

Linking up

One of the benefits of running a small independent consultancy is the opportunity to link up with others who share similar values, ideas and areas of interest without having to go through complex, bureaucratic procedures. I established GPA (www.gpa.org.uk) in 1995 and have been fortunate to be able to work with many colleagues and friends all over the world on research, consultancy and training assignments. Informal, flexible arrangements enable complementary skills to be brought to bear according to varied needs and opportunities.

One example of this arrangement is the link just established between Mokoro and GPA. It grew out of collaboration between myself and Liz Daley in 2007, when we were both working in Rwanda on a DFID funded project to improve land tenure security and land administration. Liz was working in Kigali on a long term contract, whilst I was working with another GPA Associate Alain-Durand-Lasserve on the urban aspects of land issues and tenure security. Knowing of Liz's previous report for DFID on land policy, we were able to discuss issues of common interest and have kept in touch since.

As so often happens in the field of development work, I had also had the chance to get to know Robin Palmer over the years, when he is was the land policy adviser at Oxfam. Knowing he had moved to a position in Mokoro made me interested to know more about the organisation, so when Liz also mentioned that she was working with them, we began to explore the possibilities of a formal collaboration.

What attracted me to Mokoro is that it is very different to a commercial consultancy. Rather than operating under a top-down structure of directors and staff, the office provides admin support to 10 principal consultants who all pursue individual initiatives according to their interests and experience and work on a contract-by-contract basis, making it a stimulating place to work and very sensitive to changing needs and opportunities. Furthermore, the focus of work has similarities to the work GPA has addressed in that it addresses strategic developmental issues, such as aid effectiveness, land reform and public investment. However, these are addressed from a primarily rural focus, whereas I have worked for nearly forty years in urban areas.

With urban areas expanding globally into surrounding rural areas, the rural-urban interface is increasingly raising key issues where Mokoro and GPA hope to collaborate. This is where traditional and new values, practices and techniques come into contact and, occasionally, conflict. Finding common ground in matters such as land development, housing and infrastructure policy therefore represents a key challenge on which partnerships between groups with complementary skills, but shared values, can make a useful contribution.

GPA is currently working on a national Shelter Profile of Uganda, advising on housing policy in Iraq, contributing to a major urban development and capacity building programme in Bihar, India and preparing materials on land markets and regulation for the World Bank Institute and other donors. We are also planning research projects on land and housing issues in which peri-urban issues feature prominently. Following a meeting at Mokoro, I am delighted that we have agreed to collaborate on common interests and explore opportunities for joint initiatives. One such prospect is already under preparation and I hope to be able to report on this in a future newsletter.

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