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Eliminating Bureaucracy and Enhancing Efficient Land Management under the Lagos Integrated Land Administration Automation System

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ABSTRACT

Unlocking the economic potentials of land through technology-driven land management processes is a mission of Governor Babajide Sanwolu's THEMES Plus Agenda for achieving a 21st century economy in Lagos. Recently, the Lagos State, Nigeria, Governor formally inaugurated an Integrated Land Administration Automation System, which is the application of advanced technology to land management processes. In this briefing paper, I examine the adoption of the Automation System and identify its functionalities with respect to efficient land management in Lagos. This paper finds that under the Automation System, eliminating bureaucracy and enhancing efficient land management are attainable for a 21st century Lagos economy.

Keywords: *Lagos Lands Bureau, Land in Lagos, Integrated land administration, Technology in land management.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Recently, the Governor of Lagos State, Nigeria, formally inaugurated an Integrated Land Administration Automation System, which is the application of advanced technology to land management processes. This automation of land management signifies the dawn of a new era in land management in Lagos State in particular and in Nigeria in general. According to the Governor, Mr Babajide Sanwolu, the Integrated Land Administration Automation System enables digitised processes of land management by facilitating title registration and land transactions in a more accessible, efficient, and transparent manner (Lagos Lands Bureau, 2024).

Indeed, studies have found that the automation of land management offers many significant benefits because it enables the government to ensure security of tenure of landowners, regulate land market, implement land reforms, charge land taxes, sustain the environment, and enhance

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the market value of land (Fateye et al., 2020; Reynolds et al., 2017; Mitchell et al., 2015; Allen, 2014). It is these benefits of technology-driven land management that motivated the Government of Lagos State to launch the Integrated Land Administration Automation System, which is powered by the world's leading Aumentum Technologies.

Though the benefits of the use of technologies in land management is well acknowledged, a major constraint to its adoption in developing economies is that it requires huge capital outlay in terms of available infrastructures, supporting systems, required manpower and relevant expertise. Therefore, its adoption in Lagos is indicative of the personal commitment and the political will of the Sanwolu administration to initiate revolutionary policies that make Lagos State a pacesetter in the delivery of good governance in land management in Nigeria.

In this briefing paper, I examine the adoption of the Integrated Land Administration Automation System by the Government of Lagos State, Nigeria, and identify its functionalities with respect to efficient land management. To provide a background, I briefly trace the advent of technological application to land management processes in Lagos prior to the current Automation System which is aimed at eliminating bureaucracy and enhancing effective land management in Lagos.

II. LAND MANAGEMENT IN LAGOS

Land is a fundamental resource that supports the existence of society and the survival of every living being. The availability of land and access to it are essential for land to optimally play its fundamental role. Therefore, how to ensure access to land and make it available for housing, agriculture, social and infrastructural developments is a foremost question which a responsible and progressive government must address. Effective land management requires that government is able to address the land question through the implementation of existing legislations and formulation of new policies that result in access to land not only for subsistence and residential purposes, but also for commercial and infrastructural developments.

The Nigerian Land Use Act 1978 provides that all land comprised in the territory of each State of the Nigerian Federation is vested in the Governor of that State, who shall hold such land in trust and administered for the use and common benefit of all Nigerians in accordance with the provisions of the Act. Thus, by law the Governor of Lagos State has titular ownership of land within the State and a legal obligation to ensure that the land is effectively managed for the benefits of all residents of the State. However, it must be noted that effective management of land in Lagos is particularly daunting and requires innovative and committed leadership.

This is because Lagos is arguably the most populous State in Nigeria, and it is the commercial

capital and the epicentre of economic and financial activities of the country, including neighbouring West African countries. Though Lagos is the melting pot of all Nigerians and foreigners, it has the smallest land mass of about 3,577 Square Kilometre (Ademiluyi & Raji, 2008). Consequently, the core cities and urbanization are rapidly enveloping the rural areas and hinterland, making Lagos the fastest emerging megacity in continental Africa.

