

A Brief Recapitulation Urban-Rural Land Linkages: Concept, Framework and Evidence

Uchendu Eugene CHIGBU (Namibia), Laina ALEXANDER (Namibia), Jennilee KOHIMA (Namibia) and Michael KLAUS (China)

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SUMMARY

Urban (including peri-urban) and rural development, particularly in the countries of the global South, operate in isolation from each other. As unique spatial units, they operate under different, socioeconomic, cultural, environmental and spatial situations, living standards and general liveability conditions. Despite these differences, they share many commonalities. This is true in terms of their development needs and their search for solutions to their various inter-related land problems. For instance, people in rural areas rely on essential finished goods produced in urban areas while people in urban areas rely on critical raw materials (including agricultural produce) available in rural areas. This shows that they co-exist for mutual benefits. This review provides a recap of the urban-rural land linkages (URLLs) concept, including the challenges, evidence of occurrence, strategy and framework for action.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The politics of land tenure, and imbalances in spatial planning and development have left rural and urban areas to be developed in unequal ways (Magel and Chigbu, 2022). Spatially, we have a world in which we are socioeconomically divided into thriving urban areas, semi-thriving peri-urban areas, and declining rural areas (Chigbu, 2021). Achieving a world in which it is possible for majority of the population to enjoy secure land rights in inclusive urban-rural living spaces requires better governance of land, spaces and their inter-linkages (Weber & Mendelsohn, 2017). This also requires an understanding of the current state of urban-rural land governance as an essentiality in improving the conditions of the natural and built environments, and peoples' livelihoods. This makes spatial planning a critical science and practice in achieving urban-rural interdependent development within countries and regions within countries. Spatial planning, which primarily aims to balance the interests of various policy domains and stakeholders through the management of spaces in pursue of an overall sustainable development, is crucial for achieving equivalent development (Louwsma et al. 2020). According to Louwsma et al. (2020):

“About 80% of all the global rural population live close to either urban regions or cities. This spatial proximity scenario presents an opportunity to link rural and urban areas – a move that is highly mandatory for achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs), especially the SDG that is related to achieving sustainable cities and communities (SDG number 11). The Covid-19 pandemic also shows that rural and urban areas need to coexist for mutual benefits. Many city dwellers in the developing countries are seeking refuge in the rural areas where they are closer to their relatives and have the needed space necessary for social distancing. On the other hand, people in rural areas are relying on essential goods produced in urban areas. This is only one immediate example of why rural and urban areas need to cooperate or collaborate in their quest to achieve everyday development goals.”

Several scholars (see Chigbu et al., 2022) have noted that current development efforts would not lead to a balanced spatial outcome unless the disparities that exist between rural and urban areas are reduced. Doing this requires leveraging the potential linkages that exist between urban (including the peri-urban) and rural areas. This would not be possible without tapping into the

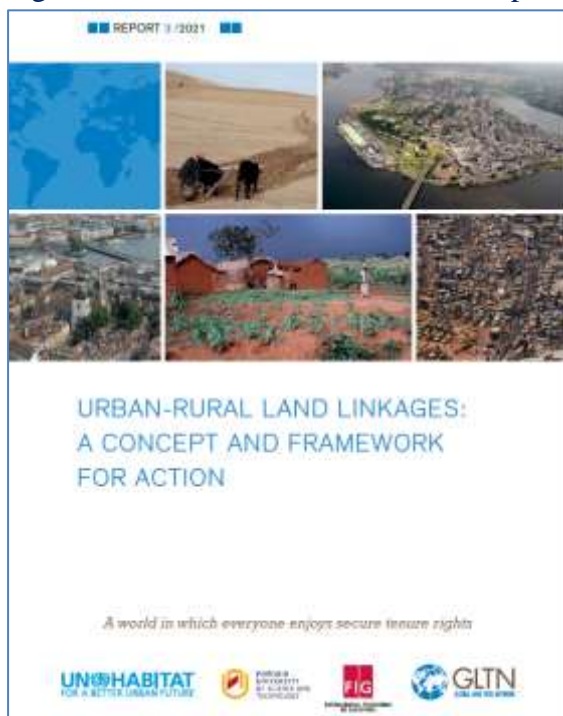
role land plays in the development process. It makes the subject of urban-rural land linkages (URLLs) critical in urban and rural planning and development. This communication paper strives to put URLLs within the context of land administration and management. It is a brief recap of Urban-Rural Land Linkages (URLLs) with the aim of highlighting ideas necessary for grasping spatial development problems from an URLLs perspective.

