit to having little or no counter-initiatives against its prevalence.

This status quo came to the fore during the just concluded symposium on land governance, which was hosted by the Network of Excellence on Land Governance in Africa (NELGA) – Southern African hub – in Windhoek this week. The event was hosted by the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST).

Academic institutions from eight countries, Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, eSwatini, Malawi, Lesotho, and Zambia attended the event. These countries compared land governance

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practices as presented in their official reports. They also identified and highlighted key challenges and opportunities in each represented country.

Corruption emerged as a common stumbling block to effective land governance in the region. In Zimbabwe, according to Dr Charles Chavunduka, a senior lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe's Department of Rural and Urban Planning, corruption is compounded by the flawed institutional framework for land governance.

"Key players in central government are three ministries: Local Government, Justice, and Lands. The institutional framework is fragmented with overlapping responsibilities and poor coordina-

tion," Chavunduka told the gathering this week.

He further stressed that the land governance process has been undermined by the conflation of government and politics. The challenges faced are built on the failure to separate the business of political parties and that of government. This has led to the undermining of ministerial directives in urban areas that are under the control of the opposition.

"This, in turn, leads to dysfunctional land governance under the weight of political pressure and corruption," Chavunduka said.

Highlighting corruption as a major stumbling block in the quest for effective land governance was Molapo

Ntaote, a lecturer in the department of geography and environmental studies at the University of Lesotho. Here, he said, the situation is worsened by administrative shortcomings.

"Councils are ill-equipped due to limited physical and financial resources. They cannot deal with the results of widespread corruption among other anomalies," Ntaote revealed.

The case reviewed the land situation in Namibia did not explicitly speak to the presence of major corruption. The Land of the Brave has made some strides in land governance. Key challenges in land governance, still exist. The barriers include implementation issues and the effectiveness and inclusive-

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ness of the above instruments.

According to Stephanie de Villiers, a lecturer in the department of land and property sciences at NUST, the current status of the land question in Namibia, "remains an unresolved question." This is a result of a multitude of injustices that still exist which raise the question of the effectiveness of the governance system.

"Almost three-decades after independence, land continues to be concentrated in the hands of a few. Redistribution programmes are proceeding at a slow pace. This awakens emotions from landless groups. In addition to the continuation of racial inequalities in land distribution and ownership, the current land reform and resettlement programme have produced class inequalities," de Villiers revealed.

She further cited other developments related to the calls to address ancestral

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land claims. She noted calls to address farmworkers' tenure security and efficient and effective land valuation and taxation. These are indicative of the frustration with land governance issues that are gaining a foothold amongst the masses. These frustrations, de Villiers noted, if left unattended, may spiral into rampant cases of corruption, as is the case in other countries.

### Milestone

Delivering the keynote address at the event, the Chief Executive Officer of the City of Windhoek Robert Kahimise concurred that the southern African region has complex land governance and administration history. This encompasses customary systems as well as those developed during the pre- and post-colonial period.

"In many cases, these systems still exist in parallel with one another (and) this legacy continues to influence the land governance regime in terms of hierarchal, inequitable and discriminatory land tenure systems based on legal dualism," Kahimise said.

The CEO was quick to state that recent land reform initiatives aimed at redressing unequal land distribution as well as gender equity, widespread tenure security and protection of the commons against land grabbing and privatisation have been formulated. However, the implementation of such policies, are challenged due to low capacity.

### Expected outcome

The expected outcome of the symposium, according to Professor Mutjinde Katjiua, the NELGA Southern African Node Coordinator and Head of the Land and Property Sciences department at NUST, was to provide a baseline for further development and improvement of land governance in the region. This enables monitoring and evaluation at periodic intervals. "The event was further set to encourage regional cooperation and facilitate further research activities at the national, bilateral and regional level, while serving as an opportunity to identify research projects that can be implemented within the next year," Katjiua revealed.