The population of Lagos grows at a geometric progression due to constant migration from other parts of Nigeria and West Africa. The result is the constant increase in the demand for land for residential, commercial, and industrial purposes far beyond the available land. For over two decades of democratic leadership in Lagos, successive administration has been confronted with the policy issue of how to resolve the high demand for the limited land in Lagos; how to ensure that available land is equitably accessible for the different purposes of social and economic development of the State.

Given that a larger area of Lagos is occupied by water bodies, there has been sustained reclamation program since the landmark administration of Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu to increase the available land for use and development. Besides the land reclamation program, the Tinubu administration laid the foundations for technology-powered land management processes which the Automation System of the current Sanwolu administration has taken to a higher level of impact.

One significant advantage of deploying technology in land management is to eliminate bureaucracy through an efficient and transparent electronic registry of available land, the land in use, titles to land, and land title holders (Rahman & Talukder, 2016). Besides, a technology-based land management system offers accurate data on available land, security of title, efficient transaction in land, and increased market value of land. The collateralization of land for business and personal loans which contribute to the welfare of residents and the economy of Lagos is an incident of increased market and commercial value of land.

Consequently, the various benefits of the elimination of bureaucracy in land management processes are what technological land management in Lagos is seeking to achieve, beginning from the Electronic Document Management System introduced by the Tinubu administration in 2003; through the Electronic Certificate of Occupancy policy initiative of the Fashola administration in 2014; and the current Integrated Land Administration Automation System under Governor Sanwolu.

(A) The Electronic Document Management System 2003

The Lagos Lands Bureau, established in 1999 to replace the hitherto Ministry of Lands, houses

the oldest land documents dating back to about 1863 after Lagos was annexed as a colonial city by British imperialists. The colonial administration introduced a system of registration of land mostly within areas reserved for government infrastructural development and the residential need of the colonial administrators, their local functionaries, and the elites. These are the present day Ikoyi and Lagos Island metropolitan areas.

Land title documents accumulated since when Lagos became the capital city of Nigeria following political independence from Britain in 1960. By the time Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the current President of Nigeria, became the elected Governor of Lagos in 1999 and established the Lands Bureau, the agency inherited a mere storehouse that was more or less for the dumping of land documents. Retrieving the documents or processing application for search or verification of title was extremely cumbersome, always trapped in bureaucratic bottleneck, and fraught with corrupt practices.

In order to address these issues, the Tinubu administration carried out a reform of the Lagos Lands Bureau through the implementation of the Electronic Document Management System (EDMS). The objective of the EDMS was to institutionalize a computerized storage, tracking, and retrieval system for land documents. Therefore, the EDMS involved the scanning of every land related document in the custody of the Lands Bureau dating back over a century ago and uploaded on to an electronically managed storage and backup systems.

Tens of millions of documents were scanned on to the EDMS and it marked the beginning of the efforts to eliminate bureaucracy in land management in Lagos. Notably, the EDMS radically curbed the cumbersome process of manual tracing, searches, and retrieval of land documents or information relating to land in Lagos. The achievements of the EDMS have been identified and acknowledged by those who patronize the Lands Bureau such as legal practitioners, estate surveyors, property agents and managers, including independent research studies.

For example, in a research into the land registration system in Lagos under the EDMS, Thontteh and Omirin (2015) found six achievements of the EDMS such as ensuring: (1) a centralized electronic storage system; (2) availability of on-line document search and retrieval system; (3) improved security of title; (4) improved public confidence in land transactions; (5) reduction in waiting time for obtaining information on land and; (6) improved managerial efficiency of the Lands Bureau. These remarkable achievements of the EDMS showed the benefits of adopting technology-based land management processes in Lagos.

(B) Electronic Certificate of Occupancy 2014

Prior to the introduction of the EDMS, the difficulty in tracing, searching, obtaining or verifying

land title documents or related information at the Lands Bureau had enabled a culture of forgery through the fraudulent practice of cloning or counterfeiting such documents, particularly the Certificate of Occupancy (C of O). The existence of a forged C of O meant that two or more persons could lay titular claim to one piece of land, or a bank loan could be fraudulently obtained through false collateral by unscrupulous persons. In addition, an unsuspecting purchaser of land with forged title documents could end up being defrauded and drawn into endless litigation by the adverse claimant.