2. EMERGENCE OF A FRAMEWORK FOR URBAN-RURAL LAND LINKAGES

2.1. Evolution of the URLLs concept

The term, *urban-rural land linkages (URLLs)*, was almost unused in both scholarly and grey literature, until the publication of the report, *Urban-Rural Land Linkages: A Concept and Framework for Action* — a collaborative work of the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN), the UN-Habitat, the International Federation of Surveyors (FIG) and the Namibia University of Science and Technology (image of the report is shown in Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: A Screenshot of the URLLs report



As stated in this report, “The concept of URLLs and its framework for action emerged from a collaboration between the GLTN and the FIG in response to land problems that affect urban and rural areas.

It follows the work of other international institutions, particularly the United Nations, on bringing together strategies that support both urban and rural development equally” (Chigbu, 2021: p. 2). The concept emerged in response to finding new ways of conceiving the interlinked land challenges (peri-)urban and rural areas face to find new ways of solving them. One of the scenarios described in the report referred to the situations where:

“In busy cities and markets, people depend on the backward-forward exchange of agricultural goods to and from rural areas. Transport networks (including rivers) are crucial for rural residents who want to travel to the city and for urban residents who want to travel to rural areas. Agricultural activities, usually found in rural areas, provide leisure and food security for urban residents. All these urban-rural features and functions are intrinsically linked. Efforts to improve their management must ensure that

the land on which they occur is secure and that the rights of those who use the land are protected” (*ibid*). The report further provides details on the concept of URLLs, and its origin from relevant literature and experiences drawn from case studies that reflect how urban and rural land can be better managed and administered to ensure security for everyone (*ibid*). It also highlights what is required to achieve an

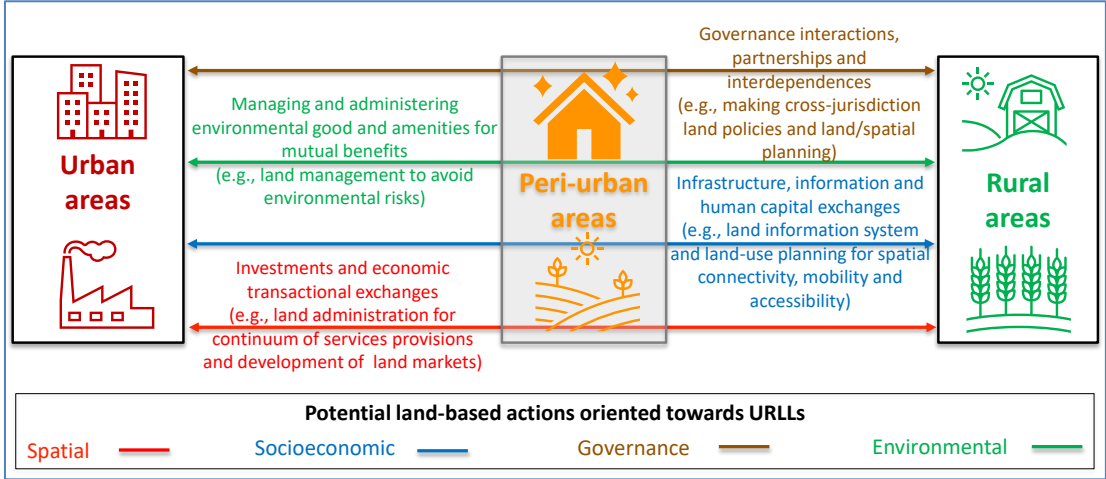
urban-rural continuum of development and how land tools can be better utilised for this purpose. Considering that “A land tool is a practical way to solve a problem in land administration and management” (GLTN, 2021), the URLLs concept report provides measures for applying principles, policies and legislation that simultaneously benefits urban and rural areas.