Land loses its market and collateral value if land title documents such as the C of O cannot be relied upon as genuine evidence of title to land. Thus, the incidence of forgery and counterfeiting of land title documents have dire consequences for private land ownership and land for commercial and public infrastructural developments. Therefore, the purpose of the introduction of the electronic C of O by Governor Babatunde Fashola administration was to curb the incidence of forgery and counterfeiting of such documents. It was also for the purpose of addressing the bureaucracy in obtaining and accessing land title documents in line with the existing EDMS architecture.

The introduction of electronic C of O aligned with the EDMS to ensure a progressive and seamless processes of obtaining, searching, verifying, and retrieving land title documents in Lagos, more than any other State in Nigeria. The notable advantages of the introduction of electronic C of O in Lagos include: (a) Ensuring that all State's land C of O in circulation are genuine and verifiable; (b) Having in place an automated and secure process for issuing C of O of State's land; (c) Increasing investors and public confidence in the integrity of the C of O; (d) Encouraging a larger pool of registration of title used as collateral to enhance the economic value of land in Lagos.

III. THE INTEGRATED LAND ADMINISTRATION AUTOMATION SYSTEM

Up until the adoption of the Integrated Land Administration Automation System by the Sanwolu administration, processes at the Lagos Lands Bureau were run within the three main Directorates of the Bureau which operated in silos with separate repositories attached to each. With the open filing system in place, processes for obtaining, verifying or retrieving land documents were convoluted, resulting in long process time. The slow workflow process involved high human interface with potential for human errors such as multiple entries for a single file, omitted registration and allocation numbers, including corrupt practices by unethical members of staff.

The technological transformation of the Lands Bureau under the current administration of

Governor Sanwolu has leveraged on the past reforms of the Bureau by addressing the inadequacies and shortcomings observed in the processes over time. The transformation involved the movement of files from the three Directorates repositories to the Digitisation Unit which was established in 2022 to coordinate all the processes across the directorates and ensure a seamless transition to a unified digital campus under the Integrated Land Administration Automation System.

The Digitisation Unit now liaises with other relevant ministries, departments, and agencies of government to provide a one-stop-center for collaboration and content-sharing of land related documents. It also addresses technical issues and users' complaints for effective service delivery by the Lands Bureau. The Automation System commenced with the sorting and merging of land information files which were moved from the three Directorates into the Digitization Unit's central infrastructure for sorting into various categories such as Government allocation and private property.

While Government allocations were sorted into scheme, block, and plot numbers, private property files were sorted into transaction types across the 20 Local Government Areas of Lagos. Files of root of title were merged with any subsequent transactions as encumbered, and files of titles and deeds were unbound from registered volumes and sorted chronologically. Files of plots of land were digitised with their cadastral mappings, including historical information and archival records dating back to the period prior to the promulgation of the Land Use Act 1978.

The methodology of moving, merging, and sorting of files was concluded by the uploading and digitization of the entire records of the land information folders. It involved scanning and digitizing every single file used in processing land title documents, such as Consent files, Allocation files, Regularization files, Excision files, Revocation files as well as all Title documents. The objective is that the Automation System will enable the public to apply for all land related processes such as Allocations, Governor's Consent, Regularization, Title Searches, and Certified True Copies of Titles and registered Deeds from the comfort of their homes or offices and anywhere in the world by logging on to a dedicated portal of the Lagos Lands Bureau.

Every step in the process of applying for land related services is expected to be done online, including payment, and tracking of application. Applicants do not need to physically visit the Lands Bureau except for collection of the processed original documents. The new Automation System also allows key staff of the Lands Bureau to work remotely from anywhere. The

transformation of haphazardly stored land records into digital chronicles allows for a workflow computerized processes that capture and streamline land and property information for a better customer service delivery and enhanced revenue generation for Government.

The Integrated Land Administration Automation System is designed to also provide a secure transactional experience with data metrics that give customers opportunity to track the progress of their applications, make comments or complaints, and receive immediate feedback. The Automation System enables collaboration and content-sharing within and across different government agencies because it offers a one-stop digital center that facilitates access on an end-to-end land management platform.

(A) Key Features of the Integrated Land Administration Automation System

As a significant advancement in the digitization of land management in Lagos, the Integrated Land Administration Automation System provides for a sustainable methodology that effectively reduces silos of information that exist across different agencies of Government and streamlines the entire workflow process. The Automation System is a suite of technology modules that conduct rapid inventory of land information, manage land records, create and maintain cadastral data, and accurately value land and landed property.

The key features of this Automation System that is powered by Aumentum Technologies allow for a complete modernization of land management processes. For instance, it is an application programming interface that provides integration with third-party systems such as existing applications of other agencies of government to fully maintain cadastral information and automate property valuations, taxation, billing, and revenue collection. It transforms semi-automated systems such as the EDMS into a registry workflow platform where all functions of the land management processes are streamlined and made more accessible, efficient, and transparent.

The Automation System enables content sharing amongst various functionally related agencies of government because as information is uploaded and stored, it is also securely shared amongst such government agencies staff. This ensures a digital process that results in secured distribution of data, a more controlled land management processes, and a faster transaction turnaround times that increase output. With the Automation System, users can generate forms, letters, and reports in different formats, and managers can report on workflow and staff productivity.

Other features of the Automation System are security and record preservation because it offers a secure storage of records that could be damaged by fingerprints, floods, fires, and other natural disasters. For effective monitoring of activities on the platform's interface, the System defines

access rights and permissions to data such that as users interact with the data, the system logs and builds full audit trails, increasing transparency and minimizing the opportunity for fraudulent activity.

(B) Functional Benefits

The Integrated Land Administration Automation System is transforming the processes and procedures for obtaining, investigating, and verifying land title documents in Lagos. The System now shortens the turnaround time for such processes and procedures thereby reducing operational costs and increasing efficiency. At the formal inauguration of the System in January 2024, Governor Sanwolu described it as a reliable tool to customise and streamline the Land Bureau's business workflow process for higher productivity, enhanced revenue generation, security of title documents, and more public-friendly service delivery (Lands Bureau, 2024). In specific terms, the Automation System offers accessibility, efficiency, and transparency in land management processes in Lagos.

a. Accessibility

Most significantly, technology-driven land management system eliminates bureaucracy in accessing land title documents throughout all the stages of the required processes (Rahman & Talukder, 2016). The Lagos Integrated Land Administration Automation System now enables members of the public to access land-related information and services from the convenience of their homes and offices, reducing the necessity for physical visits to the Lands Bureau offices. Consequently, it offers people in other parts of the world a convenient access to the services of the Bureau such as verification of land title documents.

For instance, Nigerians in the diaspora who are interested in buying land or landed property may now carry out investigations of title by applying for verification and paying the required service fees without patronising Lagos-based professional third-party agents or touts. Similarly, private and corporate foreign investors interested in the acquisition of land for industrial or commercial purposes can make necessary enquiries and apply for plots of land within Government schemes prior to visiting Lagos. The easy accessibility which the system offers would encourage more participation of people in land transactions and land-related investments in Lagos.

This also has positive impact on the commercial value and marketability of land in Lagos as prospective purchasers and institutional lenders like banks are able to quickly verify title to land presented for sale or collateral purpose and conclude such transactions faster without bureaucratic delay at the Lands Bureau. In particular, easy and convenient accessibility of land

services through the Automation System reduces human contact with its implication for all sorts of bureaucratic tailback. Users or applicants may only need to pay a physical visit to the Lands Bureau only at the final stage of collection of original title documents.

b. Efficiency

The Integrated Land Administration Automation System offers great efficiency in the processes and procedures for conducting business at the Lagos Lands Bureau. The digitized processes and procedures under the automated system have substantially reduced paperwork and eliminated manual errors or manipulations. This now leads to faster processing times for applications and transactions as well as improved service delivery. Efficient processes for conducting land related businesses boost public confidence and drive investments in the land market, which is fundamental to the industrial and commercial sectors of the Lagos economy.