2.2. Graphical Insights into the URLLs framework

The URLLs framework “is based on the premise that any land-based intervention simultaneously improves urban (including peri-urban) and rural areas” (Chigbu, 2021: p. 29). From a spatial planning perspective, it can be understood several ways. Urban and rural areas are connected through economic growth, resource utilisation, environmental issues and overall livelihood at both fronts. Essentially, rural areas are vital for supporting urban growth and integrated development (Steinberg, 2014).

As an initiative, it represents how land-based solutions can contribute to resolving urban-rural continuum challenges. In this regard, it is an interplay of land-related activities and decisions that enable beneficial development on the urban-rural continuum (Figure 2).

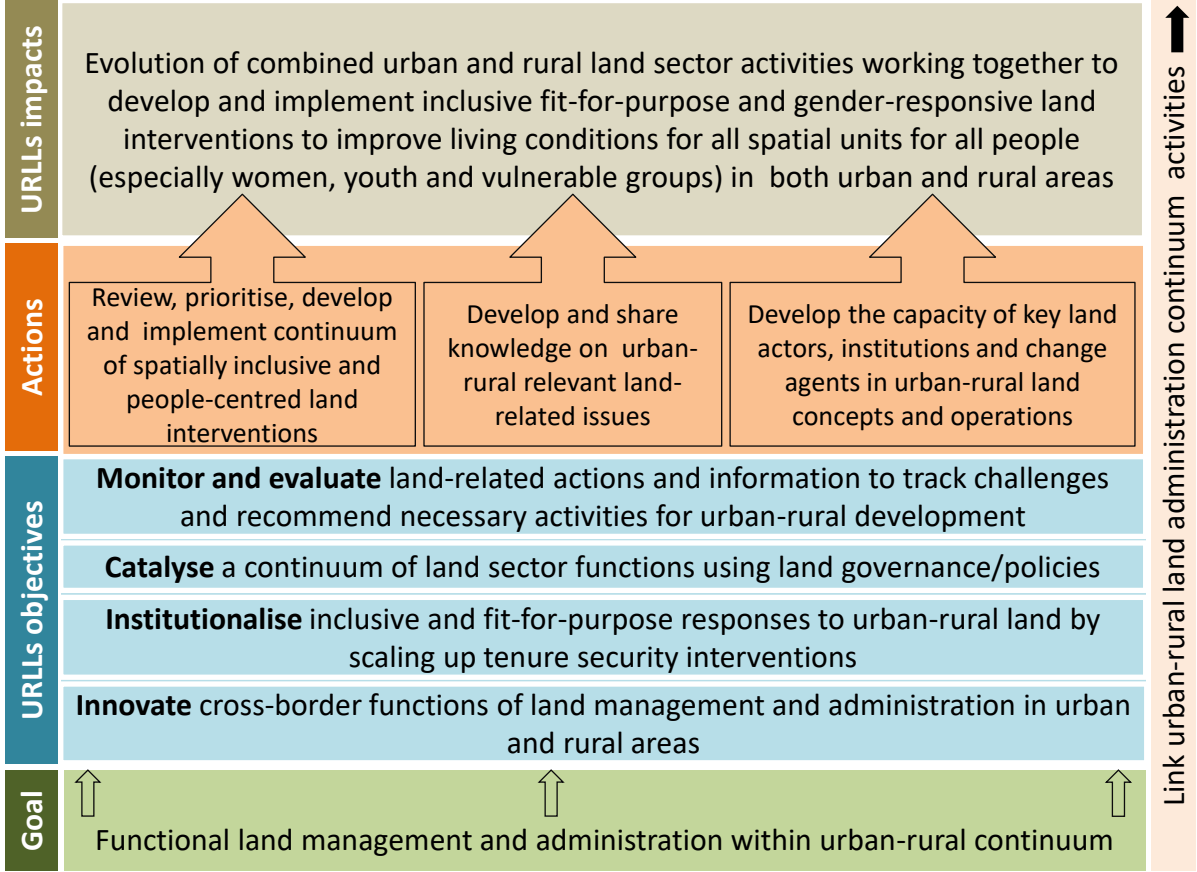
Figure 2: URLLs as a solution to urban-rural challenges. (Chigbu, 2021: p. 30)



This implies that any action-oriented objectives in applying a URLLs framework require that land administration and land management activities focus on how urban and rural areas can

play interdependent roles in their development. Some examples of action-oriented interventions that apply to URLLs could be land governance activities arising from policy-focused interactions, institutional partnerships and spatial interdependences (e.g., developing urban-rural continuum land policies, land and spatial planning). Economic activities such as land investments and other forms of transactional exchanges (e.g., land administration services, land markets for development) can promote a continuum in services provision.

Figure 3: URLLs as a strategy for urban-rural development (Chigbu, 2021: p. 31)



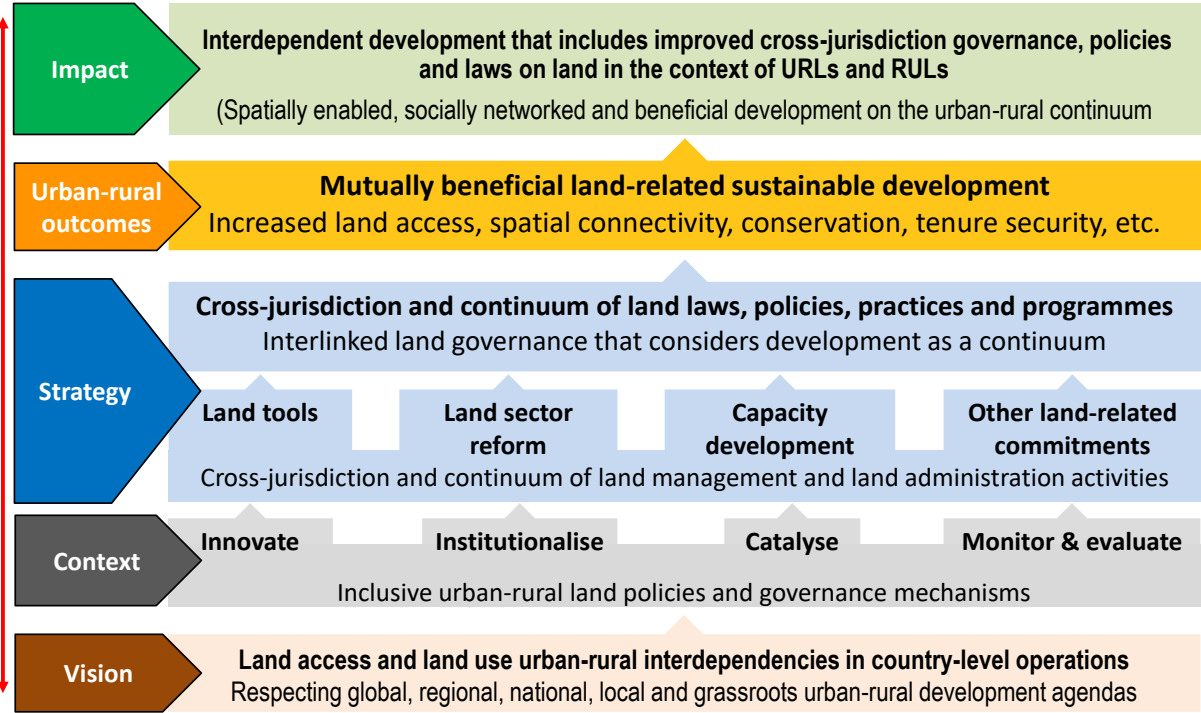
URLLs can serve as a strategy for urban-rural continuum development. This can happen by strategically adapting the interlinked objectives driven by the goal of improving land administration functions in urban and rural areas (figure 3).