In addition, the Automation System offers efficiency in the secure storage of land data, streamlined workflow, and secure content sharing, including real-time resolution of queries and complaints. This efficiency promotes higher productivity, enhances revenue generation, and ensures better public service delivery. Also, the System provides reliable information on physical structures, vacant land, and land use. This information will help Lagos Government in the efficient management of land-related social and economic challenges such as housing shortage, inadequate infrastructure, limited access to credit, and environmental degradation.

c. Transparency

There is more transparency in access to land records, property information, and administrative procedures under the Integrated Lagos Land Administration Automation System. This is because while the Automation System promotes easy access to land services, it has the capacity to analyze the site traffic, track trends, and provide relevant metrics that show users' engagement with the platform in a transparent manner. With digital footprints and audit trails, it is easy to identify and trace nefarious activities or fraudulent operations by managers or users.

The capacity of the System for audit trail serves a crucial transparent purpose because of its content sharing feature which allows inter-agency access of managers and users. There is also transparency in public access to the online processes and procedures for land services without physical contact with staff members. This reduces the potential for corrupt practices such as short-changing the processes or requesting for bribes to facilitate needed services by members of the public.

As noted by Governor Sanwolu, a major cause of delays in processing applications for title or registration of property in Lagos is the human inter-face which breeds corrupt practices in the

processes. But with this Automation system, all land-related services and transactions have been transformed to digital formats within a central web-based registry. In significant ways, this reduces operational costs for both Government and public users because there can no longer be the incidence of “missing files” or staff “hiding files” for pecuniary purposes.

IV. CONSEQUENTIAL REFORMS OF THE LAGOS LANDS BUREAU

As a result of the adoption of technology in land management in Lagos through the years, many procedural and organizational reforms have been carried out in the Lands Bureau. These are consequential reforms because they were necessitated by the developments occasioned by the application of technology to land management processes at the Bureau.

Therefore, these reforms have been introduced with a view to facilitating and deepening the benefits of accessibility, efficiency, and transparency which the adoption of technology has brought to bear in the processes and activities of the Lagos Lands Bureau. These consequential reforms (Lagos Lands Bureau, 2024) include:

- Deployment of expert and professional personnel to the Bureau for effective and efficient operational performance.
- Digital Mapping of the entire geographical area of Lagos State to aid the zoning of land for different purposes such as residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural.
- Sustainable reclamation programs to increase the available land for the housing needs of residents and Government’s socio-economic developments.
- Publication of the required forms, templates, procedures, and processes for the online conduct of business in order to prevent unnecessary physical contacts at the Bureau and the resultant bureaucracy.
- Setting up online and direct payment of processing and service fees to designated banks, including automated validation of payments receipts to avoid handling of physical cash by the Accounts Department.
- Compilation of Fair Market Value of land in different locations across Lagos and publication of respective land and property taxes assessed according to location, so as to ensure transparency and clarity of tax assessment.
- Creation of a *Lis Pendis* hyperlink on the Automation System which leads to a list of addresses of land and landed property that are subject to litigation or any form of encumbrances in order to assist public verification of title.

- Establishment of the Acquisition and Excision Registry, and the Directorate of Land Regularisation, to unbundle the defective ratification procedures and streamline the processes of acquisition and regularization of uncommitted government land.
- Establishment of Quality Control Unit to ensure that services provided by the Bureau staff comply with the required functional and ethical standards, including international best practices.

V. CONCLUSION

Unlocking the economic potentials of land through technology-driven land management processes is a mission of Governor Babajide Sanwolu's THEMES Plus Agenda for achieving a 21st century economy in Lagos (Lagos Lands Bureau, 2024). Eliminating bureaucracy and enhancing access to land through an efficient and transparent land management processes is attainable under the Lagos Integrated Land Administration Automation System. As required in a 21st century economy, an efficient and transparent processes of land management ensure that land is accessible for residential, collateral, and commercial purposes, with positive impact on availability of housing for all, credit for entrepreneurs and small business, and Government's social and infrastructural developments.

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