However, to achieve actual interdependency in urban-rural planning and development for land administration, a supportive framework is necessary. A framework for addressing URLLs is based on the need for urban-rural continuum development. Since land interventions do not exist in isolation, but rather operate along a continuum of national-local development agendas, a URLLs framework should consist of activities embedded in a development plan, vision or

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agenda. On this basis, this framework is rooted in the premise of a unified urban-rural vision about land that includes context, strategies, outcomes and impact (figure 4). To adopt a framework, it is important to begin, as a starting point, with a **vision** that will improve land administration and land management in urban-rural continuum development. Such a vision should include appropriate interventions to support its objectives. One such intervention is to review and prioritize the urban-rural continuum of spatially inclusive interactions (Chigbu, 2021: p. 30). A vision should be followed by a **context**. This means turning the vision for urban-rural continuum (or interdependent) development into a context that can motivate the innovation of strategies to support land sector reforms, capacity building and other action-oriented steps towards URLLs.

Figure 4: URLLs Framework for interdependent development (Chigbu, 2021: p. 32)



The context should be followed by a **strategy**. According to the URLLs report, “Since the core premise behind URLLs is to produce interdependent outcomes that lead to urban-rural continuum development, a common strategy would be to use land tools, capacity building measures and sector reforms (or any locally possible measures) to engage in cross-jurisdiction (or continuum activities) that would enable land laws, policies, practices and programmes to generate land management and administration outcomes on the continuum of development.” A URLLs strategy should lead to **urban-rural outcomes**. Outcomes achieved within any specific territory would depend on the nature of the land challenges and the pattern of the vision driving the URLLs initiative. An outcome would be followed by an **impact**. Consequently, a long-term

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gain would be the emergence of interdependent development resulting from continuous efforts aimed at improving land governance, policies and legislation in the context of URLLs and RULs.

3. THE EVIDENCE OF SOME URLLs OCCURRENCES ACROSS THE WORLD

Although URLLs has not yet been introduced in the mainstream of the spatial and land administration sectors of many countries in the global south, there are several evidence of the concept being applied while pursuing socioeconomic development. To identify how the occurrences of URLLs, a starting point should be to find key areas where URLLs contributes to spatial enablement, and enhancement of land administration services. In this regard, some of URLLs practices identifiable in literature are explained below.

2.1. URLLs in post-tsunami revitalisation of land administration (Indonesia)

The nation of Indonesia has had up to 77 tidal waves classified as a tsunami since 1608, which have killed more than 223,000 people. The tsunami 2004 in Aceh, with disregard to urban and rural boundaries, damaged or destroyed all the land records stored in offices across this province of Indonesia. The region lost all its cadastral index maps. This required a revitalisation or renewal of the regions land administration system to secure land tenure for everyone in the region irrespective of whether they were from urban or rural areas. This led to the establishment of *build back better* strategy in 2005 to reconstruction the system. The strategy focused on the sustainability and resilience of communities to future disasters and conflict. The linkages between urban and rural communities were a general consideration in the project design and implementation. It involved an assessment of the pre-tsunami land rights of the communities and the production of new spatial plan undertaken for the reallocation of land. By the first year after the tsunami, about 5000 land certificates were produced and distributed. Community land mapping and title distribution was also undertaken. The project is an example of a cross-jurisdiction or continuum land administration used to allow multiple areas (urban, peri-urban and rural areas) to be covered under one land administration initiative.

2.2. URLLs through village renewal or revitalisation (Germany)

Chigbu (2012) reported an URLLs relationship in Bavaria. In the southern part of Germany, in the state of Bavaria, the city of Munich (urban) and the municipality of Weyarn (rural) represent a URLLs interaction. In Munich, there is a lack of access to land for residential purposes and a need for water to meet urban use. In Weyarn, there was a lack of access to land for building by rural residents owing to unaffordable prices caused by the demand for land by urban residents moving there from Munich. The presence of a policy of “equivalent living conditions” (Federal Government Commissioner for the New Federal States, 2019) protected by the constitution, which gives municipalities stronger development rights than the central government. To pursue a URLLs goal, the municipality of Weyarn engaged in a *village renewal* (Dorferneuerung). This was embraced as a rural development strategy to improve the economic and cultural structure of rural communities by maintaining their traditions and features while simultaneously linking them responsibly to urban communities. The measures taken included the creation of a development vision to remain rural, introduction of spatial networking to cooperate with

Munich rather than depend on Munich, and a land policy to provide land to rural people. In other words, this rural policy played a significant role in the project by preventing a rural area (Weyarn) on the brink of urban domination (by the city of Munich) to introduce measures for maintaining its rurality by safeguarding its land from excessive consumption while cooperating with the neighbouring city. The urban (Munich) and rural (Weyarn) agreed to have beneficial relations on the condition that farms in Weyarn are managed ecologically to maintain quality water which is supplied to Munich. In return, Weyarn, can control land access exclusively to its rural population while stemming urban-rural migration from Munich.

2.3. URLLs through policy/administrative incorporation (Namibia)

In Namibia, there is an overwhelming focus on urban development to the detriment of rural areas. The urban focus in Namibia's development is driven by the large-scale urban-to-rural migration. The consequence is that all levels of government (local, regional and national) de-emphasise the importance of rural areas in the country. This is evident in Namibia's development policy framework which has a specific urban planning act but none for rural planning. Although the country has the Urban and Regional Planning Act of 2018, its focus is on urban, therefore neglecting the rural areas. This makes the disparity between urban and rural development huge in Namibia, with the rural areas not sufficiently catered for in the development politics of the country. There have been efforts made to narrow the gap of inequality between urban and rural areas in Namibia, however these efforts have been fruitless as this phenomenon still persists (Republic of Namibia, 2015).

An example of where URLLs apply in Namibia is between the Windhoek (urban) and its rural constituencies in the Khomas Region of Namibia. The Windhoek Rural Constituency consisting of all the settlements is the biggest among the ten constituencies of the Khomas Region in terms of land size (Khomas Regional Council, 2023). According to the 2011 population census, Windhoek Rural Constituency population size was 22 254 and it measures. The constituency is of a freehold area covered by large scale cattle ranching commercial farms, which leaves government/local authorities that have control of only 5.8% of land area. This leaves 94.2% of the land in the hands of private individuals and companies which is an advantage as this allows the people in the settlement to utilize the land to generate income therefore improving their livelihoods. Some of the challenges faced in the Windhoek Rural Constituency are such as water shortages during dry seasons. Apart from farming, commercial farmers in the settlement also engage in other agricultural and hunting activities, this indicates the diversity of income generation as well as the diversity of activities that take place in the settlement.

The integration of the rural section of the Khomas region (with Groot Aub as its headquarters) and the urban Windhoek was to ensure that the rural part of the region gained better access to services (such as water and electricity). The administrative integration also provides access to land supply and natural resources required for the urban business and production system in Windhoek (City of Windhoek, 2018). Groot Aub is an example of a settlement that was incorporated into the City of Windhoek for the same purpose of promoting development in the area. The settlement was formerly managed by the Khomas Regional Council, but it experienced numerous issues considering the regional council additionally manages other

Windhoek Rural Settlements inside Khomas Region. Groot Aub is a formal area of around 900 erven separated into three (3) recognized townships (City of Windhoek, 2021), although only 23 of these erven have title deeds (Dhikwa, 2022). The settlement was merged into the Windhoek Rural electoral constituency (simply termed Windhoek Rural) in 2017 and is now managed by City of Windhoek (City of Windhoek, 2018). This urban-rural integration, however, has primarily benefited Windhoek (Dhikwa, 2022). Groot Aub, on the other hand, has only encountered growing land issues (Newaka, 2020). Due to limitations on land resource utilization (such as water, land, and building activities that block farming operations) this has resulted in population deproletarianisation and is one of the land-related challenges Groot Aub faces. Despite the appearance and proof of URLLs between Windhoek Urban and Windhoek Rural, there is still work to be done to ensure that this administrative integration benefits both rural and urban populations.

4. PROSPECTS AND CONCLUSION

The focus of this paper has been on determining the effectiveness or efficiency of the URLLs applied in the country case studies identified. It has been on showing that urban and rural areas co-exist for mutual benefits, and that governments around the world have recognised the concept of URLLs as a strategy for achieving equivalent living conditions. Whether these approaches have been successful is a big question. Extensive research is needed to determine this. However, this review provides a recap of the URLLs concept, including the challenges, evidence of occurrence, strategy and framework for action. According to Chigbu (2021: p. 56), the URLLs framework:

“Has the potential to become a highly useful land management tool that can enable urban (including peri-urban) and rural areas to leverage each other’s strengths. The framework encourages secure land ownership and land rights, and the mobility of land-related services across urban-rural lines. It also facilitates the allocation of new land areas for purposes other than agriculture (e.g., nature restoration, public infrastructure). Implementing it requires thoroughly integrated urban (including peri-urban) and rural regulations and a territorial-focused spatial framework as part of national and regional development plans.”

A broader application of the URLLs framework is gradually emerging. Currently, there is a training course focusing on URLLs run by the UN-Habitat. Chigbu and Klaus (2022) have deconstructed the framework in the context of rural revitalisation. Chigbu (2022) has also described the URLLs from the perspective of the continuum theory and metaphor. At the recent FIG Working Week 2023 in Orlando (United States), a special session on climate change discussed the URLLs framework in the context of climate change. All of these reflect efforts at stretching the idea of URLLs to various knowledge borders. This article has provided a brief review of the URLLs in a way that would simplify the concept for more multidisciplinary readers and audience.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Prof. Dr.-Ing. Uchendu Eugene Chigbu

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Uchendu Eugene CHIGBU is Associate Professor in Land Administration at NUST (Namibia). He is a co-chair of the Research Cluster of the Global Land Tool Network (at the UN-Habitat). He is the Southern African Coordinator of the African Union's Network of Excellence on land Governance in Africa (NELGA). He is the coordinator of the European/African Unions' African-wide programme on "Fostering Research and Intra-African Knowledge Transfer through Mobility and Education" (FRAME). He is a co-chair of FIG Commission 8.1.

CONTACTS

Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) | 13 Jackson Kaujeua Street, Windhoek, Namibia | +264612072470 | echigbu@nust.na

Laina Alexander



Laina Alexander is a Master's Student in Spatial Sciences (Land Administration) at the Department of Land and Property Sciences within the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment at NUST. Her research interests are sustainable rural development, land administration and urban planning.

CONTACTS

Tortoise Environmental Consultants, Berg Street, Klein Windhoek, Windhoek, Namibia.
Tel.: +264 61 225 776 | Cel.: +264 81 407 7616 |
Email: lainaalexander9@gmail.com | Website: www.tec.com.na

Jennilee Kohima



Jennilee Kohima is a Spatial Planning Lecturer in the Department of Architecture, Planning and Construction at NUST. She has over 15 years work experience in the public, private, development and academic sectors in various land administration, development and planning fields. Currently she is a PhD candidate at University of the Free State, South Africa, and her research interests are on issues of urban informality, land use management, bottom-up planning, urban planning policy and practice, housing and governance, and planning education. She is a co-chair of FIG Commission 8.1.

CONTACTS

Namibia University of Science and Technology, 13 Jackson Kaujeua Street, Private Bag 13388, Windhoek, Namibia.
Tel.: +264 61 207 2984 | Fax: +264 61 207 9984 | Email: jkohima@nust.na | Websites: www.nust.na

Dr.-Ing. Michael Klaus

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Michael KLAUS is the chief representative of the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) Shandong Office. He has been in charge of the project “sustainable development of rural areas” of HSF since 2012. He has extensive scientific and practical experience in land management, particularly spatial (land use) planning, real estate cadastre, village renewal, and community and rural development. Before coming to China, he worked as an assistant professor in the land management department at the Technical University Munich for 17 years, focusing on course and curriculum development for study programs. In China, he also works as a guest professor within the MPA program (The Master of Public Administration) at Zhejiang University and Renmin University. He is a co-chair of FIG Commission 8.1.

CONTACTS

Hanns Seidel Foundation Representative Office Shandong, Ling Long Nan Shan Lu 7399, 262500 Qingzhou, PR China. Tel.: +86 536 2130 877 | Fax: +49 322 2800 3458 | Email: klaus@hss.de | Websites: www.china.hss.de

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